


## Article

# The Digital Transformation of the Marketing Mix in the Food and Beverage Service Supply Chain: A Grey DEMATEL Approach

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**Abstract:** Over the last decade, digital marketing and technology have gradually penetrated the food and beverage industry, redefining its marketing mix. However, the urgency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic spurred the digital transformation of the industry, as businesses were forced to adapt to many changes and restrictions, reshape their operational models, and find ways to survive in an unstable marketplace. The purpose of this paper is to examine the transformation of the marketing mix in the food and beverage service supply chain due to the emergence of digital marketing. To this end, critical success factors for the digital transformation of the food and beverage service supply chain were identified based on the literature. These factors were assessed by experts from the Greek market using a grey decision-making trial and evaluation laboratory (DEMATEL) approach because of the complexity and interdependence of the factors interfering in the decision-making process. After a screening process, eight experts were selected to participate based on their experience and their acknowledged presence in the sector. DEMATEL is a multi-criterion decision-making method used to assist in addressing practical assessment issues. Its main advantage is that it can detect and observe the interdependence among the primary components and their relevance in the decision-making process. Additionally, it facilitates the visual display of the results, assisting in the analysis of the causal influence of factors. The combination of DEMATEL with grey system theory is useful because it makes it easier to analyze ambiguities brought on by uncertainties, lack of knowledge, or inadequate human actions. Fourteen critical success factors were identified, and they were grouped into three broad categories: technology-driven, consumer-driven, and industry-driven. Seven factors were classified as causes, and seven factors were classified as effects. In addition, with the use of the DEMATEL approach, the factors were grouped into core, driving, independent, and prominent factors.

**Keywords:** digital transformation; service supply chain; food and beverage; grey DEMATEL; critical success factors



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## 1. Introduction

The definition of marketing is changing as a result of the digital revolution, and new strategies for interacting with customers and attaining their satisfaction are developing. The food and beverage sector is also changing as a result of cultural and sociological changes that have advanced customer needs and preferences and increased competitiveness brought on by enterprises' technological resources [1]. Consumers are going through a significant transformation in their daily lives, which is maximizing their behavioral intentions on the opposite side of the equation. They want distinctive experiences, comfort and ease, specialized knowledge, and appreciate co-creation. Marketers must modify their marketing mix to account for such expectations [2]. Both utilitarian and hedonistic objectives can be satisfied in a dining experience, influencing perceived value and behavioral intention.

Customer satisfaction is still the major priority in the digital world [3]. The increasing volume of e-commerce transactions is associated with changes in consumption patterns which may put further pressure on sustainability dimensions [4]. Sustainable consumption transition has been a major challenge for societies. In order to shift to sustainable consumption, manufacturers must not only create sustainable products but also educate customers about the impacts of their choices. Therefore, they have an important role in directing consumer behavior towards more sustainable patterns [5]. Consumer behavior has taken on a vital role in the process of boosting the sustainability of supply chains through consumers taking into account the effects of environmental sustainability on their purchase decisions in addition to economic/financial factors. Increasing e-consumer awareness can be a significant strategy to change customer behavior and improve the sustainability of supply chain operations [6–9].

The remarkable shift in marketing from conventional to digital that has been observed over the past several years has given a whole new meaning to marketing. To acquire a strong competitive advantage, many organizations—regardless of sector—have made significant efforts to integrate digital technology and marketing techniques like social media marketing, digital advertising, and e-word of mouth into their strategies. The food and beverage sector is trying to define itself in this era of unheard-of conversion from traditional to digital marketing because its intangible and ephemeral nature places experience at the core of the value proposition. [2,10,11].

From Marketing 1.0 to the present Marketing 4.0, there has been a major change away from a product-focused strategy and toward a customer-centric one. More precisely, Marketing 1.0 ignored the customer aspect in favor of producing low-cost goods. Marketing 3.0 built on Marketing 2.0 by emphasizing customer satisfaction, while Marketing 2.0 came to highlight the significance of the consumer's perspective. By integrating the whole customer experience into the digital system, Marketing 4.0 seeks to satisfy the demands and expectations of customers in the contemporary multichannel environment. Utilizing customer experiences, information management, and predictive data analysis procedures to identify future trends and behaviors is a crucial difference. It is a very dynamic approach that tracks customer activities and transactions in real time with the goal of giving them a very valuable and emotive experience [12,13].

Since its introduction in Borden's paper "The Notion of the Marketing Mix" [14], the marketing mix concept has grown to become one of the key ideas in contemporary marketing. Based on Borden's conceptualization, McCarthy [15] proposed a classification of four instruments: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. The 4Ps framework has been challenged as outmoded and oversimplified given the complexity of contemporary customer needs, yet been universally acknowledged as a fair starting point. The traditional marketing mix and the digital space have reached a crossroads, which is driving up demand for modified and enlarged models. Marketers must include a marketing mix model that spans time and place into their marketing strategy in order to compete in this competitive environment, provide customers with a co-creative value proposition, and create an omnichannel experience. Offering the right product at the right price to the target market is not what marketing is about nowadays. To provide a worthwhile experience, it is about connecting, engaging, and building a relationship with the consumer [16]. Brian Fetherstonhaugh, chairman and CEO of Ogilvy & Mather, has advocated the substitution of the traditional 4Ps with the 4Es, namely [17]:

- Experience instead of Product: Customers require more than just a product or service; they need an experience. They want a worthwhile and fulfilling experience that comes with special extras in addition to the core product.
- Exchange instead of Price: Modern interactions are more dynamic, and goods and services have a value rather than just a price. Customers forgo some money in return for a portion of the brand's value. Exchange and experience are therefore entwined.
- Everyplace instead of Place: The lines separating the physical and digital worlds have been erased by the widespread use of the internet and digital media. As a result, both

locations are involved in the customer experience, and omnipresence has become the new norm for both customers and companies.

- Evangelism instead of Promotion: Consumers today place more confidence in people than advertisements. In order for customers and workers to voluntarily serve as brand advocates, brands must arouse favorable emotions in them. Brand advocacy increases brand recognition and fosters consumer loyalty, which is a brand's most important asset.

This approach highlights the crucial elements of the current ecosystem while maintaining the classical logic at its foundation.

Consumer behavior is sensitive to changes in the macro- or microenvironment and has an immediate influence on marketing strategies. Consumers could not remain unaffected by the internet and digital communications' aggressive supremacy; there is no question about it. A new environment is being created where consumers have a dual consciousness, and the physical and digital worlds are combined to create a "phygital" reality. This environment is being created by the widespread use of mobile-enabled internet, the ongoing improvements in mobile devices and technology that make the digital world portable and ubiquitous, as well as cultural, social, and global shifts [18]. Digital marketing is the fastest-growing form of communication, as more and more individuals across the world are acquiring and spending a lot of time on mobile devices [19]. Additionally, the facilitation and enhancement of customer interactions and communication through efficient omnichannel marketing methods directly influences consumer behavior [20].

Given that the past two decades' worth of advancement in digital marketing were condensed into a few months, it is reasonable to say that 2020 was a transformative year [21]. The COVID-19 pandemic's limitations and crisis consequences had a significant negative impact on the food and beverage service supply chain because it was a late adopter of digital transformation [22]. The international food business has had substantial online sales demands as a consequence of COVID-19, and the supply chain is experiencing considerable challenges as a result [23]. New business models for the sector were produced as a result of the ongoing lockdowns, governmental steps to stop the disease's spread, and the emergence of new customer requirements [24]. However, the hospitality industry, particularly hotels, is the main focus of study on digital marketing and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the marketing mix, whereas the case of the food and beverage service supply chain is understudied in this area.

This paper's primary goal is to pinpoint, using pertinent research, the critical success factors for the digital transformation of the marketing mix in the food and beverage service supply chain. Additionally, quantitative research using the grey decision-making trial and evaluation laboratory (DEMATEL) technique was carried out with the assistance of eight experts from the Greek food and beverage service supply chain to acquire empirical knowledge on the relationships between those factors. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section the emergence of digital marketing is outlined. Then, the landscape of the food and beverage service supply chain in Greece is presented. Next, the methodology followed is presented and applied. The paper comes to an end with the conclusions.

## 2. Digital Marketing

Digital technology is unquestionably one of the most impressive innovations of our times if the worth of an invention is measured by its ability to improve people's lives [25,26]. A "Brave New World" has been created as a result of the disruptive emergence of the internet over the past 25 years and the development of a new generation of information and communication technologies. In this world, people's consciousness is shared between the real world and the virtual world, and marketing conventions have been completely rewritten. A new age in marketing known as "digital marketing" has begun as a result of the fast expansion of media and market globalization [27]. Given that major actors in the

current economy like Google, Meta, eBay, and Amazon, which are worldwide corporations, did not even exist 30 years ago, the rate of development is astonishing [10].

The outstanding accessibility, control, simplicity, and cost-effectiveness of digital marketing have also been recognized by marketers. The correlation between digital brand communication and consumer characteristics like trust and loyalty is supported by empirical studies [25]. Artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, smart gadgets, and machine learning are already influencing and reshaping the lives of consumers.

Digital marketing differs from traditional marketing in that it acts as a catalyst for the dynamics of the interaction between the company and the customer. Marketing was able to delve into the idea of customization due to a powerful tool. Digital marketing gives consumers authority and enables the co-creation of value in terms of the customer experience when combined with changes in the social sphere [28]. To satisfy customers and stay ahead of competition, businesses must establish conditions that enable engagement and social listening. This encourages a two-way connection between consumers and brands that delivers higher experiences. Consumers and companies collaborate to build experiences and enduring connections in digital ecosystems. The platforms that house everyone's digital presence, encourage communication, and encourage involvement are the instruments that help this live entity evolve [29].

The banner ad, the digital advertorial, the sponsored social media post, and other forms of two-way digital connection with customers all fall under the broad category of digital marketing. Other important characteristics of digital marketing that set it apart from traditional marketing are its interactive and engaging nature as well as the fact that it is focused, segmented, and quantifiable. Every time a digital marketing campaign is run, a certain audience is targeted, goals are created, and key performance indicators are analyzed. Because it is simpler to optimize and reaches target audiences with the maximum returns on investment, it is thus cost-effective. When implemented appropriately, it is surely strategic because it is flexible and adapts to the marketing plan of any firm. Last but not least, it makes competition transparent and paves the way for business-to-business partnerships to produce mutually beneficial consumer experiences [30].

With the growth of digital marketing, a new ecosystem of opportunities and problems for researchers and practitioners has emerged. More precisely, to remain abreast of and effectively use digital marketing tools, digital marketers must keep up with all improvements and new features, as it is a sector that is quickly growing in real-time. Additionally, the massive volume of data necessitates exhaustive and efficient examination, which is a difficult endeavor. The struggle to integrate digital strategies and practices into the current, traditional methods is another significant challenge that most firms are dealing with. There is no precise formula, and the task calls for executive talent, defined company objectives, and internal cooperation [25]. In addition, all of this is done while trying to catch customers' attention in an era of information overload. Therefore, a thorough understanding of consumer behavior and purchasing intents is necessary for efficient digital marketing.

The "Big Bang" of Web 2.0 saw the emergence of social media, which changed media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many). Over the past 15 years, social media has become a key part of a large percentage of people's lives [31]. Currently more than half of the global population uses social media [32]. A detailed and consistent plan of action, with clear objectives, competent executives, and continual review and optimization, is necessary for developing an effective social marketing strategy. Businesses that wish to stand out in the digital arena must have the capacity to keep up with technical and digital advancements as well as client feedback and expectations [33].

Digital platforms provide the opportunity to use multichannel marketing tactics and advertising campaigns, which help with profitable target marketing, brand awareness, consumer reach, and profit growth. The internet and digital technology's limitless potential generate a virtual market with characteristics like reach, conversions, and digital representation [25]. Digital advertising also adheres to some of the pillars of advertising, which are diverse in nature. For instance, the six primary evaluative aspects of conven-

tional advertising may also be used for digital advertising. These six dimensions were first presented by Schlinger [34] and are widely acknowledged by academics and industry experts. The following dimensions best describe how a customer feels after viewing an advertisement [35]: relevant news, brand reinforcement, stimulation, empathy, familiarity, and confusion.

Positive reviews of a product or service have historically been shown to have a significant impact on brand equity. Consumers are known to prefer talking to real people over viewing ads. Consequently, it makes sense that businesses and marketers are so concerned with brand reputation and working with experts to serve as brand ambassadors. E-word of mouth is the consequence of word-of-mouth traditions being adapted for the digital age. Customers have found it simpler to share their experiences and information on social media with strangers as well as friends because of its ease and the irrelevance of physical distance. The digital consumer is accustomed to sharing his experiences on websites, social networks, and third-party platforms. E-word of mouth can have more visual material and is more accessible to digital groups in addition to modifying the classic rules of word of mouth [10]. E-word of mouth is one of the key elements driving traffic on digital platforms and sometimes the outcomes are better than those of sponsored marketing initiatives [36]. In terms of e-word of mouth, online reviews and influencer marketing are the most effective online interactions. Online reviews are a non-controlled signal that can assist in lessening both information asymmetry and customer confusion [37]. Social media platforms now influence every area of our lives, and customers strongly rely on the opinions and experiences of their friends and even complete strangers [38]. In cases of favorable reviews, consumers actively promote the brand, while in cases of negative reviews, they actively undermine it.

### 3. The Food and Beverage Service Supply Chain

#### 3.1. Overview

Food has changed over time from being a physical necessity to a social event, a cultural statement, a form of expression, a career, a pastime, and a tool for socializing. Nowadays, gastronomy is regarded as intangible cultural property, and UNESCO has safeguarded numerous food practices and traditions [39]. People love trying out new foods, going out to eat and having a good time with friends, commemorating important life events, and having business lunches. In addition to being a necessity, food has evolved into a source of enjoyment. As a result, eating has gone beyond mere nutrition, and civilizations now engage in food-related behaviors [40].

The secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy are bridged by the food and beverage industry, which includes firms involved in production, transportation, packaging, and manufacturing, as well as the provision of services by bars, restaurants, cafés, and other establishments. Because the business model of “all-day” small businesses that offer both coffee and food is very popular and a sizable segment of the industry in the Greek market, it is considered valuable for the subject under investigation. For the purposes of this research, we will concentrate on the tertiary sector and more specifically restaurants and cafés that offer food options as well.

Various typologies may be used for categorizations in the restaurant industry. For example, according to service style, the restaurant industry can be divided into five main categories: quick-service restaurants, fast-casual, midscale, full-service, and fine dining/upscale [41]. Within each of these categories, there are numerous subcategories that are related to the type of food served, the price range, and other factors.

While quick-service restaurants are self-service models with quickly prepared meals, full-service and fine-dining restaurants offer a full dining experience where meals are prepared for each client and served to the table. A fast-casual restaurant fills a market niche that is comparable to fast food in terms of its limited service options but commits to a premium product offering and setting akin to the casual dining sector [42]. Because the kind of consumption is closely connected to customer experience, expectations, and

behavioral intention, this segmentation distinguishes the industry in terms of perceived value. We may discuss consumer behavior using the concepts of hedonic consumption and utilitarian consumption because consumption in this business encompasses both necessity and pleasure [3].

Because so many companies provide comparable services and are competing for customers, the food and beverage sector is particularly dynamic and competitive. The competitive environment in which a company operates affects its capacity to distinguish itself from competitors, as well as its location, rate of development, resources available, and willingness to change [43]. Any organization that wishes to grow and have an enduring market presence in the contemporary economy must focus heavily on developing and delivering new products and services. Researchers and experts agree that innovation in the service industry is an effective strategy for achieving and maintaining competitive advantages [44]. Innovation is a crucial growth strategy for the sector in question, especially on the managerial side, which has received less attention. The product side refers to the advancement and inventiveness of the culinary arts [45]. To incorporate the changes brought about by the digital revolution into the current strategies and adapt them to the demands of the sector, managerial innovation in the industry requires skilled executives and bold business judgments. Sociocultural interactions and circumstances have a complex role in the process of creativity in the food and beverage industry. As a result, to effectively collaborate with consumers in terms of audience listening and testing, food and beverage organizations must employ cutting-edge business practices, such as the formation of strategic alliances with outside suppliers and companies, strategic planning, disruptive culture creation, and strategic recruiting [46,47].

### *3.2. Insights from Greece*

The sector of hospitality, including the tourism and food and beverage industries, has always been neuralgic for the Greek economy. Using the latest available data (July 2020–June 2021) from the e-National Social Security Fund [48,49], which is the single insurance fund in Greece, on average, 338,315 individuals—who account for 15.2% of the average insured population—are employed in the hotels and restaurants sector. In the wholesale and retail trade work, on average, 490,759 individuals are employed, accounting for 22.1% of the average insured population, whereas in the manufacturing sector work on average 289,159 individuals, accounting for 13.0% of the average insured population. However, the standard deviation in the case of hotels and restaurants is multiple times higher (7.4 and 12.4 times respectively) due to seasonality, which is a significant factor that influences the sector because summer is the primary travel season in this country. It is important to note that the food and beverage industry makes a significant contribution to society because it provides many young adults and students with their first job, low-paid workers with their second job, immigrants with their first job as they begin a new life, and professionals and local producers with a career opportunity.

The vast majority of companies are run by individuals or families [50]. However, there are several businesses with a dominant presence in the sector, running mostly franchises as well as chain restaurants and cafés. Due to its relationship to the physical and social requirements of people, the food and beverage business is a significant contributor to the economy. As a result, the current pandemic and its socioeconomic effects, digitization, the competitive climate, and changing consumer requirements present significant problems and necessitate innovative strategies [51].

### *3.3. Implications from the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Food crises have been shown to have a significant negative impact on the reputations of brands and sales in the food and beverage sector [52]. Because of social distancing policies and concerns about crowding, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative influence on the sector. According to the regulations of each country, consumption patterns changed throughout the outbreak. Governments implemented social distancing measures,

lockdowns, and the required use of face masks to guarantee that physical contact is restricted. Following the start of vaccination, people who had not received their vaccinations were subject to specific rules. One of the first businesses to be affected by the pandemic's shock and its unusual operating effects was the food and beverage service supply chain, as restaurants and cafés were either forced to close for long periods of time or implement off-premises operations. Following the re-opening, they employ several precautions to restrict the spread of COVID-19, including decreased and distant sitting (seating is sometimes only authorized for those who have received a vaccination), no music, and shortened operating hours. Additionally, the closure of several food processing facilities, the loss of personnel as a result of COVID-19 cases, as well as the inflation of prices of many essential goods and services have put enterprises in a bad situation and impeded recovery. Additionally, the COVID-19 epidemic has had a substantial societal impact, including social marginalization, job loss, anxiety, and sentiments of uncertainty [22]. Due to employment losses in the food and beverage sector brought on by the pandemic, a number of professionals were even forced to change careers. Because eating out is a crucial component of contemporary social life, the closing of restaurants and cafés increased the sensation of social isolation in the eyes of the customers.

Online meal delivery businesses seized the ideal opportunity to capitalize on the recent trend of growth as eateries fought to survive the pandemic. The internet-based ordering and delivery system for food that serves as a mediator between restaurants and customers through websites and mobile applications, or food delivery apps, is what we refer to as online meal delivery [53]. Mobile food ordering apps provide real-time access, enabling busy users to order meals quickly and conveniently while offering alternatives from many eateries, including online ordering, takeout, and receiving the requested food at doorsteps. Customers typically use their mobile devices to explore their favorite eateries, choose a meal, and specify where they are [54]. The customer may track his purchase while he waits and can make the payment online or directly to the delivery person. Additionally, the user has the ability to look for restaurants, browse their menus and ratings, and apply filters to discover the food he is looking for. So, it is possible to think of meal delivery applications as virtual food markets. Online delivery is not only a great backup plan during lockdowns thanks to this procedure, but it is also potentially a "gold mine" and a new business opportunity for the industry as a whole because it provides a new distribution channel that appears to be in line with societal trends and technological advancements [55]. Third-party food delivery apps act as a go-between for customers and companies. Smaller businesses typically rely on patrons utilizing third-party food delivery apps, while bigger chains typically have their own unique mobile applications [53,56]. Due to innovative features like "contactless delivery," which help customers reduce their chance of contracting the virus, food delivery apps have also maintained their appeal during the lockdowns implemented in reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak [57]. Customers' decision regarding whether to keep utilizing food delivery services during the COVID-19 pandemic is greatly impacted by perceived task–technology fit, trust, performance expectations, and social influence, in addition to being strongly determined by customer satisfaction [58]. A new business model known as "dark kitchens" has also emerged as a result of the pandemic's aftermath and the growth of the internet meal delivery sector. Dark kitchens are typically used to describe eating places that specialize in meal delivery alone and do not have physical storefronts or locations for in-house consumption. Companies looking to grow at a significantly lesser cost may wish to consider the dark kitchen concept. Especially in major metropolitan areas, this strategy may lead to offering meals at reduced prices and faster delivery by centralizing orders with suppliers, deliveries, and a smaller workforce [59]. According to a recent study conducted in Brazil, there are a few practical implications for the sector [60]. The performance of the app and service should be improved by both restaurants and food delivery app providers, speeding up the ordering and delivery of orders. Additionally, restaurant operators may research customer behavior to improve their brand visibility, market appealing alternatives, and maximize customer satisfaction rates.

The latter may result in favorable word of mouth and social influence, boosting sales and preserving the business while minimizing various negative effects. Second, food delivery apps might be utilized for education tactics, such as alerting the consumer about protective procedures. Third, food delivery app developers and service operators must be aware of customers' intents in various geographic locations.

The pandemic issues led to the rise of cyber-entrepreneurship, a new type of entrepreneurship built on technical advancements, and communication technologies changed the global economy's fundamental makeup [51]. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for digital transformation and significant changes in consumer behavior because of its size and global scope as well as the concurrent and amazing advancement of technology. Convenience, cost and time savings, hedonic incentive, and ratings impact sustained usage intentions and support online meal delivery, even if it is still too soon to reliably anticipate post-pandemic customer behavior [61,62].

### *3.4. The Shift from Traditional to Digital Marketing*

For many years, marketing strategies for food and beverage enterprises were implemented through conventional media, both above-the-line and below-the-line, due to the fact that this industry is traditional in terms of service and physical experience. In terms of a marketing strategy, "above-the-line" advertising is used to reach a wide audience and increase brand awareness. This type of advertising includes TV, radio, billboards, and print, whereas "below-the-line" advertising refers to more specialized campaigns that are primarily focused on establishing relationships with customers. With in-store or outdoor marketing materials offering deals, unique meals, etc., restaurants' marketing campaigns were more particularly targeted to physical stores. In addition, chain restaurants mostly used advertisements in local guides, radio, and television due to the associated expenditures. The primary marketing route for small enterprises was word-of-mouth advertising.

The distinction between above-the-line and below-the-line advertising was "blurred" by digital marketing, leading to the coining of the term "through-the-line" to describe an integrated strategy that makes use of more expansive and direct campaigns to connect with large and segmented audiences and achieve the conversion objective. The players in the sector were late adopters of the digital revolution that occurred in many other industries, notably retail, even after the "Big Bang" of digital marketing. Only 10 years ago did the food and beverage sector actually begin to include digital marketing in its marketing strategy and see businesses choose executives with backgrounds in both technology and digital marketing for their teams.

IT breakthroughs were the first stage of the digital transition that had a big influence on marketing. The adoption of online customer relationship management systems, the use of inventory and online reservation software, and the replacement of cashier machines and oral ordering with point-of-sale systems all modernized the industry in the eyes of the consumer while also giving marketers valuable information that helped them understand their target audience and develop effective messages and campaigns. Additionally, the digitization of marketing was influenced by the digitization of customers' lives [25]. Some major companies around the world, like McDonald's, have tested cutting-edge digital technologies like mobile, artificial intelligence, wearables, virtual reality, blockchains, and automation. These technologies provide a fruitful environment for interaction and personalization and, to a certain extent, replace the physical experience [28].

Digital marketing emerged as the best ally for restaurant owners and marketers as the need for customer-centric strategies became increasingly important to succeed in this crowded industry. This is because it allows them to analyze the vast amount of available data and turn it into efficient marketing strategies to reach customers [25]. Digital advertising has become standard practice for professionals and includes things like search engine and social network ads through services like Google, programmatic advertising, re-targeting campaigns, etc. E-word of mouth is also spread through online forums, review websites, and partnerships between companies and digital influencers and food bloggers.



Social media networks, however, are the most significant route for enterprises. Their target audience interacts, communicates, shops, gathers information, and is influenced here. Therefore, a well-organized online presence on social media networks strengthens client trust and engagement while having a beneficial impact on brand equity. The official social media network sites of a food and beverage company are where new and current consumers can be stimulated with online content and visual incentives to visit the physical shop or order delivery. Along with showcasing their goods and services, social media serves as a platform for expressing the essence, voice, aesthetics, and values of the brand. The dynamic and pervasive nature of these platforms allows marketers to be more fun and reveal moments of their brand, such as “behind the scenes” content about food production or “sneak previews” of a new product, piquing customers’ curiosity. It also paves the way for customer engagement and feedback, whether in the form of a review or a comment. Careful monitoring on the part of the marketer offers the chance to avert a crisis, keep a client, and be aware of the benefits and drawbacks of the brand. Organizations might also keep an eye on their rivals and consider other viewpoints. Using “the eyes of the enemy,” just like in the military, might be a valuable strategy to reveal blind spots or best practices [63,64].

Unquestionably, the COVID-19 pandemic and regulations pertaining to the business sparked the industry’s digital transformation, hastening the adoption of technical breakthroughs in systems and IT enhancements, as well as the digitization of marketing campaigns. Marketers are in a “crisis of immediacy,” having to respond to clients’ changing needs in real time and during tumultuous times [65]. To adapt quickly and effectively to market dynamics, an organization’s readiness to utilize digital technology is a crucial source of competitive advantage [28]. No matter the sector, an organization’s ultimate purpose is to satisfy its customers by providing for their requirements and a positive customer experience. Taking the value that an intangible service like a dining experience gives online is a hurdle. Marketers must translate physical touchpoints into digital stimuli by decoding them.

#### 4. Materials and Methods

This study attempts to identify the important drivers of the transformation and their interdependency by investigating the following issues to emphasize the complexity and urgency of the issue of digital transformation of the marketing mix in the food and beverage service supply chain:

Q1: What are the major drivers of consumers’ behavior in the food and beverage service supply chain in the digital era?

Q2: What is the relationship between the critical success factors of digital transformation of the marketing mix, and which are the most significant for the digitization of the service supply chain?

To explore the subject examined both theoretically and empirically, a hybrid approach combining qualitative and quantitative data analysis was adopted. The research was divided in two phases.

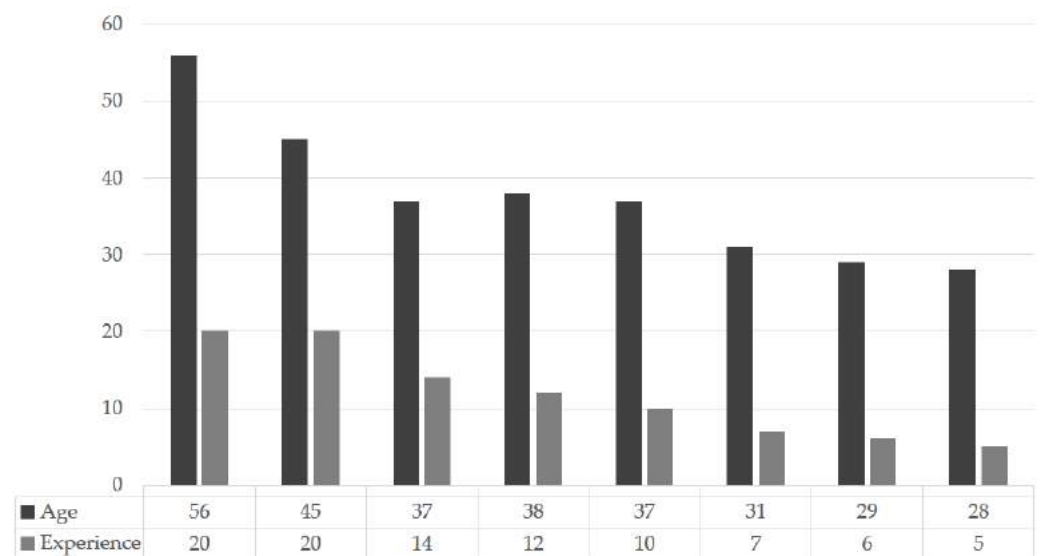
During the first phase, which took place in December 2021, the Scopus database was used to identify critical success factors for the digital transformation of the marketing mix in the case of the food and beverage service supply chain. Towards this end, the following query was used, which resulted in 145 results:

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((TITLE-ABS-KEY(“marketing mix”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY(“food and beverage”))) AND (“digital marketing”) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE,“English”)).
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These papers were screened based on their abstracts, and some of them led to the identification of the above-mentioned critical success factors. English has become a lingua franca for scientific communication, and this is why have chosen to limit our research in this respect.

During the second phase, quantitative research was conducted in March 2022. The goal of increasing empirical knowledge on the subject examined and proposing practical solutions led to the decision to collaborate with professionals. Therefore, the empirical in-

vestigation was addressed to executives of the industry, either business owners or managers in the fields of marketing and business development. The executives were selected based on their experience ( $\geq 5$  years) and their acknowledged presence in the sector. An invitation to participate was initially sent to 12 executives. After a first round of communication, two executives decided not to participate in the survey. Two others were excluded by the researchers due to their limited relevance to digital marketing. Eventually, eight executives (four business owners and four managers) of the food and beverage service supply chain in Greece were selected to participate. Four of them identified themselves as men, and four of them identified themselves as women. All of them hold at least a university degree. The data concerning the executives' age and experience are presented in Figure 1 (in descending order of experience).



**Figure 1.** The executives' age and experience.

A semi-structured interview was conducted before each participant completed the questionnaire to gain a deeper knowledge of the opposing views and integrate some additional, more specific, or useful information that was not included in the questionnaire. All participants were made aware of the study's background and goal. They received assurance about both their organization's safeguarding of sensitive information and their own personal anonymity. They all participated voluntarily and had the option to stop the survey if the format or the questions made them uncomfortable.

The determined critical success factors were discussed with experts in face-to-face meetings to obtain their insights on how important they were in relation to the topic under investigation. The data were analyzed using a grey DEMATEL approach, and the questionnaire was created and customized to assess the crucial success factors of digital transformation in the food and beverage service supply chain. The Battelle Memorial Institute of Geneva developed the DEMATEL approach between 1972 and 1976 to address complex problems by identifying the crucial elements that must be looked at and their causal connections. It aids in revealing the relationship between independent variables and examines their interconnectedness by using a structural modeling method. Seven to twenty-one individuals is the suggested range of participants [66].

In recent years, DEMATEL has gained popularity as a multi-criterion decision-making method to assist in addressing practical assessment issues. With regard to the decision maker's views, this technique has an advantage over other models of a similar kind in that it has the ability to detect and observe the interdependence among the primary components and their relevance in the decision-making process [67]. Additionally, it facilitates the visual display of the results, specifically the impact-relations map, which is the output of the DEMATEL process, assisting in the analysis of the causal influence of factors [68].

The DEMATEL method's difficulty in assessing ambiguous circumstances and scenarios when there is a disagreement among specialists due to a lack of knowledge is a significant drawback of employing it alone [69]. In similar circumstances, grey system theory is useful because it makes it easier to analyze ambiguities brought on by uncertainties, lack of knowledge, or inadequate human actions [70]. Additionally, it is a practical strategy for situations with a small sample size or uncertain data, and it is simple to integrate with other decision-making techniques to assess the accuracy of the conclusions [71].

The steps of the grey DEMATEL approach are the following [72–76]:

A linguistic scale is established, which is used to evaluate the relationships among the factors, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Linguistic scale and the corresponding grey numbers.

Linguistic Term	Notation	Grey Number
No influence	0	[0, 0]
Very low influence	1	[0, 1]
Low influence	2	[1, 2]
High influence	3	[2, 3]
Very high influence	4	[3, 4]

The evaluation of factors  $c = \{c_i | i = 1, 2, \dots, n\}$  by  $H$  experts is used to form the initial direct relationship matrix. Therefore,  $H$  different matrices are created:  $Z^1, Z^2, \dots, Z^H$ , containing the elements " $\otimes z_{ij}^k$ ". Next, grey numbers are converted to crisp numbers [77] using the following equations [78]:

Calculation of the normalized values  $\otimes n_{ij}^k$  and  $\bar{\otimes} n_{ij}^k$  is performed as follows:

$$\otimes n_{ij}^k = (\otimes z_{ij}^k - \min_j \otimes z_{ij}^k) / \Delta_{min}^{max} \quad (1)$$

$$\bar{\otimes} n_{ij}^k = (\bar{\otimes} z_{ij}^k - \min_j \bar{\otimes} z_{ij}^k) / \Delta_{min}^{max} \quad (2)$$

where

$$\Delta_{min}^{max} = \max_j \bar{\otimes} z_{ij}^k - \min_j \otimes z_{ij}^k \quad (3)$$

Calculation of the normalized crisp values  $b_{ij}^k$  that formulate the matrix  $B^k$  is performed as follows:

$$b_{ij}^k = \frac{[\otimes n_{ij}^k \cdot (1 - \otimes n_{ij}^k)] + (\bar{\otimes} n_{ij}^k \times \bar{\otimes} n_{ij}^k)}{(1 - \otimes n_{ij}^k + \bar{\otimes} n_{ij}^k)} \quad (4)$$

Calculation of the final crisp values  $y_{ij}^k$  that formulate the matrix  $Y^k$  is performed as follows:

$$y_{ij}^k = \min_j \otimes z_{ij}^k + b_{ij}^k \cdot \Delta_{min}^{max} \quad (5)$$

Calculation of the matrix  $A$  which contains the values  $a_{ij}$  is performed as follows:

$$A = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^H [Z^k]}{H} \quad (6)$$

The classical approach of DEMATEL is applied in matrix  $A$ . With Equation (7) the normalization factor  $F$  is calculated, and with Equation (8) the normalized direct-relation matrix  $X$  is formed.

$$F = \frac{1}{\max_{1 \leq i \leq n} \sum_{j=1}^n a_{ij}} \quad i, j = 1, 2, 3 \dots n \quad (7)$$

$$X = F \cdot A \quad (8)$$

Calculation of the total relation matrix  $T$  which contains the values  $t_{ij}$  is conducted as follows (where  $I$  is the identity matrix):

$$T = X \times (I - X)^{-1} \quad (9)$$

The causal relationships are identified using Equations (10) and (11).

$$R = \left[ \sum_{j=1}^n t_{ij} \right]_{n \times 1} \quad (10)$$

$$C = \left[ \sum_{j=1}^n t_{ij} \right]_{1 \times n}^T \quad (11)$$

The values  $R_i$  indicate the direct and indirect influence of the factors  $i$  over the other factors, whereas the values  $C_j$  indicate the influence imposed on factors  $j$  by the other factors. The matrices  $P$  and  $E$  are formulated with Equations (12) and (13), which indicate the prominence and the net cause/effect of the factors, respectively.

$$P = R + C \quad (12)$$

$$E = R - C \quad (13)$$

In cases where the number of factors to be addressed is large, decision makers may choose to use a threshold value  $\theta$  to depict the most important relationships between the factors. In the case discussed in this paper, the threshold is defined by the mean value  $\mu$  of the values  $t_{ij}$  and their standard deviation  $\sigma$  as follows:

$$\theta = \mu + \sigma \quad (14)$$

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Identification of Critical Success Factors for the Digital Transformation of the Marketing Mix

The majority of business sectors have been impacted by the digital disruption, which has presented a range of difficulties depending on the nature of each industry. Despite the improvements achieved in the food and beverage service supply chain over the past few years, it is still unclear whether digital transformation is practical. An overview of the key success factors influencing the digital transformation of the marketing mix in the food and beverage service supply chain is provided in this article. Any factor can be viewed as either an enabler or a barrier. According to their nature, they may be grouped into three major groups: technology-driven, consumer-driven, and industry-driven.

#### 5.1.1. Technology-Driven Factors

- Available Technology/Online Infrastructure (K1)

A major force behind innovation is digitization. The achievement of digital connectivity between customers and brands opens up a huge window for performance efficiency [79]. Infrastructure is where digitalization of an organization begins. To remain competitive and meet escalating consumer demands, food and beverage companies must invest in new technology or use their existing technological resources [80].

As there is a large amount of room for innovation, technology has permeated and changed the sector. One of the mobile application areas that is advancing the fastest is food delivery apps. Even though the food and beverage sector has historically been hesitant to adopt digital solutions, many companies used enterprise resource planning, customer relationship management, and point-of-sale software to improve customer service and streamline internal operations before the pandemic. The pandemic and the resulting consumer behavior increased the digital disruption during the past two years, causing restaurant businesses to change more quickly and address pressing problems like contact-

less delivery and payment, sanitary precautions, etc. Customer satisfaction and successful management are the major objectives for using digital technologies through a hybrid operating style. Modern loyalty programs and feedback systems, contactless transactions, internal process automation, artificial intelligence, and air-purification technologies are some of the most well-liked digital advancements in the sector [81–83].

The dynamic and perishable character of the sector, however, makes this hybrid business model more challenging. The stakeholders in the industry must learn to use the resources available to them in accordance with their business objectives to support performance, rather than just installing software to keep up with the competition. To maximize it, investment must be made in both digital technologies and trained executives.

- Digital media platforms and communication (K2)

Many customers use their smartphones to enjoy their daily activities while they are always online. Due to the fact that having only a digital presence is no longer sufficient, food and beverage companies have recognized the advantages of establishing a digital connection with their customers [84,85]. In terms of customer reach, brand building, revenue improvement, and customer satisfaction, digital media channels provide restaurants growth potential [86,87].

Digital media and social media platforms have given the food and beverage service supply chain a completely new marketplace where they can connect with, engage, and actively listen to their target audience. Through social media interactions, firms have been able to improve their brand image and manage crises brought on by adverse encounters. User-generated content digitizes the consumer experience and makes it accessible to a bigger audience, leading to e-word of mouth, whether it takes the shape of a social network post or an online review [10]. Social dynamics have a favorable association with sales success measures such as returns on investment, making them a crucial consideration for marketers [88].

This consumer-contributed work can be referred to as brand co-creation [89]. Businesses that want to implement a successful digital marketing strategy must select platforms and adopt a tone of voice that is appropriate for their target market, develop a consistent and coordinated communication strategy, measure and optimize frequently for maximum effectiveness, and develop risk-management procedures [90].

- Cost of investment (K3)

Investments in infrastructure and marketing budgets are needed to support an organization's and the marketing mix's digital transformation. The organization's IT assets determine the degree of investment when it comes to the infrastructure. Emerging technologies' "Big-Bang" made them quicker and more affordable, allowing for low-risk experimentation [91].

The money spent on marketing to draw in digital consumers is another significant source of expenses. A study conducted among restaurant owners revealed that marketing spending rises along with competition. More than 60% of them have increased their spending on digital advertising, and 80% feel pressure to keep up with the competition in the digital market [92]. The margins in the food and beverage service supply chain have always been low. Empirical research and real-world case studies have shown that, to support cost effectiveness and performance in line with a firm's goal, a clear business plan for digital transformation is needed before any investment [93].

- Security (K4)

Cybersecurity is essential to every firm that is digitally oriented, making it a critical success element when it comes to corporate digitalization [94–97]. Both the sensitive company data and the consumer data collected through digital marketing strategies are priceless assets that must be kept under control. The primary dangers in that area are challenges with data privacy and cloud security. Hacking and malware assaults are problems

that marketers face on a regular basis. Data security breaches and acts of sabotage are two categories of cyberattacks.

Businesses use the architecture of cloud computing as a service to store their data securely and privately. However, due to security concerns on each platform, this endeavor is quite challenging. It is impossible to determine where the data are housed on the cloud because it is a shared environment. Although employed as precautions, procedures like encryption and digital certificates cannot completely ensure security [98].

- Organizational culture (K5)

Internal digitization is required due to digital disruption. Organizations need to re-think their operational systems and procedures, relying on IT and revamping their business strategy to stay ahead of the competition [97,99,100]. Corporate process reengineering, according to Hammer and Champy [101], is a business approach used to reinvent the operational model to creatively increase performance and improve in terms of significant modern metrics, such as quality, cost, and speed.

To drive digital transformation in the food and beverage service supply chain, IT is a crucial enabler. Executives and staff must disrupt their normal workdays to adapt and learn new technologies and procedures, which hinders an organization's ability to flourish. A change in technical assets necessitates a change in culture as well because culture is primarily a useful strategic asset for a business [91], but it can also become a barrier for the organization's transformation. According to studies, the most crucial attributes for a corporate culture are adaptability, customer focus, agility, and readiness to learn [102].

#### 5.1.2. Consumer-Driven Factors

- Consumer behavior (K6)

Technology's introduction has caused behavioral changes. The digital customer is more intelligent, more educated, and more demanding when it comes to what he expects from a business. Nowadays, many customers consider marketing techniques like social listening and community connection management to be essential, which increases the burden on but also presents prospects for marketers [29,103]. Social media platforms have allowed for the transmission of communication and opinion exchange, creating an interactive atmosphere where individuals may influence and be influenced. Personal storytelling about restaurants has given way to computerized evaluations or social media posts by food bloggers [104].

In several fields, the pandemic generated new behaviors. When it comes to food and beverages, the need that businesses serve paved the way for off-premises options like internet meal delivery and the emergence of new business models. Businesses must change their operations to meet the demands of the digital customer, who prioritizes ease and convenience. Research indicates that many of these food-related behaviors will endure in the post-pandemic world, and predictions regarding the expansion of the online meal delivery market pave the way for the sector to undergo a digital revolution in terms of distribution channels [105,106].

- Consumer reach (K7)

In these days of emerging digital technology, marketers need to be flexible and develop ways to boost performance in a hybrid environment, taking the interconnection of the customer into consideration [79,107]. Consumer reach is a crucial aspect of digital transformation because it removes the restriction of a company's physical location and opens the door to attracting a wider and more targeted audience.

Companies have adapted technology-driven marketing mix strategies like ad targeting (geo-targeting, targeting by interest, etc.), real-time personalization, and programmatic buying to avoid blind spots and entice customers more frequently during their customer journey, which is enhanced by digital media [108]. Additionally, digital platforms offer segmentation and automation tools to classify the target population and send them personalized messages and advice.

Although these mechanisms make it easier for consumers to pay attention and increase the number of potential customers, the abundance of cues and corporate messages makes it harder for consumers to follow and focus on a particular product or service, making it a difficult and costly mission to get consumers' attention. This is because a company needs resources to process the available data and carry out efficient digital marketing strategies [18].

- Consumer satisfaction (K8)

The correlation between perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions like returning customers, repurchases, and good word of mouth has been supported by several studies [3]. Organizations attempt to incorporate both cognitive and emotional cues into their marketing mix strategies, in accordance with the principles of experiential marketing, to assess consumer satisfaction and generate value in response to the hedonistic and utilitarian aspects of the food and beverage service supply chain [109]. Additionally, there is a link between customer happiness and brand advocacy that encourages the conversion of customers into brand advocates. This translates into e-word of mouth, favorable evaluations on digital platforms, and social interactions in the digital world. A reliable source of information, like other customers or users, is essential to success for any company, but it is especially important in the food and beverage sector, as consumers cannot completely experience the service before consuming it [110,111].

The ultimate aim is customer satisfaction, which permeates all components of the marketing mix. According to research in the area of consumer intelligence, customer experience will take the lead as a key brand differentiator, eclipsing the factors of product and price [108]. Therefore, marketers are urged to merge the real and digital worlds to provide customers a useful hybrid experience.

- Legal issues (K9)

Legal issues surrounding privacy and data analysis have emerged as e-commerce, consumer digital presence, and marketing strategies have transitioned to digital platforms and media [112]. According to the United Nations, the right to privacy is a basic human right [113]. Although marketers view consumer data as a "gold mine," there are moral and legal concerns, and the line between ensuring customers' delight and violating their privacy is hazy.

Organizations have attempted to address this issue in a number of ways, including the incorporation of privacy policies into their websites and requests for permission to use cookies [114]. Governmentally speaking, legislation has been implemented in recent years to address the protection of the digital consumer, which has grown to be a serious concern. To provide an appropriate framework for marketing operations, the European Union proposed the General Data Protection Regulation. However, certain algorithmic manipulation techniques have been noted, particularly on social media sites where sensitive personal data have long been left exposed [115].

When seen in the context of the marketing mix, the customer's voluntary disclosure of personal information to the company may be understood as a component of the "Exchange" component, which denotes that the customer does so in exchange for tailored messages and services. There is therefore a large amount of room for consumer autonomy and permission, albeit in certain circumstances, it may be difficult to make judgments that respect privacy given the facts at hand [113].

### 5.1.3. Industry-Driven Factors

- Brand strategy (K10)

In the omnichannel world, branding is a crucial issue for marketers because it not only helps them stand out from the competition but also helps them give value and forge relationships with customers. Customers might feel protected by a powerful brand, which helps them use favorable associations to make decisions [116]. In addition to factors like quality, price, and convenience that have a significant impact on consumers' purchasing

decisions, other factors like ethics, trust, and sustainability are also becoming increasingly significant, emphasizing the significance of brand values [117]. Popular places with many customers seem to foster a larger feeling of confidence, especially for establishments that are closely related to sanitation, cleanliness, and food safety. Customers have a variety of shields against perceived threats, and brand trust is one of them [118]. That aspect was made even more intense by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, it is reported that branded restaurants generated more income during the pandemic than non-branded ones [119].

Relationships between businesses and their customers and value co-creation are the primary contexts in brand management [120]. The most important factor in this dynamic interaction is brand personality, as it offers emotional clues and messages [89]. Customers typically “humanize” brands to forge connections and connect with their beliefs, which shapes how customers see them [121]. In line with Marketing 4.0’s criteria, emotional branding is employed as a practical strategy to increase customers’ intent to use a product again [122]. Enticing aesthetics and formality in restaurant websites, apps, and food delivery apps that facilitate easy navigation produce positive emotions including pleasure, arousal, and mastery [105]. A consistent brand image and an intriguing brand personality, relevant to the needs of the target audience, are built through branding and its practical applications, such as an organization’s website and social media accounts, tone of voice, corporate colors and typography, brand storytelling, delivery packaging, etc.

- State of competition (K11)

Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry’s competitive landscape is changing in the age of digitization and the shared economy. There are two types of competition: conventional competition and developing competition [83]. Many already-established firms have actively moved toward digitization, harnessing the momentum and the available digital technology to attract the dynamic target audience, taking into account the competition from conventional sources. Degtyaryova et al. [123] used game theory in an analysis of the restaurant industry’s use of digital tools and found that restaurants may gain much from their use of these technologies and differentiate themselves from the competition by boosting customer loyalty. Additionally, new competitors pose a serious danger at all times, particularly in the fiercely competitive sector under discussion. Due to several companies’ decisions to remain closed during lockdowns, the pandemic offered many market possibilities for newcomers, and the entrance barrier was quite low [124]. In addition, entrants have a competitive advantage because their business models are already digitally configured and prepared to address the requirements of the digital customer.

New competition equalizes the industry’s complexity. Ghost kitchens and internet meal delivery are two non-traditional forms of competition that are severely pressuring this already competitive sector [1]. While the expenses of running a ghost brand are substantially cheaper, it is anticipated that the increase of delivery and off-premises revenues will quadruple over the next several years relative to dine-in services. The fact that technology is driving the industry’s disruption raises concerns about losing the industry’s perishable and experiential core, which has an impact on the marketing mix.

- New operating models (K12)

The operational model of the sector is changing along with the consumers’ tastes and behaviors as they migrate to the digital space. Organizations are looking for tactical strategies to acquire a strategic advantage in light of the pandemic’s developments. Digitization makes it possible for businesses to expand into new markets and offers alternatives for online products [63,125]. Stakeholders now need to choose the future of their organization’s service offering, either by adding digital channels or by going back to the pre-pandemic model, offering a purely physical experience.

Online meal ordering has grown in importance for restaurants throughout the pandemic, helping the sector’s resilience and establishing a new source of revenue [47]. This is true both while there was a required lockdown and in the post-quarantine environment. Aggregators for food delivery are examples of intermediaries that have adapted to the



industry's changing terrain. Additionally, new business models like ghost kitchens enable restaurants to make the most of their current resources (properties, staff, and raw materials) to appeal to various clienteles and meet their various demands. The results of these new models are conflicting; on the one hand, they may provide a significant source of additional income and traffic, but on the other hand, they may cause existing audiences and sales to be cannibalized. The continual, externally driven variations in demand are a crucial factor to take into account, as they may be positive, neutral, or negative depending on the degree of connection between them [1]. Without concentrating on short-term revenue targets, the challenge is to develop a flexible company model with new income streams to remain competitive.

- Partnerships and alliances (K13)

Tough times call for real relationships, just as they do in diplomacy and industry. According to the stakeholder theory, a company has to maintain strong bonds with its stakeholders to thrive and grow [126]. The primary stakeholders in the food and beverage service supply chain are suppliers, delivery services, and customers. The government might be viewed as an indirect stakeholder because of how much its policies impact the sector [22]. The future is unpredictable as a result of the industry's transformation, and innovation entails risk. Therefore, businesses that wish to command a sizeable share of the market tomorrow must form strategic alliances with the main players in the digital disruption.

Due to the quick change in online buying caused by the pandemic, both consumers and companies are now increasingly reliant on digital channels. Businesses' competitive landscape will thus be as diverse as the platforms they partner with. Food delivery services have significantly changed the way that businesses distribute their goods and advertise their brands. To jointly develop value propositions and bring about innovation in a way that is lucrative, the two types of business must learn how to work together. For instance, although being included in a food delivery platform broadens a business's target market, large commission costs reduce firms' net income, casting doubt on the effect [63].

Suppliers are vital partners because they support the creation of new products, the preservation of high quality, business innovation, the management of operational challenges, and financial settlements [127]. The pandemic emphasized that the more dynamic the capacities, the greater the competitive advantage, strengthening this link [128].

Interfirm alliances may prove to be highly advantageous and practical, removing intermediaries and boosting customer confidence. The advancement of technology makes it easier for businesses to exchange knowledge, and blockchain technology provides a trustworthy authentication method. The hazy roles of various channel participants in the value co-creation era [129], as opposed to the defined process of a traditional marketing mix, as well as the digital tools available to the demand and supply sides, allow the transfer of knowledge between firms, both vertically and horizontally between competitors, a process known as "coopetition" [130], which affects the marketing mix decision-making and the process of reliably attributing revenues and costs.

- Digital capabilities of organizations (K14)

Each organization combines a variety of resources and skills. The capacity of an organization to utilize its resources efficiently and creatively is referred to as its capabilities. The competitive advantage that enables a business to grow and stand out is derived from the resources and capabilities that are accessible [51]. The acquisition, preservation, and use of a company's technology assets rank among the most critical digital competencies [131].

Especially for businesses that are not technologically advanced, a change in the business model will include some degree of digital transformation to successfully adapt to the changing demand [63]. The pandemic hastened the emergence of digital technology in daily life, driving people to swiftly adopt new routines. Businesses must embrace their digital skills if they want to remain competitive and relevant. The alignment of marketing

incentives across the board and experimentation and discovery-driven planning are made possible by digitization.

The progress of the marketing mix is simultaneously threatened by executives' "digital myopia" and reluctance to digital transformation because these factors may put businesses in jeopardy in terms of competitiveness and business innovation [132]. Due to executives' limited digital skills, the major cause of this resistance is their reluctance to alter existing procedures and technologies. A worry of losing strategic direction and the essentials of the physical experience, which cannot be translated to the digital domain, is also present [133].

### 5.2. Application of a Grey DEMATEL Approach

The eight experts' perceptions are presented in Tables A1–A8 in the Appendix A, according to the scale presented in Table 1.

Using the procedure described in Section 4 (Equations (1)–(9)) the total relation matrix is presented in Table 2. In this table the values which are greater than the threshold value  $\theta$  are indicated with grey cell coloring and bold text.

**Table 2.** Total relation matrix.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K1	0.43	<b>0.52</b>	0.41	0.36	0.45	0.41	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.46</b>	0.33	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.51</b>	<b>0.54</b>	0.40	<b>0.52</b>
K2	<b>0.51</b>	0.44	0.41	0.36	0.43	0.44	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.47</b>	0.32	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.54</b>	0.39	<b>0.50</b>
K3	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.46</b>	0.29	0.32	0.38	0.35	0.45	0.41	0.28	0.45	0.45	<b>0.49</b>	0.36	0.45
K4	0.40	0.38	0.29	0.24	0.34	0.31	0.38	0.36	0.29	0.38	0.37	0.40	0.31	0.40
K5	0.39	0.39	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.30	0.35	0.36	0.26	0.40	0.39	0.43	0.32	0.40
K6	0.42	0.44	0.30	0.29	0.36	0.30	0.39	0.40	0.27	0.44	0.45	0.45	0.35	0.43
K7	0.42	0.44	0.33	0.28	0.35	0.33	0.34	0.38	0.25	0.41	0.43	0.43	0.34	0.40
K8	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.48</b>	0.36	0.35	0.42	0.40	0.45	0.37	0.29	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.50</b>	0.39	<b>0.46</b>
K9	0.31	0.32	0.24	0.26	0.28	0.26	0.30	0.28	0.17	0.31	0.31	0.32	0.27	0.31
K10	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.49</b>	0.35	0.31	0.43	0.40	<b>0.46</b>	0.44	0.28	0.39	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.49</b>	0.37	<b>0.46</b>
K11	0.41	0.43	0.33	0.29	0.38	0.36	0.42	0.38	0.25	0.43	0.36	0.45	0.34	0.42
K12	0.44	0.42	0.33	0.30	0.39	0.35	0.41	0.38	0.27	0.43	0.44	0.38	0.34	0.42
K13	0.36	0.37	0.29	0.27	0.36	0.31	0.37	0.33	0.26	0.38	0.40	0.41	0.26	0.37
K14	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.49</b>	0.36	0.35	0.42	0.39	<b>0.46</b>	0.43	0.29	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>0.49</b>	0.36	0.40

The degree of prominence and the net cause/effect of the factors are presented in Table 3. Based on the results, the most prominent critical success factors for the digital transformation of the marketing mix in the food and beverage industry are: "Digital media & communication" (K2) and "Available technology/Online infrastructure" (K1), followed by "Digital capabilities of organizations" (K14) and "Brand strategy" (K10).

There are seven factors that are classified as causes:  $K3 > K4 > K8 > K6 > K1 > K2 > K9$ . "Cost of investment" (K3), "Security" (K4), and "Customer satisfaction" (K8) are the most influential causes. Thus, changes on these factors would significantly affect the industry's digital transformation.

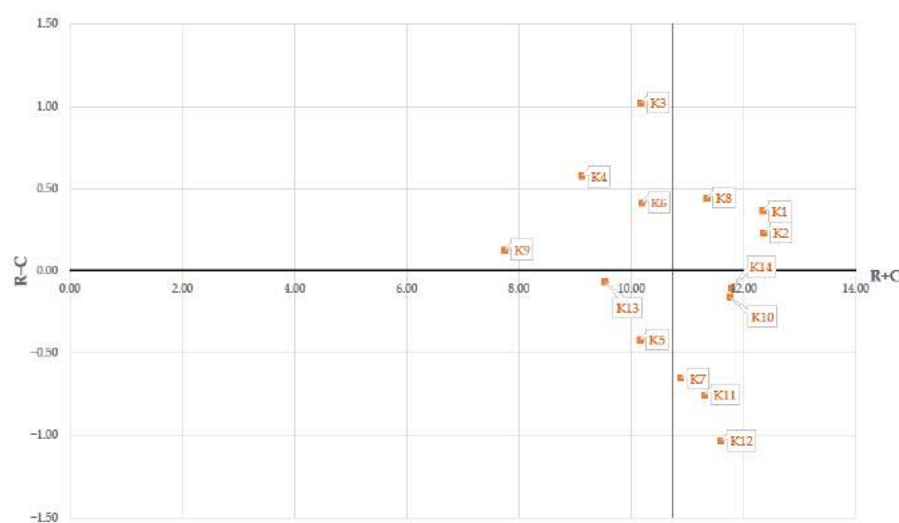
There are seven factors that are classified as effects:  $K12 > K11 > K7 > K5 > K10 > K14 > K13$ . "New operating models" (K12), "State of competition" (K11), and "Consumer reach" (K7) are the factors that are more sensitive to the influence of other factors. In this case, the results of decision-making are mostly reflected on them.

**Table 3.** Degree of prominence and net cause/effect.

Factors	R	C	R + C	R – C	Classification
K1	6.35	5.99	12.34	0.36	Cause
K2	6.30	6.07	12.37	0.23	Cause
K3	5.60	4.58	10.18	1.02	Cause
K4	4.85	4.27	9.12	0.58	Cause
K5	4.87	5.29	10.15	−0.42	Effect
K6	5.30	4.89	10.19	0.42	Cause
K7	5.12	5.77	10.89	−0.65	Effect
K8	5.90	5.45	11.35	0.45	Cause
K9	3.94	3.81	7.76	0.13	Cause
K10	5.80	5.96	11.76	−0.16	Effect
K11	5.28	6.03	11.31	−0.75	Effect
K12	5.29	6.32	11.61	−1.03	Effect
K13	4.73	4.80	9.53	−0.07	Effect
K14	5.85	5.95	11.80	−0.10	Effect

The overall prominence–causal graph is presented in Figure 2. This graph provides a convenient representation of the factors that were studied in this paper. By calculating the mean the of  $(R + C)$  values, four quadrants are created:

- The factors in the upper right quadrant are core factors (K8, K1, K2) and considered as significant for the digital transformation of the food and beverage service supply chain.
- The factors in the upper left quadrant are driving factors (K3, K4, K6, K9) and should be given further attention after the previous group of factors is considered.
- The factors in the bottom left quadrant (K5, K13) are independent factors.
- The factors in the bottom right quadrant (K12, K11, K7, K10, K14) are prominent factors with poor relation, as they are influenced by other factors.

**Figure 2.** Overall DEMATEL prominence–causal graph.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on a review of the literature and empirical research conducted with the assistance of industry experts, the study's goal was to untangle the web of interactions between the critical success factors for the digital transformation of the marketing mix in the food and beverage

service supply chain. Its contribution consists of offering workable solutions and insights to support professionals' strategic choices during this turbulent period for the sector.

The outcomes of the study have both theoretical and practical implications. The major findings that result from the input of experts and theoretical research are the significance of the technology that is currently available, in terms of an organization's infrastructure as well as digital media and digital marketing practices, and an organization's agility in reshaping its marketing mix to accommodate the digitization of modern consumer behavior. Additionally, the cost of investment for corporate digitization and refocusing a marketing strategy is portrayed as the most influential factor, which is why the sector is seen to be cost-sensitive.

The literature demonstrated how a crisis or a disruption impacts judgment and compels food and beverage companies to react quickly to change. A crucial business skill for surviving, innovating, and thriving in challenging times is resilient thinking. Dahles and Susilowati [134] define resilience as an organization's capacity to adjust to changes in a post-crisis environment while also being able to moderately build new business models and operational procedures. Additionally, a resilient mindset empowers companies to be swift and adaptable in sudden, unexpected circumstances, keeping them from falling behind and assisting them in exploring new prospects [135]. Resilience is very closely connected with sustainability and viability of supply chains, and the sources of disruptions can be of economic, environmental, and social natures. Thus, organizations rethink existing processes and experiment with new ones throughout this period—known as the “phoenix phase”—to develop flexibility, move away from regressive tactics, and create the most effective model to promote growth [136].

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated business digitalization, and agility spread beyond technology to encompass a comprehensive marketing paradigm [21]. Positive outcomes from the crisis were fast decision-making, listening to customers, and departmental flexibility. From the viewpoint of the consumer, the pandemic altered daily life and led to the emergence of new habits. The influence of COVID-19, which has lasted for a long time, changed consumer behavior, which had previously been the basis for demand and supply [63]. The pandemic caused significant harm to the food and beverage service supply chain, which was quickly compelled to adjust to the new situation. Emerging business practices including internet delivery, drive-throughs, and ghost kitchens have been seen, and studies suggest that they enhance company success. This assumption is supported by quantitative research, as new operational models are recognized as key forces in the development of the marketing mix. However, every company must consider all the factors that might present either possibilities or challenges, such as capacity limitations, shifting customer demands across distribution channels, and cannibalization vs. attracting new customers [1]. To benefit from and survive crucial events, a resilient firm also recognizes the need for maintaining solid connections with other stakeholders [22].

For businesses in the food and beverage service supply chain, digital media platforms and digital marketing strategies are among the most important components of the current marketing mix. A careful and appropriate use of digital tools, including social media platforms, may greatly boost marketing effectiveness and have a favorable impact on key performance measures like returns on investment, sales performance, and brand recognition. A tailored and enhanced digital strategy may assist the business in reaching specific audiences, addressing customer needs, and edging out competitors [2,10,137]. Furthermore, branding serves as an enabler because it may help lower perceived risk, particularly in innovative operating models like virtual brands. On the other hand, we should also note that digital media platforms increase the degree of exposure of companies to consumers. That is to say, news travels fast, especially when it comes to bad news regarding environmental scandals, violations of employee rights, and bad business practices.

It is worth noting that digital marketing is more cost-effective because it is measurable and simple to optimize, allowing for more efficient budget allocation. To reach the desired audience and sway its purchasing inclinations, food and beverage companies must deliberately select their distribution channels. Given that using that particular service satisfies

both hedonic and utilitarian demands, it is crucial for marketers to offer simplicity and convenience across all of their digital channels, as well as engaging content and useful information. To properly identify consumer preferences and achieve customer satisfaction, it is crucial to emphasize that digital marketing requires a significant commitment from a company in terms of time and labor. The technological resources of a corporation are an important tool for marketers to enhance outcomes and increase consumer satisfaction.

Digital marketing has made it possible to target, reach, and attract customers in new ways, but it should not take the place of conventional marketing; rather, the two should work in tandem to obtain the best results. Although facts show that digital marketing has positive effects on a company, traditional marketing techniques are still required to achieve greater performance [2]. Traditional marketing is significant in the start of the connection with the consumer, even though digital marketing is beneficial throughout the conversion stage. A crucial element of marketing strategies that achieve success is the integration of the two realities, as in a contemporary dining experience. To maintain consistency and provide customers with better service, the physical and digital experiences must be aligned [28]. Based on the competition, available resources, target market, and brand characteristics, each firm must choose the appropriate approach.

The role of marketing is changing in the post-pandemic world. Organizations are working to realign themselves with the new reality, and sticking with the old routines does not seem like a good option anymore. It is necessary to reevaluate conventional sources and reinvent corporate concepts and strategies. Professionals need to look for chances for innovation and growth and look for ways to stay competitive [63,138].

Although this study made several significant contributions, it also had limitations. The respondents' number was small, and the research approach used was centered on professionals. Future studies should perform quantitative research on a wide range of stakeholders to examine the topic from several angles. Furthermore, because all the enterprises are in Greece, the research was limited to the country's location. Finally, the turbulent period we are living in might have affected the perceptions and responses of participants.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Expert 1—Initial direct relationship matrix.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K1	0	4	4	3	3	2	4	4	2	2	4	4	3	4
K2	4	0	4	3	3	4	4	4	2	3	4	4	2	4
K3	4	4	0	3	4	2	3	4	2	2	3	3	3	3
K4	3	3	4	0	3	2	1	2	3	2	3	2	2	3
K5	4	3	3	2	0	3	2	3	2	3	3	4	3	3

Table A1. Cont.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K6	4	4	2	3	4	0	3	4	3	4	4	3	3	3
K7	4	4	3	3	3	4	0	4	3	3	3	4	3	3
K8	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	0	3	3	3	3	3	3
K9	2	4	2	2	3	4	2	2	0	3	4	2	3	3
K10	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	0	3	3	3	3
K11	3	4	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3
K12	4	4	3	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	3	0	3	3
K13	2	3	2	1	3	3	3	2	2	2	4	4	0	3
K14	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	0

Table A2. Expert 2—Initial direct relationship matrix.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K1	0	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	3	4
K2	4	0	4	3	3	4	4	4	2	3	4	4	4	4
K3	4	4	0	4	3	4	3	4	2	4	3	4	3	4
K4	4	2	2	0	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	1	2	3
K5	2	3	3	3	0	2	3	4	2	4	4	3	4	4
K6	2	4	3	3	2	0	4	4	1	4	4	4	3	4
K7	3	4	4	3	3	3	0	3	2	4	4	4	4	4
K8	3	2	3	4	4	3	3	0	1	4	4	4	4	4
K9	1	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	3	3
K10	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	2	0	3	4	4	3
K11	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	2	4	0	4	3	2
K12	4	3	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	4	0	3	3
K13	2	3	3	4	2	3	4	2	1	4	3	3	0	3
K14	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	2	3	3	2	3	0

Table A3. Expert 3—Initial direct relationship matrix.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K1	0	4	3	3	3	2	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	4
K2	3	0	4	4	3	4	4	3	2	3	3	4	4	4
K3	4	4	0	3	4	3	4	4	3	2	4	4	4	4
K4	4	3	3	0	2	2	4	3	4	3	3	2	4	4
K5	4	4	4	4	0	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	4	4
K6	3	3	2	3	2	0	3	4	3	4	4	3	3	4
K7	4	4	4	3	3	3	0	4	3	3	4	4	4	4
K8	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	0	3	3	3	3	4	4
K9	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	0	2	2	2	4	3

Table A3. Cont.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K10	3	4	4	3	4	2	3	4	2	0	3	3	3	3
K11	2	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	0	3	3	4
K12	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	4	4
K13	3	3	3	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	0	4
K14	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	0

Table A4. Expert 4—Initial direct relationship matrix.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K1	0	4	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	4	4	2	4
K2	4	0	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	4	3	3	3	4
K3	4	3	0	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	2	4	2	4
K4	4	2	2	0	1	1	3	2	4	1	1	2	2	3
K5	1	3	1	2	0	1	1	3	2	3	2	4	3	3
K6	2	2	2	3	1	0	1	3	2	4	3	3	3	4
K7	3	3	4	3	1	1	0	2	1	4	2	1	2	2
K8	3	3	3	3	2	4	3	0	1	4	3	3	2	2
K9	2	2	2	4	1	2	3	2	0	2	3	2	2	3
K10	3	4	3	2	2	4	4	3	2	0	3	3	2	4
K11	3	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	3	0	2	4	2
K12	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	1	2	3	2	0	2	2
K13	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	0	3
K14	4	3	4	3	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	1	0

Table A5. Expert 5—Initial direct relationship matrix.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K1	0	4	4	4	2	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4
K2	4	0	4	4	1	4	4	4	2	2	4	4	2	4
K3	4	4	0	4	1	2	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4
K4	4	4	4	0	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
K5	1	1	1	4	0	2	4	3	2	4	3	4	4	1
K6	4	4	1	1	2	0	4	4	2	2	4	3	3	4
K7	4	4	4	1	4	4	0	4	3	2	4	3	3	4
K8	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	0	2	2	4	4	4	3
K9	4	1	1	4	4	3	3	3	0	3	2	2	3	1
K10	2	4	1	1	4	3	2	3	3	0	4	4	4	4
K11	1	4	2	1	4	2	3	2	2	2	0	4	2	4
K12	2	1	2	1	4	2	2	2	1	4	4	0	3	4
K13	3	2	2	1	4	3	3	2	3	4	4	3	0	3
K14	4	4	4	4	1	4	4	3	1	4	4	4	3	0

**Table A6.** Expert 6—Initial direct relationship matrix.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K1	0	4	4	2	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	2	4
K2	4	0	4	1	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	2	3
K3	4	3	0	1	2	1	4	2	2	4	3	4	3	3
K4	3	2	1	0	2	2	3	3	4	3	2	4	2	4
K5	4	3	1	2	0	1	1	2	3	3	3	4	3	4
K6	3	4	1	1	2	0	1	3	3	4	4	4	4	3
K7	3	4	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	3	4	3	4	2
K8	4	4	2	3	3	2	2	0	2	4	4	4	4	3
K9	2	3	1	3	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	2	3	2
K10	4	4	2	1	4	4	4	4	1	0	3	3	3	3
K11	3	3	3	2	4	4	4	3	1	4	0	4	4	3
K12	4	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	2	3	4	0	3	3
K13	2	2	2	2	4	2	2	2	3	2	4	4	0	2
K14	4	4	1	4	4	2	3	3	1	4	3	3	2	0

**Table A7.** Expert 7—Initial direct relationship matrix.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K1	0	4	4	2	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	0	4
K2	4	0	4	1	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	0	3
K3	4	3	0	1	2	1	4	2	2	4	3	4	0	3
K4	3	2	1	0	2	2	3	3	4	3	2	4	0	4
K5	4	3	1	2	0	1	1	2	3	3	3	4	0	4
K6	3	4	1	1	2	0	1	3	3	4	4	4	0	3
K7	3	4	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	3	4	3	0	2
K8	4	4	2	3	3	2	2	0	2	4	4	4	0	3
K9	2	3	1	3	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	2	0	2
K10	4	4	2	1	4	4	4	4	1	0	3	3	0	3
K11	3	3	3	2	4	4	4	3	1	4	0	4	0	3
K12	4	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	2	3	4	0	0	3
K13	2	2	2	2	4	2	2	2	3	2	4	4	0	2
K14	4	4	1	4	4	2	3	3	1	4	3	3	2	0

**Table A8.** Expert 8—Initial direct relationship matrix.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K1	0	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	3	4	4	2	4
K2	4	0	3	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	2	3
K3	3	3	0	2	2	1	4	2	1	4	3	4	3	3
K4	2	2	1	0	2	3	3	3	4	3	2	4	2	4
K5	4	3	2	2	0	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	2	4



Table A8. Cont.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10	K11	K12	K13	K14
K6	4	4	1	1	2	0	1	3	3	4	4	4	3	3
K7	3	4	2	1	1	2	0	2	1	3	4	3	3	2
K8	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	0	2	4	4	4	4	3
K9	1	2	1	3	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	3	2
K10	4	4	2	1	4	3	4	4	1	0	4	3	3	3
K11	3	3	3	2	4	4	4	3	1	4	0	4	3	3
K12	4	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	2	4	4	0	3	3
K13	2	1	2	2	4	2	3	2	3	3	4	3	0	2
K14	3	4	1	3	4	2	3	3	2	4	3	3	2	0

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