PREFACE

The transformation underway in the retail world—particularly within the Italian grocery sector—is not a simple evolution of formats, assortments, or promotional tools. It rep-resents a profound paradigm shift that is reshaping the way retailers create value, cultivate relationships, and build trust with their customers. This volume, the result of work carried out by the Loyalty Promotion Monitor of SDA Bocconi (with TCC as a partner) and by leading industry players, aims to clearly and rigorously shed light on what those who design and manage loyalty campaigns experience daily: loyalty is no longer a given. It is an outcome that must be earned, measured, and continually renewed.

The most striking evidence emerging from the Observatory's analyses is the structural fragility of today's environment: geopolitical tensions, inflation, margin pressure, pop-ulation aging, and income polarization. All of this translates directly into the shopping cart. Consumers forgo what they perceive as non-essential, shift between banners, monitor promotions, and reassess their priorities. Yet they are far from passive; on the contrary, they are more informed, more demanding, and more aware.

The chapter devoted to the major transformation of retail in a fragile landscape clearly outlines the profile of this new customer:

- rational in monitoring spending;
- selective in balancing value and quality;
- values-driven when it comes to health, sustainability, ethics, and transparency.

This is not a matter of choosing between price and value; rather, consumers base their decisions on the interplay between these two dimensions. They are willing to switch banners, formats, or channels, but they are equally ready to reward those who simplify their lives, give them greater control over their choices, and offer products and services that align with their identity and well-being.

Layered onto all this is the digital dimension, which permeates the entire volume. Digital is not presented as a trend or an additional channel, but as the environment in which the customer lives, decides, learns, and shops. The analyses on the role of artificial intelli-gence, apps, blockchain, retail media, digital wallets, and advanced CRM systems demonstrate convincingly that the challenge is no longer whether to invest in digital, but how to do so in a way that is integrated, coherent, and loyalty-driven—without aban-doning the physical component, which remains essential for the success of loyalty campaigns. On this point, TCC's alignment with the volume's perspective is complete. For years, our approach to designing loyalty and engagement programs has been grounded in the same three pillars highlighted in these pages.

Customer centrality along the entire customer journey

Generic loyalty no longer exists; loyalty now emerges from the continuous un-der-standing of customer behaviors, needs, and values. Physical and digital touchpoints must be integrated and intentionally designed as parts of a single, coherent experience. The most effective campaigns accompany the customer before, during, and after the purchase, reducing friction, increasing relevance, and visibly acknowledging the value of the re-lationship.

Intelligent use of data and AI for personalization and measurement

The Loyalty Promotion Monitor clearly shows that the most advanced retailers do not simply collect data—they turn it into decisions. They perform dynamic segmentation, anticipate churn, model customer lifetime value, and measure the impact of initiatives using advanced KPIs. In this context, artificial intelligence emerges as an enabler of proximity: it allows retailers to speak to each customer with the right message, through the right channel, at the right moment.

Loyalty as an ecosystem, not as an isolated initiative

A coherent thematic thread runs through the volume and resonates strongly with TCC's values: today, loyalty cannot be reduced to a rewards catalog or a stand-alone points promotion. It is a system of ongoing relationships that must balance short-term cam-paigns with long-term value creation, commercial tactics with

brand positioning, and convenience with experience. Across the chapters on digital touchpoints, enabling factors, company case studies, and new campaign formats, one finds what TCC develops daily in partnership with retailers in over 70 countries:

- programs that integrate physical and digital components to bring the relationship into the customer's home and smartphone without losing the central role of the store;
- gamification mechanics, challenges, instant wins, and community dynamics that make participation engaging and memorable;
- reward pathways that combine products, services, and content, enhancing industry–retailer partnerships and advancing social and environmental responsibility goals;
- solutions that leverage wallets, apps, and CRM systems not only to communicate offers, but to build a true personal space for the customer within the banner ecosystem.

This volume effectively integrates macro-level analysis, quantitative evidence, and concrete cases, offering marketing and loyalty leaders a clear framework: why the context is fragile, how the consumer has changed, and which strategic levers can foster deeper, more measurable, and more sustainable loyalty.

From TCC's perspective, these pages are both a confirmation and an invitation. A con-firmation, because they demonstrate how essential it has become to conceive loyalty as a strategic asset—deeply embedded in decision-making processes and supported by data and technology. An invitation because they remind us that technology alone is not enough: creativity, vision, and the ability to translate complex insights into simple, rel-evant, and human experiences remain indispensable.

Our hope is that this book becomes not only a source of data and benchmarks for retailers and brand partners, but also a practical tool to rethink customer-relationship pro-grams—transforming loyalty from a defensive reaction into a proactive engine of growth.

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