Chapter 1

Investigation between the Quality Factors and Consumer Behaviour, through Customer Segmentation of a Shopping Centre: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of experiential shopping develops concurrently with another important and interesting one, namely the birth of Shopping Centre (Keng et al. 2007; Hedhli et al. 2013). Shopping can significantly contribute to improve people’s quality of life. The satisfaction of these needs plays an important role in the general welfare of people (Deci & Ryan, 2002). However quality is the antecedent of satisfaction, and therefore of the welfare. Several studies have shown that a relationship of dependence between quality and customer satisfaction exists (Shanaki et al. 2012; Lai, 2015). The aim of this research is twofold: (1) understanding, what are the main reasons that lead consumers to shopping centre and (2) measuring the level of satisfaction and WOM in the different groups of customers. The results show that the quality factors of the shopping centre are essential to carry out the segmentation because the consumers’ motivation and preferences are based on them.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of social and market scenarios is not always gradual but it can be traumatic. This is reflected on the panorama of consumption which appears fragmented, volatile and inexplicable, at least by means of traditional conceptual models. The social fragmentation, the multiplication of identities, the extreme heterogeneity of type of consumer prevent the application of the classic reading codes. The
meaning attributed to consumption changes progressively: while it is initially a need measured in terms of usefulness, then it is seen as an instrument of social attribution and, finally, as a language and instrument to communicate symbols (Petruzzellis & Chebat, 2010).

That is the reason why the consumer behaviour represents, with no doubts, one of the most deepened subject by marketing researchers. Understanding the reasons of consumers’ choices and defining the articulation of the making-decision process and of the individual behaviour to fulfil his needs, are among the main aims of marketing studies (Castaldo & Botti, 1999).

The configuration of consumer’s buying process, especially the correspondent level of complexity, results from the interaction of multiple factors. In addition to environmental factors and goods’ characteristics, the specification of expectations is influenced by policies enforced by companies, too (Quintano, 2006).

Consumers tend to choose a product or a service that offers the maximum value, taking into account their level of information, the cost for finding new information, their mobility and their income. After assessing which offer performs the higher perceived value, they behave consequently. The ratio between expectations and real value of the good affects customer satisfaction and the likelihood of re-purchasing.

Customer perceived value is the difference between the assessment of all advantages and costs of a specific offer and the perceived options (Kotler & Keller, 2007).

The key factor for increasing customer loyalty is just the development of high value for costumers (Oliver, 1999; Costabile 2001; Kotler & Keller, 2007).

In the past, the studies about consumer’s behaviour seldom considered that, when choosing, customers not only decide which type of product or brand to buy, but they also select the shop/point of sale where they get some useful information and where they physically make a purchase. Indeed, a common critique asserts that studies about the choice of a point of sale are marginal, compared to those dedicated to the brand choice; but in an advanced economy, customer satisfaction implies solving both problems related to brand choice and selection of a point of sale.

The moment when the consumer and the product meet within the store, becomes central especially through new shopping spaces capable of creating environments that strongly characterize not only the products they offer, but also the values and symbols they recall (Petruzzellis & Chebat, 2010).

In accordance with this vision, choosing a point of sale and having a shopping behaviour have been reckoned as rational activities, aiming primarily at satisfying functional needs. Some attempts to see shopping in a recreational dimension have been done recently; the aim of shopping, then, is not only to seek goods and information to optimize the decision-making process, but it widens to include sensorial stimulus that allows to experience an involving and fulfilling act.

One of the principal conclusion emerging from the analysis of different buyer’s profiles is the acknowledgement that there are different reasons driving to shopping, underlying in this way that it is reductive to consider the cost minimization as the only buyers’ goal. The existence of two well-defined purchase attitude has been acknowledged, that is functional and recreational. In the former case, shopping is considered merely functional to supplies; in the latter, shopping is worth amusement and entertainment (Guido, 2006ab).

In extreme situations, shopping may even become a way of spending free time, an end in itself and aside the purchasing act. It is in fact in the eighties that a new analysis approach to consumer behaviour develops: the experiential approach. This approach strongly roots in the emotional and affective com-