Investigating the Relationship Between Shopping Mall Patronage Motives and Customer Satisfaction Using Importance-Satisfaction Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Satisfying shoppers is crucial for a mall manager. To do this he/she must focus on attributes of importance to customers, or else he/she may waste resources on improving attributes that matter less. Importance-satisfaction analysis has a useful place in this regard. Therefore, this study identifies the importance-satisfaction gaps in the patronage attributes of shopping malls, as mall shoppers in the UAE perceive them. The author reviews different models of importance-satisfaction analysis and finds shortcomings in the four quadrant model and the diagonal model. To overcome these shortcomings, importance-satisfaction gap analysis is used and the author concludes that there are negative satisfaction gaps for most of the patronage attributes of shopping malls. Improvements should be directed to filling these gaps.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Importance-Satisfaction Analysis, Managers, Patronage Motives, Shopping Malls

INTRODUCTION

Shopping malls play an important part in today’s consumer lifestyle (Terblanche, 1999). Consumers’ views of shopping malls have changed from seeing them as merely a place for shopping to seeing them as a centre where different activities, such as entertainment and eating, could be found (Bloch et al., 1994). Because of their importance, shopping malls have been the subject of many studies (e.g., Bloch et al., 1994; LeHew & Fairhurst, 2000; Nicholls et al., 2000; Sit et al., 2003; Kupke, 2004; Suarez et al., 2004; Michon & Chebat, 2004; Laroche et al., 2005; Huang et al., 2006; De Nisco & Napolitano, 2006).

Nowadays, shopping malls face intense competition (Parsons, 2003; Ibrahim & Ng, 2003), not only from similar malls in their area but also from other retail formats, such as the Internet or cyber malls (Kim, 2002; Yavas, 2003; Ng, 2003) or from other types of centre,
such as power centres, discount chains and category-killers, which provide shoppers with access to almost everything they need under one roof (Hahn, 2000; Yavas, 2003).

Given the intense competition between malls, shoppers can be more selective and are more likely to patronise those shopping malls with which they are more satisfied. Therefore, it is crucial for mall managers to understand shoppers’ reasons for patronising one and not another and to know how far malls cater for these reasons.

Research into patronage motives typically considers why customers prefer to deal with a particular store or shopping centre (i.e., motivating wants) but not how far these wants are satisfied (Yavas, 2003; Haahti & Yavas, 2004). Therefore, this paper aims to identify the importance-satisfaction gaps of patronage attributes for shopping mall as mall shoppers in the UAE perceive them. This is one of the very few studies to investigate the relationship between patronage motives and customer satisfaction in a shopping mall context using importance-satisfaction analysis. To begin with, this paper reviews different models of importance-satisfaction analysis. In addition, it is the first study to handle this topic in an Arabian context.

Shopping Mall Patronage

Patronage motives have been among the most intensively examined topics in retailing (see for example Newberry et al., 2003; Sit et al., 2003; Yavas, 2003; Moschis et al., 2004; Babin et al., 2005; Moore & Carpenter, 2006; Carpenter & Moore, 2006; Korgaonkar et al., 2006; Hu & Jasper, 2006; Saunders et al., 2007). However, only a few empirical studies have addressed this topic in the context of shopping malls (e.g., Bellenger et al., 1977; Ruiz, 1999; Wong et al., 2001; Dennis et al., 2002; Drezner, 2006; El-Adly, 2007). None of the previous research on shopping mall patronage has addressed the satisfaction of mall shoppers. It has considered only such factors or attributes pertaining to attractiveness as should be acquired by a particular shopping mall intending to attract more shoppers.

Moreover, the more a shopping mall is able to match or satisfy customers’ motivating wants by its offerings, the more likely it is to be capable of attracting customers and keeping them as regular patrons (Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Therefore, mall managers should spend time on investigating shopper satisfaction.

Mall Shoppers’ Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a key issue for all organisations wishing to survive (Rampersad, 2001). In the shopping mall context, customer satisfaction comes not only from acquiring the goods and services sold in the mall but also from taking part in other activities, such as watching movies, spending leisure time with family and/or friends, having fun using the entertainment facilities in the mall, attending shows and displays, having dinner or simply passing the time (Michon & Chebat, 2004).

Customer satisfaction has been subject to research in a wide variety of industries including banking, hospitality, entertainment, fast food restaurants, retailing, hospitals, government services, etc. Measuring customer satisfaction has received much attention in research in this area (see for instance, Wilson, 2002; Chu, 2002; Dholakia & Morwitz, 2002; Crosby & Johnson, 2002; Rossomme, 2003; Wittink & Bayer, 2003; Bartkowski & Losa, 2004; Johnson et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2006). Other research has focused on the effect of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty (Athanassopoulos et al., 2001; Donio et al., 2006) or intention to patronise again (Teo & Lim, 2001; Grace & O’Cass, 2005) or word of mouth (Söderlund, 1998; Teo & Lim, 2001) or store revenues and sales performance (Gomez et al., 2004). Yet other research has focused on the determinants of customer satisfaction (Levesque & McDougall, 1996; Andaleeb, 1998; Feinberg & Kadam, 2002). However, in spite of its importance, the relationship between customer satisfaction and patronage motives has received surprisingly little empirical attention in the retailing literature. Grace and O’Cass
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