The More I Feel the Experience, the More I Buy

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Abstract

Shopping behaviour and shopping malls have received significant attention in the academic literature in the past years. At the same time, Experiential Marketing knowledge has proven to be essential for the understanding of consumer behaviour. Despite the importance achieved by the aforementioned topics, the depiction of shopping mall consumers attending to the way they live the shopping experience is still scarce. This study conducts a segmentation analysis with latent class clusters to reveal four shopping segments: "Charmed by Experience", "Explorers", "Social Interactive" and "Disappointed" shoppers. The results suggest that customers experience the mall differently, and that their purchasing behaviour differs in expenditure, visit duration, planned and unplanned purchases, and re-patronage intention. The findings of the research are discussed for future academic research and to assist retailers in the definition of strategies addressed to enhancing shopping experiences among different type of customers.

Keywords: Shopping mall, consumer behaviour, experiential marketing, shopper segmentation, retail strategy

1. Introduction

The retailing landscape and specifically that of shopping malls has changed dramatically in the last years. The spread of discount stores, factory outlets and the proliferation of lifestyle centres, require a new perspective and more than just low prices or innovative products in a convenient setting to succeed in a high competitive retail environment (Grewal et al., 2009, Gilboa & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013). In this new panorama, the importance of understanding consumer behaviour has never been more important to retailers (Puccinelli et al., 2009). Current retailing literature highlights the role of shopping experience and suggests that retailers should create a theatrical retailing environment, stress fun, excitement and entertainment; and encourage greater customer participation in the retail service experience (Thanika et al., 2013, Avello et al., 2011, Baron et al., 2000, Mathwick et al., 2001). Shopping malls evolution already reflects the fact that traditional marketing has undergone a transformation towards the marketing of experiences (Schmitt, 1999, Pine & Gilmore, 1999) as they have shifted from being primarily commercial spaces to being spaces for leisure, get-togethers, and entertainment, making shopping a gratifying experience (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003).

Nowadays, the visit to the mall has changed from "shopping" to "spending a nice time" corroborating the growing importance of experiential and emotional aspects (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, Lindstrom, 2005, Heath et al., 2006). These shopping experiences, shaped by customer perceptions of environment, are associated with emotions such as entertainment, and have led to the coining of such terms as "shoppertainment" and "entertailing" (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003, Gilboa & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013). This trend is a reality across countries and cultures (Wong et al., 2012, Kotzé et al., 2012).

This paper aims to fill the gap in previous research by exploring the existence of different segments of shopping mall consumers based on the experiential aspects of their visit and perform a complete characterization of the segments obtained. It also explores whether there are significant differences between the segments obtained in terms of expenditure, purchasing patterns, length of visit and repatronage intention. If these groups show significant different behaviour, it would be of great interest to academics and managers in order to identify which experiential profiles show the greatest potential for purchases and visits. The present study is structured in four parts. The first section offers a brief review of the relevant literature on customer segmentation in malls. The objectives of the study are presented in section two, together with the variables and methodology. The results are presented in the third section and finally we discuss the conclusions, implications and research limitations.

2. Theoretical Background: Customer Experience and Cluster Segmentation

The studies of customer segmentation in malls usually focus on the most relevant variables for classifying customers. Initially, the objective was to know who the client was from a sociodemographic perspective, since his or her behaviour was thought to be subordinate to those variables (Stone, 1954). The entry of marketing into psychology (Mehrotra & Wells, 1977) opened the door to the explanation of behaviour in other ways. Interest focused on reasons to attend and activity performed during the mall visit: what does the customer do in the mall and why does he or she visit? Segmentation models emerged to classify customers as a function of their activities. Variables were added to these models in order to explain these activities, e.g. benefits obtained from the visit, environmental factors and emotional variables (Bloch, 1994, Frasquet et al., 2001, Reynolds, 2002, Ruiz et al., 2004, Millan & Howard, 2007). This new information was used to clarify customer motivations.

Table 1- Summary of main studies related with types of customers in shopping malls

Author / Year	Segmentation criteria	Sample size	Type of client	Segmentation method	Country
Roy (1994)	Visit frequency Financial/ recreational motivation	710	Frequent/ infrequent customer	Renewal Model of Sikken and Jelierse (1987)	USA
Bloch et al. (1994)	Activities Benefits	600	Enthusiast Traditional Grazer Minimal	Hierarchical cluster with Ward's algorithm K-means cluster	USA
Frasquet et al. (2001)	Socio-demographic Perceived value	402	Middle-aged married / Young housewives Singles 20-30	Hierarchical cluster using Ward's algorithm K-means cluster	Spain
Reynolds (2002)	Attributes	1097	Basic Apathetic Destination Enthusiast Serious Brand	Hierarchical cluster using Ward's algorithm K-means cluster	USA
Ruiz et al. (2004)	Activities Socio-demographics Psychographics Perceptions Emotions Atmospherics Density Conduct Shopping motives Non-financial costs	889	Recreational Total Experiencer Traditional Customer with objectives	P-median clustering	Canada
Millan and Howard (2007)	Motives Values Enjoyment Activities Socio-demographics	355	Relaxed Utilitarian Strict Utilitarian Committed Explorers	Hierarchical cluster using Ward's algorithm K-means cluster	Hungary
Gilboa (2009)	Reasons for visiting Activities during the visit Visit patterns	636	Disloyal Family unit Minimal Enthusiast	Hierarchical cluster using Ward's algorithm K-means cluster	Israel

Nowadays, marketers recognize that beside product design and branding, understanding the experience consumers feel in the point of sale is of critical importance (Schmitt, 1999). Verhoef et al., (2009) note that customer experience involves the customer´s cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer. Nicholls, (2002) observe significant changes in shopping patterns and purchase since 1990. Compared with the shoppers in the early 1990s, today's mall patrons tend to be more leisure driven, they have a greater concern for merchandise selection, and they visit the mall less often but make more purchases per visit. In this new context, that situational variables are more likely to have an impact on shoppers' purchase decisions today than they did before (Nicholls, 2002). From the perspective of segmentation studies there is a need to get more in depth understanding on how consumers experience shopping and its relationship with buying and future revenues. Recent studies indicate that customer enthusiasm towards malls is associated with a greater frequency of visits (Gilboa, 2009).

3. Research

A. Variables

Lillien and Kotler (1983) proposed that a segmentation study can be described in terms of base variables and descriptive variables. The base variables for segmentation used in this study are the key variables in the description of an experiential trip to the mall, environmental and entertainment variables. Environmental variables are the essential ingredient in the creation of sensory experiences (Turley & Milliman, 2000, Bellizzi & Hite, 1992, Spangenberg et al., 1996, Wakefield & Baker, 1998, Michon et al, 2005, Lindstrom, 2005). The scale to measure it was adapted from Wakefield and Baker (1998). Six items in a 7-point Likert scale were used. These items concerned music, ambiance, decoration, design and distribution ($\alpha = 0.828$).

Entertainment or fun has been studied as a source of pleasurable experiences in commercial establishments in general and in shopping malls in particular (Donovan et al., 1994, Sherman et al., 1997, Wakefield & Baker 1998, Jones 1999). In order to measure entertainment we used the six items scale developed by Rusell and Prat (1980), which measures the enthusiasm or entertainment perceived by the subject in order to indicate the state of emotional activation caused by the surroundings ($\alpha = 0.911$).

Table 2- Items and Cronbach's alpha values

Environmental Variables (α = 0.828)
AMB 24: I like the music in this Shopping mall
AMB 25: It is clean
AMB 26: The architecture of the Shopping mall is attractive
AMB 27: I like the decoration of the Shopping mall
AMB 28: I like the general design of the Shopping mall
AMB 29: The layout of the Shopping mall makes it easy to walk through
Entertainment perceived (α = 0.911)
DIV35: This Shopping mall is scarcely entertaining – very entertaining
DIV36: This Shopping mall is boring - fun
DIV37: This Shopping mall is scarcely stimulating – stimulating
DIV38: This Shopping mall is monotonous– diverse
DIV39: This Shopping mall is not attractive – very attractive

We used the descriptive variables recommended by Nantel (1996) to characterize each segment: geographic, sociodemographic, psychographic and variables related to benefits sought and activities performed during the visit. Time was measured by the customer´s subjective travelling time from their home to the mall (Kang et al., 2003), Sociodemographic, variables included gender, age, occupation and income level. Psychographic variables were measures by the level of implication using the Zaichokswy (1985) scale and variables related to the benefits sought and the activities performed during the visit.

B. Method

We used the statistical technique of latent classes to obtain the groups. This analysis divides the population into discrete groups as a function of attributes derived from their different experiences (Bond & Morris, 2003, Bhatnagar & Ghose, 2004).

While traditional clusters group together “close” cases in accordance with an ad hoc distance definition, latent classes clusters use an approach based on a probability model for belonging to a certain group in order to classify each case within the appropriate cluster. In the end, this provides a statistical model, based on clusters, for the population from which the studied sample is extracted. The differences among classes in segmentation with latent classes can be clarified and deepened by using descriptive variables, e.g. expenditure or patterns of visits, which provides a solid understanding of the differences among classes (Madigson & Vermunt, 2003).

C. Data

We selected a quota sample of 350 subjects older than 18 years who were resident in Spain, based on data from the Municipal Population Census of the National Institute of Statistics. The gender composition of the sample was adjusted based on the proportion of customers in malls, based on information obtained from the Spanish Association of Shopping Malls (AECC).

Surveys were carried out in 8 shopping malls, which were selected as representative of the geographic area under study. The numbers of surveys performed in each mall was determined according to proportionate allocation in order to take into account the size of the population in each mall's zone of influence.

The surveys were conducted in person at the mall exits by professional interviewers working for specialized firm in this type of studies.

4. Research /Results/Findings

To determine the optimal number of latent classes, 4 models were estimated. The model with the smallest value of the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) and a maximum likelihood bootstrap p value > 0.05 was accepted. For additional support, we also estimated the Constrained Akaike Information Criteria (CAIC) which penalizes overparametrization more strongly than the BIC. Estimating the p value with a bootstrap of L2 allows a more precise estimation of the model fit, since it does not assume that the L2 statistic follows a chi-square distribution.

Table 3 - Model fitting

Number of segments	BIC (LL)	CAIC (LL)	N Par.	L^2	Bootstrap *p* value
1	12584,43	12649,42	65	8111,425	0,176
2	11691,13	11768,13	77	7147,8343	0,352
3	11408,21	11497,21	89	6794,6194	0,312
4	11241,65	11342,65	101	6557,77	0,354

A. Experiential and descriptive characterization of the segments

We first analyzed the differences in the experiential patterns among groups as a way to check whether the choice of the segmentation base variables was valid. A Chi-square test was performed between the four clusters and each of the variables and they all resulted to be significant at 0,05 level. Results are shown in table 4-1.

Crossing the groups obtained with the descriptive variables provides us precise information about the profile of each type.

Table 4 - Sociodemographic Profile

Variables	Charmed by Experience shoppers	Explorer shoppers	Social Interactive shoppers	Disappointed shopper	% of total
Number of Individuals	36%	29%	20%	15%	100%
Base variables					
Environmental (BV1)	5,66	4,51	5,62	3,78	4,89
Excitement (BV2)	6,05	4,77	5,07	3,09	4,75
Gender					
Men	19 %	25,5 %	36,2 %	49,1 %	28,9 %
Women	81 %	74,5 %	63,8 %	50,9 %	71,1 %
Age					
18-29	20,6 %	26,5 %	37,7 %	49,1 %	30,0 %
30-39	38,1 %	25,5 %	23,2 %	26,4 %	29,7 %
40-55	32,5 %	38,2 %	30,4 %	13,2 %	30,9 %
+55	8,7 %	9,8 %	8,7 %	11,3 %	9,4 %
Motivation					
Level of Involvement (mean)					
Not important - very important (INV1)	5,19	4,46	4,22	3,43	4,52
Not attractive - very attractive (INV2)	5,54	4,74	4,33	3,66	4,78
Not significant – very significant (INV3)	5,01	4,30	4,13	3,43	4,39
Boring – entertaining (INV4)	5,44	4,75	4,48	3,72	4,79
An obligation – a pleasure (INV5)	5,27	4,75	4,57	3,83	4,76
Objective of the visit					
Buy a preplanned item (OBJ1)	74,6%	57,8%	73,9%	84,9%	71,1%
Spend time/ walk round (OBJ2)	27,8%	18,6%	17,4%	5,7%	19,7%
Look at shops (browse) (OBJ3)	20,6%	33,3%	14,5%	13,2%	22,0%
Have something to eat or drink (OBJ4)	7,1%	11,8%	29,0%	9,4%	13,1%
Variety of offer (mean)					
I value the variety of shops/ stores	5,85	5,26	5,71	4,47	5,44
I value the variety of leisure and entertainment	5,52	4,75	5,19	3,34	4,90

Group 1 (36% of the sample) is made up of subjects who evaluate mall atmospherics very positively. They find malls to be entertaining, attractive, and stimulating. The characteristics of these subjects and the way they feel and live their experience at the mall leads us to call them "Charmed by Experience" customers. They score the highest in environmental and entertainment variables (Table 4-1, BV1 and BV2). They comprise primarily middle-age professional women, with low-to midrange salaries. Very involved with shopping, they consider it to be an important and pleasurable activity (Table 4-1, INV1-5). They arrive to the mall to make a pre-planned purchase, although they also enjoy themselves exploring the shops or having something to eat or drink. For this type of customer, the variety of shops with wide assortments constitutes an additional motivation.

Group 2 (29.1%) is made up of people who do not particularly value the environment or the entertainment of a mall (Table 4-1, BV1 and BV2). They may be called "Explorer Shoppers", since one of their main objectives when visiting the mall is to browse (Table 4-1, OBJ3). Explorer shoppers are also highly involved in shopping (Table 4-1, BV1 and BV2). They are also a feminine group, although they are older and a larger proportion of them are self-employed. When an Explorer shopper visits a shopping mall she will either purchase something, or she may just stroll around, look at the stores or have something to eat or drink. Taking into account that creating a superior customer experience seems to be the central objective in today´s retailing environments and that the concept of leisure is promoted by mall retailers, we can say that explorer shoppers are those who have best assimilated this strategy and who make the best use of it.

Group 3 (19.7%) labelled as "Social Interactive Shoppers" includes those who, although they find the environment of the mall to be quite attractive and exciting (Table 4-1, BV1 and BV2), initially they feel low involved in shopping. Despite their idea of visiting a mall with a pre-planned purchase in mind, once in the inside their experience changes their point of view and their behaviour. The duration of the visit of this group is the longest (110.8 minutes) and almost a 30% has stopped to eat or drink in a restaurant. Among this group, we begin to find a greater presence of men. They are young and mature, with relatively few middle-aged customers. They usually work for someone else, and their purchasing power is slightly higher than Groups 1 and 2. Their visits begin with clear objectives: to buy, eat or have dinner, but end in an unforeseen manner.

Lastly, Group 4 (15.1%) does not enjoy shopping malls at all. They do not find the environment to be pleasant, nor do they enjoy the activities available inside. This is certainly the most atypical group. We refer to this group as "Disappointed shoppers ". It is comprised by men and women in equal measure, they are young (under 30) students or poorly-paid workers, and they have the lowest income level. Purchases do not have a special meaning in positive terms. They do not enjoy their purchases, and they relate them more to a duty than to a pleasure. They visit the mall with a specific focus such as to buy something pre-planned, but they do not consider shopping malls to be a leisure venue, since they are not interested at all in strolling, looking at stores or eating or drinking in restaurants. When they need to buy something, they do not require a wide range of shops.

B. Experiencial typology and purchasing

The experiential types described show significant differences in all of the outputs examined: expenditure, planned purchasing, unplanned purchasing, length of the visit and repatronage intention.

Table 5 - Purchase behaviour profile of segments

Variable	Charmed by Experience shoppers	Explorer shoppers	Social Interactive shoppers	Disappointed shopper	TOTAL	Sign. (*)
Number of individuals	36%	29%	20%	15%	100%	
Behavioral responses						
I have made the intended purchase(s) (%)	74.6	56.9	69.6	79.2	69.1	0.04
I have purchased something unforeseen (%)	64.3	71.6	73.9	49.1	66.0	0.02
I have spent more than I intended (mean)**	5.06	4.67	4.81	3.92	4.73	0,00
I will return whenever I can (mean)**	5.27	4.52	4.59	3.77	4.69	0.00
Expenditure in euros (mean) (M)	70.4	55.68	52.57	38.0	55.7	0.01
Duration of the visit (min) (T)	107.9	88	110.8	73.5	98	0.00

* ANOVA was used for continuous variables, and the chi-square test was used for categorical variables

** Mean score where 1= have not spent more than intended/will not return and 7= have spent more than intended/ will return.

These results lead us to the conclusion that the differences obtained between the segments are not only experiential differences, but that they are also related with behaviour, which highlights even more the interest of certain groups in terms of shopping potential.

Following these results we can conclude that there is a relationship between experience and expenditure. Those customers highly involved, living intense experiences are those that spend the most, stay more time and with the highest repatronage intention. Thus, the second objective of this study has also been achieved.

5. Discussion, limitations and recommendations

The purpose of this study was twofold. Firstly, to segment mall customers according to their experiences and characterize each segment and secondly, to examine the different behavioural outputs based on these different experiences. Analyzing the level of expenditure, visit duration and planned vs. unplanned purchases gives retailers and academics a better understanding of why the experience is important to the shopping mall, more than just knowing what the experience is as whole.

Regarding the segmentation of mall customers according to their experiences, the results reveal four shopping segments, namely: "Charmed by Experience", "Explorers", "Social Interactive" and "Disappointed shopper ". Each segment has its own experience that differs from the others. Of the four groups, “Charmed by Experience” shoppers is consistent with the findings of Bloch (1994), Reynolds (2002) and Ruiz et al. (2004) who identified a total experience/enthusiast segment who enjoy de venue and the visit itself. But this research also shows who enjoy the shopping experience at the mall spend the highest amount of money both in planned and unplanned purchases. The second cluster, the Explorers, is consistent with the recreational customer described by Wakefield and Baker (1988) and Ruiz et al. (2004), a less planer shopper, but in the second place, in terms of expenses. Both clusters account for a greater proportion of the sample –a total of 65%–. This result may reflect the high acceptance level of malls in our country, where these shopping centres continue to grow.

The cluster of Social Interactive customer is newly defined. However if we consider the initial motives for visiting the mall, it could be connected with the "destination customers" described by Reynolds (2002) or the "mission shoppers" described by Ruiz et al. (2004). Earlier studies have suggested that destination customer o customer with clear objectives holds little interest for mall operators because of their infrequent visits. However the Social Interactive shopper shows a high potential for shopping mall managers. Visits from this group last the most (Table 5, T) and they make a large percentage of unforeseen purchases. Based on our results, the problem with this group of shoppers is their low engagement with shopping (Table 4-1, INV1-5), although when they begin to feel the experience, they respond satisfactorily to marketing stimuli (Table 5, M and T).

The major difference found between our typology and that described by other researchers lies in the segment of the so-called "Disappointed shopper". We find no equivalent segment described in the literature. They might show some similarities with the functional/rational shopper but its differences are notable. These young people show little affinity for shopping and are a reality of our culture; indeed, other segmentation studies reveal peculiarities of the country where they are carried out (Millan and Howard, 2007, Gilboa, 2009). Frequent to find in the Spanish young population, they are 20 to 30 year-old, live with their parents and whose income does not exceed 1,000 euros per month. This limits their consumer capabilities and may engender a certain rejection of consumer culture. There are some limitations of this study that needs to be addressed. The self-report nature of the data is a limitation of the study as in most segmentation based on customer perceptions. The results, therefore, may be subject to self-report bias. This study does, however, offer several directions for future research. First, in depth questions on experience aspects could give a broader understanding of each segment interest. The variables used could be expanded in order to probe experiences more deeply, by incorporating other experiential aspects (Schmitt, 1999) and by adding outputs to allow tracking of where expenses are incurred or what types of products are purchased. Second, it will be interesting to incorporate data from the teen and tween segments they will be soon become the consumers of tomorrow.

We do not wish to conclude without making some strategic recommendations for managers of malls. Profiling each segment in terms of experience, sociodemographics, and shopping behaviour helps mall managers in developing the appropriate retailing strategy that satisfy each segment. The consumer groups that we have described coexist, and each one of them requires the use of different strategies of customer attraction and retention. For the Charmed by experience segment, who come to the mall out of a necessity or desire to acquire something planned, but who end up –in more than half of cases– buying something unforeseen, we recommend to malls that, in addition to featuring leading merchants that offer variety and attractive shopping opportunities, they feature offers on clothing accessories, decoration or services, as they value assortment.

We should not forget that this segment is the one that spends the most money during visits to the mall, and it is a segment that enjoys the mall experience, and that intends to return whenever they can.

For the Explorer shoppers, who come to the mall on a less focused visits and who tend to explore stores more than the previous segment, we recommend the organization of events that enable them to prolong their stay while enjoying the surroundings. Activities such as expositions of technological products or collectibles would be effective for this consumer group.

Social Interactive shoppers are those who, once they have purchased what they intended, are the most likely to prolong their stay in restaurants or bars. For this group, it is essential to provide a pleasing and wide-ranging variety of venues in which to eat, have dinner or take a break from a long day of shopping. Cross marketing promotional strategies will also be suitable for this segment to increase their expenditure level.

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