A Multidimensional Structure of Shopping Centre Visit Objectives - An European Consumers' Perspective

Marcin Gasior[1] -- Lukasz Skowron[1]

[1]Faculty of Management, Lublin University of Technology, Poland

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, one can observe significant, and, more importantly, constant shifts in numerous areas of consumer behaviour, especially those related to purchase processes and buyers' attitudes toward shopping. With the grow of societies' wealth and development levels, shopping becomes more a part of a lifestyle and a way of spending time, than a means of satisfying vital, elementary needs. Such situation resulted in tangible change in the role and the strategy of retail places and malls, and directly leaded to the concepts like leisure shopping.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the possible reasons for visiting shopping centres and malls as well as selected attitudes towards shopping. Such analysis made it possible to assess the significance and relevance of different objectives of the visit as well as to evaluate the existence and the size of the continuum between two approaches towards shopping, defined as: (a) strictly pragmatic, and (b) leisure and social experience.

The study was conducted on the quota sample of 1375 polish consumers, who had visited a shopping centre in the recent months.

The obtained results clearly show that, contrary to common belief, one cannot assume the existence of the consumers' inclination towards one of abovementioned approaches, although some correlation with age and gender has been observed. Moreover, the adaptation of clustering methods (expectation-maximisation algorithm) made it possible to prove the existence of different, yet internally coherent groups of consumers, displaying different combinations of the perceived significance of evaluated reasons and objectives of the visit.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour, Consumer objectives, Leisure shopping, Consumer segmentation.
JEL: M30, M10, L81.

1. Introduction

In today's market situation shopping centres, understood as large-area facilities offering to the visitors access to numerous shops and service points of various nature, enjoy great and still growing popularity. The confirmation of this fact is both growth in their number, as well as a phenomenon of pushing smaller entities, with a narrower offer, away from the market.

For this reason, the question might appear as to the values which a consumer seeks when visiting a centre, and thus as to elements and nature of the offer, which should be delivered thereto and which encourages him or her to visit and also to return.

For a long time, we have been aware of decrease in significance of location in favour of other factors forming the image and the appeal of the facility (Meoli *et al.*, 1991; Eppli and Shilling, 1996), the issues of offer complexity are discussed also in selected indexes used to measure the facility's attractiveness (Wong *et al.*, 2001), but, surprisingly, there is no detailed description and analysis of reasons and purposes to visit the shopping centre by prospective consumers.

Certainly, it does not mean the lack of knowledge with regard to motives and behaviour of consumers

during the described activities (Dennis, 2005; Howard, 2007), however such deliberations are conducted usually in a broader context, including factors common for the whole centre (image, location, offer scope etc.), without considering particular elements offered by them.

The question about purposes of visiting a shopping centre and, in a broader context, the role of this kind of activities in consumer's life gains particular significance considering a tendency more and more often observed in developed economies and communities, to combine purchasing behaviours with recreation (Dixon, 2005; Howard, 2007). The discussed processes lead, among others, to separation of groups of consumers putting, when visiting a shopping centre, a greater emphasis on the entertainment offer than on satisfying the purchasing needs (Sit *et al.*, 2003), which in consequence may lead to re-orientation of the role of institutions of this type and their more and more frequent perception in categories of a product combining commerce and services (Knecht-Tarczewska, 2011; Grzesiuk, 2013), rather than a facility grouping a large number of potential shopping points.

On the other hand, what is quite often neglected in the existing literature, is the separation of two possible sources of pleasant experiences, possible to obtain in the course of visiting the shopping centre. One of them is obviously the process of purchasing that may be fun and entertaining in itself (Babin *et al.*, 1994), with regard to which also factors are known determining the level of experienced pleasure (Jones, 1999). The other is a strictly entertainment area of the offer of facilities of this type, taking into account, on the one hand, points focused on organizing free time (cinemas, restaurants), on the other hand, however, any activity of organizational nature, covering for example, contests, events, shows etc.

The purpose of this article is to make an attempt of diagnosis of possible purposes for visiting shopping centres among Polish consumers. On their basis, an attempt will be made as to effective (Wedel and Kamakura, 2000) market segmentation, according to the criterion of perceived significance of subsequent reasons for visiting, subjected to analysis. The separation of such segments will enable verifying the hypothesis concerning a multi-dimensional attitude of a consumer towards this type of shopping, as well as indicating a typical combinations of values, sought by buyers.

At the same time, assessment will cover selected consumer attitudes related to conducting shopping, in particular from the point of view of their perception of the visit to a shopping centre and in purely pragmatic categories or as forms of recreation and spending free time.

2. Methodology

Evaluation of goals and selected attitudes, associated with visits to shopping centres was conducted within a broad research project oriented on discovering reasons and association between satisfaction and motivation of employees, and satisfaction and loyalty of customers of selected market entities.

Account was taken of twelve activities that can be undertaken within the centre, which included: (1) *use of service points*, (2) *shopping for groceries*, (3) *use of mobile networks' offer*, (4) *shopping for jewellery*, (5) *shopping for press or books*, (6) *shopping for cosmetics,* (7) *shopping for interior design supplies*, (8) *shopping for clothes and shoes*, (9) *shopping for electronics and household appliances,* (10) *participation in organized events*, (11) *use of entertainment services,* and (12) *use of gastronomic services.*

At this point, it should be pointed out that these factors can be assigned into three groups. The first of them is formed by actions of purely utilitarian nature, which essentially involve fulfilling consumer needs, not providing consumers with experiences or pleasure (factors 1-3), the second group is formed by actions of purely entertainment nature oriented strictly on spending free time and pleasure (factors 10-12) and actions of indirect nature, satisfying consumer needs, but which may constitute a source of pleasure for a consumer (factors 4-9).

In the conducted research, assessment covered also selected consumer attitudes related to shopping in shopping centres. They took account of: (a) tendency to visit all potentially interesting shops, or focus on specific, previously chosen shops, (b) shopping for only planned products, or allowing the possibility to buy products not planned before (c) focusing on limited, previously defined scope of brands, or tendency to buy products of different manufacturers, also those not considered before, (d) preferences with regard to participation of other people in shopping, and (e) evaluation of one's own attitude to a visit to centre – treating it as a form of spending free time, or its perception only in the shopping categories.

The presented research took place in the period from May to June 2013 and was conducted using a survey questionnaire. It involved participation of 1375 respondents, selected using quota sampling method (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2009) from among customers visiting all shopping centres located in the city of Lublin (Poland). The number and size of quotas were determined in a manner which made it

possible to reflect population structure in the sample, from the point of view of sex and age range criterion.

Significance of the previously discussed potential purposes of visiting a shopping centre was determined using questions in which the respondents were asked to assess, in a ten-grade scale, significance of each of the analyzed activities. The intensity of attitudes was diagnosed by presenting to the respondent each of them in the question with a set of six-point (and thus forcing) semantic scales (Himmelfarb, 1993).

In order to assess similarities among consumers in terms of combinations of typical purposes of visiting a shopping centre, a cluster analysis was used (Rand, 1971), whose task in this case became an attempt to group the respondents into relatively consistent sets of people with a similar assessment of the causes for visiting a centre.

With the segmentation criterion defined in this way, cluster analysis proceeded in two stages. In the first place, cases agglomeration was conducted (square of euclidean distance, Ward's method), whose purpose was to determine initial number of groups, and then, using the Expectation-Maximization algorithm (Celeux and Govaert, 1992; McIachlan and Krishnan, 1996), being a type of generalized analysis of k-means (MacQueen, 1967), proper clusters were created.

Analysis of a tree diagram, obtained by way of agglomeration, indicated a possibility of creating two, three, or five clusters. Later, to evaluate the optimum number of segments, also V-fold cross validation was used (Witten and Frank, 2000). Assuming the default, minimum percentage level of decrease in error function (defined as average distance of cases from centres of clusters) of 5%, it indicated as the optimum the number of five segments, and this number was adopted for proper analysis.

The second stage of the analysis was establishment of relevant groups using the previously mentioned Expectation-Maximization method, assuming the Euclidean distance and selection of initial centres of clusters in a manner maximising the distance between the sets. In clusters determined in this way, average assessments were calculated, concerning the significance of subsequent analyzed purposes of visiting shopping centres, on the basis of which profiling and analysis of consumers forming them were conducted.

3. Purposes of Visiting Shopping Centres

The first part of the conducted analysis became verification of the significance of subsequent, possible purposes for visiting a shopping centre. Average values, calculated for the whole group of respondents as well as a for fractions creating it, separated according to the criterion of sex and age, are presented in Table 1.

Table-1. Average assessments of the significance of subsequent purposes for visiting a shopping centre

Aim	Fraction							
	Total	**Males**	**Females**	**<=18**	**19-25**	**25-36**	**36-50**	**50+**
shopping for clothes	7,01	6,52	7,32	7,49	7,01	7,11	7,41	5,40
shopping for cosmetics	5,63	4,54	6,26	6,52	5,64	5,60	5,51	4,78
shopping for electronics and	3,16	3,58	2,89	4,38	2,96	3,64	3,51	2,81
shopping for jewellery	4,05	3,23	4,51	5,23	3,94	4,16	4,18	4,09
shopping for press or books	4,49	4,24	4,65	4,91	4,37	5,06	4,57	3,74
shopping for groceries	4,89	4,72	4,99	6,11	4,75	5,00	4,99	6,03
shopping for interior design	3,68	3,53	3,74	3,85	3,39	4,27	4,43	5,03
use of entertainment services	5,21	5,13	5,27	6,14	5,45	4,76	4,26	2,14
use of gastronomic services	4,84	4,69	4,96	6,11	4,92	4,61	4,29	3,97
use of mobile networks' offer	3,34	3,53	3,22	4,16	3,19	3,59	3,75	3,47
participation in organized	3,06	3,20	2,98	4,26	2,94	3,39	2,99	2,94
use of service points	2,96	3,08	2,88	2,95	2,81	3,48	3,40	2,59

The obtained data quite clearly indicate that the most important purpose of visiting a shopping centre is shopping for clothes. This kind of shopping obtained average assessment significantly higher than other activities, subject to analysis, while standard deviation calculated in its case (2.36, ignored in the table due to limited space) was expressly lower than in the case of purposes for which standard deviations assume values from the range from 2.55 to 2.99. It can be thus assumed that shopping for clothes for

Polish consumers is a common reason to visit the centres, being, in a way, the basis around which other motives are shaped.

Further, respondents indicated shopping for cosmetics (5.63) and use of entertainment services (5.21), with addition that the latter was characterized by a very high level of standard deviation (2.99), which in the adopted measurement scale suggests not only diversity of opinions of the respondents, but even their polarization into two groups characterized by an extreme approach to the aforementioned activities. The lowest significance can be assigned, on the other hand, to visits to service points (2.96), participation in events organised at the centre (3.06), shopping for electronics and household appliances (3.16), as well as visits to mobile networks stores (3.34). Low level of significance of last two activities can be quite easily explained with the fact that they are undertaken quite rarely.

Comparison of average assessments for significance of subsequent factors, calculated separately for men and women leads substantially to confirming the popular stereotype, concerning the significance, for both sexes, of shopping for products from different categories. Among women greater significance than among men was observed in the case of shopping for clothes (7.32, men 6.52), cosmetics (6.26, men 4.52) and jewellery (4.51, men 3.23), among men more significant turned out to be shopping for electronics and household appliances (3.58, women 2.89). In other cases, average assessments were relatively comparable, usually slightly higher in the case of women.

The conducted Mann-Whitney U test validates a statement that differences in assessment of significance ($p < 0.05$) of subsequent possible purposes of visiting a shopping centre in groups of respondents separated according to the criterion of sex can be mentioned in the case of *shopping for clothes* ($p<0.001$), *shopping for cosmetics* ($p<0.001$), *shopping for electronics and household appliances* ($p<0.001$), *shopping for jewellery* ($p<0.001$), *shopping for press and books* ($p = 0.007$) and *visiting mobile networks stores* ($p = 0.009$) and *service points* ($p = 0.049$). It is worth, at the same time, emphasizing that none from among the differences observed at typically entertainment purposes is statistically significant.

Interesting remarks are also provided by the analysis of average significance of subsequent purposes of visiting a centre perceived from the point of view of an age group of a respondent. First, it should be stressed that there are activities whose significance seems to remain in close, linear dependence on age, with addition that they are undertaken more often by younger people, and less frequently by older ones; these activities include shopping for cosmetics, using entertainment services and gastronomic services; the fact that the latter two purposes are of purely entertainment nature may lead to a conclusion that utilitarian approach to shopping is rather a feature of older consumers. A contrast is shopping for household appliances and interior design supplies, whose significance, as a purpose of visiting a shopping centre increases along with the age of a respondent.

In other cases, average assessments were at a comparable level in all age groups, provided that:

1. persons from the lowest age group (up to 18 years of age) indicate usually higher assessments of the significance of subsequent purposes than persons from other age groups; this can be explained by the fact that for this group shopping in centres is a natural behaviour, being a part of a lifestyle, and also the fact that these persons do not have their own funds, they spend the funds of their parents, and are thus less willing to save money, as well as their greater tendency to consumer behaviours (Dittmar, 1992); higher assessments of the significance of subsequent purposes do not imply, on the other hand, more frequent visits to the centre;

2. respondents from the next group in the sequence (18 up to 25 years of age) usually assign to subsequent purposes of visits to the centre much lower significance than other examined groups (except for group 50 +), which may be caused by the fact that these are often independent persons, also sustaining high costs of education, and not always possessing their own income.

4. Segmentation of Consumers

The observed diversity of the opinions of respondents with regard to significance of particular, possible purposes of visiting a shopping centre became a premise to make an attempt to specify smaller, relatively consistent groups of buyers, characterized by similar combination of preferences.

When applying the previously defined procedure, five segments were determined. Table 2 and figure 1 present average assessments of significance of subsequent possible purposes for visiting a shopping centre calculated for the respondents forming each of them.

Table-2. Purposes and attitudes towards visiting a shopping centre according to separated clusters

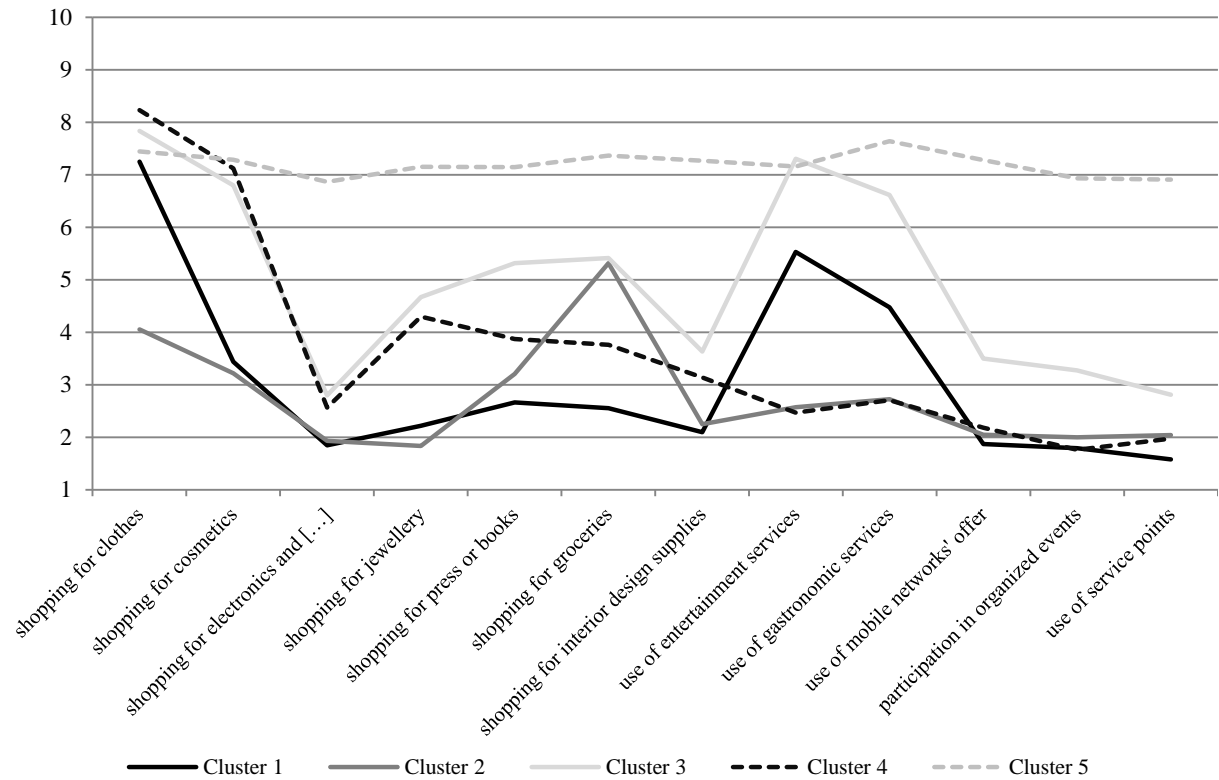|	Clusters				
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5
Goals					
shopping for clothes	7,25	4,05	7,84	8,24	7,45
shopping for cosmetics	3,44	3,22	6,80	7,12	7,29
shopping for electronics and	1,85	1,94	2,80	2,57	6,87
shopping for jewellery	2,22	1,84	4,67	4,30	7,16
shopping for press or books	2,67	3,21	5,32	3,87	7,15
shopping for groceries	2,55	5,32	5,41	3,76	7,37
shopping for interior design	2,10	2,25	3,64	3,14	7,27
use of entertainment services	5,53	2,57	7,31	2,47	7,16
use of gastronomic services	4,48	2,73	6,62	2,71	7,64
use of mobile networks' offer	1,87	2,05	3,50	2,18	7,28
participation in organized	1,79	2,00	3,28	1,76	6,94
use of service points	1,58	2,04	2,81	1,98	6,91
Attitudes[*]					
shops: selected vs all	3,39	2,86	3,69	3,18	3,70
shopping: planned vs free	2,76	2,31	3,36	2,98	3,55
brands: selected vs all	3,92	3,60	3,92	3,71	3,68
visit: shopping vs leisure	2,35	2,31	2,63	2,24	3,41
company: present vs alone	2,63	3,10	2,68	2,87	3,22
Cluster size	21,22%	17,84%	25,84%	19,67%	15,43%

[*] low values mean the tendency towards selecting the first statements, high values – the second; owing to length of the scale (6 elements), its centre was placed at the value of 3.50.

The first of the separated segments (cluster 1), including 21.22% of the respondents, is the group for whom only three purposes seem to be important – these are shopping for clothes (7.25) and, to a slightly smaller extent, entertainment (5.53) and restaurant services (4.48). At the same time, it should be emphasized that these persons opt for expressly pragmatic approach to shopping: they clearly declare that shopping is not a form of spending free time (2.34) and declare making only planned transactions (2.79). However, on the other hand, most often from among all groups, they decide to visit the centre in a larger group (2.67). These results seriously hinder interpreting the nature of this cluster, it seems, however justified to state that this group expressly differentiates between purchasing and entertainment functions of the centre, and most likely, deciding for shopping, does shopping only, and deciding for a visit connected with entertainment offer – it focuses only on it.

The second of the separated groups (cluster 2), gathering 17.84% of respondents, includes persons perceiving the shopping centre as a convenience store, a place to buy everyday products, meant for current consumer needs. In the case of this group the most important purpose of visiting a shopping centre became shopping for food and groceries (5.32), and to a smaller extent, shopping for clothes (4.05). Other purposes, on the other hand, are strongly marginalized. The respondents, to the greatest extent from among all groups, indicate visiting specific shops (2.86) and shopping of planned nature (2.31). They expressly declare that a visit to a shopping centre has a clearly shopping character (2.31), and they often visit it on their own (3.10). The nature of this group suggests that these are persons most likely from a direct vicinity of the centres, frequently shopping there. The third separated group (cluster 3), consisting of 25.84% of the respondents, is the group of consumers using the offer of shopping centre in an open and comprehensive manner. The most important objective in their case should be considered shopping for clothes (7.84) as well as using entertainment services (7.31), an important factor are also such activities as shopping for cosmetics (6.80) using gastronomic services (6.62), shopping for groceries (5.41) and press and books (5,32). Other purposes were considered less significant, however their average significance was the highest among all other segments, except for cluster 5. Consumers from this group gladly visit different, not only previously selected stores (3.69), accept spontaneous shopping (3.36) and purchasing various brands, not necessarily previously defined (3.92). Visits to the centre are still oriented on

shopping, while in to a slightly higher extent than in the case of other groups, they also relate to spending free time (2.62).

Fig-1. Significance of subsequent purposes of visiting a shopping centre according to separated clusters

The fourth from the defined groups of (cluster 4, 19.67% of the sample), gathers, like in cluster 1, respondents with a very selective attitude to visiting the shopping centre, and contrary to group 1, the respondents of this cluster do not assign any significance to the entertainment offers of the centres, (entertainment services – 2.47, restaurant services – 2,71, participation in events – 1,76). For this group of respondents, a significant issue is shopping for only clothes (8.24) and cosmetics (7.12), and to a slightly smaller extent shopping for jewellery (4.30) press and books (3.87) and groceries (3.76).

The respondents from this group are, to a certain extent, willing to make visits to specific shops (3.18) and shopping previously planned products (2.98), and perceive visits to a shopping centre in strictly utilitarian categories (2.24).

Extremely interesting is the last, fifth group of respondents (cluster 5), covering 15.42% of the examined sample. These are persons emphasizing the significance of all examined purposes of visiting a shopping centre. The calculated average assessments of significance range between 7.00 and 7.50, except for use of gastronomic services assessed higher (7.64) and lower, but still highly assessed shopping for electronics and household appliances (6.87), participation in events organised at the centre (6.94) and use of service points within its area (6.91).

Persons forming this group, to the greatest extent from among all groups, prefer visiting all potentially interesting shops (3.70), to the greatest extent accept making spontaneous shopping (2.98), and what is most important, to a considerably higher extent than other groups, consider shopping as a way of spending free time (3.41). It can be thus assumed that this group is created by individuals for whom consumption and visits to places of this kind are an essential element of lifestyle.

5. Conclusions

The data presented above enable formulation of several conclusions related to the objectives, and the attitude of consumers towards visiting a shopping centre. Taking into account the assessments of subsequent examined activities alone, it may be indicated that:

1. for most Polish consumers the main purpose, being the axis connecting other activities possible to undertake in the shopping centre is shopping for clothes; other purposes seem to be of lower significance; at the same time, most purposes strictly related to entertainment and free time seems to be moderately significant; thus, it should be assumed that spending time at a shopping centre, provided that it actually is

a way of spending free time, is rather of shopping nature.

2. while it is possible to observe differences in average assessments of significance of subsequent purposes of visiting a shopping centre in groups separated according to the criterion of sex of a respondent, we cannot speak about any statistically significant differences in relation to purposes with nature associated with spending free time; what is more, we cannot speak about statistically significant difference in assessment of one's own attitude to shopping, measured in the space of "a visit focused on shopping – "a visit as a way to spend free time ($p = 0.2697$);

3. age is a factor strongly diversifying the respondents in terms of attitude to subsequent, possible purposes of visiting a shopping centre, provided that for the youngest persons, subsequent purposes are much more important than for next age categories; however, in most cases we cannot speak about relations of a linear nature;

The conducted segmentation of consumers, on the other hand, provides an interesting outlook, from cognitive point of view, on possible combinations of purposes implemented during the visit to the centre. The obtained results clearly indicate that we cannot speak about the same attitude to subsequent, feasible purposes among various groups of consumers. It is possible to separate consistent, and what is most important, logical groups, possible for interpretation possible to be observed in the market reality, gathering respondents sharing a common attitude to possible purposes, but also declaring similar attitudes to this type of activities. It is also worth noting that the attitude to shopping as a leisure activity seems to be in correlation with the number of purposes of visiting a shopping centre, recognized by consumers as significant. Additionally, if consumers treat visits to a shopping centre more in the categories of entertainment and a method to spend free time, they deem as significant more potential activities, that can be undertaken in its area.

6. Acknowledgements

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