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### WHAT IS THE SHOPPERS' PERCEPTION OF MULTILLOCATION? A FIRST MEASUREMENT

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## WHAT IS THE SHOPPERS' PERCEPTION OF MULTILLOCATION? A FIRST MEASUREMENT

### Abstract:

The paper proposes a measure of the perception of multilocation in order to examine its potential impact on the shoppers' attitudes. Indeed, numbers of brands choose to exploit several stores within a reduced shopping area in order to ensure their development. Researches in retailing have tackled the issue of multilocation from the retailers' perspective, but there is no research from the consumers' perspective. Not being "customer centric", measuring the impact of multilocation on shopping behaviors can produce better outcomes for the firm and for the consumer.

To measure the shoppers' perception of multilocation, a new scale was created. The main result of our research is that shoppers' perception of multilocation is not a positive and simple construct. Faced with a standardization of shopping areas and homogeneous streets, shoppers may also develop a negative attitude.

### Keywords:

*multilocation, retailing, shopping / patronage behavior, resistance.*

### Track the paper is intended for:

*Track Retailing and Channels*

## 1. Introduction

In the fashion sector, the main retail strategy consists in multiplying stores location all over the shopping area. The reasons why retailers spread their network on a territory are firstly linked to the opportunities that the property market offers. Secondly, internationalization of retailers which want to expand in foreign markets through direct stores or with the development of a franchising network has increased. One of the main problems they have to face is the time they save replicating abroad the characteristics of a format which is successful in the local market; the faster they locate a retail format, the faster they dominate competitors. Moreover, in order to gain in efficiency, networks have to create new outlets, to cover the territory to maintain uniformity, then to adapt locally and globally to ensure notoriety and to facilitate loyalty (Bradach, 1998). As a matter of fact, this retail strategy gives the chain organizations a spatial value (Cliquet, 1998) which increases their notoriety.

Finally, multilocation is a crucial way to communicate when traditional medias are saturated and when mobility of consumers has increased.

On the one hand, this development of chain organizations, in particular in the women's clothing sector, is an outstanding spatial phenomenon, that causes a revitalizing dynamics for the central areas. But on the other hand, this development also leads to some banality of the urban landscape. In fashion retailing, chain stores may locate two or more outlets in a same highstreet, usually the main street (*Zara, Etam* for instance). It is paradoxal that retailers, appealing to the five senses of shoppers, try to offer new experiences in their instore area, and in the same time, that they create such a standardization of the retail environment. The risk is that multilocation may provoke a sixth sense, the sense of reluctance or resistance to the standardization.

Indeed, what are the reactions of consumers faced with this retail environment? Where is the search of pleasure when the shoppers constantly find the same retail brands downtown and on

the outskirts, indeed even at several places of the centre of town? Where is the « re-enchantment » so imperative for the survival of the retail brands (Ritzer, 1999)?

Therefore, this research attempts to measure the shoppers' perception of multilocation in order to help retailers in their choice of store location. Our purpose is to foreknow their perception of multilocation with the development and test of a new scale that may measure the impact of their attitude on their patronage behavior.

Studying the shoppers' perception of multilocation is relevant for marketing research and practice for several reasons.

First, the retail sector is characterized by an intense competition among retailers for customers' patronage. Over the past decades, the retail business environment has faced aggressive competition with rapid market entry of innovative store concepts and formats (Maronick and Stiff, 1985). This intense competition has led to a benchmarking of the best retail strategies, a so-called dialectic process that has resulted in the blurring of distinctions between retailers (Maronick and Walker 1974; Levy and Weitz 2004; Zinkhan et al. 1999). Ganesh et al (2007) provide empirical support that these trends have resulted in the evolution (Dreesman 1968) of the "Big Middle" retailer (Levy et al. 2005). Although the distinction between for both individual retailers and multi-store formats is getting diffused (Ganeh et al. 2007), the homogeneity of retail environment is particularly intense between retailers of a same sector and in territories i.e. in France, where the chain stores, particularly franchise networks, are spreading.

Second, the standardization of retail environment created by multilocation is a critical issue for urban managers. The local communities are the most implicated in the issues concerning attraction of the downtown area. The purpose of urban managers is to line up and manage the center of town as a shopping mall. Their goal is precisely to render the downtown area attractive and animated.

Third, in the apparel sector and generally in the fashion market, some of the most important store attributes are variety seeking and the search for originality (Waquet and Laporte, 2002). As far as teenagers are concerned, the consumption of fashion refers to the quest of identity (Marion, 2003). When they shop fashion goods, the consumers patronage homogeneous streets and malls, with a multiplication of stores of the same brand. Do the shoppers appreciate to patronage standardized outlets everywhere they go? Does multilocation influence the evaluation of store attributes? Does it generate large flows of stores patronage? So how retailers can evaluate if the consumers perceive multilocation as a positive opportunity?

Decades of research have tackled the issue of the choice of store location (see Dellaert et al. 2008 for a review). Moreover, some research has recently pointed out the problem of standardization of the retailing format with the internationalization of the retailing format through franchising (Dianoux et al. 2007). However, the store choice models do not take into account the shoppers' perception of multilocation. Whereas it is a relevant issue, retailers have no idea whereas shoppers' attitude is positive or not. There is no research on the perception of multilocation strategies that may indicate to retailers if they have to go on standardizing their retail outlets or not.

In order to measure the shoppers' attitudes towards the brands which multiply store location in the same shopping area, our methodology encompasses the steps of creation of new scale. We have first tested the items that measure the shoppers' perception, then we have confirmed it in a second data collection. Finally, we have generalized the test of the measurement instrument with a third data collection which deals not only with clothes and furnitures, but all shopping goods.

In so doing, we contribute to the literature. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper to propose a scale that measures the customers' evaluation of the retailer strategy. In addition,

we empirically investigate shopping behaviors within the shopping streets of a downtown area, an open and uncontrolled context.

In addressing these issues, we structure our article as follows. We first provide a brief synthesis of the literature on the retail patronage behavior and the theoretical framework. Then we examine the empirical study, we discuss the results and propose future research directions.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### *2.1. Models of store location and retail patronage behaviors*

Various models have been proposed since the 1970s. The nature of the earlier ones is generally aggregate and macroscopic. The gravity model (Huff model) allocates customers from different locations to several shopping centers across the city, using external variables such as shopping center attractiveness (e.g. retail floorspace, parking lots) and distance. It is typically calibrated using data on customer origin-destinations (O-D) flows (e.g. Hagishima et al. 1987; Berry et al. 1988). Over the years, these aggregative models have been gradually replaced by individual, microscopic models. Although numerous their contributions, research on store location has conceptual limits (concepts of least effort, trade area) and limits in terms of understanding the interaction between spatial behaviors and trade environment.

Another research stream has focused on explaining retail patronage with respect of various elements (e.g. personal factors such as attitudes, product features and attributes such as price and assortment and market-relevant factors). Beyond the market-relevant factors, store image and opening hours, parking facilities, travel distance and other factors dealing with convenience, are considered as key independent variables.

- Convenience: A substantial volume of studies has dealt with the transaction costs associated with shopping (e.g. transportation cost, time spent); for example, the central

place theory suggests that a central location can reduce these transactions costs. Regional shopping centres that offer a large assortment of goods and services attract customers from greater distance than smaller centers that offer a smaller range of goods and services (Craig et al. 1984). In addition to a convenient location, other convenience orientation such as longer opening hours, ample parking, is a key benefit to attract customers (Hansen and Deutscher 1977) and has a positive influence on the consumers' perception of services and on their satisfaction (Berry et al. 2002).

- Store image: the retail store environment offers a multitude of stimuli (e.g. ambient design, social factor) which contribute to the subjective impressions and consumers' perceptions that form the store image, that is to say the way in which the store is perceived by shoppers. Image formations have a significant impact on consumers' patronage behavior (Finn and Louviere 1996; Kasulis and Lush 1981).
- Variety seeking behavior: in some situations, consumers become satiated by the constituent attributes derived from consuming the implied item (McAlister 1982; Givon 1984; Lattin and McAllister 1985). This concept has also been used in a french study in order to explain the customer loyalty (Siriex 2000). Indeed, in the non grocery sector, in particular in the fashion one, this pattern is positively linked with implication in the product and it may impact the patronage behavior.

A substantial volume of studies has been published with diverse study conditions and heterogeneous findings, so the relationship between various predictors and a shopper's retail patronage remain unclear (Pan and Zinkhan 2006). The results of the studies reveal inconsistent direction and magnitude of the effects for the same predictor variables across studies. Limitations are due to the use of student samples, to the way in which retail patronage is measured (recalled or anticipated future behaviors). Also some antecedent factors have not been investigated (gender, purpose of shopping trip) enough. For example, the retail



environment and especially the number and location of stores are not often investigated as antecedents to retail patronage. This lackness and findings above stress the need to go further in the modelling of shopping behavior.

## 2.2. *Definition of multilocation*

In a shopping area, the store network may be divided as follows:

- One or several outlets in a main shopping street of the centre,
- One outlet in the shopping centre,
- Another one in a mall of the outskirts,
- Warehouses, delivery relays, and of course a web site.

In this research, we do not focus only on the location of several outlets in the same street. The big chain organizations are able to use it in big cities, but this is one case upon many. Thus, we define multilocation as a location of multiple outlets within a same shopping area, that is to say **the location of several stores of a same retailing system**.

The measure of the consumers' perception of multilocation is based on this definition of the shopping area as the area where the consumers usually go shopping. It is a large area, not only the one which is visited during a particular shopping trip, but a wide area, accessible by car or other form of transportation. This shopping area includes highstreets and shopping malls, whatever the type of the stores, the type of products. As a matter of fact, the consumers do not only shop at a unique store. Even if the consumers have favourite ones, and even if they prefer go shopping downtown for the clothes and furniture, and on a shopping mall of the suburb for food products, wherever they patronage, they know the marketing offer of the place they are used to. So with this definition of the shopping area, multilocation may not be an exceptional phenomenon; it may be inevitable, so fewer negative effects may be expected.

We underline that the perception of multilocation is different from the notion of keeping the brand in mind, or the fame of a brand name. We suppose that it is one of the antecedent of the

store image. They are different concepts, even if there is a link between the two notions. Indeed, retailers which choose to locate simultaneously in different points of the catchment area are the famous ones. The consumers recognize and prefer the brands the most famous. So during the store choice process, we may suppose that the consumers' attitude is different if they know the brand or not.

### 2.3. *Theoretical framework and hypothesis*

The issue that we tackle here is that retailers actually suppose that their fame is reinforced by the strength of their store image, but there is no empirical evidence that demonstrate that the perception of a multilocation is positively linked to the store image or negatively.

Since the research of Achabal and al., many authors have investigated the agglomeration of several outlets in a catchment area in order to explain the locations and to optimize the network (Achabal, Gorr, Mahajan, 1982). Therefore, researches in spatial marketing intend to optimize the stores location in the retailers' perspective, in order to maximize the expected value. Our objective is to give a measure of the consumers' perception of the multilocation. We hypothesise that the location of two or more stores in a same shopping area may have contradictory effects on shoppers' attitude.

On the one hand, multilocation may have a positive influence on the consumers' attitude. Indeed, the location of many stores of the same retail brand may have a positive influence on the consumers' perception of services and on their retail patronage behavior.

On the other hand, standardization of stores may influence negatively consumers' attitude. In a retail environment where retail brands propose more than one store in the same shopping area, consumers may become satiated by the fact that they patronage the same stores. In the non-grocery sector, for example, in the fashion sector, we hypothetise that the variety seeking behavior may have a negative impact on the patronage behavior.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Data collection*

In order to measure the perception of multilocation of fashion retail outlets on female shoppers' attitudes, we have first conducted a qualitative stage. In order to understand the context and the objectives of the retail brands, we interviewed five managers of retail stores in the fashion sector. We firstly aimed at understanding their retail strategy, especially if they used multilocation and what were the expected effects (in terms of communication for instance). Secondly, we asked them if they knew the consequences of these strategies and if multilocation was related with different attitudes or behaviors. Then, in order to understand the concept, we interviewed 13 female consumers aged from 18 to 60.

After this qualitative stage, we have conducted a data collection in two steps to test our scale. In the first step, we have interviewed 458 women. This first step gave raise to measure the concept of multilocation [table 1]. We have accepted 8 items within three dimensions among which one seemed more valid. Then, we have tested this dimension during step 2 (388 questionnaires). We have verified that the scale of multilocation in one dimension was less valid than in three dimensions. Finally, in summer 2010 we have undertaken an other step by internet, in order to confirm the results; an internet survey was filled in by 204 consumers.

#### *3.2. Variables and measures*

Relevant measures were assessed using a survey instrument. In line with our conceptualisation, the attributes of store brand which may be influenced by multilocation were convenience, variety seeking, trust and degree of domination. These attributes were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 corresponding to "totally disagree" to 7 corresponding to "completely agree". Table 2 shows the variables depicting consumers' perception of multilocation.

### 3.3. *Scale specification*

KMO and Bartlett's test is significant. The principal component analysis shows three dimensions:

- Benefits of multilocation
- Originality versus ordinariness
- Degree of domination perceived

This structure is interesting because it underlines the complexity of the effects on consumers' perceptions. The strong opposition between the three dimensions gives a weak general validity for 8 items because of the third dimension, only calculated by two items. In order to confirm the structure of the instrument, we made a confirmatory factorial analysis and we chose to keep the third dimension in spite of its weakness (14% of explained variance) for its conceptual interest. We tested 2 scales, one with 8 items and one with 7 items (item "multiloc4" removed because of its communality). For an exploratory research, indicators are satisfying. They are summed up in table 2.

## **4. Major Results**

This research has investigated the shoppers' perception of multilocation. We have proposed a scale of this variable that fulfils the usual validity criteria. With this measure, we affirm that consumers do not perceive multilocation as a simple and positive retail strategy. On the contrary, the women interviewed declare they feel negative influences of this multiple presence of brands in shopping area. On the one hand, we have found a negative dimension related to seeking for variety as a store's choice criteria. On the other hand, the presence of a retailer at numerous places in the town may be perceived as a threat for liberty of wearing whatever kind of clothes, as a mean of controlling people. The existing literature reveals that people can form negative brand attitudes and refrain from using a brand for a variety of

reasons. Our results indicate that the multilocation of retail brands involves a distaste or even a resentment of the retail brand. This dimension directly refers to the totalitarian firm which shuts away people in a scheme without possibility of escaping from it (see especially research of Jackle and Sculle, 1999 and Badot, 2004). Indeed, shoppers might feel that multilocation is being the sign of an authoritarian temptation, the willingness of domination of stores upon the consumers. So, one of the dimension of the shoppers' perception of multilocation is a negative resentment; the multilocation may involve a rejection of the retail brand, at least a reactance or even a resistance to the retail brand that multilocate on the same shopping area.

## **5. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research**

The multiplication of stores federated under a brand name, in a restricted area, is a usual retail management strategy, especially in the fashion sector. In this research, we focused on the effects of such a strategy on the consumers' perception of the store name.

Indeed, retailing managers need to spread their network in order to gain market shares on their competitors, but they do not know the effects of the expansion of their stores in a same shopping area. This exploratory research is tackling the issue of the shoppers' perception of this retailing strategy. We have interviewed 859 adult female shoppers during their shopping trips. The scale measures different attitudes towards the brands: positive attitude, referring to attributes that are important in the store choice process: convenience and trust; negative attitude, referring to different attributes: variety seeking on the one hand, and perception of domination from the store on the other hand. The second step of the survey took part during september 2010. We have added more items, in order to purify the scale. It confirmed that the perception of multilocation is a complex construct. This research contributes to the existing literature by offering new insights on the consumers' attitude toward retail brands.

### *5.1. Limitations*

We have first collected our data in only one middle-sized French town, which poses the problem of external validity. That is why we have tested the measurement instrument on internet, with a sample not only composed of female consumers. But we cannot say that the results could be replicated in a larger study. Moreover, internal validity must be improved, including more items.

### *5.2. Future research*

Despite these limitations, our results have some managerial implications for retail brands that may encourage to undertake a future research. First of all, the multilocation of retail brands points out that the shopping area must be better defined. The definition of the shopping area does not fit with the actual retail environment, that is to say the strategies of the retail brands and the mobility of consumers. A new definition of a retail area has to be found, taking into account each shopping trip.

Moreover, this research has focused on the consequences of multilocation from a consumer's perspective. It aimed at constructing a new scale. Finally, the measurement instrument reveals that the perception is a complex and dual phenomenon; each one of the dimensions found in the statistical analysis seems to be a different attitude.

- One positive attitude, linked to the convenience offered by the multilocation.
- A negative attitude, linked to the fact that multilocation is contrary to their variety seeking behavior. Indeed, the multilocation provokes standardization of the retail environment or even privation of freedom, that has a negative impact on their attitude toward the retail brand.

A wide and recent stream of research deals with the rejection of products or brands by the consumers. They may protest individually (e.g. Kozinets 2002) or collectively, but they also may protest in silence, without boycotting and other loud behaviors of anti-consumption, with

negative consequences for the retailers. The concept of resistance encompasses the behaviors that have these reactive and negative aspects (e.g. Fournier 1998 ; Fischer 2001). Among the research that deal with all the aspects of resistance to the market, a few ones consider that resistance is the natural consequences of the interaction between the consumer and the retail environment (Thomson and Arsel 2004; Fisher 2001; Arnould 2007). The various tactics and behaviors of the consumers are consequences of their willingness to protect some values such as freedom, choice, self-governance (Roux 2007). If the differences between reactance and resistance have been clearly stressed out (Clee and Wicklund 1980), future research on the effects of multilocation on retail patronage behavior will have to point out if the negative attitude is only reactance or if it is more resistance.

Finally, we assume that an equilibrium is needed by the banners between a necessary presence in order to perform spatially (a sufficient covering of territory to ensure the uniformity of the dimensions that give outlets their distinctive character) and a reasonable presence, which means that chain organizations may avoid to exceed the limits of a standardization of offer which may divert consumers from their favourite brand, because they seek variety. However, this hypothesis must be validated in the conceptual framework of store location modelling. Future research will have to confirm if store location modelling should benefit from taking into account the perception of multilocation. For instance, it is possible to use these two attitudes of perception of multilocation in a probabilistic model (revealed preferences). This should help retailers to develop effective retail strategies.

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## 7. Appendix

**Table 1 - Analysis of the scale of perception of multilocation (7 items)**

Steps	Indicators	Acceptance	Results
<b>1st step : data</b>	Bartlett's test: Measure of global fit Measure of individual fit	$\geq 0,60$ $\geq 0,60$	Yes 0,611 yes for 4 items > 0,50 for 3
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> step : principal factor analysis</b>	<i>Choice of factor</i> Kaiser rule Scree-test minimum restitution	$\geq 1$ < 0 $\geq 0,60$	1,97/1,67/1,11 yes 68,09%
	<i>Interpretation of the matrix</i> Poids factoriel Communality	$\geq 0,50$ $\geq 0,50$	yes yes
<b>3rd step : Reliability and validity convergente</b>	<i>Validity</i> Cronbach' Alpha : dimension 1 Cronbach' Alpha : dimension 2 Cronbach' Alpha : dimension 3	$\geq 0,60$	0,71 (yes) 0,65 (yes) 0,32 (no)
<b>4<sup>th</sup> step : common factor analysis</b>	Chi-deux / dl GFI and AGFI Gamma 1 and Gamma 2 RMSR RMSEA	$\leq 2$ ou $\leq 5$ $\geq 0,90$ $\geq 0,90$ < 0,05 < 0,05 ou 0,08	2,27 0,979 / 0,960 0,988 / 0,977 0,05 0,05
	NFI and CFI Bentler and Bonett indicator  PNFI AIC	$\geq 0,90$ $\geq 0,90$  Strongest value Weakness value	0,936 / 0,962 0,947  0,668 0,132
<b>5<sup>th</sup> step : Validity and reliability of the scale</b>	<i>Qualité spécifique de l'ajustement</i> Résidu standardisé T test	<  1,96  >  1,96	yes yes
	<i>Validity 1</i> internal coherence Coefficiency ( $\rho$ )	> 0,60	Yes for 2 dimensions / 3
	<i>Validity 2</i> Poids factoriel ( $\rho_{vc}$ )	> 0,50	No
	<i>Reliability</i> - Difference between $\rho_{vc}$ and correlation between two factors, squared $\varphi^2$	$\rho_{vc} > \varphi^2$	Yes

## Table 2

- (multiloc 1) : J'évite les magasins qu'on retrouve à la fois en ville et dans les galeries commerciales.
- (multiloc 2) : J'aime bien aller dans les magasins que je suis la seule à connaître.
- (multiloc 3) : Je vais surtout dans les magasins qui n'existent pas ailleurs.
- (multiloc 4) : Je n'aime pas que l'on m'impose une façon de m'habiller en ouvrant des magasins de la même enseigne partout.
- (multiloc 5) : Ça me rassure de retrouver plusieurs magasins de la même enseigne dans la même ville.
- (multiloc 6) : C'est pratique d'avoir plusieurs magasins de la même enseigne dans la même ville, ça permet d'échanger.
- (multiloc 7) : J'aime bien quand il y a plusieurs magasins de la même enseigne dans la même ville, car ils ne proposent pas exactement les mêmes vêtements.
- (multiloc 8) : Déjà qu'on les retrouve dans toutes les villes, mais dans la même ville, alors on n'a plus le choix !