

**“BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA  
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
MARKETING DEPARTMENT**

**Ph. D. Thesis  
-SUMMARY-**

**STUDY REGARDING THE UNDERLYING ELEMENTS  
OF THE MARKETING STRATEGIES USED TO  
ATTRACT AND CREATE LOYAL CUSTOMERS FOR  
SHOPPING CENTERS**

**Ph. D. Advisor:**

**Ioan PLĂIAȘ, Ph.D. Professor**

**Ph. D. Candidate:**

**Ioana Nicoleta IEVUȚA (married ABRUDAN)**

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### **Key words:**

Shopping center; retail; marketing strategy; underlying elements of strategies; customers attraction; loyalty; image; satisfaction; motivation; shopping behavior; shopping destination evaluation; shopping center selection.

## Introduction

Shopping centers have a long history, having appeared many centuries ago. The concept of "agglomeration of retailers" first took the shape of markets and bazaars, then of commercial galleries and passages. Only during the twentieth century and especially in its second half, shopping centers experienced an ample scale, displayed through a variety of formats and a significant geographic expansion. Economic and political conditions did not allow for the same rate of development of the offer of shopping centers. Therefore, nowadays, in terms of management experience and of numbers of shopping centers or built area per one thousand inhabitants, the shopping centers markets may be classified into mature, developing or emerging markets.

In Romania, until early 1990s, the only modern retail formats were considered to be the department stores of each county capital city. The first openings of shopping centers with modern, international formats took place around the year 2000 (the first mall in Romania is Bucharest Mall, launched in 1999). The rate of development accelerated after 2006, when the standard of living of the Romanians experienced sustained growth, reaching a value considered attractive by shopping centers developers. Apart from western formats of shopping centers, in Romania there may be encountered a format that is peculiar to Eastern Europe, named the "bazaar type shopping center" (e.g. Mărăști Market in Cluj-Napoca). Its development began right after 1990. Shopping centers have expanded their role in our country, as everywhere, offering not only speed and low cost for shoppers, but also entertainment and various other services to the communities they belong to. Although some experts predict the end of the shopping center with the development of virtual stores, however, at least for now, they are not really threatened by any other format, and continuous innovation in this area will allow them to continue to thrive, offering consumers "an even more enjoyable experience than before" (Lebovitz, 2004, p109).

The current context of retail in Romania can be described as a rather heterogeneous mix between traditional and modern elements, domestic and imported, amateurism and professionalism, superficiality and profundity. It is true that for the last 6-7 years it has seen a dramatic transformation, but the haste with which the changes were made left a visible mark. The same situation may be noticed for shopping centers. Many projects were designed during the 2005-2007 period, but many of them were completely abandoned, or otherwise disposed, while others in various stages of construction stalled due to financial bottlenecks of

developers. Of those that were released, some had difficulty in attracting tenants and/ or buyers and have had to close their doors, others still face financial difficulties, quite frequently changing their mix of tenants, and only a small part of them are successful.

This is due to the short period during which the shopping center market has developed. Therefore, the “baggage” of local practices in this area is not yet developed, and studies related to shopping activities and to the behavior and buying habits of their visitors are missing. This paper aims to be a useful tool for both researchers and practitioners to help the understanding of the mechanisms and levers involved in attracting and retaining shopping centers customers.

The objectives of the Ph. D. thesis are twofold. The first one tries to capture the marketing vision of shopping centers management on the attraction activities and customer loyalty. For this, the radiography of best practices in the field of shopping centers marketing and of their underlying elements is considered useful. The review is founded on both the literature review, and on the qualitative study conducted among the representatives of Romanian shopping centers. The second line of research tries to capture customers’ reaction to the marketing tools that shopping centers managers use in order to gain their satisfaction and loyalty. Based on their views, a conceptual model of satisfaction and loyalty is created. This model can be used as an active marketing tool in the scientific research as well as in the marketing practice of shopping centers. The conceptual model is grounded on the elements of attraction of the shopping centers, which, at the same time, outline their image among shoppers.

## **Chapter 1. Research Methodology Overview**

From the methodological standpoint, the thesis is divided into two parts. The first part involves desk research to determine the current level of research in the marketing of shopping centers and their customers’ behavior. The secondary sources were used to develop a comprehensive radiography of the shopping centers in Romania, which is still missing, probably because there is still no consensus on the meaning of the concept of shopping center. It helped the author become familiar with the marketing activities of shopping centers and identify the practices of customer attraction and creation of loyalty.

The second part is a double exploratory empirical research. The first research is a qualitative one, conducted in the form of structured interview among 18 managers and

employees of the marketing departments of shopping centers in Romania. Its objective is to identify the strategies currently used in shopping centers in Romania in order to attract and retain customers, with the final goal to understand where it is necessary to propose solutions to streamline the marketing activities of these centers. It is important to determine the underlying elements of marketing strategies because the marketing activity must be able to attract and retain a sufficiently large volume of buyers to ensure the financial success of the shopping center tenants and thereby, of the centers themselves. The second research is quantitative and is based on the survey technique. It is described in detail in chapters seven and eight.

## **Chapter 2. The Shopping Center Concept and Its Peculiarities in Romania**

Although it is a very familiar term, the shopping center does not have a universally accepted definition in the literature. Even within the same state it may be assigned with several meanings. However, most industry experts and organizations consider that it is a “group of commercial establishments designed, built, owned and managed as a single entity” (Lambert, 2006, p35, NCSC, 2010; CNCC). In addition to this basic structure, each definition contains specific elements related to the existence of parking, minimum leasable area, the maximum percentage of the area of the shopping center to be occupied by a single store etc. In addition to the heterogeneity of definitions in the literature, there can be noticed differences in the classification of shopping centers. To remedy this shortcoming, the second chapter of the thesis attempts to present the concept of shopping center as defined in the different regions of the world. Based on literature review, the author’s own definition is introduced. The author considers the shopping center refers to the commercial property that is planned, constructed and managed as a single entity, including common areas and at least ten retail units and service providers. Departing from ICSC’s attempt to develop a pan-European standard classification of shopping centers, the author’s own classification is created, according to the reality in Romania.

### **Chapter 3. The Selection of Visited Shopping Centers**

Shopping center management's objective is to maximize income from the rents collected from tenants. Because in many cases the rents charged depend on retailers' sales, and the image, success and long-term prosperity of a center are closely correlated with the financial success of the tenants, the management of the center will express a direct and immediate interest in generating traffic and maximizing sales for all residents (whether catering facilities, retailers or services providers).

Sales maximization is based on proper understanding of customers' shopping behavior. This information can aid the development of strategies and tactics perfectly customized to buyers. The premise of this approach is that the ease and satisfaction of the shopping process directly influences economic indicators of a center (quantity or value of sales, profits and so on). The first step in understanding shopping behavior is to identify its factors of influence, external and internal, and the perceptual processes related to the whole process of selection of the point of sale. For these reasons, the third chapter tries to capture the specific aspects of customers' shopping motivations and of the image creation.

### **Chapter 4. The Marketing Mix of Shopping Centers**

Once deployed the insight into the selection process of shopping destination, it is important to establish the tools that shopping center managers can use to influence shoppers' behavior. From retailers marketing mix it was possible to outline a specific mix for shopping centers. It is important to note about the marketing mix of shopping centers that literature review revealed the existence of two mixes. Thus, on the one hand there is the specific marketing mix that caters to all visitors who make purchases in stores in the shopping center, and on the other hand the mix focused on the business units that are located or are interested in renting spaces within the shopping center. The entire work refers to the relationship between the shopping center management and the end consumers. This decision was taken because it was considered that each of the activities carried out by a shopping center must consider, above all, the end consumers, and so the first mix is relevant for the operation of a shopping center, thus requiring special attention. Each of the components of this marketing



mix (assortment of stores and products, ambience, location, communication, price and service) is discussed at length, in proportion to its importance.

## **Chapter 5. The Strategies and Their Underlying Elements Used by Shopping Centers to Attract Customers**

Chapter five focuses on the strategies to attract shopping center customers. It presents generic and specific strategies, structured on the marketing mix components (selection of retail units and service providers and their location within the center; shopping center site selection; integrated marketing communication for shaping a clear and distinct offer and price strategies). The chapter introduces the strategies that can be used by shopping centers managers in their market positioning, and those already implemented in Romania. The conclusions drawn from the interviews with shopping centers representatives regarding the elements that help fundamental strategic decisions of attraction are presented here as well.

## **Chapter 6. Loyalty Strategies for Shopping Centers Customers**

This part of the thesis deals with the issue of loyalty from final customers. It introduces many opinions on this concept and definitions of the customer loyalty term. Determinants of loyalty to shopping centers, satisfaction, value and service quality are widely debated in order to help shape the theoretical model of loyalty. The second half of the chapter presents loyalty strategies that can be used by shopping centers in relation to their buyers and those used by Romanian shopping centers, as emerging from the interviews conducted. The discussions with the representatives of the centers highlight their degree of concern with customers' satisfaction and the manner and frequency of studying this issue.

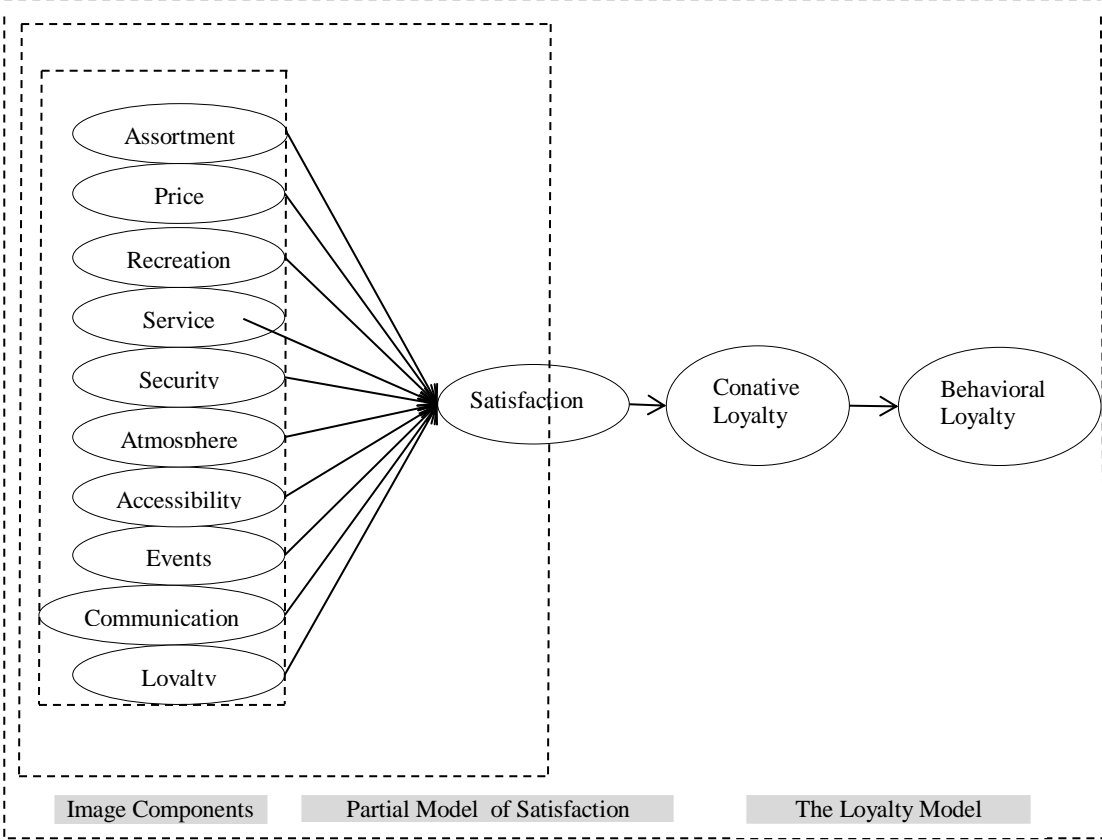
## **Chapter 7. Quantitative Research Methodology**

Chapter seven introduces the quantitative empirical research methodology. The data collection technique is the questionnaire based survey. It aims at better understanding of the shopper behavior and on this basis at offering suggestions for possible improvement and retention strategies to attract buyers for shopping centers.

Due to objective limitations of the research, namely financial and concerning the availability of operators, the selected population is limited to people with temporary or permanent residence in Cluj-Napoca aged at least 15 years (642 people). Out of these persons were selected only the visitors of shopping centers in Cluj-Napoca (574 respondents).

In the absence of a sampling frame, which is the list of permanent and temporary residents of Cluj-Napoca, on which to apply a probability sampling method, but in order to ensure a better representation of the population in the sample, a combination of probability and non-probability sampling methods was used. In the first phase a probabilistic sampling method was used, namely systematic random sampling based on postal codes in Cluj-Napoca. This process ensures a random territorial distribution allowing for the inclusion in the sample analyzed of buyers from all of the analyzed shopping centers. In the second phase a non-probability sampling method was used – the quota sampling, to ensure a sample structure by age and sex similar to that of the population.

Data processing was performed using IBM SPSS 20.0 statistical program and its supplement Amos, allowing for hypothesis testing and building a statistically reliable and valid model. The proposed model of loyalty is represented in fig. 1:

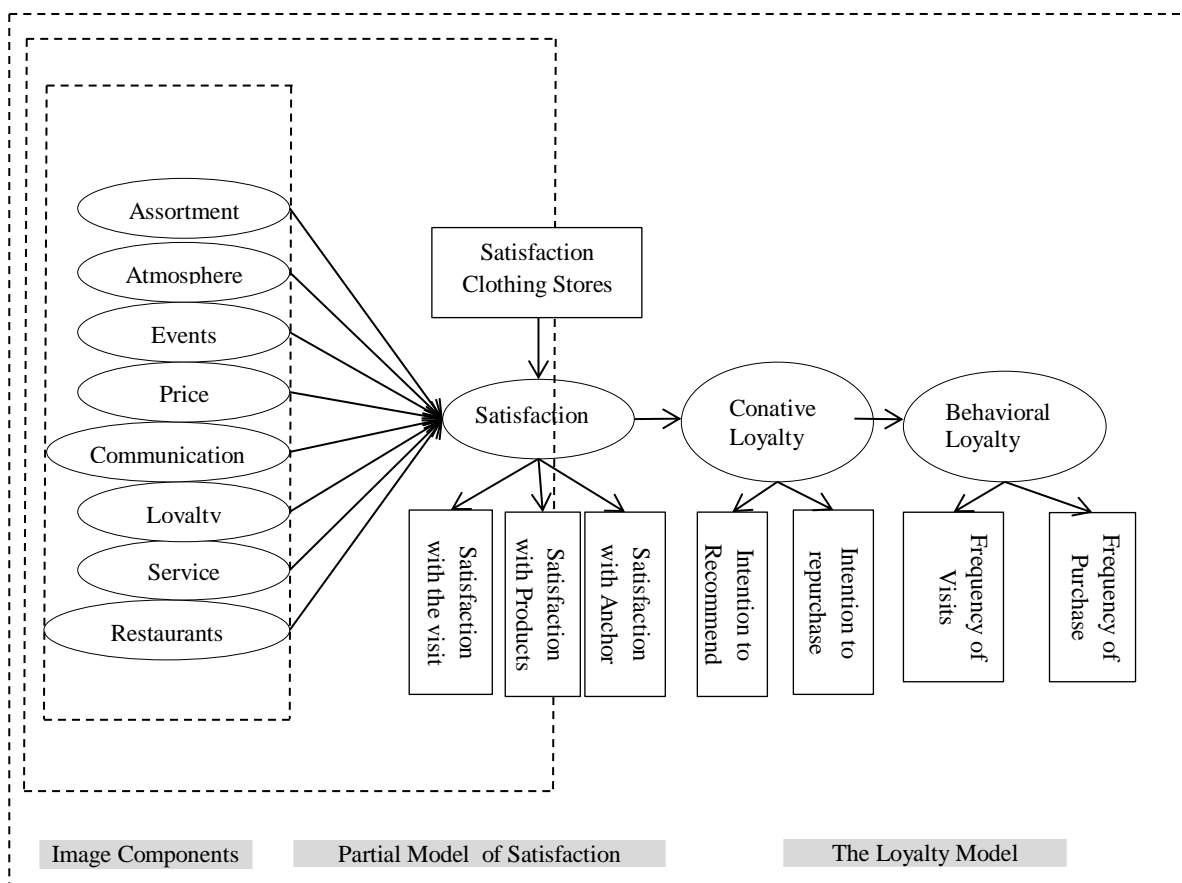


**The proposed model of customer loyalty to shopping centers**

(Source: own research)

## Chapter 8. The Results of the Empirical Research Conducted among Shopping Center Customers

Chapter eight presents the results of the quantitative research conducted among the customers of the shopping centers in Cluj-Napoca. The habits and preferences regarding shopping destinations, shopping behavior and determinants of shopping destinations choice, the elements that contribute to shopping centers image construction; the determinants of satisfaction, shopping behavior motivations and loyalty model towards a center are highlighted. The loyalty model towards the shopping center is based on Oliver's theory (1999), which states that behavioral loyalty is preceded by three phases, namely cognitive loyalty (equated for shopping centers with their image), affective loyalty (identified with satisfaction) and conative (intention to repurchase and revisit). The validated model of loyalty is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. The model of loyalty to shopping centers**

(Source: own research)

Regarding the hypotheses formulated in chapter seven, which are a reflection of the desired information and of the established goals, the conclusions are presented in Table.1

**Table 1. Conclusions regarding the formulated research hypotheses**

No.	Hypothesis	Conclusion
<b>H 1:</b>	<b>Several components of the marketing mix of shopping centers that determine their image among buyers may be identified.</b>	✓
H 1.1:	The assortment of stores and products represents a part of shopping centers image.	✓
H 1.2:	Price policy is a component of shopping centers image.	✓
H 1.3:	Recreational facilities are a component of shopping center image.	*
H 1.4:	Service policy is a component of shopping center image.	✓
H 1.5:	Safety features are a part of shopping center image.	-
H 1.6:	Shopping center ambiance is a part of the image.	✓
H 1.7:	Shopping center accessibility is a component of the image.	-
H 1.8:	Special events are part of shopping centers image.	✓
H 1.9:	Communication actions of the shopping centers are a component of their image.	✓
H 1.10:	Loyalty actions are a component of shopping centers image.	✓
<b>H 2:</b>	<b>Perception of image components directly influences customer satisfaction with the shopping center.</b>	✓
H 2.1:	Assortment of shops and products positively influences satisfaction.	✓
H 2.2:	Perception of price positively influences satisfaction with shopping centers.	✓
H 2.3:	Recreation facilities positively influence satisfaction.	-
H 2.4:	Service policy positively influences shoppers' satisfaction.	✓
H 2.5:	Perception of safety level of shopping centers directly influences satisfaction.	✓
H 2.6:	The ambience of shopping centers positively affects satisfaction.	✓
H 2.7:	Accessibility of shopping centers directly influences satisfaction.	✓
H 2.8:	Special events positively influence satisfaction with the centers.	-
	Communication actions of shopping centers contribute positively to the formation of satisfaction.	✓
<b>H 3:</b>	<b>Distance from home to the shopping center inversely influence satisfaction.</b>	-
<b>H 4:</b>	<b>Distance from work/ education institution to the shopping center inversely affects satisfaction.</b>	-
<b>H 5:</b>	<b>Satisfaction with the shopping center positively affects conative loyalty.</b>	✓
<b>H 6:</b>	<b>Conative loyalty directly determines behavioral loyalty.</b>	✓
<b>H 7:</b>	<b>Loyalty actions positively affect conative loyalty.</b>	✓
<b>H 8:</b>	<b>Image components which do not affect satisfaction directly influence conative loyalty.</b>	✓
<b>H 9:</b>	<b>Customer behavior in shopping centers is motivated by hedonic aspects.</b>	✓
<b>H 10:</b>	<b>Customer behavior in shopping centers is motivated by utilitarian aspects.</b>	✓
<b>H 11:</b>	<b>Gender does not influence the choice of shopping center.</b>	✓
<b>H 12:</b>	<b>Level of education significantly influences shopping center choice.</b>	✓
<b>H 13:</b>	<b>Occupation does not significantly influence the choice of shopping center.</b>	-
<b>H 14:</b>	<b>Age significantly influences shopping center choice.</b>	✓
H 14.1:	The average age of mall shoppers is lower than for the other formats.	*
H 14.2:	The average age of mall shoppers is lower than the overall average for shopping centers;	✓
<b>H 15:</b>	<b>Net monthly income per family member significantly influences the choice of shopping center.</b>	✓
<b>H 16:</b>	<b>Domicile significantly affects shopping center selection.</b>	✓
H 16.1:	Customers' district of residence significantly determines the shopping center choice.	✓
H 16.2:	Distance from the shopping center to customer's home significantly influences the shopping center choice.	✓
<b>H 17:</b>	<b>Distance from work / education institution influences the choice of the visited shopping centers.</b>	✓
<b>H 18:</b>	<b>Number of family members significantly influences the choice of shopping center.</b>	-

H <sub>18.1</sub> :	Families with a large number of members will choose shopping centers anchored by markets.	-
<b>H<sub>19</sub>:</b>	<b>The number of cars owned significantly influences the choice of shopping center.</b>	-
H <sub>19.1</sub> :	The higher the number of cars owned, the farther the most frequented shopping center.	-
<b>H<sub>20</sub>:</b>	<b>The size of the monthly available income for shopping significantly affects the choice of shopping center.</b>	-
H <sub>20.1</sub> :	The size of monthly available income for visitors of shopping malls is significantly higher than for the total sample of respondents.	-
H <sub>20.2</sub> :	The size of monthly available income for visitors of shopping malls is higher than for the other formats.	-
H <sub>20.3</sub> :	The size of monthly available income for visitors of shopping centers anchored by markets is significantly lower than for the whole sample.	-
<b>H<sub>21</sub>:</b>	<b>Non- visitors of shopping centers are mostly people over 64 years old.</b>	✓
<b>H<sub>22</sub>:</b>	<b>The main reason some people do not visit shopping centers at all is the distance from their home.</b>	✓
<b>H<sub>23</sub>:</b>	<b>Shopping centers anchored by markets are more frequently visited than other formats.</b>	✓
<b>H<sub>24</sub>:</b>	<b>Shopping malls are the favorite shopping center format for most buyers.</b>	✓
<b>H<sub>25</sub>:</b>	<b>The reason why customers do not visit most frequently their favorite shopping centers is the distance.</b>	✓
<b>H<sub>26</sub>:</b>	<b>The food anchor is the store where customers make their purchases most often in a shopping center.</b>	✓
<b>H<sub>27</sub>:</b>	<b>The duration of a visit in a mall is larger than for the other shopping formats.</b>	✓
<b>H<sub>28</sub>:</b>	<b>Average number of stores visited in malls is higher than for other shopping formats.</b>	✓
<b>H<sub>29</sub>:</b>	<b>In average, customers make purchases from more stores in the malls than in other shopping formats.</b>	✓
<b>H<sub>30</sub>:</b>	<b>Average amounts of money spent in the mall during a visit are higher than in other shopping centers.</b>	✓

Note: ✓ confirmed; \* partially confirmed; - invalidated.

(Source: own research)

## Empirical Research Findings

The paper concludes by reiterating the conclusions of the research, presenting the limitations and future directions of research that will contribute to the development of this Ph.D. thesis.

The fulfillment of the first objective, the *study of underlying elements and strategies to attract and create customer loyalty towards shopping centers* was pursued through qualitative empirical research based on structured interviews conducted among representatives of Romanian shopping centers. The *understanding of the behavior of shopping centers' customers* and of their response to the marketing tools that shopping center management uses in order to stimulate their satisfaction and loyalty was achieved through a research-based quantitative survey conducted among Cluj-Napoca shopping centers

customers. This research resulted in the development of a conceptual model of satisfaction and loyalty based on elements of attraction of shopping centers.

The interviews with *shopping centers representatives* highlight the following:

- In an attempt to survive the crisis, managers of all shopping centers have to make compromises in the *composition of assortment of retailers and service providers* and do not strictly follow a specific strategy a priori determined.
- According to the *representatives*, the *strength* for all shopping formats is their location and not the quality or variety of products and services. Issues related to assortment (diversity for malls and quality and uniqueness for community) come second.
- For the total sample and particularly for community centers, tenants' location depends to a great extent on their ability to pay higher rents. For malls, the main concern is to boost traffic in all areas of the centers, while the ability to pay rent is the least significant factor. One possible explanation is that, in the case of malls, the difference between the tenants' ability to pay rents is not significant.
- In *selecting the location*, customers' accessibility to shopping centers (both on foot and by public transportation or personal automobile) is the most important factor. Competitors' location is not very important for malls' managers. The use of *scientific location models* for shopping centers in Romania could not be determined (e.g. Huff's model, which is extensively used by consulting companies for shopping centers).
- All *communication tools* (advertising, point of sale advertising, direct marketing, price or non-price sales promotions, special events and public relations) are more frequently used and to a larger extent by the malls than by the community centers. It may be noted, however, the concern for improving image among customers from both malls and community centers.
- Malls are characterized by strong focus on *planning of the interior space*. This orientation transforms them into such enjoyable shopping destinations.
- Purchasing power of the target market, followed by the prices charged by competitors, determines the medium price positioning for all of the formats. This is considered the approach with the lowest risk in the current market conditions in Romania.
- *The investigation of customers' opinions and satisfaction* is performed on a regular basis (at least annually) in most shopping malls, and occasionally among community centers. The preferred means are surveys and interviews.

- *Loyalty instruments* are not very popular among the shopping centers' managers included in the qualitative research. One explanation is that they are popular when the market becomes mature. An interesting aspect is the fact that a much higher percentage of community centers use customer databases than malls. The reason may be that many community centers' marketing department coincides with that of the anchor store (the shopping gallery of hypermarkets, for example) and the anchors are the ones that frequently use this tool. In the case of malls, where the activity is being carried out, it is delegated to shops and service units within the center.

***The research among shopping centers' customers*** revealed that:

*The important factors in the evaluation of shopping centers* are represented by:

- *The assortment of stores and products*, with reference to the width and depth of assortment, the existing retail brands in the center, the clothing and footwear stores and the quality and the modernism of the goods sold in the stores. The assortment does not refer to the stores that sell food and other fast moving consumer goods. One possible explanation would be that many of the buyers identify the shopping center with the super-/ hypermarket, the discounter or the market that anchor the center. Thus, the assessments regarding the diversity of its product range, the modernism etc. may, in fact, refer to the anchor and consider that the items "grocery stores" and "quality of household goods" refer to other, much smaller stores.
- *The ambience of the shopping center* is another factor that contributes to shaping the image among customers. All items in the analysis, design, cleanliness, wide alleys and public spaces and stores decorations are identified as relevant for building perception and attitude of buyers towards a shopping center.
- The *special events* element refers to concerts, performances, fashion parades etc. and they also seem to stir interest from buyers. Although they are considered a part of the shopping center communication tools, to buyers they are attractive means of entertainment and leisure.
- *Price policy* also outlines the image buyers create of shopping centers. On this basis they decide whether they attend a neighborhood center, community one or a mall. The price component refers to the actual level of prices for all major product categories and the value obtained by customers, defined as the price to quality ratio.
- *Communication tools* considered in image building refer to advertising. A potential reason for the lack of sales promotion activities from this factor, category of techniques and tools commonly used in retail is that there are no significant differences among shopping centers with respect to promotions. Special offers and promotions schedule is basically the same for

all retailers and clearance sales periods are regulated by law. Public relations were not included in the measurement scale for shopping centers in Cluj-Napoca because they are not obvious to customers and when visible they are perceived as sales promotion tools.

- Restaurants, bars, cafes and especially the food court area is another image component. Out of the shopping centers, malls stand out as the best leisure destination for shoppers. Especially on week-ends one can see families with young children and couples who eat or socialize in the restaurants, bars and cafes of the malls. Due to the protection from environmental factors and the availability of parking spaces, malls are an excellent venue for business partners. Other types of shopping centers are considered good places to eat mainly by people working nearby.

- Interest in *loyalty tools* and the fact that most centers in Romania do not employ them yet may suggest a possible course of action for the managers of shopping centers. In order to be effective, loyalty programs should be designed with tenants and include a large proportion of the residents.

- Personnel behavior and its training are also considered by buyers and influence their opinion on a shopping center. Instead, it is noted that they are not concerned with the number of employees or the return policies. This is noted especially among buyers who lived the period before 1989, when the supply of products was very limited in variety and insufficient in quantity and sellers, not buyers, were sovereign. It was almost impossible for products to be exchanged after purchase or to get reimbursement for faulty products. These customers do not trust and do not get information about the return and exchange policy. Romanian customers are not interested in the presence of a large number of personnel, as self-service represents for many a much more pleasant alternative, giving them freedom of choice. It is therefore important for managers to train personnel to become customer oriented.

These components of the image correspond, from shopping center managers 'perspective, to the following elements of the marketing mix: product (assortment of shops and catering products and services); ambience, communication - sales promotion actions not based on price (special events), price, loyalty and service policies. There is one component of the marketing mix of shopping centers, that is missing – location (convenience). Accessibility could not be proved as a component of the image. This situation leads to the formulation of assumptions which may explain this fact. One possible reason could be that customers do not perceive significant differences in terms of access, as all centers are generally accessible by public means of transportation, by and car or even on foot. Most of them have similar or the



same opening hours, inner guidance is easy and they all have good signage posts. These elements may be properly combined in order to create and maintain the desired image of the shopping centers and customer satisfaction.

There are two *components of satisfaction*, one related to clothing and footwear stores and the other to the center in general. The distinction is made because customers are not familiar with the concept of shopping centers and perceive somewhat unclear its structure and its functioning. Perhaps to explain it some resort to analogy with the department stores that were, before 1989, the modern format of retail in Romania.

*Satisfaction* is directly determined by five of the eight components of the image: assortment, price, communication, ambience (décor) and service. They contribute in different proportions to the creation of satisfaction.

*Satisfaction* indirectly *mediates* the relationship between the five components of the image that directly influence it and conative loyalty.

*Loyalty actions* are *useful in stimulating conative loyalty*, expressed through the intention to repurchase and recommend shopping centers.

*Restaurants, bars and cafes*, which represent for the shoppers an excuse and an opportunity to visit the centers, *directly contribute to creating conative loyalty*.

*Special events* have an *inverse effect on loyalty*, a conclusion which comes in agreement with the results obtained by Parsons (2003), who states that fashion shows and product exhibitions are not very effective in attracting visitors.

*Conative loyalty* *mediates the relationship between special events, restaurants, loyalty and satisfaction and behavioral loyalty* (measured by frequency of visiting and purchasing).

*Shoppers' motivations for visiting shopping centers* fall into two categories: hedonic (desire to admire the stores and relaxation) and utilitarian (concern for value and low prices).

*Other elements that outline customers' choice of shopping centers* are: education level, occupation, age, net income per family member, buyers' district of residence and distance from the shopping center to buyers' domicile.

Combining the results of the two empirical researches, it may be noted that the shopping malls are the most successful of the three formats analyzed and that this is due to the more careful attention paid to shopper satisfaction and the implementation of their opinions and conclusions into their current marketing activity. Retention strategy based on increasing the satisfaction felt stands out as the best option for building true customer loyalty. Therefore, an attractive and individualized mix of shops must be outlined. It must also be located so as to

be readily accessible to purchasers, and to correspond in terms of pricing policy, products and services. The assortment of stores and service units should be provided in an environment that complies with pricing and assortment, by a friendly and well trained staff. Communication actions must accompany the ongoing process. Appropriate use of other elements of the marketing mix can help, but to a lesser extent, the “binding” of customers to a shopping center, but this does not mean a “monogamous” relationship, but an increased preference for a particular center.

### **Limitations and future research directions**

Both the qualitative empirical research conducted among representatives of shopping centers in Romania and the quantitative one among the buyers of Cluj-Napoca centers have some limitations, which at the same time represent future research directions:

- The insufficient number of proximity shopping centers representatives to allow for the characterization of this format of centers. This is due to the reluctance of representatives of such centers to disclose information about their work. To encourage participation in such research, it is recommended to reward future participation.
- Conducting the survey among Cluj-Napoca shopping centers’ customers with the domicile in Cluj-Napoca and Florești, due to time and financial constraints. However, considering the size of the population of the municipality (second in the country - 309,136 people (INS, 2012)) and the development of the network of shopping centers and other modern retail units, it can be assumed, with certain doubts and limitations, that the research may be relevant for the other larger county capitals and, to a certain extent, even for Bucharest. It should be noted, however, that unlike in the case of goods, services and retail formats, which should develop national strategies, shopping centers act locally. Therefore, to the managers of shopping centers, customer behavior in the retail trade area of the city in which they operate is more relevant than of those in other parts of the country. For this, in the future it would be useful to include in the sample the population of the other localities that are included in the metropolitan area of Cluj-Napoca (Aiton, Apahida, Baci, Bonțida, Borșa, Căianu, Chinteni, Ciurila, Cojocna, Feleacu, Gârbău, Gilău, Jucu, Petreștii de Jos, Tureni and Vultureni) and make comparisons with other metropolitan areas in the country.

- There is a slight deviation in the structure of the investigated sample in terms of age groups 15-24 (more) and 65 years (less). But this is not necessarily a problem because many of the students temporarily residing in Cluj-Napoca are not included in official statistics, and among people over 65 years old there is a tendency to withdraw into the countryside. Regarding the structure of the sample of shopping centers patrons, this reflects the absence of older people and of those who for various other reasons do not attend at all the analyzed shopping centers.
- The sampling method, partly non-probabilistic, does not allow for the calculation of precision estimators. This does not mean that the sample is not representative for the population from which it was extracted.
- Failure to confirm a high confidence in the motivational measurement model deems appropriate to deepen the research on this topic in order to build a more appropriate model. In the future it is intended to include motivations in the model of satisfaction and loyalty of shopping centers customers.

Other lines of research refer to the resumption of regular research among buyers of shopping centers because the market is very dynamic. Thus, between the time the survey was conducted and time present, the two Kaufland supermarkets with shopping galleries in Cluj have included new tenants in their offer, exceeding the threshold of 10 units. Also, during the course of investigation, Central Shopping Centre was in the process of remodeling, transforming from a community center based on comparison (not anchored), without any grocery stores, into a center anchored by a supermarket.

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