Where to shop?
Understanding consumers’ choices of grocery stores

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Hörsal D, Samhällsvetarhuset, fredagen den 3 juni, kl. 13:15. Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska.

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Abstract

For the last couple of decades consumer decision-making has been of increasing interest for retail as well as for consumer behaviour research. Food shopping constitutes a unique type of shopping behaviour. In comparison to other types of shopping, food is essential to life, and not often are there as many choices to be made in a short period of time as when shopping groceries.

The purpose of this dissertation was to advance the knowledge of what influences consumers’ choices of grocery stores. More specifically, the main focus has been on how different situations (e.g. type of shopping) influence choices of grocery stores. Five papers, which build on three surveys on how consumers choose grocery stores in Sweden, are included in this dissertation.

In the first paper a comprehensive set of ten aggregated attributes that determine store choices were developed. The second paper brought forward five consumer segments (Planning Suburbans, Social Shoppers, Pedestrians, City Dwellers, and Flexibles) based on where and how they shop. In the third paper it was shown that accessibility attributes (e.g. accessibility by car, availability) and attractiveness attributes (e.g. price, service) have different impacts on satisfaction, depending on consumer characteristics and shopping behaviour in supermarkets compared to convenience stores. In the fourth paper the result showed that satisfaction is affected by type of grocery shopping (major versus fill-in shopping) in conjunction with time pressure and which store attributes that are important for satisfaction. It was also shown that the effect of time pressure and type of shopping on satisfaction varied in different consumer segments. In the final paper it was shown that a store has to be more attractive in terms of attributes for a consumer to switch from the grocery store they usually patronage, even if the new store is situated right beside or closer than the consumer’s regular grocery store. The view of a “good location” is further developed in this dissertation, arguing that consumers’ mental distance to a store – their cognitive proximity – is much more important than the physical place of the store.

In sum, this dissertation revealed that the situation is more important than previous research has shown. Depending on the situation, consumers will face different outcomes (different stores) and value different store attributes. Hence, stores need to manage different store attributes depending on which consumer groups the stores want to attract and what situation the consumers are facing. Therefore, consumers’ choices of grocery stores are situation-based choices.

Keywords

Consumer decision-making, store choice, situation-based choices, cognitive proximity