

CONSUMERS SHOPPING PREDILECTIONS WITH HYPERMARKETS: AN UAE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: *With the competition getting heated up in UAE, consumer's preference over the hypermarket is of immense importance. This paper mainly focuses on the shopping predilections of UAE customers with hypermarkets from Dubai and Sharjah emirates of UAE. The purpose of visit to hypermarkets is not limited to purchases but also for leisure. The range of factors affecting the consumer predilections of hypermarkets in UAE are revealed in the outcomes of the study. Further than scholastic study, the findings are vital to retailers, and real estate developers to develop a customer centric retail experience. The inferences will also aid to recognize the findings will also help in understanding the disparity in retailing activities, nationally and globally.*

Keywords: Competitive strategy; Consumer preference; Growth Strategy; Hypermarket; UAE

1. INTRODUCTION

The new generation customers are on a self-service shopping spree. They are well aware of their needs and all they need is one umbrella under which all their needs and wants are satisfied. The customers are looking for a comfortable place with easy accessibility, simple and supportive store arrangement, large range of products combined with good promotions and essentially at a competitive price. [20] All the hypermarkets understanding their market, want to develop a long lasting relationship with their customers. The main aim of the hypermarkets is to retain and build their customers in the target market. [21-22]

The increasing competition from global entries are driving the hypermarkets to channelize their attention to satisfying customers, [1-5] building customer loyalty by understanding their preferences and the factors that drive to choose a particular hypermarket.[23]

It may help the dealers to notice the role of customer service in the overall context of product or service development and management.[6-10] Consequently, the primary reasons for assessing customer preferences are to maximize customer retention, and to gain and build customer loyalty. It is important to realize that customer satisfaction does not equate to customer loyalty. Merely satisfied customers will switch to a competitor that will exceed their expectations, especially in a highly competitive market, within the blink of an eye. [24] True competitive advantage therefore requires that customers are completely satisfied. In addition, it is important to inform customers that their opinions matter, and that their responses will instigate change within the organization. [27-28]

Customer preferences and their satisfaction is the primary mission that every hypermarket in the market should be paying attention. Prospective customers may vary from area to area, hence the needs have to be covered on the whole. [29]

The customer preference has a vibrant relationship with service quality. This is focal point of competition between the hypermarkets to provide a competitive edge in their products and services compared to the other competitors. The key to succeed in this competition is to satisfy the customer needs by knowing their preferences, building customer loyalty leading to customer retention. [35-36]

2. Consumer Behaviour

Consumer preference is consumers' attitudes and perceptions towards the selection and consumption of products and service that satisfies their needs.[30] Cultural, Social, Personal or Psychological factors manipulate the consumers' preferential behaviour during the select and buying decision making. [32] At present, the consumers have become more knowledgeable and conscious in their purchase decisions due to their changing work life and the influence of their social groups. [30-31]

2.1 Importance of consumer behaviour and consumer preferences

The growing competition paves way for thinking out of the box rather than thinking in terms of strategies and tactics. The marketers need to get more focused on understanding the consumers' behaviour and their preferences, to optimize the market.

Firstly, the marketers need to question themselves on what do the people really want? It's essential to understand what consumers want because all of us in the market are consumers and we expect similar level of service and seamless shopping experiences. [35] There are numerous ways to know what the customers want and simulate a picture very close to reality.[42]

Understanding the consumer behaviour and preferences, collecting data upon them and constantly acting upon them would alleviate the flow of profit and customers. [44] The organisations need to get on to their toes to reach to their customers directly and get quantitative and qualitative output from them. [43] Telephonic conversation, direct interview schedules, mails have to be used to know their problems, passions and preferences. If the organisation shows interest, the customer will reciprocate the same for the organisation.

Secondly, the marketers need to understand what do people want the organisation to know? The social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. have created new paths through which the organisations can easily reach the customers and ask them regarding their preferences and passions.[33]

All the qualitative and quantitative data collected to understand the customer may not be much relevant but the

organisation need to create a better lives for its customers and work constantly in improving the efforts to build a stronger customer relationship.[37-38]

Minimizing the weaknesses and discovering the untapped market linked with the optimization of the customer experience is the best thing any organisation can do.[32]

2.2 Factors influencing consumers shopping predilections

The current customers in the market are more inquisitive to know about the brands, product range, promotions, pricing, parking facility, customer loyalty programs and other value additions related to the hypermarkets before their buying decision making.[42] This behaviour of the consumers has lead to the growing stiff competition between the competitors. [47]

The main attributes that play a major role in influencing the consumer shopping predilections include, easy accessible location, assortment of products, store layout, value for money, one-stop shopping, quality of the products, attractive promotional offers, store decoration, parking facility, brand image of the store and convenience are the few vital influencing attributes assessed by the consumers while deciding the hypermarkets for shopping. [45-49]

The hypermarkets who understand these attributes and satisfy their customers, rule the market. It is vital to maintain the level of satisfaction and happiness in the minds of the customers to continue the relationship with the customer for a longer period of time. [48] Also a satisfied customer is a positive word of mouth publicity, who will bring more loyal customers to the hypermarket. [30] In the competitive environment, the hypermarket can continue to stay in its place only if it offers an added advantage over its competitors. Customer Satisfaction is the secret key to earn customer loyalty to the hypermarkets.[33]

3. Background of Hypermarkets in United Arab Emirates

Hypermarkets generally operate on self-service operation system. They are retail outlets which provide an extensive variety of different brands of food items, household cleaning products, cosmetics, toiletries, frozen food items, household furniture, health care products, sport equipments, electronic products, watches, jewellery and clothing. [47] Express stores and groceries also operate in similar fashion but basically provide the daily needs and other household necessities consisting of household cleaning and personal care products. [25]

In general, the supermarkets in UAE comprises of three parts: private groceries, express supermarkets and hypermarkets. Private groceries are run by small entrepreneurs privately in residential area where generally express supermarkets and hypermarkets are not available. [26] They usually do not have branches but the attractive part is they sell products on credit basis.

Express supermarkets are a recent development in UAE. They are mini-hypermarkets with few daily needs and necessities generally open 24 hours. Carrefour Express is an ideal illustration for Express supermarkets. [22-23-24]

Hypermarkets is what that is discussed in this article. They are very big retail giants which offer a massive range of

products. These hypermarkets bring in the various goods and products under one roof to satisfy their customers. Hypermarkets are now not only a place of purchase but also a place for outing during the weekends for the UAE customers. [50-54]

Here are the evolution and backgrounds of some major hypermarkets in UAE:

The last recorded total population in United Arab Emirates in 2014 was 9.5 million. (Trading Economics, 2015). In 2013, the UAE had the fifth-largest international migrant stock in the world with 7.8 million migrants (Froilan & Youha, 2013). The huge migrant population is the main rationale behind the evolution and growth of hypermarkets in the UAE. The growing need of the variety of products of the migrants from other countries lead to the successful growth of hypermarkets. [50-54]

3.1 UNION COOP

Union Coop is the pioneer of hypermarkets in the UAE. It is a government operated hypermarket which came into vogue as early as 1982 in Dubai. The main aim of Union Coop is to improve the social and economic conditions of the local producers and to serve the local community. [55]

Union Coop has branches in all the 7 emirates namely, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Fujairah and Umm Al Quwain. Since the formation of Union Coop., it had always seen an upward trend with respect to its branches, capital and profits. [55]

After 13 years, LuLu and Carrefour entered as new entrants into the hypermarket business in UAE in 1995. [55]

3.2 LuLu Hypermarket

LuLu Hypermarket, is the retail division of the LuLu Group International. LuLu has spread its wings over 118 stores across the Gulf region namely, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and also India in the Asian sub-continent. [53]

“With its pleasant and novel variation from the usual supermarkets, LuLu offers an ultra-modern shopping ambience by integrating all conceivable needs of the consumers under one roof. LuLu Hypermarkets have extensively laid out counters, sprawling parking spaces, play areas for children, food court, money exchange and bank counters”. (LuLu, NA)

3.3 Carrefour

“Carrefour, one of the largest French hypermarket chains in the world was introduced to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) market in 1995 by Majid Al Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, retail and leisure pioneer across MENA.

Carrefour has become the most dynamic, fast-moving and exciting hypermarket chain in the region and shared its growth with more than 21,000 employees from more than 68 nationalities in 12 countries, providing shoppers with variety and value-for-money. [49]

Carrefour ensures customer satisfaction and everyday convenience while offering unbeatable value for money with a vast array of more than 100,000 products, shoppers can purchase items for their every need, whether home electronics or fresh fruits from around the world, to locally produced items. [49]

Carrefour currently operates over 55 hypermarkets and over 50 supermarkets and one web store in 12 countries across the MENA region and will extend to include 38 countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and Russia. [49]

By 2018, Majid Al Futtaim Retail expects to reach 140 hypermarkets and 210 supermarkets and expand its territory in 6 new markets". (Carrefour, 2013)

3.4 Géant Hypermarket

"In 2005 Geant opened its first store in Dubai. Fu-com joined hands with Groupe Casino - one of the world's largest French hypermarket chains, to bring the "Géant hypermarket" to Middle East for the first time. The Hypermarket's unique "It's Géant and it's for you" marketing strategy and aggressive theme-based promotional campaigns has helped it to pitch itself across all Customer segments of Dubai's multi-cultural consumers. [51]

Designed on the pattern of best outlets of Europe and covering approximately 13000 square meters, with average 40 customer checkout counters and about 300+ staff members, the Hypermarket carries an average of 65000 Product lines which include food, grocery, apparel, house ware, consumer electronics, beauty care, etc." (Géant, NA)

3.5 Hyperpanda

Hyperpanda lately stepped into the UAE in 2006 by opening its first outlet in Dubai Festival City, Dubai. It offers products spanning over 100,000 lines. It has outlets in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Al Ain. [52]

4. Objectives of the study

This study has been conducted with the primary objective to evaluate the consumers' shopping predilections with hypermarkets in UAE. Besides this it also attempts to identify the The range of factors affecting the consumer predilections of hypermarkets in UAE are revealed in the outcomes of the study, [45-46]to measure the level of satisfaction regarding the current hypermarket the respondents have preferred and to measure the level of willingness of the respondents to recommend the hypermarkets to their friends, relatives and other social group. [47-48]

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, data was collected from 5 leading hypermarkets in UAE namely, Union Coop., Lulu, Carrefour, Geant and Hyperpanda covering respondents who were visting the hypermarkets in the morning, afternoon and night. The above 5 hypermarkets were chosen because of the similarity of goods and prices they share. We wanted to analyze why customers preferred one against the other hypermarket, analyze the customer satisfaction in the selected hypermarket and also wanted to know why the respondents are going to Union coop. or Lulu or Carrefour or Geant or Hyperpanda because of the product range?, quality?, price?, store arrangement?, parking facility? easy accessibility? [50-54]

Respondents were randomly selected, in variety nations, ages and different band of the society from Dubai and Sharjah because both the cities have various migrants visiting the hypemarket for purchasing the products. An undisguised structured questionnaire was one of the research instruments, which was very advantageous to collect the data and analyze

it. Around sixty questionnaire forms were assigned for each hypermarket and collected data from 300 respondents from 5 hypermarkets in Dubai and Sharjah.

6. Findings

In this study, it shows that the 54% of the respondents comprised of the male population and 46% was women. This reflects that the bachelor expat population is more compared to the families residing in UAE. Also it was observed, many men after their office hours had dropped in to pick the groceries before they reached the house to minimise travel because of the hectic traffic commonly found.

As per the study, 52% of the respondents were Asians, followed by 28% of GCC Nationals, 10% Emiratis and 5 % each by Westerners and Africans. The hypermarkets have to tap the market segment of African and Westerners by knowing their needs and satisfying it appropriately. More range of products needed by these minority segment needs to be identified.

Figure 1, depicts that 36% of the respondents visit hypermarkets daily, while 34% of the respondents visited weekly, followed by 24% of them visiting fortnightly and 6% of them visiting monthly. The hypermarkets have brought in a major cultural change in the life of the UAE customers. The respondents are not only vising the hypermarkets for purchasing but also for window shopping and as a weekend outing.

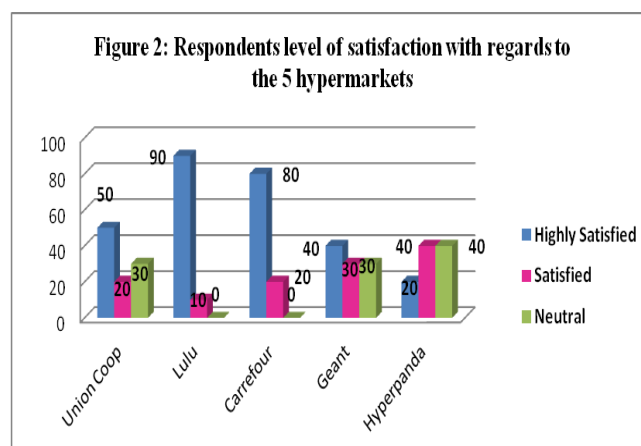
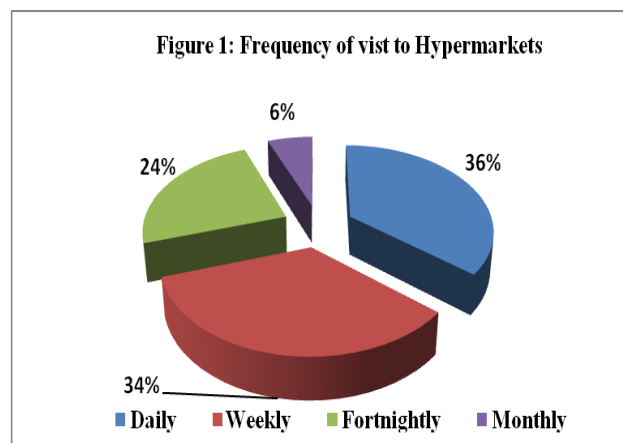


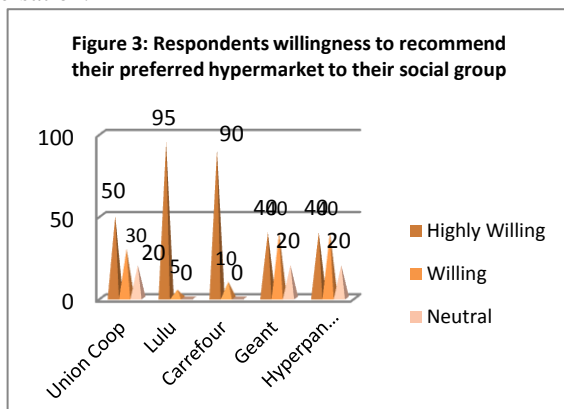
Figure 2, depicts that Lulu hypermarket lead the UAE market with 90% of respondents satisfaction, closely followed by Carrefour at 80% and Union Coop at 50%. Geant is closely competing with Union coop. with 40%. Hyperpanda is lagging behind in this stiff competition with 20% customer satisfaction.

Further, Figure 2, depicts the trend of multilateral aids as increasing over the period of time. Precisely, early periods of 1990s show a sharp increase of multilateral aids flow, while the period after witnessed a gradual increase of this category of aid. Total bilateral and multilateral aids are tracked in figure 3. During the earlier periods of 1970s, total bilateral aids exceed multilateral aids (figure 3). This disparity cannot be far-fetched, bilateral aids which comes through the Development Donor Countries (DAC) are seen as free monies with less stringent conditions as against multilateral aid which are mostly tied to agencies conditionality. However, the periods of 1990s and 2000s witnessed an increase in the influx of multilateral, thus making it exceed the bilateral aids.

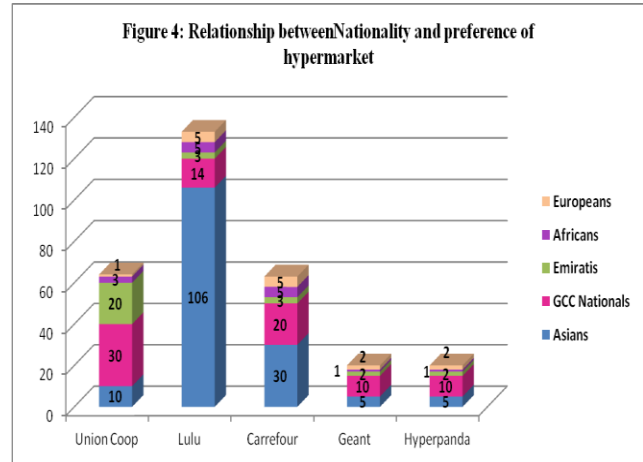
The various products that are fast moving, slow moving and non- moving are as follows, 18% purchase household cleaning products, 40% food items, 12% personal care products, 10% clothing, 10% electronics, 5% furniture and 5% toys. The respondents preferred dedicated furniture, toys and clothing stores compared to the offering in the hypermarket.

The level of effectiveness of the hypermarket promotional tools on the consumers' preference to shop has been analyzed using the weighted average ranking statistical method. It is inferred that the cash back offer leads, closely followed by buy 1 get 1 free offer. Bundle offers wins the third place and last but not the least is loyalty points. Union Coop. and Carrefour alone have the loyalty program for the customers. Lulu, Geant and Hyperpanda have to introduce this strategy and develop their relationship with its customers.

Figure 3, depicts that the study research shows that 95% of the Lulu respondents are willing to recommend their preference to their social group, closely followed by Carrefour at 90% and Union Coop. at 50%. Geant and Hyperpanda respondents are not highly satisfied with the store offerings, so they are on 40% willing to recommend their preference to their social group. Geant and Hyperpanda, need to closely work with their customer and need to know what their customers want and draft strategies of growth based on the conversation.



In figure 4, depicts a positive correlation between the nationality and the preference of hypermarket. The Asians prefer Lulu hypermarket over the other hypermarkets. The Emiratis and the GCC national prefer to purchase from the Union coop. because the products that suits their tastes and preferences are stocked. The Africans and Europeans are comparatively minor population in the UAE, hence they are scattered over all the 5 hypermarkets.



The factors that influence the consumers' preference of shopping towards a hypermarket have been well analyzed using the weighted average ranking method. The following are the influencing factors rank wise from 1 to 8 . 1 - Product range, 2 – Pricing, 3 – Quality, 4 – Promotional Offers, 5 – Store arrangement and decoration, 6 – Easy Accessibility, 7 – Parking facility and 8 – Store image.

7. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study suggests that the various consumer preference attributes relating to the store and product determine to build customer retention leading to customer loyalty. Store decoration and arrangement not the appearance is not the essential factors determining consumer preferences in the shopping selection. In conclusion, the UAE consumers are more concern about product range, quality of customer service offered, pricing, store convenience, quality of the product, value for the money spent and constantly making new products available. The study helped to provide very valuable findings with regards to retaining customers and building customer loyalty. Firstly, the store managers need to improve the quality of the product and make the store convenient for the customers to enhance customer loyalty. Secondly, the hypermarket managers must closely watch on the quality of service offered and the constant change in products and bringing in new products to increase the level of loyal customers.

Lastly, the research has proven that majority of the respondents are loyal to their hypermarkets and they are highly satisfied to continue with them in future too. [24] Increasing the operation hours of the hypermarkets during the weekends would be attracting more profit and and customer satisfaction.

Online-shopping and telephone-shopping can be encouraged more actively to build more new customer and subsequently increasing customer satisfaction.

Finally to wrap up, UAE consumers are enjoying with the growth of hypermarkets in the form of availability of quality products at lower prices, umbrella shopping, wide range of brands and products, family shopping, and fresh stock.

8. Limitations and Future Research

The study was descriptive and sampling was done only from Dubai and Sharjah and thus is not representative of entire population of UAE. Further research is needed that covers the other 5 emirates of the UAE. Future research can compare consumers using various retail formats and consumers' perception of product and store attributes on retail formats.

The consumers in the UAE are also largely attracted by the private groceries due to convenience, credit sales, home delivery, smaller quantity of items and goodwill. It is clearly evident these people are giving a good run to the hypermarkets as they are tapping the market which the hypermarkets cannot enter.

9. Recommendations

Marketers need to understand that customer loyalty cannot be built overnight. [44] It is a slow and steady process through which quality services are offered to the customers in the form of wide range of products at affordable prices, smooth shopping procedure and a proactive customer service system. [24] These will built a strong commitment in the minds of the customers which leads to customer loyalty. [32]

To build a strong sense of trust in the minds of the customers, the hypermarkets have to be transparent in their process and procedures, provide the best customer service continuously. [22] The organisation as a whole should have to aim for building a strong trustworthy relationship with the customers. For this, the organisations have to train and develop their employees, develop good loyalty programs, and create unique marketing communications programme that constantly inform the customers about the existing and new products in the hypermarket.

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