

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER EXPERIENCE IN BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA

UMA ANÁLISE COMPARATIVA DA EXPERIÊNCIA DO CONSUMIDOR NO BRASIL E NA ARGENTINA

UN ANÁLISIS COMPARATIVO DE LA EXPERIENCIA DE LOS CONSUMIDORES EN BRASIL Y EN LA
ARGENTINA

Harrison Bachion Ceribeli

Doutorando

Universidade de São Paulo
harrisonbceribeli@yahoo.com.br

Edgard Monforte Merlo

Doutor

Universidade de São Paulo
edgardmm@usp.br

Sebastián Senesi

Especialista

Universidade de Buenos Aires
ssenesi@agro.uba.ar

Hernán Palau

Mestre

Universidade de Buenos Aires
hpalau@agro.uba.ar

Submetido em: 22/09/2011

Aprovado em: 28/03/2012

RESUMO

Este estudo teve como objetivo identificar e comparar os principais itens que fazem parte das experiências de consumo e que influenciam a satisfação dos consumidores no varejo de supermercados do Brasil e da Argentina. Para atingir este objetivo, realizou-se um levantamento de campo. Para análise de dados, foram desenvolvidas duas Regressões Múltiplas, uma para cada grupo de indivíduos de mesma nacionalidade. Analisando os dados coletados, verificou-se a importância da organização dos produtos dentro das lojas e da qualidade percebida, tanto para os consumidores brasileiros quanto para os argentinos. Além disso, constatou-se que a aparência física da loja é mais valorizada por consumidores brasileiros, assim como preços, horário de funcionamento e relacionamento com os funcionários do supermercado são mais importantes na Argentina. Este estudo evidencia que, apesar de serem países próximos geograficamente, com culturas similares, há diferenças significativas entre o comportamento do consumidor no Brasil e na Argentina, o que deve ser considerado por redes varejistas que atuam ou planejam atuar nestes dois países sul-americanos. A principal implicação gerencial deste estudo é que redes supermercadistas que atuam em diferentes países sul-americanos devem ajustar seu *mix de marketing* de varejo de modo a atender diferentes consumidores, levando em consideração especificidades relacionadas a diferentes contextos socioeconômicos e culturais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Varejo de supermercados. Satisfação do consumidor. Países sul-americanos.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify and compare the main items that form part of the consumer's experience and influence retail consumer satisfaction in supermarkets in Brazil and Argentina. To achieve the defined objective, a field survey was carried out. For the data analysis, two Multiple Regressions were performed, one for each group of individuals of the same nationality. Analyzing the data, it was observed that the way products are organized and displayed in the store, and the perceived quality, are important both for the Argentine and Brazilian consumers. It was also found that the physical appearance of the store environment is more valued by Brazilian consumers, while prices, opening hours and relationship with store employees are more important for the Argentine consumers. This study demonstrates that although the two countries geographically close together, with similar cultures, there are significant differences between consumer behavior in Brazil and Argentina, which should be considered by supermarket chains that operate or plan to operate in these South American countries. The main managerial implication of this study is the need for supermarket retailers operating in different in South American countries need to adjust their retail marketing mix to meet the needs of different consumers, taking into account specificities related to the different socio-economic and cultural contexts.

KEYWORDS: Supermarket retail. Consumer satisfaction. South American countries.

RESUMEN

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar y comparar los principales ítems que forman parte de las experiencias de consumo y que influyen sobre la satisfacción de los consumidores en el comercio minorista de supermercados de Brasil y de la Argentina. Para alcanzar este objetivo se realizó una encuesta de campo. Para análisis de datos fueron desarrolladas dos Regresiones Múltiples, una para cada grupo de individuos de la misma nacionalidad. Analizando los datos recogidos, se comprobó la importancia de la organización de los productos dentro de los establecimientos y de la calidad percibida, tanto para los consumidores brasileños como para los argentinos. Además, se constató que la apariencia física del local es más valorizada por consumidores brasileños, así como precios, horario de funcionamiento y relacionamiento con los empleados del supermercado son más importantes en la Argentina. Este estudio evidencia que, a pesar de ser países próximos geográficamente y con culturas similares, hay diferencias significativas entre el comportamiento del consumidor en Brasil y en la Argentina, lo que debe ser tomado en consideración por redes minoristas que actúan o proyectan actuar en estos dos países sudamericanos. La principal implicación gerencial de este estudio es que redes supermercadistas que actúan en diferentes países sudamericanos deben ajustar su *mix* de *marketing* de comercio minorista para atender a diferentes consumidores, tomando en consideración especificidades relacionadas a diferentes contextos socioeconómicos y culturales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Comercio minorista de supermercados. Satisfacción del consumidor. Países sudamericanos.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Cajaraville and Biondo (2010), the concept of economy of experiences, which sees consumer experiences in retail as an important tool for differentiation and consumer satisfaction, was considered one of the ten most influential ideas in the field of contemporary management, demonstrating its present relevance.

Verhoef et al. (2009) argue that because it is an issue that is directly related to consumer satisfaction, and one that has still been little explored by academics, research focused on consumer experiences should be encouraged as they tend to contribute to formation of a theoretical framework on a recent topic in marketing management.

Additionally, according to Andreassen and Lindestad (1998), when a company fails to satisfy its customers, its future profitability tends to suffer, demonstrating the importance of customer satisfaction and the need to study the aspects that influence this satisfaction.

It is worth highlighting that with the expansion of the movement of internationalization of companies and the consolidation of economic blocs, the study of retail customer satisfaction should no longer be restricted by geographical frontiers (McGOLDRICK, 2002).

In this context, this study aimed to identify and compare the main items that form part of consumer experiences and influence consumer satisfaction in supermarket retail in Brazil and Argentina.

Brazil and Argentina were chosen in this work because they are the two countries with the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in South America.

This research is important because it explores a new concept, which still requires empirical research (VERHOEF et al., 2009) and which is related to retail customer satisfaction. Moreover, because it carries out a comparative analysis of consumer behavior in the two South American countries, this study contributes to the process of internationalization of companies operating in the supermarket segment in South America.

The main contribution of this work is the comparative analysis performed between the elements of consumer experiences that are most appreciated in Brazil and Argentina, in order to contribute to the consolidation of studies on consumer behavior in South American countries.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Consumer satisfaction

For Churchill Junior and Surprenant (1982), satisfaction is a post-purchase or post-use effect resulting from the comparison between the benefits obtained by the purchaser, and the costs needed to acquire the item.

Moreover, Oliver (1993) argues that consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction is the result of a dissonance between the expectations prior to the purchase, and the perceived performance. When there is a negative dissonance in this regard (i.e. the product/service does not meet expectations), the customer tends to be dissatisfied, and when there is a positive dissonance (i.e. the product/service meets or exceeds expectations), the client tends to be satisfied.

In the model of cognitive and affective satisfaction, Oliver (1993) notes that beyond expectations and performance of the product or service, other aspects such as feelings and attitudes (affection or disaffection developed by the customer about the product or service purchased) and sense of fairness (when the client feels that they have gained a good deal, and other products and services would not have superior performance) also influence consumer satisfaction.

In addition, Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) define satisfaction as the evaluation made by the customer in order to verify whether the product or service purchased meets their needs and expectations.

Yi (1989), after developing extensive review of studies of satisfaction, affirms there are two broad categories of definitions for the concept, one emphasizing satisfaction as a process and the other, satisfaction as a final product.

Parker and Mathews (2001) corroborate this classification and claim that satisfaction, when viewed as a process, corresponds to the result of the evaluation between what was received and

what was expected of a product or service. Also according to these authors, in the second case, where satisfaction is seen as a product in itself, it is seen as a cognitive state, defined by emotion and consumer satisfaction.

Lee and Overby (2004) suggest that satisfaction is basically related to two aspects: (1) utility value, which includes a comparison of all the benefits received and all the sacrifices associated with the purchase, and (2) experimental value, resulting from the benefit provided by the shopping experience.

It should be noted that in the study of consumer satisfaction, there are many different definitions of the concept, some very divergent, which demonstrates that this topic has not yet reached academic maturity, requiring further research focusing specifically on this theoretical aspect.

In this research, however, we adopt both dimensions defined by Yi (1989) and Parker and Mathews (2001), who argue that satisfaction can be described as a cognitive state, defined by emotion and consumer satisfaction, and also as a result of evaluation between what was received and what was expected of a product or service.

According to Rossi and Slongo (1998), consumer satisfaction can be divided into momentary and cumulative satisfaction.

Momentary satisfaction results from an experience of immediate consumption or a transaction conducted recently (GARBARINO; JOHNSON, 1999) and is related to three indicators: (1) the performance of the product or service, (2) the comparison between the product or service purchased and the ideal product or service, and (3) the cognitive state that reflects how consumers feel about the product or service purchased (FORNELL et al., 1996).

On the other hand, cumulative satisfaction is that resultant of the consumer's overall experience in relation to one specific store, product or service (ANDERSON et al., 1994) and is the result of a long-term relationship between the customer and the store, product or service.

The focus of this work is the study of momentary satisfaction, which results from an experience of immediate consumption.

According to Baltas et al. (2010), the more satisfied the customer is with a particular store, the less effort will be spent in search of new alternatives, which demonstrates the relevance of this issue in contemporary management.

2.2 Consumer experience

According to Meyer and Schwager (2007), consumer experiences influence satisfaction and can be translated as internalized and subjective responses of consumers in relation to any form of contact that takes place with a company while the consumer is shopping.

Additionally, Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) argue that a consumer experience is the result of a set of interactions between an individual and a company, causing a reaction on this individual during his stay inside the store. These authors also explain that consumer experiences may affect customers at rational, emotional, spiritual, physical and sensorial levels, depending on the interactions and the consumer's involvement while shopping.

For Grewal, Levy and Kumar (2009), the consumer's experiences include every contact point that involves interaction between the customer and the company, during the period when the customer is inside the store doing their shopping. These authors defend that consumer experiences influence the level of customer satisfaction when leaving the store.

Also according to Grewal, Levy and Kumar (2009), the consumer's experiences are affected by macro factors such as socio-economic aspects, which affect individual's level of income and savings, and by factors that can be controlled by retailers, including communication, pricing, assortment, location and factors related to the supply chain, such as conflicting points of sale.

Another definition, developed by Verhoef et al. (2009), delineates the experiences of consumption as cognitive, emotional, social and physical responses of clients in relation to a retailer. According

to these authors, the consumer experiences include factors that can be controlled by the retailer, and other factors that are outside the retailer's control.

In the model developed by Verhoef et al. (2009), the cognitive, affective, social and physical aspects resulting from the consumption experience are affected by:

- Social environment, including interactions involving in-store customers and employees and interactions between customers themselves;
- Interface of services, including the customer service technologies used in the store and the services provided by employees;
- Atmosphere of the store, which includes design, sensory attributes (such as music, aroma and temperature), and others;
- Assortment, which includes product and brand variety and quality of products offered;
- Price, which includes, besides the prices of products, promotions and loyalty programs;
- Consumer experiences in alternative channels, as customers tend to compare their consumption experiences across different retail channels;
- Name of the retailer, including aspects related to communication developed by the company in order to strengthen its image;
- Previous consumer experiences, as customers generate expectations based on the experiences they have had previously, either in the same store or at competing stores.

It should be mentioned that situational variables, such as store type, level of competition in the industry, culture and economics of the region, and variables related to consumers themselves, such as objectives, socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes, which are not under the retailers' control, also influence the results of consumer experiences (VERHOEF et al., 2009).

The variables examined by Verhoef et al. (2009) and Grewal, Levy and Kumar (2009) are discussed by many researchers studying retail consumer behavior, showing the relevance of each variable included in the models proposed by those authors.

Examining the assortment of retailers, Westbrook (1981) and Carpenter and Moore (2006) report that the quality of products sold is an item that deserves attention, because customers are looking for companies that sell higher quality products.

In addition, Guiry et al. (1992) and Clarke et al. (2006) argue that the variety of products and brands available is a key criterion in the evaluation of a particular store. According to Katsaras et al. (2001) and Fox et al. (2004), customers prefer retailers that offer a wide variety of products in their assortment, including newly launched products in the market.

Finally, McGoldrick (2002) points out the need for retailers to display fresh, high quality products in the sales area, ensuring a good experience for customers.

Another element included that forms part of the discussion of consumer experience is the price. According to Bäckström and Johansson (2006), customers prefer retailers whose prices are perceived as fair.

Besides the price, according to Westbrook (1981) and Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996), the concession of credit, and the payment periods offered by retailers, are other aspects that cause consumers to evaluate retail establishments more favorably.

Additionally, Fox et al. (2004) explain that promotional efforts are also essential elements in the customer's choice. Along this line, McGoldrick (2002) and Lee (2009) highlight the importance of special offers given by retailers.

Another element that deserves attention in the discussion of consumer experience is the retailer's communication with the customer. According to Guiry et al. (1992) and Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996), the retailer should be able to inspire trust in their customers, developing an ethical behavior that is consistent with the message communicated to the market, in other words, the retailer must fulfill what it promised, assuring the reliability of its brand.

Carpenter and Moore (2006) emphasize that retailers must use the media in order to project an established brand in the market. This can be done using promotional events, among other resources.

Additionally, Degeratu, Rangaswamy and Wu (2000) suggest that customers choose to buy from retailers with well-known, traditional brands.

In relation to the store environment, Baker, Grewal and Parasuraman (1994), Degeratu, Rangaswamy and Wu (2000) and Bäckström and Johansson (2006) argue that the store environment, including design, sensory attributes (lighting, colors, music and fragrance) and social attributes, is one of the criteria commonly used by clients to evaluate the quality of retail stores.

Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) complement these statements, arguing that the appearance and layout of the store are items that impact on the customer's perception of a certain retailer. Bäckström and Johansson (2006) suggest that the store layout should be designed in such a way that it facilitates the flow of consumers.

According to Carpenter and Moore (2006) and Lee (2009), the atmosphere related to the store environment is also an element that must be monitored very carefully by retailers, due to its importance in the consumer's decision.

Furthermore, Titus and Everett (1995) and Bäckström and Johansson (2006) argue that the organization of products and internal signage are attributes that facilitate the customer's search for products within the store.

Thus, Titus and Everett (1995) explain that customers typically conduct several judgments about the qualities of store environment, based on the legibility (the ease with which the customer is self-guided in the store) and the degree to which a particular environment is capable of stimulating their senses.

These two dimensions (legibility and degree of stimulation) can be achieved through four items that must be worked by retailers: (1) spatial configuration of the store, (2) differentiation achieved by the shop in the sales environment through clear visual separation between different sections of the store and indicative signs, (3) visibility of products, and (4) internal promotional ads (TITUS; EVERETT, 1995).

Examining the social environment of store, Westbrook (1981) and Guiry et al. (1992) argue that the interactions between employees and customers are essential for ensuring good consumer experiences during their time in a particular store.

Complementing this, Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) and McGoldrick (2002) explain that retailers must ensure that employees are always polite and that their posture transmits confidence to customers.

Carpenter and Moore (2006) confirm the previous statements, suggesting that customers prefer stores whose employees are courteous, polite, and willing to solve the problems presented.

Finally, examining the level of customer service, Clarke et al. (2006), Bäckström and Johansson (2006) and Lee (2009) highlight the importance of the services offered. Thus, each retailer must adapt his service package to needs of their target clients and ensure that the level of services provided is sufficient.

The additional services that may be offered to customers in the retail market include home delivery, availability of staff to pack bags, a shopping service by telephone, and financial services, among others (McGOLDRICK, 2002).

According to Westbrook (1981) and Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996), in relation to the level of customer service, the retailer should be able to resolve customer's complaints, to ensure they evaluate the company positively.

Westbrook (1981) also mentions that the ease with which the clients can purchase products at the store is a very important attribute on the customers' evaluation.

Moreover, Guiry et al. (1992) argue that the availability of staff, ensuring a quick and effective service, it is an important aspect to be considered in the consumer experience.

Analyzing the services related to convenience, Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) and Clarke et al. (2006) suggest that retailers should increase convenience for the consumer, by offering flexible opening hours and customer parking.

In addition, Katsaras et al. (2001) suggest that convenience, in terms of time and distance to reach the store, is a very important element in the consumer's decision, which is in agreement with the statements of Carpenter and Moore (2006) and Lee (2009), who add store location to the construct convenience.

Furthermore, in relation to convenience offered by retailers for consumers of services, we can mention the presence of various establishments and restaurants inside the store (CLARKE et al., 2006; CARPENTER; MOORE, 2006), as this optimizes the time customers need to spend traveling to locations such as restaurants, pharmacies and gas stations.

Finally, also in relation to the construct convenience, Clarke et al. (2006) and Carpenter and Moore (2006) also cite the presence of facilities for children in retail stores, which facilitates the purchases of consumers shopping with children.

3. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

This study aimed to identify and compare the main items that form part of consumer experiences and influence retail consumer satisfaction in supermarkets of Brazil and Argentina.

To achieve the defined objective, a field survey was carried out (HAIR JUNIOR et al., 2005).

The sampling method used was the quota technique; the researcher separated the study population into two groups (based on the criterion of level of education) and then chose individuals belonging to the two groups at a proportion of fifty percent each (individuals with university level of education and individuals with non-university level of education).

The sampling groups were composed based on these proportions, with the aim of including different consumer segments, so that the results would not be limited to university individuals.

The research sample consisted of 540 individuals, 267 living in Argentina and 273 living in Brazil.

For the data collection, a questionnaire was used, developed by the authors based on the theoretical framework previously researched and composed of closed questions based on the 7-point Likert Scale.

The questionnaires used for the data collection were delivered personally by the researchers to consumers who were part of the sample, and were self-administered.

To validate the questionnaire, a pre-test was carried out with fifty consumers, chosen by convenience, who had the same characteristics as the subjects included in the final study sample.

The questions of the questionnaire are presented in Table 1, as well as the theoretical variables that gave rise to each question. It is worth noting that among the instructions for completion of the questionnaire, the subjects were asked to respond based on their recent experiences of shopping in supermarkets.

Selection criteria	Questions
Price	Q1 – The product prices were lower than those of other supermarkets.
Cleanliness	Q2 - The cleanliness of the supermarket was very good.
Location	Q3 - The supermarket was located near my home or work.
Number of checkouts	Q4 - The time I had to wait in line in the supermarket was short.
Security of store	Q5 - I felt safe while shopping.
Parking	Q6 - The supermarket had parking available for customers.

Security of parking	Q7 - The supermarket parking was safe.
Layout	Q8 - The physical structure of the supermarket (shelves, runners, checkouts) was good.
Front of shop	Q9 - The front of the supermarket was very attractive.
Advertisements	Q10 - The advertisements I saw for the supermarket were very good.
Offers	Q11 - The promotions (offers) that the supermarket had were very good.
Confidence in retailer	Q12 – While shopping, the supermarket transmitted confidence to me.
Supermarket brand	Q13 - The name or brand of the supermarket selected was very traditional.
Quality of products	Q14 - The supermarket sold good quality products.
Freshness of products	Q15 - The supermarket sold fresh products (including vegetables, fruits, bakery).
Courteousness	Q16 - The supermarket staff were very friendly and courteous.
Reliability transmitted	Q17 - During the service, the supermarket staff transmitted trust to me.
Additional Services	Q18 - The supermarket offered additional services (home delivery, bag packing service, among others).
Payment period	Q19 - The supermarket offered a long payment period for purchases.
Problem solving	Q20 - The employees have shown themselves ready for attend my complaints.
Display of products	Q21 - The products sold in the store were well-organized.
Recommendations	Q22 - The recommendations from other people (before and during my purchases) were great.
Own brand	Q23 - The supermarket sold private label products of excellent quality.
Product exchange	Q24 - The supermarket offered great facility in the exchange of products.
In-store design	Q25 - The internal design of the supermarket (color, format of the runners) was very good.
Sensory attributes	Q26 - The aromas, music, lighting, and other items in the environment, were pleasant.
Attendance	Q27 - The attendance provided by the staff was very good.
Quality of services	Q28 - The services provided by the supermarket were of excellent quality.
Facilities for children	Q29 – The supermarket had good facilities for parents with children.
Number of people in the store	Q30 – While I was shopping, the supermarket was not too crowded.
Internal decor	Q31 - The interior design of the supermarket was very appealing.
New Products	Q32 - The supermarket sold products considered entries in the market.
Internal signage	Q33 - The supermarket had clear signage to guide customers.
Fast food	Q34 - There was a restaurant or cafe in the supermarket.
Opening hours	Q35 - The supermarket had long opening hours.
Extent of the assortment	Q36 - The supermarket sold a large number of different products.
Depth of the assortment	Q37 - The supermarket sold a large number of different brands of each product.
Presence of other stores	Q38 – There were other stores within the supermarket (gas stations, pharmacies, etc.).
Expectations	Q39 - The supermarket where I made my last purchase met my expectations.
Satisfaction	Q40 - I am emotionally satisfied with the supermarket where I made my last purchase.

Table 1. Theoretical variables and research questions.

Source: Elaborated by the authors, 2011.

The data were collected in shopping centers of Ribeirao Preto (Brazil), Campinas (Brazil) and Buenos Aires (Argentina), between February and May of 2011. These sites were chosen for the data collection because they attract different segments of consumers.

For the data analysis, two Multiple Regressions were performed, one for each group of individuals of the same nationality, with the aim of identifying the most important elements of consumer experience in the formation of satisfaction in each country.

According to Gujarati (2006), the equation developed using the Multiple Regression technique follows the general structure:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \dots + \beta_n X_{ni} + u_i$$

In this research, Y (dependent variable) represented the overall level of consumer satisfaction and aggregate two variables (Q_{39} - expectations and Q_{40} - satisfaction) and X_n (explanatory variables or regressors) represented the most important variables in relation to consumer satisfaction (Q_1 - Q_{38}).

It should be mentioned that the method used to develop the equations was the Stepwise method, which includes, in the regression model, only statistical significant explanatory variables (GUJARATI, 2006).

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

As mentioned previously, the survey sample consisted of 540 individuals, 267 individuals living in Argentina and 273 individuals living in Brazil. After the data collection, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated (0.941), to confirm the reliability of the questionnaire developed.

Initially we analyze Brazilian subjects and obtain the following multiple regression equation:

$$Y = 1.116 + 0.350X_1 + 0.448X_2 + 0.257X_3 + 0.329X_4 + 0.181X_5 + 0.268X_6$$

Y – Brazilian consumer satisfaction;

X_1 – in-store design;

X_2 – quality of services;

X_3 – presence of restaurants and cafés in the supermarket;

X_4 – quality of products;

X_5 – number of people in the store;

X_6 – display of products.

It should be noted that the adjusted R^2 of the regression equation for Brazilian consumers was 0.421, which means that 42.1% of the consumer satisfaction with the supermarkets frequented can be explained by the equation developed.

However, before analyzing the regression model developed, the authors analyzed the multicollinearity between the variables included in the equation, and found that there are no problems of this nature, increasing the reliability of the analysis to be performed. The VIF and Tolerance tests were performed.

Analyzing the equation that explains the Brazilian consumer satisfaction, we highlight the importance of store environment, which appears three times in the regression model (X_1 - design in-store, X_3 - restaurants and cafeterias and X_6 - display of products).

It should be emphasized that the store environment in Brazil is valued under two different perspectives: the convenience afforded to the consumer while shopping, and the physical appearance.

Convenience is related to the availability of restaurants and cafeterias within the store environment, giving the consumer the option of having a bite to eat while shopping (CLARKE et al., 2006; CARPENTER; MOORE, 2006).

The display of products within store can facilitate consumers search for specific items, which is also related to convenience (TITUS; EVERETT, 1995; CARPENTER; MOORE, 2006).

Complementing this, the physical appearance of the store environment is related to in-store design, which should be planned to create a pleasant atmosphere for consumers (BAKER; GREWAL; PARASURAMAN, 1994; DEGERATU; RANGASWARY; WU, 2000; VERHOEF et al., 2009).

Still analyzing the equation that explains Brazilian consumer satisfaction, another aspect is quality, which can be split into two dimensions: quality of services (CLARKE et al., 2006; BÄCKSTRÖM; JOHANSSON, 2006; LEE, 2009) and quality of products sold (CARPENTER; MOORE, 2006; GREWAL; LEVY; KUMAR, 2009; VERHOEF et al., 2009).

Regarding quality of services, it is worth noting that modern consumers have become more demanding, i.e., besides demanding more options of services offered by organizations, these consumers are looking for retailers that offer services with high standards of quality, which increases the need to raise consumer perceptions of the quality of services offered by supermarkets. Tools such as SERVQUAL and SERVPERF, although not discussed in this paper, are widely used to analyze the quality of services.

Besides the quality of services, the quality of products was also significant, indicating the importance of supermarket assortment. In this sense, aspects such as supplier selection, monitoring of expiry date of products sold, storage and refrigeration of products and bag packing by employees of the supermarket become essential for ensuring customer satisfaction.

Finally, we highlight the importance of consumer perceptions in relation to the number of customers in the store (VERHOEF et al., 2009). Through this survey, we found that Brazilian consumers appreciate stores designed for easy customer flow, to reduce overcrowding in the store.

In addition, it highlights the need to use methods of demand adjustment, reducing overcrowding in the store that negatively influences consumer satisfaction in Brazilian supermarkets.

After analyzing the regression developed for Brazilian consumers, we analyze the regression model related to Argentine subjects, which can be described as follows:

$$Y = 0.321 + 0.164X_1 + 0.555X_2 + 0.406X_3 + 0.294X_4 + 0.370X_5 + 0.164X_6$$

Y – Argentine consumer satisfaction;

X₁ – quality of services;

X₂ – quality of products;

X₃ – service;

X₄ – opening hours;

X₅ – display of products;

X₆ – prices.

It should be mentioned that the adjusted R² of the regression equation for the Argentine consumers was 0.565, meaning that 56.5% of the satisfaction of consumers with the supermarkets frequented can be explained by the equation developed.

Nevertheless, before analyzing the regression model developed, the authors analyzed the multicollinearity between the variables included in the regression equation and found that there

are no problems of this nature, increasing the reliability of the analysis to be performed. The tests realized were VIF and Tolerance.

Analyzing the regression equation that explains Argentine consumer satisfaction, we can see the importance attributed to quality, both of the retailers' assortment and the services offered.

Comparing this result to the results obtained for the Brazilian consumers, we see the importance of consumers' perception of quality in ensuring satisfaction in the supermarket sector.

Therefore, practices that ensure quality of the products sold, such as correct refrigeration, monitoring the shelf life of goods displayed, proper storage and handling, and careful selection of suppliers, should be prioritized by retailers operating in Brazil and Argentina, in order to increase consumer satisfaction.

The management of service quality should also be a priority for supermarket retailers operating in Brazil and Argentina, what can be done through widely disseminated tools such as SERVQUAL and SERVPERF.

The arrangement of products on the shelves of sales was also one of the most important elements for increasing consumer satisfaction in Argentina, therefore we can verify that this item proved to be an important aspect in both countries studied.

The importance attributed to this element is associated with the search for convenience among today's consumers. According Baltas et al. (2010), consumers do most of their shopping in a single supermarket, as this minimizes the effort needed to look for specific products, since they already know the layout of the store.

Moreover, according to Titus and Everett (1995), consumers evaluate the store environment using criteria such as organization of products on the shelves, which facilitates the search for specific items.

Another item related to consumer convenience, which also stood out as one of the most important elements for Argentine consumer satisfaction, was opening hours of supermarkets (DABHOLKAR; THORPE; RENTZ, 1996; CLARKE et al., 2006).

We therefore observed the importance of keeping supermarket stores open later in Argentina, to cater for consumers with different demands.

The service provided by employees of Argentine supermarkets was also suggested as relevant, which shows the importance attached by Argentine consumers to the relationship with the retail staff.

This finding highlights the need to invest in staff training in order to prepare them to serve customers courteously (McGOLDRICK, 2002; CARPENTER; MOORE, 2006; VERHOEF et al., 2009).

Finally, analyzing the Argentine consumer satisfaction, the most important aspect was the prices (BÄCKSTRÖM; JOHANSSON, 2006; GREWAL; LEVY; KUMAR, 2009; VERHOEF et al., 2009). Comparing this result with the results for Brazilian consumers, we verify that the prices practiced by retailers were more important in Argentina, which can be explained by the more precarious economic situation this country is currently going through, compared with Brazil.

After discussing the results for each country individually, the authors made a comparative analysis between both regression models. The results of Brazil and Argentina are summarized on Table 2.

Thus, comparing the two equations developed, it is found that the quality of products sold and services provided, and the organization of products on the shelves, were important in both countries studied. These elements must therefore be carefully planned by supermarket chains operating, or wishing to operate in these two South American countries.

We also found that store environment proved to be more important for Brazilian consumers, while elements related to consumer convenience, relationship between customers and employees and economic aspects were more important in Argentina.

Brazil	B_i	Argentina	B_i
in-store design	0.350	quality of services	0.164
quality of services	0.448	quality of products	0.555
presence of restaurants and cafeterias in the supermarket	0.257	service	0.406
quality of products	0.329	opening hours	0.294
number of people in the store	0.181	display of products	0.370
display of products	0.268	prices	0.164

Table 2. Most important variables for consumer satisfaction in supermarkets in Brazil and Argentina, and Beta coefficients.

Source: Elaborated by the authors, 2012.

Therefore, we highlight that although Brazil and Argentina are countries whose cultures are recognized as similar, there are significant differences in relation to the elements that have the greatest influence on customer satisfaction in each of these countries studied, and these differences should be taken into account by supermarket chains operating in these countries.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study seeks to identify and compare the main items that form part of consumer experiences and influence retail consumer satisfaction in supermarkets in Brazil and Argentina.

Analyzing the results, we highlight the importance of perceived quality both for Argentine and Brazilian consumers, noting that the quality perceived by consumers in both countries applies to both the services and the products.

We also see the importance of product display in supermarkets of both countries studied, facilitating the customer's search for specific items.

Among the differences between consumers of both countries, greater importance was attached to prices in Argentina, which can be explained by the current socio-economic climate in that country.

It was also found that the physical appearance of the store environment is more valued by Brazilian consumers, and that the opening hours and relationship with store employees are most important for Argentine consumers.

Finally, it was found that Argentine consumers place most value on convenience, while Brazilian consumers value more the structure of the store.

Thus, we can see that although the two countries are geographically close, with similar cultures, there are significant differences between consumer behavior in Brazil and Argentina, which should be considered by supermarket chains that operate or plan to operate in these two South American countries.

As a managerial implication of this study, which mapped some differences and similarities in consumer behavior in the supermarket sector in Brazil and Argentina, we can mention the need for retailers operating in South America to adjust their retail marketing mix, in order to cater for different consumers, taking into account the specific socio-economic and cultural differences.

Additionally, as an academic implication of this study, we can highlight the importance of consumer experiences in the analysis of satisfaction. Besides quality and prices, this perspective includes every point of contact between consumer and retailer, and, consequently, measures how consumers feel during their shopping experience.

It should be highlighted that both of the countries studied have vast territories and are heavily populated. Thus, the results obtained here apply specifically to consumers from Ribeirao Preto and Campinas in Brazil, and from Buenos Aires in Argentina.

For future studies, the authors suggest that the same data collection tool be used with larger samples, in order to compare consumers' experience in different South American countries and cities, consolidating the results obtained here.

REFERENCES

ANDERSON, E. W. et al. Customer satisfaction, market share and profitability. **Journal of Marketing**, v. 58, p. 53-66, 1994.

ANDREANSEN, W. T.; LINDESTAD, B. Customer loyalty and complex services: The impact of corporate image on quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty for customers with varying degrees of service expertise. **International Journal of Service Industry Management**, v. 9, p. 7-23, 1998.

BÄCKSTRÖM, Kristina; JOHANSSON, Ulf. Creating and consuming experiences in retail store environments: comparing retailer and consumer perspectives. **Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services**, v. 13, p. 417-430, 2006.

BAKER, J.; GREWAL, D.; PARASURAMAN A. The Influence of Store Environment on Quality Inferences and Store Image. **Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science**, v. 22, p. 328-339, 1994.

BALTAS, George et al. The Role of Customer Factors in Multiple Store Patronage: A Cost-Benefit Approach. **Journal of Retailing** (xxx, 2010). Article in press.

CAJARAVILLE, A.; BIONDO, G. G. Un mundo de sensaciones. **Gestión**, edición especial 15 años, p. 12-15, nov./2010.

CARPENTER, J. M.; MOORE, M. Consumer demographics, store attributes, and retail format choice in the US grocery market. **International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management**, v. 34, p. 434-452, 2006.

CHURCHILL JUNIOR, G. A.; SURPRENANT, C. An investigation into the determinants of customer satisfaction. **Journal of Marketing**, v. 19, p. 491-504, 1982.

CLARKE, Ian et al. Retail restructuring and consumer choice 1. Long-term local changes in consumer behaviour: Portsmouth, 1980 – 2002. **Environment and Planning**, v. 38, p. 25-46, 2006.

DABHOLKAR, P. A.; THORPE, D. I.; RENTZ, J. O. A measure of service quality for retail stores: scale development and validation. **Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science**, v. 24, p. 3-16, 1996.

DEGERATU, A. M.; RANGASWAMY, A.; WU, J. Consumer choice behavior in online and traditional supermarkets: the effects of brand name, price, and other search attributes. **International Journal of Research in Marketing**, v. 17, p. 55-78, 2000.

FORNELL, C. et al. The American customer satisfaction index: nature, purpose and findings. **Journal of Marketing**, v. 60, p. 7-18, 1996.

FOX, E.; MONTGOMERY, A.; LODISH, L. Consumer shopping and spending across retail formats. **Journal of Business**, v. 77, n. 2, p. 25-60, 2004.

GARBARINO, E.; JOHNSON, M. S. The different roles of satisfaction, trust and commitment on customer relationships. **Journal of Marketing**, v. 63, p. 70-87, 1999.

GENTILE, C.; SPILLER, N.; NOCI, G. How to sustain the customer experience: An overview of experience components that co-create value with the customer. **European Management Journal**, v. 25, p. 395-410, 2007.

GREWAL, D.; LEVY, M.; KUMAR, V. Customer experience management in retailing: an organizing framework. **Journal of Retailing**, v. 85, p. 1-14, 2009.

GUIRY, M.; HUTCHINSON, W.; WEITZ, B. A.. **Consumers' Evaluation of Retail Store Service Quality and Its Influence on Store Choice**. Working paper, University of Florida, 1992.

GUJARATI, Damodar N. **Econometria básica**. Rio de Janeiro: Elsevier, 2006.

HAIR JUNIOR, J. F.; BABIN, B.; MONEY, A. H.; SAMOUEL, P. **Fundamentos de métodos de pesquisa em administração**. Porto Alegre: Bookman, 2005.

KATSARAS, N.; WOLFSON, P.; KINSEY, J.; SENAUER, B. **Data mining: a segmentation analysis of U.S. grocery shoppers**. Working paper, University of Minnesota, 2001.

LEE, E. J.; OVERBY, J. W. Creating value for online shoppers: implications for satisfaction and loyalty. **Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior**, v. 17, p. 54-67, 2004.

LEE, W. T. **The impact of store attributes on consumer shopping behaviour**: a study of grocery stores. 2009. Dissertation (Master of Business Administration) - Faculty of Business and Accountancy, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2009.

McGOLDRICK, P. J. **Retail Marketing**. London: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

MEYER, C.; SCHWAGER, A. Understanding customer experience. **Harvard Business Review**, p. 117-126, Feb. 2007.

OLIVER, R. L. Cognitive, affective and attribute bases of the satisfaction response. **Journal of Consumer Research**, v. 20, p. 418-430, 1993.

PARKER, C.; MATHEWS, B. P. Customer satisfaction: contrasting academic and customers' interpretations. **Marketing Intelligence and Planning**, v. 1, n. 19, p. 38-44, 2001.

ROSSI, C. A. V.; SLONGO, L. A. Pesquisa de satisfação de clientes: o estado-da-arte e proposição de um modelo brasileiro. **Revista de Administração Contemporânea**, v. 2, n. 1, p. 101-125, jan./abr. 1998.

TITUS, P. A.; EVERETT, P. B. The consumer retail search process: a conceptual model and research agenda. **Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science**, v. 23, p. 106-119, 1995.

VERHOEF, P. C.; LEMON, K. N.; PARASURAMAN, A.; ROGGEVEEN, A.; TSIROS, M.; SCHLESINGER, L. A. Customer experience creation: Determinants, dynamics and management strategies. **Journal of Retailing**, v. 85, p. 31-41, 2009.

WESTBROOK, Robert A. Sources of Consumer Satisfaction With Retail Outlets. **Journal of Retailing**, v. 57, p. 68-85, 1981.

YI, Y. **A critical review of consumer satisfaction**. Working paper 604, University of Michigan, School of Business, An Arbor, Michigan, 1989.

ZEITHAML, V. A.; BITNER, M. J. **Marketing de serviços**: A empresa com foco no cliente. Porto Alegre: Bookman, 2003.