RETAIL MARKETING INSTRUMENTS – AN ANALYTIC APPROACH

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Abstract: Each of the classical marketing mix policies get specific meanings and characteristics in retail. Some of the authors suggest their accurate transposition in retail, meanwhile others highlight those elements derivate from the service marketing mix. There is also the tendency of outlining the in-store-management, the location or the customer "binding" policy as independent marketing mix policies in retail.

JEL classification: M3, M31

Key words: retail marketing, marketing mix, assortment, price, service, communication, location, in-store-management, customer loyalty

Introduction

According to Lazer and Kelley (p.38) retail marketing mix includes all the goods and services a store is able to offer to its consumers and also all the programmed efforts of the managers that adapt the store to market environment. This definition, over fifty years old, underlines the fact that retail does not only represent products sale, but it is also a complex of goods and services. Meanwhile, marketing mix efforts must be coordinated and oriented towards market needs and opportunities.

The present retail mix has developed at the same time with retail formats. McGoldrick and Andre (p.74) have noticed over the period of three decades that retailers were collectively "obsessed" with a particular element of the marketing mix. Thus, advertising has become an essential element of the mix during the '70s; design dominated the '80s, while loyalty programs became prominent during the '90s. At the beginning, the systematization of marketing instruments was based on retail functions. Recent literature succeeds in finding a better relationship between practical aspects of retailers' activities and theoretical ones. Therefore, following a continuous evolution, marketing mix includes, depending on the author, between three and ten specific elements (Müller-Hagedorn, 2005, p.8).

In Hansen's approach (1990, p.36) marketing mix includes nine elements: location; assortment; product, especially private labels; store layout; price; sales financing; sales promotion; customer service; customers' complaints management.

Berekoven (1995, p.176) defines, several years later, ten retail marketing elements: assortment; commercial brands; quality and quality assurance; service; price; advertising; sales promotion; store layout and merchandising; sales force; location. Barth (1999, p.143) identifies only three elements, each with several subcomponents:

- service delivery (with assortment; quantity and merchandise availability);
- remuneration (attaining desired turnover; merchandise processing; assortment completion) and
- consumers influence (merchandising; advertising; public relations).

More recently, Müller-Hagedorn (2005, p.322) considers only six policies (location; assortment; price; promotion planning; sales force; in-store-management), while Liebmann, Zentes and Swoboda (Liebmann et al., 2008), based on predominantly Anglo-American literature identified eight components of retail marketing: assortment; private labels; price; communication; location; service; in-store-management) and consumer loyalty.

Assortment and private labels

Assortment refers to the sum of all measures (Theiß, 2007, p.291) designed to influence and delineate merchandise and services offer of a retailer, the multitude of the objects on sale (Müller-Hagedorn, 2005, p.157) – goods, services and use rights – of a retailer in a certain season, regardless of the producer, and the composition of various articles and groups of merchandise. The assortment, its structure and, more recently, the array of complementary services can be tackled from both retailer's and customer's sides. The assortment allows the retailer to differentiate from its competitors and to accurately position itself within a certain retail format. From customer's perspective, assortment represents the opportunity to attract new consumers and to loyalise them (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.459).

Regarding assortment, retailers and wholesalers must decide the products that will be included in the assortment, the length, width and depth of the assortment and must analyze the possible effects of including new articles and complementary services. Retailers will also have to decide upon the number of complementary services they should offer, of customers segments that could be approached and how actively they should be provided (Homburg et al., 2002, p.122).

Among the brands offered, retailers' private brands occupy a special position thanks to their importance for the "bind" with present customers and for attaining the desired level of success (Jacoby & Mazursky, 1984, pp.519-533). In fact, these are retailers' marks placed on various articles; either produced by them or by other parties for them and marketed through their own stores. At the same time, retailers own both the property and the use rights over these "private" brands (Birtwistle, Freathy, 1998, pp.318-323; Müller-Hagedorn, 2005, p.57). In this context, the differentiation elements between retailer's private labels and producer's brands are quality and selling price. Generally, private brands "succeed" in adjusting better, faster and more efficiently to consumers' lifestyles and their social, moral and psychological values.

Price

In retail, price occupies a central place, serving the development and application of general business strategy, the achievement of very important goals (Bruhn, 2007, p.166) - increase of: quantitative sales; turnover; market share; profitability; presence on certain distribution channels; gross margin; the immediate effect on customers: improvement of customers' perceptions of price credibility or of price-quality ratio; and on competitors using specific instruments (Levy et al., 2004, pp.13-26): discounts, temporary discounts, permanently low prices benefits, prices for special offers or assortments.

The effects of interventions on price are rapidly perceived by both consumers and competitors. There are several instruments that can be used by retailers to influence consumers and their perceptions regarding service price, as it is revealed by certain empirical researches (Theiß, 2007, p.596; Bruhn, 2007, pp.172-144; Liebmann et al., 2008, pp.564-573):

- Price differentiation – it implies the offer of the same good to various consumer segments at different price levels. Differentiation can be: quantitative (price per unit decreases as quantity purchased increases); temporal (at the end of store hours certain prices are reduced); spatial (because in various regions transportation costs may differ); customized (based on age or sex – customers cards; facilities for employees or students);
- Price aggregation – prices are established for a whole package and not for each item. The literature distinguishes among (Priemer, 2002, p.508): „additive bundles" (aggregate price = sum of individual prices); „super additive bundles" (aggregate price > sum of individual prices); „sub additive bundles" (aggregate price < sum of individual prices);
- Special offers are either preplanned (active special offers) or designed to match similar competitors' actions (passive special offers). They are characterized by limited and short validity time, application to a few articles and significant reduction in price. Usually, their goal is to increase the quantity sold of the promoted product or of the complementary articles (Haller, 2001, p.201), but also to improve store's results, to increase acquisitions frequency or to improve general consumers' perceptions.
- Lowest everyday prices – operated to align a retailer's positions to that of its competitors;
- Lowest price guarantee – the promise that the retailer will provide compensation in case an article can be found at a lower price somewhere else;
- Recommended (reference) prices aim at improving retailers' overall image;
- Value discounts (consumers pay a lower price), monetary ones (consumers purchase the product using coupons), quantitative discounts (consumers pay regular price and receive additional items);
- Credit and payment facilities in order to increase frequency of purchases and quantities sold;
- Software packages aid managers in the optimization of sales promotions related decisions and acquisitions scenarios and in the calculation of efficiency indicators (Levy, 2004, pp.XIII-XXI);
- Databases include comparative situations regarding prices charged in various stores;
- Online portals that allow customers to make price comparisons.

The use of these instruments allows the retailer to focus on specific strategies, such as: (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.544):

- Strategy of high, medium or low prices;
- Discount strategy – a quality service at an attractive price;
- Penetration strategy – lowest price in the launch phase of a product, in order to immediately increase awareness;
- Market skimming strategy – a relatively high level of price in the launch phase to test customers' payment availability;
- Strategy of daily, seasonal or monthly price change.

Service and personnel policy

From the perspective of distribution policy, service in retail companies includes:

- Personal sale, carried out by store's staff;
- Multi-channel retailing –refers to selling goods through several retail formats that belong to the same chain or through internet or catalogs (Nunes & Cespedes, 2004, pp.46-59);
- Supply and distribution logistics from central warehouse to regional ones and stores (Pepels, 1995, p.111).

In retail, just like for other services, the integration of customer in service delivery is obvious, since self-service is a fundamental characteristic of most retail stores. Moreover, service policy contributes to (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.526) the differentiation and the creation of competitive advantage, the winning and binding of customers or to their information and counselling. It is important to underline the optimization of service quality (Donabedian, 1989) through the implementation of potential goals (personnel training; logistical infrastructure; location), of processes goals (personnel politeness, time spent in lines) or results (store image, products utility).

In service implementation and control (Berekoven, 1995, p.175; Liebmann et al, 2008, pp.531-534) retailers must take into account target segments, retail service's content and quality (functional, technical), moment and frequency of service delivery, distribution channels, communication instruments and costs.

Personnel policy represents a key component of service policy, for it directly contributes to the creation of consumer's image of the retail store. The personnel play an essential role in attracting and "binding" customers to the store. In this respect, the personnel must display highly developed communication skills, adequate training, pleasant appearance, empathy, competence and objectivity in conversation, friendly attitude towards customers' concerns (Deery et al., 2002, pp.3-16). From retailer's point of view, staff loyalisation is a priority, because loss of personnel may induce customers' loss.

Several studies reveal increased importance of service in retail. Complementary services increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Also, a more complete offer has positive effects both on retailer's image and turnover (Homburg et al., 2002, pp.86-101). Personal service and complementary services play an important part both in food and non-food retail, clothing, do-it-yourself and home appliances.

Communication Policy

Communication is almost as important for goods, services and retail. For a retailer the promotion of its private brands, of a particular location and personal sales are the most important aspects.

Generally speaking, communication includes all instruments and measures used by an enterprise for its own "presentation" and that of its services to target groups (Bruhn, 2007, p.199). In retail, this "presentation" is oriented both towards "inside" (employees), and "outside" (market) (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.574). Typical instruments are mass-media, prints and direct advertising, sales promotion, personal sales, public relations, internet or fairs and exhibitions. A significant matter in accomplishing an effective communication activity is to understand that target groups perceive retailer's characteristics and values differently. Therefore, it is important for the retailer to know socio-demographic characteristics of its target market and to adjust its communication programs to the peculiarities of each segment, sub-segment or even individual (Erdem et al., 1999, pp.137-144).

Depending on the market conditions or the phase in the decision process, retailers may follow one or more communication goals, be they economic or not. The second types of goals are classified into:

- cognitive (attention and perception – to direct attention and perception towards promotional articles; increase in brands or assortment awareness);
- affective (emotional – to activate implicit or new needs; to strengthen emotional positioning; transmission of entertainment value of the purchase process);
- conative (behavioral – increase in the recommendation intention; increase of product trials;
- increase in the number of re-purchases and frequency of acquisitions) (Bruhn, 2007, p.206).

All these goals serve both to influence consumers' decisions and to develop loyalty relationships. The implementation of communication goals is carried out with the aid of communication instruments and of their peculiarities (Zentes et al., 2007, pp.273-299).

TV advertising creates the fastest emotional effect upon consumers thanks to simultaneous use of images, sounds and texts with ample multi-sensitive effects that activate memories and feelings induce states of fact or increase the intensity of perception or of nostalgia (Kroeber-Riel & Esch, 2000, p.143). Cinema and radio advertising have a more modest impact because of the relatively narrow groups that utilize these communication media. Radio is however suitable for rapid increase in retailer or brand awareness. Magazines and newspapers ads can approach certain target consumer segments, their impact being both regional and national (Dabija & Abrudan, 2008, pp.133-148).

Public relations require interrelation between retailer and its public (customers, suppliers, investors, institutions, organizations, and authorities), its stakeholders or employees (Bruhn, 2005, p.179). Public relations through webpage development and update, publication of reports or interviews with company's decision makers, event organization (press conferences, seminars, lectures, congresses or open doors events, fairs or exhibitions), relationship maintenance with opinion leaders and multipliers, with sponsors and journalists, reduction in the impact of negative news related to scandals, accidents, cases of expired or suspicious or nonconforming products (Homburg & Krohmer, 2006, p.830) create and delineate retailer's image among its public.

Direct communication does not only imply preservation of relationships with existing customers, but also the contact and winning of new ones with the aim of "binding" them to the retailer. Direct communication includes mailing of brochures, prospects or catalogs, telephone or e-mail marketing (Theiß, 2007, p.659). The basis for direct communication is represented by the existence of databases with information on customers – the so-called „Database Marketing" (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.583).

Fairs and exhibitions are essential instruments for retail as well (Pop & Dabija, 2009, pp.64-67), because they facilitate in an organized environment the exchange of merchandise (goods and services) among producers, distributors and consumers, representing thus ancillary instruments of retail (Tietz, 1993, p.160). Retailers may organize universal fairs (includes industrial, manufacturer or agricultural exhibitors), sample fairs (where contracts are signed based on samples, while products are later remitted by the producer) or exhibitions (present a representative offer for a certain field of activity and informs upon sales promotions). Among communication instruments, the most modern ones are "ambient media", "ambush media", "keyword advertising", viral effects or „guerrilla marketing" (Todt & Dabija, 2009).

In-Store-Management

In-store management may either be included in the communication policy or presented individually. It represents the equivalent of physical evidences from service marketing. Physical evidences in retail include the interior space of the store, the layout of shelves and gondolas, product merchandising and opening hours (Oehme, 2001, p.121). Building and interior standardization, space and gondolas design, systematization of decorations, pleasant sound, adequate lighting, use of fine scents and warm colours contribute essentially not only to the creation of a pleasant shopping atmosphere, the conveyance of an exciting shopping experience and the formation of a safe and agreeable environment for shopping or recreation, but also to the crystallization of retailer's image and location among its public, to the improvement in its efficiency and chances of rapid development and to the increase in customers' preference towards the retailer. Ambiance policy contributes, definitely, through emotions conveyed, to retailer's strategic differentiation (Levy M., Weitz, 2003, p.225).

Provision of pleasant shopping atmosphere and experience seem to represent (Liebmann et al., 2008, p. 596) the most important goals of this policy because consumers' satisfaction is usually related to superior turnover / sales area, increase in: number of visitors, impulsive acquisitions, time spent in the store, loyalty of consumers, accessibility of purchases, retailer's image differentiation, consolidation of consumer's preference for the store and optimization of consumers' visits frequency (Diller & Kusterer, 1986, pp.105-123).

Transmission of shopping excitement, of new and pleasure is carried out by assortment, communication, and service and in-store management. Attractive packaging, unique design or billboards that stir consumers' emotions in order to increase sales represent subtle means of influence and reach of economic indicators (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.598). In-store management involves one or more of the following (Theiß, 2007, p.683; Liebmann et al., 2008, pp.598-605; Kroeber-Riel &Weinberg, 2003, p.437):

- Division of store surface in areas for different activities: merchandise display, counselling (quiet space outside noisy area), circulation (stairs, aisles), the rest (cash registers, dressing rooms);
- Placement of gondolas and aisles in order to fluidize flow of customers;
- Logical organization of merchandise and articles on gondolas and shelves to maximize visibility, to facilitate access and to allow creation of synergies and positive effects;
- Presentation of articles according to their utility, satisfied need, source, level of gondolas;
- Use of personal service departments;
- Visual communication and its psychological effects: lighting of the sales area; mix of colors and their dynamic (yellow – sympathy, joy; red – stimulation; green – silence; blue – relaxation); use of decorations;

- Acoustic communication: background music; store's radio (for promotions, special offers and announcements);
- Use of smells (fresh bread), perfumes (combinations from drinks, detergents, fruits departments), breeze (in the dairy department) and temperature (cold in meat or fruits departments, warm in recreation areas);
- Competent, clean and informative design of the windows in order to convey pleasant feelings;
- Informative screens and kiosks, price checks, order terminals, stands for film developing, computers with internet access and with various software.

In-store-layout may be regarded from consumers' point of view, who expects to do the shopping within a reasonable time period, without having to search for a long period of time the goods they need. In the cases they want a great shopping experience, the ambience should be completely different from that of competitors, and it should excite and please customers, and be in accordance with their lifestyles (Gröppel-Klein, 2006, p.676).

Location

Just like service or loyalty policy, location derives from physical evidences and from the integration of extern factor into service delivery. The store represents the place where consumers interrelate with the retailer. At the same time, location is a component of distribution policy, representing the geographic place where the retailer utilizes its resources in order to deliver the service to its customers.

In most countries it may be noticed a change in time of retailers' location. Thus, if initially retail was concentrated in the centre of localities and neighborhoods, later on peripheries have become more important. The "reactivation" of central areas within the cities has been possible thanks to the concentration there of public and service companies (Zentes & Swoboda, 1999, p.94). Lately we can talk about the repositioning of retail in shopping centers and areas.

Retail location is primarily determined by their format (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.494). Proximity units, specialized stores and discounters can usually be found in dense traffic areas, close to residential areas or to public institutions (schools, hospitals, and banks), agencies and service companies. Supermarkets are also found in dense traffic or populated areas, but usually are accessible by car. Hypermarkets, cash & carry, do-it-yourself units are built at the periphery or outside localities, being accessible only by car or public means of transportation.

Store location's selection depends on (Müller-Hagedorn, 2005, pp.133-142):

- Distance to: households; format of competitors (hypermarkets for a supermarket); assortment of competitors (shopping centers, specialized stores); areas with dense traffic;
- Existing infrastructure (car access; public transportation; existence of other institutions in the area);
- Demographic factors (population's distribution by sex, age groups, income; density and volume of population; nationalities; number of mono-, bi- or multi-parental families);
- Economic factors (population income; propensity to economize; purchasing power; propensity to consume; number of people that live in that area and that of the people that work there);

- Psychological and social factors (lifestyles; consume habits; frequency of acquisitions and their size; mentality);
- Intensity of competition in the area (number and size of retail units; their turnover; degree of competitors' specialization; image and ancillary services provided);
- Objective evaluation (of location; expansion opportunities or of improving the location; value of the location; trade area);
- Costs determined by the location (supply and logistics costs; rents; repairs and maintenance; costs with energy; personnel costs; taxes and dues; necessity of parking's or passageways);
- Disturbing factors (legislation; noise, odors, climate).

In choosing optimal location for a retail unit, economic theory offers several possible approaches, such as: the method of concentric circles around a potential location; the method of temporal distance (minutes by car or on foot, or kilometers); Reilly's gravitational model and its developments in Huff's model; STORELOC model; Checklist model; regression models (Liebmann et al., 2008, p. 501)

Customer Loyalty

The policy of customers' loyalization, deducted from the integration of the external factor into the service delivered, reveals the present loyalization methods of stores (Foscht & Swoboda, 2007, p.213). Loyal customers may through the combined interaction of the offered assortment, of private brands, of store's atmosphere, of the competent and friendly personnel, but also through the store itself and its location (Pop & Petrescu, 2008, pp.125-129). Only to the extent the retailer will stir its customers' interest through its entire service and will convince them of the increased value it can provide, it will succeed in attracting them. Fulfilling customers' expectations and underlining the various forms of utility (Homburg & Krohmer, 2006, p.513) (functional– deducted from the basic function of the articles; emotional – positive feelings inculcated to the possessors; social – prestige) can strengthen the business relationship, favoring repurchasing, increase of visit frequency and amount of money spent in the store, and, in the end customers' loyalty towards the retailer.

The starting point in creating loyalty is the satisfaction of consumers' expectations (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.616). In fact, satisfaction can be considered a complex process of comparisons made by consumers at the time of acquisition and the desires related to this. Both the perception of purchase and the desires and expectations differ from one consumer to the other, being influenced by lifestyle, income, education and other socio-economic variables.

If consumers' expectations are exceeded, its satisfaction will be increased, with a positive impact on the sales: the clients return and recommend the store to their friends and acquaintances. Not being able to fulfill the expectations will have a negative, much stronger than in the first case, effect. The retailer will face complaints, legal actions and dissemination of negative information about its business. In order to satisfy its customers retailers must take into account the following three aspects (Holland & Heeg, 1998, p.57):

- Fundamental demands: customers expect the personnel to be friendly, eager to help and competent at all times. Not being able to fulfill these expectations will easily end the business relationship;

- Achieving satisfaction: customers expect that all products and brands are properly labeled, that all prices are correct and not too different from those of competitors. If customers find another retailer that offers the same products at much lower prices, they will feel betrayed. Good service also means short queues at the cash registers;
- Enthusiasm: customers will feel important if rewarded with presents or discounts, if they are the 100.000th, the 1.000.000th, etc. customers.

Even though the "satisfaction" concept seems to be easy to be perceived, it describes a phenomenon that must not be overlooked. Satisfied customers will accept the retailer more easily and will visit it more often than those that are unsatisfied. Therefore, customer's satisfaction and loyalty are interconnected phenomena, and retailers must be aware of that. Loyalty programs are classified by the literature taking into account (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.626):

- Level of cooperation between the retailer and producer – isolated loyalty programs (carried out by only one producer or retailer) versus collaboration loyalty programs (collaboration between several companies);
- Customers' expected value – loyalty programs that focus on one side on the functional or economic component, and, on the other side on the emotional, social or service component;

Among the relationship marketing instruments the most representative are cards and clients clubs. They contribute, together with bonus points programs, complaints management, customers' magazines and brochures to long-term relationship strengthening. Clients cards, first introduced at the beginning of the last century in the US and only in the 50's in Europe have five functions (Liebmann et al., 2008, p.627): identify its possessor; remind of the retailer; prestige (sense of belonging) – the possessor can identify with a group of people; finance – the possessor enjoys several facilities; marketing – the card can offer several ancillary advantages (free parking, etc.). Card holders "earn" points proportional with the amount of money spent or as a percentage of the total value of acquisitions, as a progressive accumulation or in stages.

Market and customers concentration, together with the necessity of reciprocal exchange of information with the goal of approaching a large number of customers has made possible the foundation of partnerships between retailers and of associations. Thus, acquisitions made at any of the partners will generate points that are cumulated on one card, and which can be spent at any of them (Zentes et al., 2007, p.238). According to recent studies, the launch of a loyalty program by a retailer using cards is viable if there are at least eight locations of the store (Popa, 2008).

Another trend in loyalty programs is that of co-branded debit and credit cards (partnership with a bank or credit cooperative). In the context of the financial crisis, the profitability and efficiency of this initiative is more carefully analyzed, considering the credit conditions, interest rates and consumers' ability of reimbursement.

Clients clubs are utilized by retailers in order to "bind" clients tighter to the company. They represent associations sustained, initiated and organized by one or more enterprises (Homburg & Krohmer, 2006, p.948), offering its members several supplementary advantages.

Complaints management, as an ancillary service of the retailer, provides it the opportunity to improve its operations and to implement its general strategy. Correctly processed, the ideas, observations and suggestions from the customers can contribute not only to improve unit's image among its target market, but also to increase satisfaction and trust and to positively influence their loyalty. Other instruments that create loyalty among consumers and that can be used by retailers are: direct marketing, discount coupons and several computer programs that can predict consumers' demands or optimize clients' management depending on their acquisitions (Liebmann et al., 2008, pp.637-640).

Conclusions

From the above mentioned ideas we may conclude, that all authors recognize as independent policies in retailing assortment, price and communication (with lots of components). If in early times, the specific processes of customer handling were not very well demarcated, in time these have evolved and were incorporated in the service and personnel policy.

For any retail company it is very important not only to know these retail marketing mix policies and their components, but to successfully combine them when approaching their target markets in order to achieve or to increase loyalty or awareness. Another fundamental goal for any retailer should be gaining the best position in consumer minds by building and continuously developing their store image.

From this point of view it is crucial for a retailer to understand how customer perceives them. Therefore a retailer should constantly try to decrease the gap between their own positioning on the market (inside-out perspective) and that considered by the target segments (outside-in perspective).

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