Research Questions, Methodology and Questionnaire Design for Part II

Research questions and hypotheses

The aim of this book concerns the general question: ‘why do people shop where they do (choices of shopping centres). Following the literature search outlined in Chapter 1 above, specific research questions can be posed:

(i) Which attributes of a shopping centre are most associated with shopper spending?
(ii) Can the attractiveness of a centre be measured in a way that has meaning and utility, for example in relation to shoppers’ spending, the sales turnover or rental income of shopping centres?
(iii) Are the specific attributes most affecting shoppers’ spending significantly different at various shopping centres?
(iv) Are the specific attributes affecting shoppers’ spending significantly different for different segments of shoppers?

This chapter concerns the methodology adopted in attempting to answer these questions, relating to Part II of this book, i.e. Chapters 3 to 7 inclusive below.

Decisions consumers make on where to shop are affected not only by attributes specific to each centre, such as the choice of stores, but also by the distance or time of travel. According to spatial interaction theory (considered in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6 below), there is decay in shoppers’ patronage of a centre with increasing travel distance or time. This decay in patronage can be described in terms of the ‘distance exponent’. As argued in Chapter 5 below,
the distance exponent can be considered as consisting of two components:

(a) The decay in the proportion of the population shopping at a centre with increasing travel distance or time and
(b) The decay in shoppers’ assessments of the attractiveness of a centre with increasing distance or time.

Many authors – briefly summarised in Chapter 5 below – have studied Component (a). A number of researchers have drawn attention to the variable nature of this part of the distance exponent – possibly related to the size or attractiveness of the centre. Because of this link, the present study of attractiveness and image has also encompassed this variation in the distance exponent.

Component (b) has received less attention and indeed is difficult to study directly. In this work, an alternative proxy indicator has been investigated: ‘Individual relative spending’. Again, because attractiveness can be postulated to be affected by distance, this research has also included the decay (or otherwise) of Individual relative spending with distance and travel time. To complete the picture in terms of the relationships between attractiveness and travel distance or time, two further questions, (v) and (vi) below have also been addressed.

(v) Can the variations in the distance exponent, Aspect (a), be quantified in terms of the measured attractiveness of centres?
(vi) What independent variable(s) influence Aspect (b), the decay (or otherwise) of individual relative spending with distance and travel time.

Accordingly, a study was designed aimed at answering the research questions as far as practicable.

Methodology

Research questions on shopping centre choice can well be studied by qualitative techniques focused on individual’s perceptions of shopping centres and how these affect decisions on where to shop. Accordingly, in the preparatory work for this study, thirty unstructured, open-ended interviews were carried out with a convenience sample of shoppers. Central to this work, though, is the objective of testing hypotheses with a view to eliciting (so far as practicable) statistically significant