4
The Shopping Centre as a Brand

This chapter is adapted from a paper that first appeared in the *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* (Dennis et al, 2002a).1

Introduction

In the context of shopping centres, the terms ‘image’ or ‘attractiveness’ tend to be more used than ‘branding’. In this chapter, it is argued that techniques of measuring brand image and building brand value can help towards customer satisfaction and commercial success for shopping centres. The concept of ‘branding’ is well known for consumer products. Successful manufacturers have built up brand value through the development of a differentiated brand personality and a long-term reputation for quality backed up by advertising and other forms of brand support. Concentration in retailing has led to the balance of marketing ‘power’ shifting towards retailers, whose brand equity has overtaken that of even leading manufacturers (McGoldrick, 2002). Jary and Wileman (1998) questioned whether retail businesses are really brands. They concluded that retail brands are ‘The Real Thing’ although differing from product brands ‘not least because of the difficulty of managing the multiplicity of attributes of a retail brand’. The larger retailers are building their brands – for example one study rated the leading multiple grocer Tesco in the top 10 (out of 115) major UK companies committed to building powerful brands (Brand

---

Retailers have become more aware of the value of branding and have (according to Davies, 1998) attempted to copy the images of manufacturers’ brands in developing their own brands.

There is a strong link between retail concentration and the share of trade taken by retailer brands (Akehurst and Alexander, 1995). Just as consumers’ preferences are moving towards fewer, larger retail stores, so they are also moving towards larger shopping centres. Between 1986 and 1999 the number of ‘super-regional’ shopping centres (over 100,000 m²) in the UK rose from two to seven (based on Guy, 1994b). The number has only grown by one since 1999 as planning approval is almost impossible to obtain for new super-regional shopping centres in the UK, rather than on account of lack of demand. Shopping centres have been branded in practice – Arndale for example has been known as a shopping centre brand name since the opening of the UK’s first regional centre (at Poole) in 1969.

Brand names affect perception (evidenced by the well known example that over half of consumers chose Diet Pepsi in blind tests, but when they knew the brand names, almost two thirds preferred Diet Coke – De Chernatony and McDonald, 1998). As Jobber (2001, p. 229) puts it: ‘a rose by any other name would smell as sweet … or would it?’. More than one of the shopping centres in our study was under the same ownership – but shoppers would probably not have known this. Many UK shopping centres do not make use of a name in branding to any extent. Exceptions include The Mall – applying consistency of branding across a portfolio of shopping centres and The Bentall Centre in Kingston on Thames, which benefits from association with a well-known department store having a long history and a reputation for quality. The Mall Corporation (a joint venture of Capital and Regional plc with funding partners) owns 21 UK shopping centres at the time of writing and plans to increase to 30 to 35 branded centres. For the future it might be expected that more shopping centres may follow the general retail trend and seek to build their brand images.

Others have studied the marketing of shopping destinations, including work by the Association of Town Centre Managers (e.g. 1994) and Warnaby and associates (e.g. Medway et al, 1999; Warnaby and Davies, 1997; Warnaby, 1998; Warnaby and Medway, 2000). Nevertheless there has been little research to date, in the UK, on the branding of shopping centres. According to Howard (1992), shopping centres had up till that time largely ignored centre branding considerations. In this chapter, the author reports a preliminary exploration of the potential using UK case studies. The aim is first to demonstrate that both qualitative and quantitative brand image measurement techniques can be of