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Profiling shopping mall customers during hard times

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ABSTRACT

Shopping malls are facing times of hardship due to the recent economic crisis, the maturity of this retailing format and the increasing competition of the electronic commerce. This study aims to examine and profile shopping mall customer segments, since this context of hardship may have altered the previous mall customer segmentations.Data from 511 shopping mall customers in a mature market and during a recessionary period was analyzed through two-step cluster analysis and a subsequent MANOVA.Results suggest that mall customer segments are no longer so in hard times; and five segments emerge, namely "*senior hostelry seekers*", "*young enthusiasts*", "*deal hunters*", "*adverse-reluctant customers*" and "*leisure comfy-teens*"; being the "*young enthusiasts*" the most attractive segment; while the "*adverse-reluctant customers*" represent the main challenge for mall managers.

1. Introduction

The shopping mall retailing format could be facing hard times influenced by the maturity stage of this format, the recent economic crisis and the increasing competition of online retailers, driving to the decline and low profitability rates of some shopping malls in some developed countries. In the last decade, a great amount of shopping malls was entering a phase of decline both in the US and in Europe (Parlette and Cowen, 2011; Ferreira and Paiva, 2017), increasing consciousness of the shopping mall crisis.

There are numerous factors creating a context of hard times for the shopping malls. One factor is the stage of their life cycle, since in a context of increasing retail competition and greater availability of new retail formats such as supercenters, category killers or factory-outlets, the life of shopping malls has entered a maturity stage (Moccia, 2012). So, the strong competition in the retail industry has influenced the decline of shopping malls (Moccia, 2012). In addition, recent studies report that consumers are increasingly turning to online retailing (Rigby, 2011), offering a wide range of products and brands available with overnight delivery and great discounts and promotions (Resnick, 2015). Finally, another factor threatening shopping malls today is the economic context, given that prior studies indicate the negative effects of the economic crisis of 2008 in the retail industry, increasing the number of shopping mall closures in many countries (Ferreira and Paiva, 2017).

There is abundant retail literature reporting the existence of different typologies and profiles of shopping mall customers (Bloch et al., 1994; Reynolds et al., 2002; Ruiz et al., 2004; El-Adly, 2007; Gilboa, 2009), but none of this prior research has conducted a segmentation analysis and customer profiling in times of hardship. Further, one important limitation in the retail marketing literature relates to the factors beyond the customer and the mall itself influencing the shopping behavior, such as the downturn economic context or the maturity or decline of the retail format. Only a small number of the retail studies have considered one of these external factors, such as the maturity stage of the malls (Frasquet et al., 2001; Yavas, 2003; Gilboa, 2009). However, this new context of hard times for malls could have altered considerably the consumer shopping behavior, and therefore the previous shopping mall customer segmentations require a new examination.

The objective of the present study is to develop a mall customer segmentation in this context of hardship, based on the factors of attraction of the shopping malls; and then profile these mall customer typologies to provide practical guidance for retailers to better understand their customers. This new examination of mall customer profiles considers the new context of hardship for this retailing format, which may have altered the customers' retail patronage and behavioral consumption.

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2. Literature review

2.1. Hard times for the shopping malls

2.1.1. Maturity of the retailing format

Shopping malls are experiencing a significant decline in the number of shoppers and transactions (Resnick, 2015) which are related to the retail environment. One reason for this decline is that shopping malls are facing strong competition today with the saturation of retail locations and the increase of the electronic commerce (Ruiz et al., 2004). Further, the innovations in the retail system -with the entry of innovative store concepts and formats- constitute a threat to the existing retail formats, because the more attractive innovative retail formats contribute to the decline of the existing ones (Ferreira and Paiva, 2017). Another reason for the declining role of the mall is the changing consumer behavior. In his seminal work Wakefield and Baker (1998) reported that consumers are increasingly busy and have little time for shopping; and in addition, many malls look quite similar from each other, with little differentiation in a context of format maturity (El-Adly, 2007), which increases competition between malls. Likewise, one of the major challenges of shopping malls today is that customers have better shopping options through online shopping, which offers a wide variety of products and brands increasing the options available with overnight delivery; therefore, jeopardizing the need for shopping malls (Resnick, 2015). In addition, the market size for malls has reached a threshold. Some authors highlight that life cycle theories explain the increasing decline of malls (Garrefa, 2011), and that malls have entered a maturity stage in their life cycle, characterized by threats to growth and by a lower profitability (Moccia, 2012). That is, shopping malls have a time of growth, an apex and will experience a decline until closure.

2.1.2. The decline of shopping malls

Shopping malls have experienced a significant decline in the last years in most of the developed countries. In the US, where shopping malls have a longer tradition, the decline and closure of this retail format is much more widespread than in Europe. In year 2001, a total amount of 2076 malls could be considered as decline malls and 249 become *"dead malls"* in the US (Global Strategic Real State Research Group, 2001). Similarly, authors like Garrefa (2011) identified more than 3800 closed shopping malls in year 2005; while Moccia (2012) indicates that the 7% of the shopping malls in the US could be classified as entering in a decline stage in year 2012. In Europe, the shopping mall vitality is being endangered and are facing serious challenges in France (Gasnier and Guillemont, 2011), Portugal (Teixeira, 2014) or Sweden (Kärrholm et al., 2014); and many of them are becoming "*dead malls*" (Ferreira and Paiva, 2017).

But, what is a declining mall? Following Moccia (2012) declining malls are economically obsolete malls. More precisely, this author reports that a declining malls are those with a sales per square foot less or equal to $150, even though other variables confirm the mall decline stage such as the age of the mall, its size, the occupancy rates, the tenant mix characteristics or the trade area demographics. Further, the so-called "*dead malls*" are received increasing attention in the academia. The use of the term "*dead mall"* is applied to malls that have closed or malls with low occupancy rates and low consumer traffic that are losing some of their prime retailers (Durnham-Jones and Williamson, 2011). Other authors indicate that dead malls are those with a vacancy rate of 70% or higher, low consumer traffic and low sales volume (Ferreira and Paiva, 2017), which is related to the decline of the mall as a competitive retail format.

2.1.3. The downturn context

Some authors report that the economic crisis and the downturn context suffered by most of the EU countries in year 2008 could be the main factor explaining the decline of some shopping malls (Moccia, 2012). In other words, the economic downturn has influenced the low profitability and decline of shopping malls.

The bad economic climate reduces consumption, particularly the consumption of discretionary goods, reduces of the proportion of the disposable income spent on retail consumption and restrains household spending (Ang, 2001). Accordingly, consumers change their consumption behavior under economic hardship: consumers buy less and spent more time on comparative shopping (Shama, 1981), become more careful in their spending, seeking for affordable low prices and have lower participation in leisure or recreational activities (Ang, 2001), increase their purchase planning and price consciousness (Hampson and McGoldrick, 2013). In addition, the great variety of different retail outlets available increases the likelihood that consumers can adjust their behavior just adapting where they shop (Ang et al., 2000). Similarly, consumers trying to maximize the utility of their reduced incomes may be turning away from traditional retail formats to online retailers in search of the best quality-price relationship, bargains and good deals (Rigby, 2011; Puelles et al., 2016). On the other hand, electronic commerce has gained force in response to reduce spending, since it facilitates the comparison of prices as compared to physically visiting the mall. For this reason, during economic crisis the internet is being increasingly used as a source of information on products, prices and promotions and to make online purchases (Puelles et al., 2016). So, the online commerce main advantages compared to physical stores respond perfectly to consumer requirements during recession periods.

2.2. Shopping mall customer typologies

The theoretical background of the present research is the development of customer "*typologies"* that base their roots in clinical psychology (Barnes et al., 2007), being classification schemes that provide a means to compare and order individuals and cluster them into categorical types (Rich, 1992).

There is abundant research regarding shopping mall customer segmentations. These segmentation studies have been developed to describe the different customer typologies using different criteria, such as the attractiveness of the shopping mall, (El-Adly, 2007; González-Hernández and Orozco-Gómez, 2012); the customer motivations (Bellenger et al., 1977; Ruiz et al., 2004; Gilboa, 2009); shopping behavior, the perceived benefits of the mall (Bloch et al., 1994); mall attributes (Bloch et al., 1994; Sit et al., 2003; Ruiz et al., 2004; El-Adly, 2007), the customer emotions (Ruiz et al., 2004); the customer attitudes (Reynolds et al., 2002) or even the activities developed in the mall (Bloch et al., 1994; Ruiz et al., 2004).

The seminal work of Bellenger et al. (1977) considers the customer mall patronage motivations for segmentation in order to describe two mall customer segments: convenience or "*economic shoppers"*, who satisfy their most utilitarian needs and are looking for products and services; and the "*recreational shoppers"*, who are looking for leisure and social interaction in the mall. Later, Bloch et al. (1994) used the mall behaviors, mall benefits and mall activities to report in order to analyze customer profiles. Their study reported four types of mall customers: "*minimalists*" who are practical in their purchases and have a low purchase and visit frequency; the "*mall enthusiasts*" who seek for a wide range of activities at the mall and show high mall activity levels; the "*grazers*" who perceive the mall as a place for socialization and entertainment and visit the for social needs; and the "*traditionalists*" who are interested in the mall atmosphere and environment as well as on the mall convenience and visit the mall for escape purposes.

Likewise, other studies have considered the importance of the shopping mall attributes for segmentation such as Reynolds et al. (2002), Sit et al. (2003) or El-Adly (2007). In this context, Reynolds et al. (2002) segmented shopping mall customers into "*basic*" customers who are focused on malls essentials and convenience; "*apathetic*" customers who are disinterested in all aspects of the mall; "*destination*" customers who do not value mall entertainment; and "*serious*" customers who value the merchandise and convenience of the mall, as well as the distance of the mall from their homes. Other authors following this segmentation criteria are González-Hernández and Orozco-Gómez (2012), who reported three different segments among customers: "*serious*" customers who seek for good personal service and an attractive mall atmosphere; "*enthusiasts*" who are oriented towards socialization and entertainment, demanding a complete mall experience; and "*basic*" customers, who are oriented towards convenience.

Moreover, some of the mall customer segmentation studies use *customer activities* at the mall to develop segmentation (Ruiz et al., 2004; Farrag et al., 2010). Accordingly Ruiz et al. (2004) propose four customer segments, namely the "*recreational*" shoppers who are motivated by leisure and social interaction, the "*mall enthusiasts*" who enjoy the life of the mall, the "*traditional*" shoppers who visit the mall for browsing and shopping; and the "*mission*" shoppers who have utilitarian motivation and go to the mall to make planned purchases. The present study profiles shopping mall customer segments based on the factors of attraction of shopping malls.

2.3. Factors of attraction of shopping malls in hard times

2.3.1. Affordability

The reduction of consumer spending is a great challenge for shopping malls; however, today, patronizing the shopping mall is an affordable way to spend some time off in an enjoyable way, without the need of spending money (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). This variable is related to the appropriateness of prices in the mall to the customer income. In this context, previous research reports evidence of the positive relationship between retail low-prices and retail choice (Thelen and Woodside, 1997); and that low price in the form of general price level creates and increases retail traffic (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006). More precisely, regarding shopping mall customer behavior Bellenger et al. (1977) identified one mall customer segment *-cost-oriented customers-* who show a strong desire for lower prices. For this customer segment the mall tenant variety and services are secondary attributes compared to the economic advantages of the mall. Moreover, El-Adly and Eid (2015) report that seeking bargains and price deals is a common behavior among mall customers, regardless of their income level. Finally, some authors indicate that the development and offer of free parking lot areas are also demanded by mall customers (Anselmsson, 2006).

2.3.2. Accessibility

When visiting the mall, customers consider the time, distance and effort involved in travelling to the mall, which are related to mall accessibility; and in turn, the accessibility of the mall is considered one important factor of attraction. Shopping malls offer spatial convenience through the proximity to customers; so that, the shorter the distance from the customers' home or workplace, the more spatially convenient (Anselmsson, 2006; Reimers and Clulow, 2014). Similarly, the availability of a reliable transport mode and the distance to the mall have a significant influence in shopping malls' patronage (El-Hedhli et al., 2013). In addition, the mall accessibility is related to a convenient location, the ease of access, circulation and parking facilities (Chebat et al., 2010; González-Hernández and Orozco-Gómez, 2012); and consequently, malls are often located in highly accessible areas (Chebat et al., 2010) and in cities with transportation systems based on good highway networks to attract customers from long distances (Moccia, 2012).

2.3.3. Service

Previous studies report a direct relationship between a good service quality and mall patronage intentions and customer behavior (Finn and Louviere, 1990). According to Sit et al. (2003) the shopping mall services could be classified as personal and communal services. On one hand *personal* services are related to the courtesy, attitude, knowledge and friendliness of personnel, which have great influence in the mall patronage and the frequency of visits to the mall; and conversely, *communal* services are related to amenities such as restrooms, the availability of escalators, lifts or adequate signposting. Both types of services represent the *augmented product* (Sit et al., 2003; González-Hernández and Orozco-Gómez, 2012), which adds value to the mall shopping experience. Likewise, the shopping mall can offer time convenience to customers with extended opening hours (Reimers and Clulow, 2014), increasing the customers' satisfaction with the mall services (Berry et al., 2002).

2.3.4. Tenant variety and retail mix

A shopping mall is an agglomeration for various retail tenants; and in turn, the store selection and the distinctive, varied and consistent tenant-mix are crucial for the success of the shopping mall. The shopping mall tenant variety deals with the core benefit of the shopping mall experience which is the offering of a wide variety of tenants and products within one single location, providing a value that cannot be found at the stand-alone store level (El-Adly and Eid, 2015). That is, a wide selection of stores minimizes the perceived costs associated with each shopping trip. Accordingly, the mall tenant variety could be defined as to the way that the mall has an assortment of quality and quantity stores to meet customers' needs (El-Hedhli et al., 2013). Likewise, previous research shows that the mall tenant mix attracts customers and influences shopping, patronage behavior (Wakefield and Baker, 1998) and customer satisfaction (Chebat et al., 2010), being the malls with a wide variety of stores and merchandise matching customers' preferences the preferred ones (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006; El-Adly, 2007).

2.3.5. Open comfy spaces and recreational activities

Shopping malls are perceived as pleasant spaces that provide rest areas and a comfortable internal temperature, which could entail great customer value during times of hardship. Today, shopping malls have evolved into comfortable spaces with appealing interiors and natural settings (Yan and Eckman, 2009) becoming important venues offering recreational activities such as live music, special events or exhibitions (Wakefield and Baker, 1998).

Further, shopping malls typically offer customers an enhanced hedonic value through natural elements such as green settings and open spaces (Yan and Eckman, 2009). In fact, malls have embraced the concept of open spaces to provide customers with exciting consumption experiences that offer a way of escapism from daily life, boredom and reducing stress-provoking situations (Babin et al., 1994). Consequently, shopping malls are offering today mall-based recreational activities, such as cooking classes, yoga classes, children's workshops, holiday events, fashion shows, artisan events, and family entertainment attractions (Sit et al., 2003; Rigby, 2011); trying to differentiate from online retailers (Rigby, 2011) and compete with them by offering mall-based experiences and activities (Grewal et al., 2009).

2.3.6. Entertainment

Shopping malls have become social meeting places where people come together -even when they do not plan any shopping-, so that consumers go to the mall as a way to socialize (El-Hedhli et al., 2013). Moreover, in the context of maturity and strong competition faced by this retail format, shopping malls have expanded their activities to include a wide range of entertainment, social and leisure activities, in order provide a meeting place for customers who wish to socialize and enjoy leisure (El-Adly and Eid, 2015). According to Sit et al. (2003) mall entertainment could be defined as the set of amenities offered by the mall, such as food courts, restaurants, cafeterias, bars, cinemas, beauty salons or simply meeting places, that generate excitement and enjoyment in the mall-based experience. More precisely, authors like El-Hedhli et al. (2013) highlight that shopping malls host both implicit and explicit entertainment programs: *explicit entertainment* takes place when customers go to the movies or eat at the food court inside the mall; while *implicit entertainment* occurs in the form of just browsing through the mall and stores within; and it is likely that this implicit entertainment increases in times of hardship.

2.3.7. Communication and promotions

Taking advantage of promotions and sales discounts is a clear consequence of a reduction in disposable income during economic downturns. In fact, today shopping malls are adopting more aggressive pricing and sales promotion activities, since lowering prices helps to maintain retail patronage behavior (Fox et al., 2009) and customers' shopping behavior is strongly influenced by their perception of the frequency and depth of the mall's promotions (Chebat et al., 2010). More precisely, the mall-wide sales and the price-oriented promotions are the preferred methods of promotion (Parsons, 2003), increasing customers' visit frequency to the mall and the amount spent. The mall communication programs are closely related to the shopping mall promotional campaigns (El-Adly, 2007), improving the mall image (Chebat et al., 2010). Interestingly, during downturns retailers increase their communication campaigns focusing on rational elements such as security, reliability and durability, and less on the image and status of the retail outlet (Lee Huu and Nhu, 2009).

2.3.8. Environment

In his seminal work, Bitner (1992) classified physical environment into three categories, namely, *ambient elements*, which are intangible features of the environment such as background music or lighting; the *spatial layout and functionality* which includes the equipment, facilities, furniture and furnishing; and *signs, symbols and artifacts*; which are the signboards and designs used for communication with customers. More precisely, the internal environment of the mall refers to the aesthetics, atmosphere and ambience, including environmental elements such as the style, image, internal color and lighting, decorations, background music or crowding (Chebat et al., 2010), aspects that are relevant in attracting customers to the mall. Furthermore, El-Hedhli et al. (2013) report that the mall environment refers to the overall ambiance as perceived by customers, including elements such as the outside appearance, the shape and internal atmospherics, the color and lighting, the store windows, decorations or even aroma.

During hard times depressing or boring shopping malls should turn into cheerful and stimulating malls, given that malls with an attractive environment motivate customers to linger around, to spend more time within the mall and do their shopping, encouraging them to use the mall in leisure time. Conversely, customers may feel reluctant to visit a mall with poor environment or even limit their time at the mall (El-Hedhli et al., 2013). Likewise, the security and safety at the shopping mall are considered quite important by customers who decide to visit a mall, influencing customers' mall patronage (El-Hedhli et al., 2013), since customers cannot effectively engage in shopping when they are concerned about their own safety. Finally, the installation of signs and directories within the mall increases the mall convenience (El-Hedhli et al., 2013).

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling and fieldwork

Data collection was conducted in April 2015 using a self-administered structured questionnaire through a mall intercept survey on a random basis. The questionnaire was based on measurement scales adapted from previous research. The researchers administrated the questionnaires on a face-to-face basis, assuring that the questionnaire took no longer than ten minutes to be completed. More specifically, participants were surveyed by university junior researchers during all days of the week in five major shopping malls located in Spain (Marineda City, Area Central, Los Rosales, Cuatro Caminos and Ponte Vella) and then were invited to complete the questionnaire inside the mall. Spain has a mature retail system and data were collected in the year 2015, when the country was suffering an economic downturn.

Participants indicated their level of agreement with the proposed items on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = "*strongly disagree*"; 5 = "*strongly agree*") on a selection of 30 mall attractiveness attributes to evaluate the importance of each one. The second section of the questionnaire included some socioeconomic and demographic questions. Finally, a total 511 valid questionnaires were collected among shopping mall customers.

Regarding the sample profile, the 64.9% of the respondents were female, while the 35.1% were male. In addition, the majority of the participants (28.86%) were between 45 and 59 years old, followed by individuals aged between 21 and 29 years old (26.0%). In terms of household average income level, the 23.92% of the sample indicated an income level between 18,000 and 24,000 euros/year. Regarding the shopping mall consumer behavior, the majority of the respondents (28.12%) report purchasing at the mall "*occasionally*"; while the majority of the participants (27.02%) indicate that they "*almost never*" browse at the mall, and the 28.74% of them reported going "*occasionally*" to the mall for leisure and entertainment. Finally, regarding the way of access to the mall, the 46.32% indicate using their own vehicles and the 29.46% use public transportation.

3.2. Variables and scale development

All measures were adapted based on prior research. In first place for evaluating the shopping mall *accessibility,* we developed a five-item scale adapted from and from Sit et al. (2003) and from El-Adly (2007). Second, in order to measure the mall *services*, we adopted two items proposed by El-Adly (2007). For measuring the *tenant variety*, we considered a 3-item scale previously used by Bellenger et al. (1977). To assess the *mall spaces*, a five-item scale was adapted from Bloch et al. (1994) and from El-Adly (2007); while for measuring mall *entertainment* three items proposed by Bloch et al. (1994) and El-Adly (2007) were used. In order to evaluate the shopping mall *communication and promotions*, we adopted three items proposed by El-Adly (2007). Finally, in order to measure the mall *environment* a four-item scale from Wakefield and Baker (1998) and Sit et al. (2003) was used.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Principal component analysis and confimatory factor analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was performed using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation to determine the potential groupings of the items. According to Hair et al. (1998) factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and items with rotated factor loadings of 0.5 or higher were retained; while items that did not meet these criteria were removed. The results show 25 items out of 29 loading on seven meaningful factors which jointly account for 78.20% of the explained variance (Table 1). In addition, measures of sampling adequacy indicated that the correlation matrix for a 25-item scale was suitable. Then the Barlett's test of sphericity (X^2 = 3971.976; df = 378; $p < 0.000$) was applied, and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (0.945) indicates a value of sampling adequacy.

The first factor relates to the affordability and easy access to the mall; and in turn, is referred to as "*affordability and easy access*". The second factor is named as "*service*" since it is related to the opening hours and the customer services and care. A third factor is named as "*tenant variety*", being related to the presence of a variety of stores and franchises in the mall. We have called the fourth factor as "*open comfy spaces and activities*" which is related to the existence of open comfortable spaces and recreational mall activities. The fifth factor is termed as "*entertainment*" since it is related to the presence and availability of restaurants, cafeterias and bars. The next factor is labelled as "*communication/promotions*"; and finally, the last factor was named as "*environment*" meaning the ambience and the existence of a safe and

Table 1
Exploratory factor analysis.

Dimensions	Components						
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7
ACC2: Available and large parking space	0.752						
ACC4: Good value-for-money relationship in the mall	0.746						
ACC5: Affordable/cheap prices in the mall	0.744						
ACC3: Good and easy access to the mall	0.679						
ACC1: Free parking	0.639						
SERV1: Wide/convenient opening hours		0.687					
SERV2: Good customer services		0.622					
VAR3: Stores offering high quality products			0.742				
VAR1: Wide variety of stores			0.723				
VAR2: Availability of popular franchise stores			0.642				
SPAC4: Availability of comfortable rest areas for relaxing				0.737			
SPAC2: Availability of recreational and leisure areas				0.636			
SPAC5: Availability of spaces and activities for children and youth				0.619			
SPAC3: Open comfortable spaces				0.596			
SPAC1: Fun and interesting events and activities				0.595			
ENT3: Presence of cinemas in the mall					0.827		
ENT2: Variety of restaurants					0.762		
ENT1: Variety of bars and cafeterias					0.761		
COM2: Attractive communication campaigns						0.832	
COM1: Advertising campaigns						0.823	
COM3: Attractive promotional campaigns in the mall						0.657	
ENV1: Attractive facilities and environment							0.719
ENV2: Attractive/appealing internal atmosphere							0.715
ENV3: Adequate signposting							0.734
ENV4: Safe space							0.726

attractive internal environment and atmosphere.

Then, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed using maximum likelihood method with Amos 18.0 to find the validity of the seven-dimension model (Table 2). Our results indicate that the confirmatory factor analysis provided satisfactory results (Hu and Bentler, 1998). All factor loadings exceed the 0.683 value. In addition, the model overall fit supports the measurement model: $X^2 = 518.660$; df = 184 ($p < 0.001$). The Root Mean Squared Error (RMSEA) is 0.05, the Adjusted-goodness of fit index (AGFI) is 0.824 the Goodness of fit index (GFI) is 0.981 and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.942.

The results support convergent and discriminant validity, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981). The convergent validity was measured by the average extracted variance (AVE) from the items of a construct exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.5; and the discriminant validity was also supported, since the squared root of the extracted variance exceeded the correlation values between the constructs (Table 3).

4.2. Cluster analysis

A two-step cluster analysis is developed in order to identify shopping mall consumer groups. This analysis combines a hierarchical

Table 2
Constructs and item identification.

Variables	Indicators	Factor loadings	Cronbach alpha	CR	AVE
Affordability and easy access	ACC1: Free parking	0.731	0.803	0.847	0.529
	ACC2: Available and large parking space	0.683			
	ACC3: Good and easy access to the mall	0.760			
	ACC4: Good value-for-money relationship in the mall	0.715			
	ACC5: Affordable/cheap prices in the mall	0.688			
Service	SERV1: Wide/convenient opening hours	0.687	0.631	0.814	0.689
	SERV2: Good customer services	0.862			
Tenant variety	VAR1: Wide variety of stores	0.751	0.737	0.776	0.556
	VAR2: Availability of popular franchise stores	0.731			
	VAR3: Stores offering high quality products	0.685			
Open comfy spaces and activities	SPAC1: Fun and interesting events and activities	0.778	0.778	0.866	0.663
	SPAC2: Availability of recreational and leisure areas	0.706			
	SPAC3: Open comfortable spaces	0.679			
	SPAC4: Availability of comfortable rest areas for relaxing	0.689			
	SPAC5: Availability of spaces and activities for children and youth	0.722			
Entertainment	ENT1: Variety of bars and cafeterias	0.787	0.817	0.863	0.680
	ENT2: Variety of restaurants	0.940			
	ENT3: Presence of cinemas in the mall	0.700			
Communication/promotions	COM1: Advertising campaigns	0.947	0.818	0.907	0.768
	COM2: Attractive communication campaigns	0.842			
	COM3: Attractive promotional campaigns in the mall	0.728			
Environment	ENV1: Attractive facilities and environment	0.689	0.721	0.747	0.590
	ENV2: Attractive/appealing internal atmosphere	0.807			
	ENV3: Adequate signposting	0.687			
	ENV4: Safe space	0.720			

Table 3
Correlation matrix among constructs.

	Correlation coefficients						
	Aff.	**Serv**	**Tent.**	**Space**	**Enter.**	**Comm.**	**Env.**
Affordability	**0.727**						
Service	0.640	**0.830**					
Tenant Var.	0.272	0.305	**0.746**				
Spaces/Activities	0.346	0.382	0.539	**0.814**			
Entertainment	0.018	0.181	0.588	0.555	**0.825**		
Communication	0.108	0.296	0.334	0.530	0.468	**0.876**	
Environment	0.491	0.599	0.587	0.620	0.453	0.555	**0768**

Note: the diagonal values in bold represent the square root of the average variance extracted of each contruct.

cluster analysis through the Ward's method, with a non-hierarchical k-means clustering method to optimize the cluster solutions. First, the hierarchical cluster was performed and the number of segments was determined by the agglomeration coefficients (Hair et al., 1998); and a five-cluster solution emerged as the most appropriate. Then, a K-means clustering analysis with the initial seeds provided by the hierarchical clustering solution was conducted to obtain the final clusters. In addition, the examination of the F-ratios obtained through the Anova analysis indicates that the five clusters identified differ significantly. Finally, the five-cluster solution was determined as follows: 96 individuals in Cluster 1; 134 individuals in Cluster 2; 123 individuals in Cluster 3; 76 individuals in Cluster 4 and 82 individuals in Cluster 5.

4.3. Manova analysis

In order to validate the cluster solutions, a Manova test conducted on the entire set of variables was developed to discriminate differences among the identified clusters (Hair et al., 1998). The multivariate test using Pillai's Trace and Wilks' Lambda were conducted obtaining values of Pillai's Trace = 2.076, F (100, 12.302), p = 0.000; and Wilks' Lambda = 0.034, F(100, 15.044), p = 0.000; respectively. In addition, the five clusters were examined through the multiple comparisons with Tuckey's post hoc test to examine the between-group differences in all the dimensions, providing validation of the results from the cluster results (Table 4).

Then, demographic, socioeconomic factors and behavior related variables were considered to better describe the main characteristics of the customer clusters. The obtained results indicate major differences in shopping behavior among the five customer segments; however, findings do not support differences among clusters regarding their average access time to the mall (Table 5).

5. Discussion of results

5.1. Cluster 1: "Senior hostelry seekers"

This group of customers makes up the 18.79% of the sample (n = 96) being characterized by their high leisure and entertainment purposes when visiting the mall and their older age, compared to other groups of customers (the 48.3% have between 45 and 49 years old, and the 22.7% have 60 years or more). Interestingly, this group has the lowest proportion of young customers, including far more elderly customers. In addition, they show the highest frequency of attending restaurants, bars and cafeterias at the mall, but are not strongly interested in shopping and do not tend to browse or ramble at the mall; and for this reason, they are named as "*senior hostelry seekers*".

So, "*senior hostelry seekers*" go the mall for the specific hostelry services, with the purpose of socializing and enjoying leisure with friends and peers in restaurants, cafeterias or bars; seeking for hedonic and emotional benefits when going to the mall. Considering that the majority of this segment has a medium-high household income level, we propose that going to cafeterias and restaurants is their way of socializing and enjoying leisure in a context of hard times. We suggest that these customers go to the shopping mall, but could go instead to hostelry services located in other commercial areas or spend their money on more expensive leisure activities such as travelling. Therefore, the increasing cost of other leisure and socializing alternatives could have drawn these customers to the mall. That is, "*senior hostelry seekers*" seek for affordable leisure outlets, instead of other activities that could be more expensive. So, according to our findings, the main motivation of this customer group is socialization and enjoying leisure during hard times in an affordable way. This customer group is unique and has not been described in the retail literature before. This cluster is somehow comparable to the "*browsers*" (Ruiz et al., 2004) regarding their middle age and their frequent mall visits; however the "*senior hostelry seekers*" are often older customers who are mostly demanding hostelry services at the mall such as bars and cafeterias. Finally, retailers targeting this customer segment should provide a great variety of affordable restaurants and cafeterias that provide hedonic value to these customers.

5.2. Cluster 2: "Young enthusiasts"

This customer segment represents the 26.22% of the sample (n = 134), including mostly women (72.3%), and being the biggest cluster in the number of customers. Additionally, this customer group is characterized by their young age (the 39.4% are 16–20 years old, and the 39.9% have between 21 and 29 years old) and their enthusiasm and involvement with the shopping mall experience. These customers report the highest purchase frequency (the 37.1% purchases quite frequently) and the highest browsing frequency (the 29.7% browse quite frequently). This customer group perceives that the shopping mall offers great benefits in hard times, and more precisely, they feel the shopping mall as a place where they like shopping, spending time and enjoying some entertainment; and for this reason they are labelled as "*young enthusiasts*". Similarly, these customers show the highest values in most of the mall dimensions, highlighting their high evaluation of the mall services, the tenant variety and the mall environment.

Likewise, this group really enjoys shopping at the mall, being strongly stimulated by the mall environment and atmosphere, placing the greatest importance to the attractive environment. Moreover, they show the highest preference for the tenant and store variety and the quality of the product offerings, as well as on the availability of open comfortable spaces at the mall. So, we propose that engaging in positive shopping experiences and hanging around the mall represents a form of entertainment for them in times of hardship.

This group has some similarities with the "*mall enthusiasts*" (Bloch et al., 1994) with the "*enthusiasts*" (Ruiz et al., 2004) and with the "*enthusiasts*" described by González-Hernández and Orozco-Gómez (2012), since they show high mall activity levels, engage in high levels or purchasing and enjoy shopping at the mall. However, the main difference between these groups and the "*young enthusiasts*" proposed in this study are related to socio-demographic characteristics, given that the "*young enthusiasts*" are mostly women. Further, while the "*mall enthusiasts*" described by Gilboa (2009) are mostly female adolescent customers, in the present study, the "*young enthusiasts*" are older female customers.

The great size of this customer segment and their high purchase frequency makes the "*young enthusiasts*" a great market opportunity for malls managers. In fact, mall managers should focus on retaining these customers, since this customer group enjoys the mall life, the mall environment and are involved with the shopping mall experience. Managers targeting this group should enlarge the mall tenant variety putting greater emphasis on store diversity and providing a wide range of franchises.

Table 4
Results for five-cluster group solution.

Variables	Indicators	Cluster means					Tuckey test	
		Senior hostelry seekers (n = 96)	Young enthusiasts (n = 134)	Deal hunters (n = 123)	Adverse-reluctant (n = 76)	Leisure comfy teens (n = 82)	F-Value	Significance (p < 0.005)
Affordable /accessibility	ACC2	4.25	4.44	4.70	2.47	3.43	55.655	0.000
	ACC4	4.05	4.06	4.31	3.14	2.86	29.246	0.000
	ACC5	3.91	4.00	4.29	3.28	2.88	24.433	0.000
	ACC3	3.93	4.20	4.55	2.78	2.93	52.984	0.000
	ACC1	4.57	4.70	4.86	3.22	3.64	49.907	0.000
Service	SERV1	4.25	4.56	4.46	3.58	4.12	14.650	0.000
	SERV2	4.02	4.26	4.55	2.81	3.60	34.041	0.000
Tenant variety	VAR3	3.82	4.33	3.51	2.83	3.69	31.022	0.000
	VAR1	4.20	4.51	4.11	3.00	4.38	29.756	0.000
	VAR2	4.13	4.63	3.84	3.61	4.71	19.298	0.000
Open comfy spaces and activities	SPAC4	2.48	4.11	3.47	2.50	3.38	35.624	0.000
	SPAC2	2.62	4.36	2.81	2.78	3.55	44.612	0.000
	SPAC5	2.66	4.29	3.11	2.22	3.74	43.478	0.000
	SPAC3	2.59	3.88	3.84	2.53	3.05	29.856	0.000
	SPAC1	2.38	3.60	3.13	2.17	2.90	22.588	0.000
Entertainment	ENT3	4.02	4.67	3.96	3.58	4.26	15.274	0.000
	ENT2	4.04	4.88	3.86	3.14	4.79	50.741	0.000
	ENT1	4.02	4.85	4.04	3.33	4.83	37.170	0.000
Communications/ Promotions	COM2	2.21	3.80	3.49	2.19	3.10	45.952	0.000
	COM1	2.34	4.03	3.52	2.06	2.93	50.360	0.000
	COM3	2.00	3.71	3.19	2.11	3.52	45.701	0.000
Attractive/Safe environment	ENV1	2.95	4.28	3.67	2.69	3.43	38.698	0.000
	ENV2	3.02	4.22	3.89	2.53	3.81	44.208	0.000
	ENV3	2.93	4.19	3.90	2.72	3.69	26.409	0.000
	ENV4	3.52	4.43	4.41	3.08	3.88	23.549	0.000

5.3. Cluster 3: "Deal hunters"

This customer segment represents the 24.07% of the sample (n = 123), being characterized by their low household income level (the 23.1% earn 12.000–18.000€/year, and the 35.3% earn 18.000–24.000€/year), their low purchase and browsing frequency at the mall (the 45.7% almost never purchase at the mall). In addition, they are price sensitive customers who concentrate on paying less, putting great emphasis on price, and look for low prices and sales; and in turn, they are named as "*deal hunters*". Interestingly, this is the second largest customer segment, which is coherent with the mall shopping behavior during hard times, especially when referring to a downturn context; and their low-medium purchasing power in a context of economic crisis explains their bargain and deal hunting purchase behavior and their deal prone. These customers are price conscious and highly motivated by price comparisons to find the right product with the right price, obtaining the highest value. Therefore, this customer group could patronage the mall for "*window shopping*" purposes, trying to find good bargains. We consider that this group has a rational perspective of shopping, since they are functional shoppers with utilitarian motivations, behaving in a deliberate, efficient, rational and task-related way. So, these customers do not enjoy shopping as a leisure activity, and consider that money saving and finding affordable prices are more important than delight or pleasure in their shopping experience. Finally, this customer group is not interested in store variety, since their main shopping driver is price and the finding of bargains at the mall.

This customer group is somehow similar to the "*mission*" customers characterized by Ruiz et al. (2004) considering their utilitarian motivation, and with the "*price shoppers*" (Lesser and Hughes, 1986) and the "*pragmatic shoppers*" (El-Adly, 2007), since they seek for the best prices and bargains. Similarly, this cluster has some similarities with the "*pragmatic shopper*" (Ribeiro-Cardoso, Carvalho-Pinto, 2010) given that they understand shopping as a utilitarian activity, and with the "*functional shopper*" (Kim, 2006) who showed high utilitarian shopping motivations. However, the "*deal hunters*" described in the present study could be looking for bargains and low prices because of the downturn context, compared to the previous shopper categories. Additionally, compared to the "*pragmatic shoppers*" (El-Adly, 2007), the "*deal hunters*" described in our study do not seek for store variety. Shopping mall managers should offer frequent mall-wide, sale discounts, quantity discounts, promotional activities based on price and gift with purchases more often to attract this customer group.

5.4. Cluster 4: "Adverse-reluctant customers"

This cluster represents the 14.87% of the sample, being the smallest cluster in the number of customers (n = 76). They are characterized by their low-medium level of income (the 45.4% has a household income of 18.000–24.000€), being mostly women (63.9%) and with more than 45 years (the 41.7% are between 45 and 49 years old).

These consumers spend the least time in the mall, present the lowest shopping and browsing frequency at the mall, show the lowest values for all the mall dimensions. Similarly, they are not interested in the shopping aspects of the mall and show a weak involvement in the mall shopping experience. Likewise, they do not perceive the mall as interesting, stimulating or cheerful; and in turn, they avoid visiting the mall. This group rarely goes to the mall, does not have a positive motivation for visiting the mall and are not engaged in any mall activity; and accordingly they are labelled as "*adverse-reluctant customers*". Their low level of income in a downturn context could be one potential explanation for the mall behavior: they would rather spend their money on necessity goods, are more likely to plan low expenditures in the mall, and visit the lowest number of stores.

This customer segment shows some resemblance with the "*apathetic*" customers described by Reynolds et al. (2002) and by Sit et al. (2003) and with the "*minimalists*" (Bloch et al., 1994), since they are disinterested in all aspects of the mall, have low shopping frequency and are the least satisfied with the mall. However, the "*adverse-reluctant customers*" identified in the present study have a low income level, which could be the explanation for their low shopping motivations. Accordingly, this customer segment is the most challenging for mall managers, because they show the lowest shopping frequency and an

Table 5
The five-cluster group solution.

Variables	Indicators	Cluster means					Tuckey test	
		Senior hostelry seekers (n = 96)	Young enthusiasts (n = 134)	Deal hunters (n = 123)	Adverse-reluctant (n = 76)	Leisure comfy teens (n = 82)	F-Value	Significance (p < 0.005)
Freq. purchases	Never	1.8%	–	1.2%	58.4%	–	7.303	0.000
	Almost never	26.8%	6.4%	45.7%	22.2%	9.5%		
	Occasionally	35.9%	25.6%	39.8%	11.1%	28.2%		
	Often	20.4%	30.9%	13.3%	8.3%	32.0%		
	Quite frequently	15.1%	37.1%	–	–	30.3%		
Freq. leisure/ entertainment	Never	8.5%	9.5%	7.2%	36.1%	14.3%	6.153	0.000
	Almost never	10.7%	22.3%	19.3%	33.4%	21.4%		
	Occasionally	21.4%	24.5%	49.4%	22.2%	26.2%		
	Often	43.1%	27.7%	18.1%	8.3%	23.8%		
	Quite frequently	16.3%	16.0%	6.0%	–	14.3%		
Freq. browsing/rambling	Never	28.4%	9.6%	5.8%	20.4%	19.0%	5.072	0.001
	Almost never	28.8%	18.1%	30.3%	38.9%	19.0%		
	Occasionally	19.6%	21.0%	44.1%	27.8%	14.3%		
	Often	12.5%	21.6%	16.2%	10.1%	31.0%		
	Quite frequently	10.7%	29.7%	3.6%	2.8%	16.7%		
Way to access	My own vehicle	71.5%	61.5%	50.6%	32.8%	15.2%	3.809	0.005
	Public transport	21.4%	26.8%	22.9%	35.0%	41.2%		
	By foot	7.1%	11.7%	26.5%	32.2%	43.6%		
Average access time to the mall	Less than 5 min	12.0%	7.5%	4.8%	11.2%	11.7%	0.571	0.684
	5–10	30.4%	33%	18.1%	19.5%	16.7%		
	10–15	19.2%	15.7%	25.3%	33.2%	23.8%		
	15–25	20.5%	25.4%	26.5%	25.0%	25.4%		
	25–35	8.9%	8.5%	19.3%	5.5%	15.4%		
	35–45	7.2%	8.6%	6.0%	5.6%	4.6%		
	More than 45 min	1.8%	2.2%	–	–	2.4%		
Age	16–20 years old	5.7%	30.4%	7.0%	10.9%	50.0%	21.824	0.000
	21–29	10.9%	39.9%	16.9%	19.4%	42.9%		
	30–44	12.4%	14.8%	20.7%	28.0%	4.7%		
	45–59	48.3%	8.5%	43.4%	41.7%	2.4%		
	More than 60 years	22.7%	6.4%	12.0%	–	–		
Household average income level (Eur/Year)	12,000–18,000	6.1%	5.3%	23.1%	11.1%	64.3%	11.090	0.000
	18,000–24,000	11.1%	6.4%	35.3%	45.4%	21.4%		
	24,000–30,000	20.4%	14.5%	21.0%	30.6%	9.5%		
	30,000–36,000	37.1%	37.5%	13.2%	10.1%	4.8%		
	36,000–42,000	21.8%	24.2%	4.1%	2.8%	–		
	More than 42,000	3.5%	12.1%	3.3%	–	–		
Gender	Male	42.9%	27.7%	49.4%	36.1%	19.0%	4.063	0.003
	Female	57.1%	72.3%	50.6%	63.9%	81%		

adverse mall behavior.

5.5. Cluster 5: "Leisure comfy teens"

This cluster represents the 16.05% of the sample (n = 82), including mostly women (81%), being the 50% of them between 16 and 20 years old. Further, they spend great time browsing and rambling (the 16.7% browse quite frequently, and the 30% browse often) and enjoying leisure facilities and activities at the mall. Similarly, they have a strong preference for mall convenience and comfort; and for this reason they are labelled as "*leisure comfy teens*". This consumer group places great importance to the availability of comfy spaces and recreational activities, showing a strong recreational motivation, since they have strong leisure and entertainment purposes; and engage in recreational-related activities, despite the context of times of hardship. One possible explanation for their mall behavior is that in times of hardship the mall could be providing free entertainment options and a safe comfy place for social interaction for this customer segment, who is not necessarily keen on spending money, but who enjoy leisurely browsing. For this customer segment, malls are more than simply "*a place to shop*": the shopping mall neat, presentable and attractive atmosphere creates a pleasant environment for teenagers to meet and hang out with friends and peers. In fact, teens usually prefer to spend leisure time with their friends, and the mall provides them the possibility to meet with peers in a safe and physically comfortable place, where they could spend enjoyable time. Interestingly, this group is mainly composed by teenage female consumers, who could prefer to spend their leisure time with their friends, rather than with their parents; and at the same time, their parents could perceive the mall as a safe comfortable place for their teens to stay and socialize with peers. Therefore, we note that the main motivation for visiting the mall for this customer group is socialization in a safety and comfortable place.

This cluster has some similarities with some customer typologies identified in previous research such as the "*grazers*" proposed by Bloch et al. (1994), since they perceive the mall as a place for socialization and entertainment. However, the "*leisure comfy teens*" described in this study are mostly teenagers looking for a place to socialize that is safe and comfortable. Likewise, this segment is somehow related to the "*relaxed shoppers*" described by El-Adly (2007), given that this segment is very concerned about comfort and security at the mall; conversely, the "*relaxed shoppers*" (El-Adly, 2007) are mostly mall customers aged 31 or older, while the "*leisure comfy teens*" are teenagers. Therefore, this customer group with these particular characteristics has not been profiled in previous studies. Finally, this is an interesting group for mall managers who could enhance and increase the mall activities and comfortable areas directed at this segment, so that this customer group can lengthen their stay at the mall, and in turn, increase their spending.

6. Conclusions

This study reports the shopping mall customer heterogeneity in a context of hard times has altered previous mall customer segmentations. Our findings are in line with previous research, showing that mall customers cannot be seen as a homogenous group; however, the results highlight the existence of five typologies of shopping mall customers different from the previous typologies proposed and described in retail literature. More precisely, our study reports and describes five shopping mall customer profiles with substantial differences among them, which are labelled as "*senior hostelry seekers*", "*young enthusiasts*", "*deal hunters*", "*adverse-reluctant customers*" and "*leisure comfy-teens*"; being the mall "*young enthusiasts*" the most attractive segment for mall managers, since they are strongly involved with the mall shopping experience. On the contrary, the "*adverse-reluctant customers*" represent a challenge for mall managers, given their low shopping frequency. One interesting question is why these shopping mall customer segments have emerged. Based on the holistic Theory of Shopping (Woodruffe-Burton et al., 2002) the emergence of these five customer typologies could be explained by the influence of the shopping environment, and more specifically by the impact of the economic and technological contexts. Therefore, the major contribution of the present study is providing segmentation and a shopping mall customer profile in a context of new shopping environmental factors, which presents interesting differences compared with previous mall customer segmentations.

Consequently, mall managers should consider mall customers as five different types, instead of considering them as one single customer. In addition, it is important that retail managers during times of hardship try to maintain the attractiveness of the different aspects of the shopping mall and to remain customer-oriented. Moreover, this customer segmentation could have an impact on the future positioning of the shopping mall. That is, our findings provide interesting information for mall managers to develop marketing strategies to position the mall targeting the most attractive customer segments. For example, if the mall targets "*young enthusiasts*" or "*leisure comfy-teens*" they could introduce new stores, activities and spaces to meet their need of enjoyment at the mall and their hedonism motivations.

This research presents limitations that provide avenues for future research. In the first place, the inclusion of new retail variables could complete the profile of the shopping mall customer segments, such as their mall image or customer motivations. Secondly, a replication of this research to other retail formats could validate the obtained findings. Finally, this study was developed in one single market. Addressing these limitations in future research will provide a deeper view of mall customer segments.

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