Standardization / adaptation of the retailing format: an exploratory research on French and Italian consumers

Christian Dianoux, Maître de Conférences
Université de Metz, France
Christian.dianoux@univ-metz.fr

Jean Luc Herrmann, Maître de Conférences
Université de Metz, France
Herrman2@univ-metz.fr

Donata Vianelli, Associate Professor
Università di Trieste, Italy
Facoltà di Economia
donata.vianelli@econ.units.it

Abstract

In recent years the problem of standardization / adaptation of the retailing format has become more critical due to the increasing internationalization of companies. In fact, one of the main problems they have to face is the possibility or not of replicating abroad the characteristics of a format which is successful in the local market. This alternative significantly depends not only on the characteristics of the local distribution system but also on the differences related to in-store consumer behaviour.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the problem of standardization / adaptation of the retailing format from a consumer perspective, taking into consideration two countries – France and Italy – that at a first glance could be considered quite similar by store managers who want to internationalize their stores networks. So the main question is: nowadays is standardization of the retailing format possible (i.e. shopping consumer behaviour is homogenized in Italy and France), or is it preferable to adapt the concept (i.e. local culture is still prevalent)?

A cross-cultural research has been organized with the interview of a sample of 534 women of various ages, in charge of house-keeping activities.

The analysis carried out hereby has pointed out that while French consumers appreciate the sensorial dimension of the store, Italian women tend to pay more attention to the social aspects.

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1. Introduction

In recent years the problem of standardization / adaptation of the retailing format has become more critical due to the increasing internationalization of companies which want to expand in foreign markets through direct stores or with the development of a franchising network. In fact, one of the main problems they have to face is the possibility or not of replicating abroad the characteristics of a format which is successful in the local market. This alternative significantly depends not only on the characteristics of the local distribution system but also on the differences related to in-store consumer behaviour.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse, theoretically and empirically, the problem of standardization / adaptation of the retailing format from a consumer perspective, taking into consideration two countries – France and Italy – that at a first glance could be considered quite similar by store managers which want to internationalize their stores networks. In other words, the main question we want to answer is the following: nowadays is it important adaptation (i.e. local culture is still prevalent) or is standardization of the retailing format possible (i.e. shopping consumer behaviour is homogenized in Italy and France)?

The paper is divided into two parts. In the first part an in-depth literature review will be carried out. The theoretical analysis will be focused on the standardization/adaptation dilemma, specifically related to distribution and on the results of previous researches on shopping behaviour: the main dimensions of the topic will be pointed out in order to define a conceptual model for the analysis of the standardization / adaptation alternative in the two countries. In the second part, the results of an empirical research conducted on a sample of French and Italian female consumers and related to household goods stores will be presented. More specifically, the empirical research will provide a comparison between the two countries in terms of perception of store atmosphere and in terms of variables related to shopping consumer behaviour. The results will be discussed and some managerial suggestions on the standardization/adaptation dilemma will be developed.

2. Standardization / adaptation of the retailing format and shopping behaviour: a literature review

The alternative between standardization versus adaptation has been deeply discussed in the academic literature in the last twenty years (Vianelli, 2001). Nevertheless few researches have been developed on the analysis of this decision in the retailing context (Severin *et al*, 2001), even if the internationalization of the retailing format through franchising has recently pointed out the relevance of this aspect (Watson et al, 2005). An exhaustive analysis on this topic has been carried out by Kaufmann and Eroglu (1998). The Authors have identified cost and benefits of standardization, describing the main drivers and, vice versa, the most important inhibitors.
Cost minimization is definitively one of the main motives for standardization, and it is mainly due to an homogeneous approach to the development of research, purchasing and marketing activities, from which it derives scale economies and easier implementation of management programs and monitoring systems. In this context, also the introduction of new products and the service deliverable becomes more simple. The second important driver of standardization is the global image that a uniform retailing format is able to convey. Standard unique elements of the store, together with an homogeneous communication strategy, allow the development of a distinct and clearly positioned perceived retail image.
On the other side, a number of factors which can favour adaptation can be evaluated. Above all, market differences can be so significant to inhibit standardization, if not in the core elements of the retailing format, at least in the peripheral ones. Secondly, decisions on the standardization / adaptation dilemma strongly depends on the development stage of the distribution system, that determines also the expertise and the characteristics of consumer shopping and purchase behaviour: Hofstede's dimensions of national culture applied by Sternquist (1998) to the analysis of international retailing management have pointed out significant differences, that we can find also in other two relevant variables, i.e. consumption and media behaviour, which are both relevant for international retailing. As an example, in a recent research focused on convergence and divergence in global consumer behaviour, de Mooij and Hofstede (2002) found out a positive relationship between uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001) and percentage of consumption expenditures going to furniture and household equipment, that can explain why IKEA, selling no-nonsense cheap furniture, originated in the weak uncertainty avoidance Swedish culture (score = 29), whereas solid design furniture originated in strong uncertainty avoidance cultures like Germany (score = 65) and Italy (score = 75).
From a marketing point of view, the analysis of consumer behaviour and the evaluation of store attributes becomes one of the main aspects which has to be analyzed when defining in particular the following characteristics and management decisions related to the retailing format in an international context:
- definition of atmosphere design;
- width and depth of the product range;
- price positioning;
- price / quality ratio
- activities related to in-store advertising;
- characteristics of external advertising;
- in-store promotions
- sales strategies
- direct marketing activities
- services
- loyalty programs

Hence, in order to investigate on cross-cultural differences in consumer shopping behaviour, different components of atmosphere and the characteristics of the buying behaviour process will be described.

Store atmosphere management is, as a rule, one of the main strategic and operative leverage for the retailer (Turley, Chebat, 2002), especially in the distribution environments where the hedonistic and recreational shopping attitudes have turned to the call for satisfying particular needs. The ambiance and the atmosphere in their multi-sensorial and experiential dimensions (Pine, Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999) are actually at ease to creating the added value that make a store to become a "special place, unique and unrepeatable, that turns with a touch of magic the goods to purchase into a symbol and the consumer into a protagonist" (Pasquini, 2002). Starting both from the early contributes of Kotler (1973) during the seventies and of Mehrabian and Russel (1974) on environmental psychology, subsequently adapted to a distribution context (Donovan, Rossiter, 1982; Donovan *et al*, 1994), researches on store atmosphere and shopping behaviour have followed by (Collesei, 1986 and 2000; Castaldo, 2001; Dauce and Rieunier, 2002; Volle, 2000). Nevertheless some questions regarding the generalization of this connection, which cannot be applied to any consumer, nor to any distribution context and cannot be extended to all the atmosphere physical and social variables, have been pointed out (de Luca, Vianelli, 2004).

Consumer shopping behaviour variables that can influence the degree of standardization of the retailing format are numerous and they are probably the most useful parameter in comparing the two different countries. Should any differences arise, they might deeply influence the marketing strategies to be enforced, particularly those concerning in-store promotion and advertising.

As shown in recent literature (Leszczyc, Timmermans, 2001) consumers do shopping in a different way relating to the characteristics of variables like *planning* (or not) the buying decision, the sought after benefits, the degree of involvement, the ability to evaluate differences between alternative brands, the money and the time available, and the sensitivity towards prices. As these parameters may vary from consumer to consumer, it becomes meaningful to be able to identify what are the different behaviours corresponding to each step of the whole process. Putrevu and Lord's (2001) research is particularly interesting as they have developed a segmentation based on shopping behaviour by identifying different consumer categories based on a specific approach relating to the *choice and the evaluation of the product/brand while inside the store*. For instance, the Authors evaluate whether consumers *compare the price* of a single product and the price-listed products in different formats, if they compare different brands, if they are interested in using *coupons and special offers*, if they *visit more than one outlet* for daily or weekly expenses and if their purchases are based on *parent or friends' advices* or on information collected by reading *newspapers and magazines*. Three segments have been identified on the basis of this information. The *high-search segment* is characterised by the fact that the consumer dedicates a long *time* to the research and to the *comparison between different products and brands* as highlighted by Bloch *et al* (1986) when talking about "continuous research". Such consumers are usually rewarded by the fact of just comparing different products and brands, without necessarily buying them. On the other hand, the *selective search segment* is more selective in a way that it uses only some of the above-mentioned instruments and tends to cut on time dedicated to comparing different brands. Last but not least, the *low search segment* is the less involved in the choosing behaviour.

Segments identified by the Authors are very much alike to those focused on by previous researches (Furse *et al*, 1984), which had distinguished consumers who base their choices only on the information collected within the store, from consumers that start to gather information before entering. In other terms it seems to be reasonable to assume that the "selective consumers" proposed by Putrevu and Lord (2001) might be further divided into those who mainly rely on *in-store collected information*, whom we might call *store based*, and those who rely on other sources like parent and friends' advices, *media* opinion and so on, whom we might call *non-store based*. The managerial implications for a business company are remarkably evident. If involved consumers might be attracted with in-store and out-of-the-store communication, the selective ones require particular attention according to the kind of information they base their choices on. The *store-based* ones might be significantly influenced by, for instance, the atmosphere of the store, both according to its physical and social dimensions (de Luca, Vianelli, 2001; Lee, Geistfeld, 1995) the outlet

image (Zimmer, Golden, 1988), in-store indications, special offers shown inside the shop and so on. On the other hand, those who collect information primarily outside the store will be more sensitive to radio and/or television advertising, outdoor and printed advertising, and to word of mouth.
In the analysis of the perception of store atmosphere and of the different characteristics of shopping behaviour that have to be evaluated in the standardization / adaptation decisions, variables related to consumer involvement and to shopping psychographic have to be considered since they can be significantly different depending on the country (de Mooij, Hofstede, 2002).
The analysis of in-store consumer involvement takes into account three different levels: product, brand and shopping involvement. The degree of involvement for a product identifies the perception of the role played by it relating to activities, behaviours and consumer habits (Mittal, Lee, 1989). Brand involvement represents, instead, the importance assumed by a brand in influencing consumer choice. Shopping involvement is related to the pleasure a consumer can feel in doing shopping. Finally, as highlighted by O'Cass (2000) with reference to the buying step, also the degree of involvement which reflects the consumer behaviour towards the buying decision may be analysed as well.
Considering the approach to the *shopping activity*, Belleger and Korgaonkar (1980) and Ohanian and Tashchian (1992) have distinguished *recreational shoppers* from *purchasing – involved shoppers*. The first ones look at the buying activity as to a recreational activity associated to one's spare time, during which they are deeply involved and focused on the hedonic aspects of the in-store experience (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). The second ones are consumers to whom the shopping activity is a means by which they purchase a product that most of the times has been previously identified. Their choices are therefore led by the evaluation of what the best product is rather than by the search for amusement during their shopping activity. Distribution system researches have highlighted a great variety of attitudes towards the shopping activity (Reid, Brown, 1996) that help us in drafting each segment's consumer profile.
Also the *attitude towards the store personnel* may easily be associated to the identified segments, as the fact of taking into account the degree of involvement of a consumer himself shows a different way of perceiving the presence or not of personnel inside the store, who may represent a constant presence throughout the whole shopping process.
Last but not least the *store loyalty* needs to be considered as it may influence the consumers' shopping behaviour especially both when choosing out of more than a store and planning shopping logistics as well: this dimension has to be evaluated by the retail managers especially in the development of store loyalty programs.
In-store behaviour can be characterized also by another dimension of analysis, linked to consumer logistics, which involves the consumer himself both before and after the in-store shopping activity. Consumer logistics refers to modes and timings of the store visits, to the transportation and storage of products at home. More in detail, the aspects that might be taken into account (Granzin *et al*, 1997) are:

- *Purchased products storage*, as to their storage on the home shelves and to the selected storage modes;
- *Degree of independence or of interdependence in transportation* linked to the shopping activity, which reflects the independence of the consumer in choosing the timing, the day, the means of transportation and the fact of reaching the store accompanied by another person who, for instance, might give a lift with the car;
- *The possibility (or not) to plan the purchases* in order to buy the missing products or that the consumer did not manage to find on the last visit to the store;
- *Modes of transportation of the purchased products* from the store to the home storey;
- *Logistic coordination*, as to either asking for help to the other family members or, on the other hand, to visit different outlets to further raise information;
- *The variety of one's shopping activity* as to the variety of shops, even from different market categories, that a consumer decides to visit during shopping activity;

- *Saving attitude* as to the consumer's orientation to "more convenient shops" rather than to "round-the-corner shops".

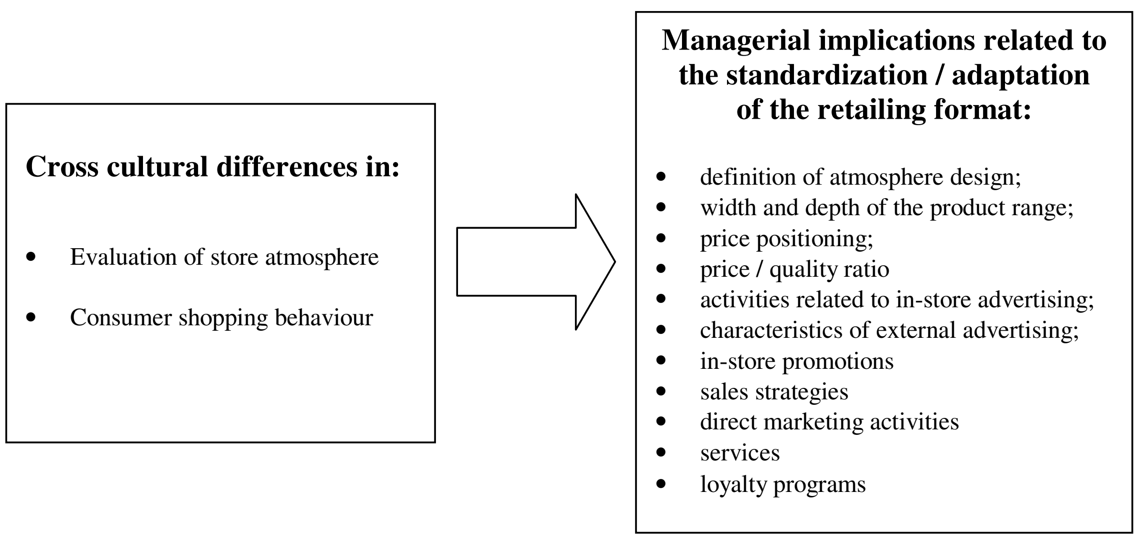
In the analysis of the standardization / adaptation dilemma, consumer logistic variables become particularly critical when considering decisions related to services that have to be offered by the store.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Objectives and research structure

The previous analysis of existing literature has led us to projecting an explorative research, aiming at studying the phenomenon and at going deep into the existing relationships between the highlighted variables with reference to Italian and French consumers. The draft scheme proposed in Figure 1 highlights the supposed differences between consumers in different countries regarding those variables which can affect the standardization / adaptation decision.

Fig. 1 – The research framework



Considering the empirical research, some detailed interviews helped us in identifying the home furnishing sector (interior decoration, accessories and so on) as an ideal category to develop a research about as it shows both low and high degrees of product, brand and shopping involvement and moreover different buying behaviours and logistics management (Quester, Lim, 2003).

A cross-cultural research aiming at inquiring the complexity of shopping behaviour in the house-related goods sector in the two different geographic areas has been organized subsequently. The empirical and qualitative research has been run in-between March 2004 and July 2005 by the means of direct interviews out of a sample of 332 Italian and 202 French consumers, composed of women of various ages, in charge of house-keeping activities. The data elaboration has been conducted applying descriptive statistic and processing data with factor analysis and cluster analysis, applied by using the SPSS 12.0 software.

The questionnaire submitted to the interviewees was composed of five sections aiming at investigating the perception of store atmosphere and different characteristics of consumer behaviour. At a last stage some personal characteristics such as time perception, store and brand loyalty and the main socio-demographic features have been registered. The questionnaire set up was based on the use, with convenient adaptations, of variables and scales of measurement already applied and tested during previous theory analysis and privileging retailing related ones (Tab. 1). The answers that relate to involvement, behaviour, logistics and personal variables have been obtained by asking the interviewees the degree of agreement with the proposed options by using a Likert scale from 1 (I do not absolutely agree) to 5 (I definitely agree). With the same scale, questions related to atmosphere have been obtained asking to the consumers the degree of importance of different attributes.

Tab. 1 – Variables and measurement scales

Variables:	Adapted from:
Store atmosphere	
• Physical attributes	Donovan &Rossiter (1982), Lee (1991), Lee & Geistfeld (1995), Tai & Fung (1997).
• Social attributes	Lee (1991), Lee & Geistfeld (1995), Grove & Fisk (1997), Tai & Fung (1997).
Consumer behavior	
• Planning activity	Popkowski & Timmermans (2001).
• Searching activity (store, product, brand, price comparisons, etc.)	Bloch *et al* (1986), Putrevu & Lord (2001).
• Influence of promotions	Severin *et al* (2001), Putrevu & Lord (2001).
• Sources of information	Furse *et al* (1984), Putrevu & Lord (2001).
• Time perception	Popkowski & Timmermans (2001), Marzocchi (1999), Chettamrongchai & Davies (2000).
• Brand and store loyalty	Ailawadi, Neslin &Gedenk (2001)
• Consumer logistic	Granzin *et al* (1997)
• Product involvement	Lockshin *et al* (1997), O'Cass (2000), Smith & Carsky (1996), Zaichkovsky (1985), Laurent & Kapferer (1985 et 1986), Kalamas, La Roche & Lézard (2002), Kinley, Conrad & Brown (1999).
• Brand involvement	Baumgartner & Steenkamp (1996), Lockshin *et al* (1997), O'Cass (2000), Putrevu & Lord (2001), Smith & Carsky (1996), Zaichkovsky (1985), Laurent & Kapferer (1985), Kapferer & Laurent (1992), Mittal (1989).
• Shopping involvement	Baumgartner & Steenkamp (1996), Lockshin *et al* (1997), Smith & Carsky (1996), Hausman (2000), Chettamrongchai & Davies (2000).

3.2. Findings

Before presenting the most significant differences between French and Italian consumers in in-store shopping behavior and in the evaluation of store atmosphere, it is important to provide a synthetic outline of the characteristics of the two samples analyzed, in order to find out if some existing differences could influence the results of the empirical research. Even if the analysis was based on a non probabilistic sample, final data have pointed out that the two groups of French and Italian women are quite similar in terms of psychographic and socio-economical aspects: the degree of brand and store loyalty, the tendency of not wasting time and the income is generally on the average for both the two nationalities. Furthermore, both the French and the Italian consumers considered in the sample mainly use the car to get to the store. Nevertheless, also some significant differences can be pointed out. Coherently with the diversities in the distribution system of the two countries, considering the store where they buy household goods, French consumers of the sample mainly visit hypermarkets (56%), followed by specialty stores (35,5%) and home department of big stores

(7,5%); on the other side Italian consumers mainly buy in specialty stores (52,7%) and in home departments (33,2%) and only a 13,7% uses to buy in hypermarkets. From the socio-demographical point of view, Italian and French consumers of the sample can be considered quite similar in the scholarly degree: 47,7% of the French consumers and 42,6% of the Italian consumers have a diploma, while the university degree is prevalent in the French sample with a 38,6% against a 16,3% of the Italians. They are homogeneous also in the occupation where, a part from the housewives (20,2% in France and 26,0% in Italy), the employees are the majority with a 47,7% of the French women interviewed and a 42,6% of the Italians. Coherently with the higher degree, it is significant also the presence of a 10,6% of medium managers in the French sample. Considering the age, 70% of the French women involved in the research are aged between 40 and 49 years old, while in the Italian sample women aged between 30 to 60 are almost equally represented.

3.2.1. Evaluation of store atmosphere: a comparison of French and Italian consumers

The analysis of cross-cultural differences in the evaluation of store atmosphere has been conducted from different perspectives, trying to describe the most critical aspects for French and Italian consumers. Hence, the analysis has been divided into three phases:

- first of all the means of the answers on the role of store atmosphere for consumers of the two countries have been compared and commented;
- secondly two different factor analysis on consumers of the two countries have been developed in order to identify if different variables are similarly correlated and what is their role in describing the perception of atmosphere;
- finally, a factor analysis on the total sample has been processed in order to apply a cluster analysis finalized to the identification of horizontal segments within which the weight of consumers of the two countries has been evaluated.

Tab. 2 - Importance of atmosphere in the shopping and buying process: a comparison between French and Italian consumers

	Total sample *(mean)*	**French consumers** *(mean)*	**Italian consumers** *(mean)*
A nice atmosphere (A1)	3,86	4,38	3,55
A nice furnishing (A2)	3,40	4,00	3,04
A nice and particular style and design (A3)	3,15	4,29	2,46
A good lighting of the shop (A4)	3,88	4,38	3,57
An agreeable smell and perfume in the store (A5)	3,04	3,62	2,69
A large shop, where I can easily move around (A6)	3,52	4,43	2,98
Little noise and confusion (A7)	3,70	3,74	3,70
Background music (A8)	2,96	3,95	2,37
Some indications that can help me to easily find those products and departments I am looking for (A9)	4,37	4,66	4,18
When I buy household goods, the kindness and politeness of the personnel are a must (A10)	4,12	4,41	3,94
When I buy household goods, it is essential for me to perceive that clients in the store are quite similar to me (in lifestyle, etc) (A11)	2,56	2,55	2,56

From a first analysis of the role of store atmosphere in the shopping and buying process, some significant differences between the two nationalities immediately emerge (Tab.2). French consumers recognize in general a greater role of atmosphere in all its components, and the difference is really strong when some sensorial variables like smell, perfume and music (A5 and A8) are taken into consideration. Coherent with these results are the outputs of the factor analysis processed on consumers of the two countries: in fact, while in the physical and rational dimensions of atmosphere the variables in the two countries seem to be similarly correlated, a clear sensorial dimension can be identified in the French sample (Tab.3), opposed to a social dimension of the Italian consumers (Tab.4).

Tab.3 – Factor analysis on the evaluation of store atmosphere by French consumers – Rotated component matrix

	Factor 1 Physical/Emotional dimension	**Factor 2** Rational / Organizational Dimension	**Factor 3** Sensorial dimension
A nice and particular style and design (A3)	0.835		
A good lighting of the shop (A4)	0.751		
A nice furnishing (A2)	0.726		
A nice atmosphere (A1)	0.699		
When I buy household goods, it is essential for me to perceive that clients in the store are quite similar to me (in lifestyle, etc) (A11)	0.433		
When I buy household goods, the kindness and politeness of the personnel are a must (A10)		0.733	
Some indications that can help me to easily find those products and departments I am looking for (A9)		0.704	
A large shop, where I can easily move around (A6)		0.574	
An agreeable smell and perfume in the store (A5)			0.799
Little noise and confusion (A7)			0.581
Background music (A8)			0.580

Extraction method: Principal component analysis; Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 4 iterations. Variance explained 55,2%.

Tab.4 – Factor analysis on the evaluation of store atmosphere by Italian consumers – Rotated component matrix

	Factor 1 Physical/Emotional dimension	**Factor 2** Rational / Organizational Dimension	**Factor 3** Social dimension
A nice and particular style and design (A3)	0.854		
A nice furnishing (A2)	0.841		
A good lighting of the shop (A4)	0.729		
A nice atmosphere (A1)	0.615		
An agreeable smell and perfume in the store (A5)	0.535		
Little noise and confusion (A7)		0.766	
Some indications that can help me to easily find those products and departments I am looking for (A9)		0.709	
Background music (A8)		0.564	
A large shop, where I can easily move around (A6)		0.535	
When I buy household goods, the kindness and politeness of the personnel are a must (A10)			-0.691
When I buy household goods, it is essential for me to perceive that clients in the store are quite similar to me (in lifestyle, etc) (A11)			0.527

Extraction method: Principal component analysis; Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 4 iterations. Variance explained 56,1%.

Based on the fact that at least two factors of the rotated component matrix processed on French and Italian consumers can be considered quite similar, a factor analysis on the total sample has been developed, in order to identify the common segments that characterize the two countries. As emerges in table 5, the "physical / emotional dimension" aggregates those variables that describe the store atmosphere in its physical and emotional characteristics. The second factor is represented by the "rational and organizational dimension", in the sense that a consumer can develop a more rational choice within a store if there is no noise and confusion, indications related to products and departments are clear and sales employees can help the consumer with their advice. Finally, the social dimension is here identified only by the presence of other consumers visiting the store.

Tab.5 – Factor analysis on the evaluation of store atmosphere by French and Italian consumers – Rotated component matrix

	Factor 1 Physical/Emotional dimension	**Factor 2** Rational / Organizational dimension	**Factor 3** Social dimension
A nice and particular style and design (A3)	0.868		
A nice furnishing (A2)	0.826		
A good lighting of the shop (A4)	0.746		
A nice atmosphere (A1)	0.674		
An agreeable smell and perfume in the store (A5)	0.641		
A large shop, where I can easily move around (A6)	0.638		
Background music (A8)	0.495		
Some indications that can help me to easily find those products and departments I am looking for (A9)		0.756	
Little noise and confusion (A7)		0.696	
When I buy household goods, the kindness and politeness of the personnel are a must (A10)		0.479	
When I buy household goods, it is essential for me to perceive that clients in the store are quite similar to me (in lifestyle, etc) (A11)			0.888

Extraction method: Principal component analysis; Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 4 iterations. Variance explained 58,5%.

The results of the cluster analysis (K-Means method; Anova test) processed on the total sample can be read in tables 6 and 7, where consumers of the three segments have been identified and described. Finally, it had been interesting to conduct an analysis on the weight of French and Italian consumers within the horizontal segments previously defined. As emerges in table 8, considering the values related to the percentage within the country (that is more significant due to the not equal numerousness of the two samples), the "Independents" cluster can be found almost only in the Italian sample, coherently with the comparison of the means presented in table 2 where it emerges a low importance of all the aspects of atmosphere for the Italian consumers. It is also significant to point out how the weight of the "Snob" cluster is similar in the two countries, while the "Simples" is prevalent in France.

Tab.6 – Cluster analysis on the evaluation of store atmosphere by French and Italian consumers

Total sample (n=533)	**Cluster 1 (n=274; 51,4%)**	**Cluster 2 (n=88; 16,5%)**	**Cluster 3 (n=171; 32,1%)**	**F**	**Sig.**
Factor 1 – Physical / emotional dimension	0,063	-0,640	0,228	25,124	.000
Factor 2 – Rational / organizational dimension	0,289	-1,162	0,369	286,919	.000
Factor 3 – Social dimension	-0,748	0,245	1,072	533,682	.000

Tab.7 – Cluster profiles and socio - demographic variables

CLUSTER 1	
• A very low importance is ascribed to factor 3 (social dimension) • A quite modest importance is ascribed to factor 2 (rational / organizational dimension) **Socio-demographics**: shopping in different stores, aged 40-50, employees and housewives, 4 family members and income on the average.	**THE SIMPLES** When they do shopping they are not really influenced by the atmosphere in its physical and emotional characteristics, but they modestly appreciate if the store is not noisy and if there are indications and polite sales employees able to guide their choices. Finding different clients within the store is absolutely not a problem for this segment, which can be generally defined very simple in its shopping behavior.
CLUSTER 2	
• A very low importance is ascribed to factor 2 (rational / organizational dimension) • A low importance is ascribed to factor 1 (physical / emotional dimension) • A modest importance is ascribed to factor 3 (social dimension) **Socio-demographics**: shopping in specialty stores, aged 30-60, employees and workers, 2 to 4 family members and income on the average.	**THE INDEPENDENTS** They are very autonomous in their choices, and for this reason they do not perceive to be influenced by store atmosphere neither in the physical / emotional aspects nor by other elements that are supposed to guide their choices (indications, sales personnel, etc.). In other words they want to be independent and if they can choose, they prefer to buy in stores where they can find clients they perceive similar.
CLUSTER 3	
• A very high importance is ascribed to factor 3 (social dimension) • A modest importance is ascribed to factor 1 (physical / emotional dimension) and to factor 2 (rational / organizational dimension) **Socio-demographics**: shopping in specialty stores and hypermarkets, aged 20-60, employees and workers, 2 to 4 family members and income on and above the average. 30% of the segment is without a diploma.	**THE SNOBS** Doing shopping in stores being "up to their characteristics" is essential for these clients that want to find not only an accurate atmosphere but especially similar clients, adequate to their lifestyle.

Tab.8 – Horizontal clusters and consumer nationality in the perception of store atmosphere

Total sample (n=533)		**France**	**Italy**	**% of total segment**
The simples	% within the cluster	45,6	54,4	100
	% within the country	**62,2**	**44,9**	
The independents	% within the cluster	13,6	86,4	100
	% within the country	**6,0**	**22,9**	
The snobs	% within the cluster	37,4	62,6	100
	% within the country	**31,8**	**32,2**	
% of total country		100	100	

3.2.2. Differences in consumer shopping behavior between French and Italian consumers

While in the analysis of the perception of store atmosphere some significant differences have been pointed out, data related to those characteristics of consumer shopping behavior that can affect the degree of adaptation of the retailing format, seem to be more homogeneous. In tables 9, 10 and 11 the average values of the different answers have been provided both for the total sample and, separately, for consumers of each country. The similarity is quite evident, hence the attention can be focused only on few specific variables. As emerges in table 9, consumers of the two countries both reveal a quite high degree of product involvement and a modest degree of brand involvement in buying household goods. Nevertheless in this context, and coherently to the evaluation of store atmosphere, French consumers reveal a higher degree of shopping involvement if compared to the Italian consumers of the sample (I11 and I12). This tendency is correlated on one side to the time spent comparing the peculiarities of different brands and products sold in the store (B3), that is anyway similar for the two groups of consumers, but on the other side, for the French women interviewed in the research, it is mainly related to the logistic activity of visiting different stores in order to compare the characteristics of different brands and products (L4) (tab.11). In general, if compared to the French sample, it is interesting to point out how Italian consumers seem to reveal a lower impulse buying behavior (tab.10): in fact, not only they know what they want to buy (B1) but also they are never tempted to buy products that attract them but they have not planned to buy (B2). Vice versa, if compared with the Italians, the French consumers seem to be more influenced not only by external information related to advertising (B6) and word-of –mouth (B7) but especially by in-store information. However these results seem to be coherent first of all with the characteristics of the clusters previously identified, where the majority of the "Independents" cluster could be found in the Italian sample. Secondly it has to be considered that the typology of retailers preferred by the consumers of the present sample differ in the two countries, determining a lower (i.e. specialty stores) or, vice versa, higher importance of point-of-sales advertising (i.e. hypermarkets).

Tab.9 – Consumer involvement: a comparison between French and Italian clients

	Total sample *(mean)*	**French consumers** *(mean)*	**Italian consumers** *(mean)*
I like to buy household goods (I1)	4,17	4,33	4,07
Having the right pieces of furniture and (I2) household accessories is really important for me	4,12	4,34	3,98
I like spending a lot of time choosing household goods (I3)	3,14	3,14	3,14
Household goods I buy give an idea of my personality (I4)	4,03	3,76	4,19
I like buying household goods as a present for my friends and relatives (I5)	3,09	2,85	3,24
When I enter a house I always look at how it is furnished and how different household accessories have been matched (I6)	3,62	3,95	3,42
I like spending a lot of money on household goods (I7)	2,56	2,54	2,57
I prefer to do without other expenses, if I can only buy household goods that I like (I8)	2,24	2,40	2,13
When I buy something for my house I look for branded products, because I am sure it is the right choice (I9)	2,73	2,76	2,71
I like reading magazines about house furniture and goods in order to get some information on different brand proposals (I10)	2,59	2,83	2,45
I like shopping (I11)	3,64	4,05	3,40
I try to spend a lot of time shopping (I12)	2,52	2,92	2,28
I like visiting household goods stores, even just for curiosity (I13)	3,49	3,42	3,53

Tab.10 – Consumer shopping behavior: a comparison between French and Italian clients

	Total sample ***(mean)***	**French consumers** ***(mean)***	**Italian consumers** ***(mean)***
Most of the time, before entering a household goods store, I already know what I want to buy (B1)	3,80	3,70	3,86
I never let me tempt to buy products that attract me but that I did not plan to buy (B2)	2,93	2,55	3,16
Before buying household goods, I spend a lot of time comparing the peculiarities of different brands and products sold in the store (B3)	3,22	3,20	3,22
I am always able to compare and evaluate the quality, the price and the other important attributes of household goods I want to buy (B4)	3,33	3,48	3,24
If I see some products on special offer, I am always tempted to buy them even if I don't need them immediately (B5)	2,54	2,46	2,60
When I buy household goods, I am really influenced by the information I can find reading a magazine, an advertisement, etc. (B6)	2,25	2,57	2,06
When I buy, I am really influenced by the advice of my friends and relatives (B7)	2,55	3,03	2,26
When I buy household goods, I usually base my choice on the information I get inside the store (point-of-sale advertisement, shop-assistant's advice, etc.) (B8)	2,56	2,80	2,41

Tab.11 – Consumer logistic: a comparison between French and Italian clients

	Total sample ***(mean)***	**French consumers** ***(mean)***	**Italian consumers** ***(mean)***
I always ask to myself if I can manage to bring it home (L1)	2,97	2,99	2,95
I always take into consideration if I am doing shopping alone or, vice versa, with someone that will help me to bring my products home (L2)	2,70	2,78	2,66
I never ask to myself if I have enough space to fit it in at home. If I like it, I will buy it and then... I will figure out how to! (L3)	2,09	2,06	2,10
I always visit different stores in order to compare the characteristics of different brands and products (L4)	3,12	3,44	2,92
I always visit different stores in order to find the best price (L5)	3,35	3,38	3,33
To make sure I am buying at the cheapest price, not only I visit shops that are close to my house, but I am always ready to visit farther stores (L6)	2,63	2,33	2,81

4. Conclusions

Retailing companies aiming to develop their distribution networks both in the national and international markets, have to carefully take into consideration the problem of the degree of adaptation / standardization of the store format, even if, at a first glance, countries of expansion can be considered similar.

The analysis carried out hereby has pointed out some interesting managerial implications, especially in relation to the definition of atmosphere design. In fact French consumers like to be more "cuddled" by an accurate atmosphere, well characterized by a specific style and design, properly organized and spacious, perfumed and with background music. It is not possible to say the same for Italian consumers, that seem to consider the components of atmosphere almost neutral in relation to their buying process. More precisely, while French consumers investigated in this empirical research appreciate even the sensorial dimension of the store, Italian women tend to pay more attention to the social aspects.

Another consideration that derives from the analysis of the data is that, in a context of internationalization of a retailing network, a cluster analysis of the perspective clients is absolutely necessary, since the company can find out that the target served in the domestic market is not equal to that one reached in the foreign country: not only it can differ in the evaluation of atmosphere design, but also in some important aspects of consumer behavior. As an example, considering the present analysis, if a retailing company can develop the same approach in terms of price positioning, price / quality ratio, in-store promotions, services and loyalty programs, nevertheless more attention and, consequently more adaptation to the local requirements and tastes is necessary when activities related to external and in-store advertising have to be developed, since they can deeply influence the shopping behaviour of French consumers.

The study is not without limitations. Even if this research is considered explorative, the main limit is related to the numerousness of the two samples and to their non probabilistic structure. This is particularly true also in relation to the characteristics of the geographical territories analyzed, that can significantly influence the structure of the retailing context and the shopping habits.

In spite of these limits, the findings can be helpful from a managerial point of view especially because they can make aware retailing managers to the problem of adaptation not only from a legislative point of view but also reinforce the perception of the necessity of being close to the different needs of local clients.

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