THE SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: 
A CANADIAN/ESTONIAN STUDY

Abstract

The focus of this empirical study is to present the findings of a cross-cultural comparison between 
Canadian and Estonian university students and their perceptions of retail practices. The findings 
of this research indicate a level of commonality in retail shopping perceptions between both 
groups as well as non-trivial differences in both how shopping practice, in terms of the construct 
structure, and individual service drivers, should be theorized.

Although the findings of this study solely focused on one particular sample set, and one type of 
retail format, they nonetheless represent an initial focus on an unknown area of retailing research. 
There are two specific contributions resulting from this study. The first is that Estonian 
University student consumers, in comparison to their Canadian counter-parts, have a similar focus 
in terms of how shopping behaviour should be modelled. At the factor and overall level, the 
linking of merchandise price, merchandise selection, retail service, and customer loyalty appears 
sound. The findings of this study also highlight potential differences in both how the specific 
constructs should be measured (i.e. at the scale level), and in terms of the relevance of a customer 
loyalty factor.

In terms of customer loyalty determinants, university students in both countries were significantly 
influenced by the three other factors. However, there were differences in terms of perspective. In 
the Estonian sample, retail service, and merchandise selection, measures were deemed of greater 
importance than merchandise price. In the Canadian sample merchandise price, then retail 
service, versus merchandise selection was found. These findings are interpreted in that Estonian 
consumers, who have had a shorter period of product choice, and arguably stores that provide 
“western” style service, would thus focus on these measures if they were to have a sense of store 
loyalty. Conversely, price would have a lesser role in customer loyalty due to a lack of price 
competition in the local marketplace. With respect to retail practice, for the Canadian sample, 
price and selection were not significantly correlated. This may imply that by providing a better 
understanding, or distinction between these factors needs to be communicated to Canadian 
consumers in order to influence store loyalty, versus in Estonia where the two factors should have 
a closer linkage.

A second implication is the degree of commonality in the two groups in terms of relevance of 
specific shopping behaviour measures. This may not only be of interest to retail practice, but also 
provide insight into the potential value of developing programs to encourage customer loyalty at 
the university student level in other transition economies.

Finally, the limitations of using university student samples should continue to be addressed, but 
based on this study, contributions can still be made to marketing practices such as shopping 
behaviour, and should not be dismissed out of hand. It is argued that the use of university student 
samples may have even greater relevance for study in transition economies, such as Estonia, due 
to the limited history of “western” marketing practices.