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An Examination of British Charity Shop Shoppers

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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of nonprofit organizations are developing charity shops to raise resources to support their charitable efforts. The United Kingdom currently has 9000 charity shops that take in annual revenues of 300 million British Pounds. Such stores seek donated merchandise . . . sell it . . . and use the proceeds to support philanthropic endeavors. As such, achieving a better understanding of charity shop shoppers can enhance performance of the charity shop which will, in turn, provide greater resources for helping others.

The purpose of this study is to examine the processes by which charity shop shoppers: (1) decide to buy pre-owned merchandise, (2) get information about competing outlets, and (3) select which organizations are appropriate for their particular purchase decision.

Focus group research was used to identify: (1) the reasons shoppers seek to interact with charity shops, (2) the variables commonly used to assess shopping options, and (3) the information sources used by charity shoppers. The questionnaire was refined using a number of pre-tests. The population of analysis for this study is citizens in one county in England. The data was collected in a non-random process by students enrolled in undergraduate business classes door-to-door. A total of 50 usable responses were collected (n=50).

When asked to report the top three reasons for purchasing from charity shops, the most frequently cited items were (1) value seeker. . . I saved money (27%), (2) supporter of the organization . . . I believe in the cause (23%), and (3) pragmatic . . . I found a product that fit my needs (15%).

When asked the relative importance of information sources when looking for an outlet of second-hand items, the most frequently cited items were (1) visibility of store (26%), (2) past experience as a shopper (24%), and (3) recommendations from family and friends (20%).

When assessing store selection criteria, the most frequently cited items were (1) quality of merchandise (14%), (2) convenience of store location (14%), and (3) well-organized displays (13%).

Shoppers expect excellence from all retailers, including charity shops. Charity shop shoppers want quality merchandise at a value, a cause they can support, well-organized merchandise displays, and convenient visible locations. To achieve this, charity shop operators need to (1) focus on securing high quality donations from donors, (2) set prices significantly below those of

first-run stores to appeal to value seekers (3) target consumers who support their cause (4) organize merchandise and the store itself in a way that is pleasing to the senses and (5) consider locating on high streets surrounded by first-run stores to maximize the visibility and convenience of their shop in order to increase their resources and the positive impact on society.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Robert Montgomery is a Professor of Marketing at the University of Evansville. His research interests include “the hunting consumer” “charity retailing” and “generation y.” Ariana Murray is a senior business major at Marian University. Her research interests include “charity retailing” and “motor sports marketing.”

