SUNDAY SHOPPING FOREVER?

INTRODUCTION

In the US, most large retail stores are open on Sundays. However, in many other parts of the world, countries, provinces, states and municipalities continue to regulate Sunday opening hours and there is an on-going lively debate on Sunday trading. In Europe most stores in Austria, Belgium and Norway are closed on Sundays, however in England, Hungary, Portugal and Ireland they are open. In general, there is a growing trend towards deregulation, however exceptions remain and regulations are continually changing. In 2009, France relaxed Sunday trading laws (Samuel 2009) while Germany's Constitutional Court upheld a complaint made by the country's Catholic and Protestant churches. The court ruled that from 2010 German retailers must close on Sundays which should be protected as a day of rest from work and for ‘spiritual elevation’ (Dowling 2009). Europe’s Sunday shopping laws have been described as a ‘conundrum’ with Slovenia enforcing tighter restrictions on Sunday trading at the same time that the Croatian government overturned Sunday trading bans after protests by retailers (Faithful 2006).

England is one of the most progressive European countries with regards to Sunday trading. Since 1994 when the Sunday Trading Act was introduced, most larger stores have opened every Sunday. With longer trading hours, Sunday shopping appears to have become a convenient alternative for those consumers who have embraced the concept. However, empirical academic research on Sunday trading remains scarce and has mainly investigated attitudes and the arguments for and against Sunday trading prior to 1994. Hence, this study aims to investigate the perceptions that three major groups of English stakeholders: business managers; employees; and consumers; have towards Sunday trading in the new millennium. Due to space limitations, this paper focuses on the results of the consumer survey.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In England until 1994, the Shops Act (1950) mandated contradicting restrictions on the types of shops that could open and the categories of goods that could be sold on certain days. For example, on Sundays Chinese takeaway shops could open while fish and chip stores could not. Consumers could purchase magazines but not books (Burke and Shackleton 1989). The introduction of the Sunday Trading Act in 1994 attempted to clarify the confusing situation and enabled large shops to trade for maximum of six hours continuously between 10am and 6pm on Sundays. The rights of the store employees who work on Sundays was protected, so no employee could be terminated due to refusal to work on Sundays (Halsall 1994). Concerted efforts by retailers to further extend Sunday trading hours in 2006 resulted in the Department of Trade and Industry commissioning an independent analysis of the costs and benefits related to easing Sunday shopping restrictions (Williamson et al. 2006). Although the government concluded that at that time there was no substantial demand for further change, some retailers are continuing to campaign for deregulation (Allen 2009).

Sunday trading has had an impact in UK retail circles. It has generated a great deal of debate on the positive and negative impacts with owners and directors of retail businesses, retail employees, consumers and special interest groups having varied and sometimes opposing opinions and arguments. Some academics have further explored these arguments as well as the structure of Sunday trading. For example, a survey of employees by Freathy and Sparks (1993) concludes that the majority of staff working on Sundays were part time workers under
thirty years old. Over 70% of the respondents were paid at least time and a half for working on Sunday while almost half received double time. The major reason for working on Sundays was the ability to earn extra income (52%), followed by the need to bring in essential family income (21%) and that working on Sundays was part of their job contract (10%). Fifty five percent of respondents stated that there were no disadvantages to working on a Sunday, however, for those that did find disadvantages, the lack of time available to spend with partner/children topped the list. Freathy and Sparks (1993) conclude that the main disadvantages of working on Sundays were predominantly domestic and social as opposed to religious concerns. Furthermore, the outcome of the national survey by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in 2006 revealed that the likelihood to shop on Sundays declines with age. Also, parents with young children and consumers employed in a full-time capacity were more likely to shop on Sundays (DTI, 2006). Kirby’s (1992) research revealed premium payment as the major reason for working on a Sunday and that nearly Forty percent of employees stated they would not work on Sundays if they were asked too. No recent research has been conducted that has examined whether these arguments are still valid in the new millennium, or reviewed current perceptions of Sunday trading and working. Given the ongoing debate and requests for further deregulation as well as the lack of academic activity, there is clearly a need for further research in this area.

Traditional definitions of shopping ‘implicitly assume that the shopping motive is a simple function of the buying motive’ (Tauber 1972); and suggest that individuals go shopping with the specific intention of making a purchase. However, it is now generally accepted that consumers may visit stores for a number of reasons other than simply purchasing a good (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Wakefield et al. 1998). Babin et al. (1994), propose that there are two main motivations behind a shopping activity-namely, utilitarian (functional or tangible) or hedonic (pleasurable or intangible) and suggest that Sundays would be predominantly used for hedonic reasons. While utilitarian shopping motivations are primarily task orientated, hedonic motivations are primarily emotional and tied to the shopping experience. Hedonic and utilitarian shopping motivations have been used to explain the behaviour of shoppers and explore the reasons why retailers should create exciting store environments (Allard et al. 2009; Carpenter and Moore 2009; Kaltcheva and Weitz 2006; Sit et al. 2004).

Arnold and Reynolds (2003) identify six major categories of hedonic shopping (Adventure Shopping; Social Shopping; Gratification Shopping; Idea Shopping; Role Shopping; and Value Shopping). Sunday shoppers might use the day to socialise with friends and family (Social Shopping), or simply to relieve boredom (Adventure Shopping). It has been suggested that many retailers could learn from the social-recreational industry (Tauber 1972; Smith 1995). This seems particularly true on Sundays when retailers compete directly for a consumer’s time and money with other alternatives (Smith 1995) such as going to church, seeing relatives, having a Sunday lunch, relaxing and exercising. However, these factors have not been explored in the context of Sunday trading.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The results of the literature review identify a number of significant issues that present opportunities for gaining a deeper understanding of current issues relating to Sunday trading. The salient objectives of this exploratory research are to answer the following questions regarding Sunday trading:

- What impact has Sunday trading had on retail businesses?
- What impact has Sunday trading had on retail employees?
What impact has Sunday trading had retail consumers?

What benefits does Sunday shopping provide for consumers and retailers?

Are the traditional arguments for and against Sunday shopping still valid?

In-depth interviews with managers from the retail sector were conducted in order to gain a detailed account of recent trends and explore their perceptions of Sunday trading. A semi-structured questionnaire assessed the perceptions of staff from department stores in a large shopping mall in the centre of the Newcastle Upon Tyne. A separate semi-structured questionnaire was developed in order to investigate the extent to which consumers engage in Sunday shopping and to explore shopping habits. Each questionnaire contained 15 questions that could be used to identify the age and gender of respondents as well as their attitudes and perceptions of critical elements. Quota sampling was used to determine the sample which consists of 7 managers, 79 full time and part-time employees and 150 consumers.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected for this research. The qualitative data was in the form of in-depth interviews. Content analysis was carried out on the transcripts of the interviews with the objective of identifying important factors such as the managerial perceptions and motives regarding Sunday trading. The analysis of the interviews aimed to develop a number of consistent themes and enabled the authors to identify a number of levels of benefits associated with Sunday trading. Survey data was analysed by using the SPSS statistical package. Pearson Chi-Square and ANOVA tests were used to test for independence and identify differences between age and gender profiles of respondents. The results of the survey of consumers are presented in the paragraphs that follow.

The survey of consumers revealed that only fifty-one percent of consumers shopped on Sundays. These results were surprising when compared to the interviews of store managers and reflect that Sunday is not accepted as an ordinary shopping day for all consumers. There were significant differences (Chi Square p < .029) between age categories with more consumers less than 45 years old more likely to shop on a Sunday. The majority of those that did not shop were older than 60 years. This may be associated with traditional values and beliefs possessed by older people who regard Sunday as a day of rest and worship (Townsend and Shuluter, 1985). However, this is also in line with the findings of the DTI (2006) survey that likelihood to shop on Sundays declines with age. For example, people aged between of 16 and 54 and parents with young children were more likely to shop on Sundays.

Thirty percent of respondents stated religious commitments as the major reasons for not shopping on Sundays. However, seventy percent of the respondents stated various other reasons such as prefer to relax, spend time with their family and work. Among non-shoppers, there were significant differences (Chi Square p < .001) between the answers of younger respondents (under 45) who preferred to work or relax rather than shop on Sundays and older people (over 45) who had religious commitments or preferred to spend time with their family.

The results of this research also found that fifty-eight percent of the people interviewed tend to purchase high involvement products on Sundays. This concurs with the findings of past research, which suggests that consumers use the extra trading time to purchase products where more thought and higher risk are involved (Burke and Shackleton 1989; Kay and Morris 1987). Females were more likely to shop for high involvement low priced products...
(possibly clothes) than men who focussed on high-priced high involvement products (Chi
Square $p < .020$). Furthermore, Tabuer (1972) and Kay and Morris (1987) suggest that
Sunday is predominately used for leisure shopping rather than targeted purchases. The
findings of this research reveal that female consumers prefer to use Sunday shopping as a
leisure activity and in contrast men only liked to shop on Sundays when it is necessary. The
majority of consumers (68%) reported that they have not been affected at all by Sunday
trading. The thirty-two percent, who were affected, stated that less time spent with
partner/children as their main concern. Furthermore, seventy percent of the respondents also
agreed that Sunday shopping could be considered as a family activity. Thus, the idea that
Sunday trading erodes family life seems to be somewhat of a generalisation.

Ninety percent of the respondents believed that Sunday trading had been a success. Most
consumers indicated that they do not believe that stores were open long enough before
Sunday trading began. Although there were significant differences between the number of
males and females and old and young consumers that agreed with the statement that stores
should be open longer on Sundays most respondents did not perceive that current opening
hours should be extended. More males than females favoured longer opening hours (ANOVA
$p < .06$). Finally, most respondents agreed that they expect the same kind of service on
Sundays as with any other day. This indicates that the stores need to employ experienced staff
as opposed to part time workers with little product knowledge where high involvement
purchases were made as they expect the same level of service on Sundays too. Information
presented in Table 1 summarises the key findings as they relate to the traditional arguments
for and against shopping on Sunday.

**MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The results of this study offer a number of implications for practitioners. They justify recent
trends towards the creation of more pleasurable shopping environments that offer family
activities to entice customers into stores. As consumers choose Sundays to shop for high
involvement purchases, promotional and other programs aimed at these goods could be
focussed on Sundays. In addition, as there were age and gender differences over respondents’
perceptions of some aspects of Sunday trading, segmenting the target market according to
these categories could help managers develop targeted marketing campaigns and programs.
Finally, more efforts should be made to understand and cater for the needs of the large
proportion of shoppers who believe that Sunday Trading has been a success but do not shop
on Sundays. For retailers, benefits associated with Sunday trading include increased
opportunities for stimulating sales and profits. Thus, enabling retailers to effectively utilize
resources and more importantly gain operational excellence. Also, enhance customer intimacy
by meeting and exceeding customer expectations by providing them with value-added
hedonic services that enhance long-term customer relationships. Ultimately benefits include
greater synergy and a long-term sustainable competitive advantage.
Table 1: Summary of findings relative to traditional arguments and objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern/Objective</th>
<th>Key findings of the present study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incentives for working on a Sunday will decrease over time</td>
<td>The incentives to work on Sunday have not actually decreased, although they have changed. Full-time employees are now offered extra time-off, as opposed to or in addition to extra pay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Do businesses still use an incentive/what are the current motivators and incentives and are employees happy with these?)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Store costs and sales will increase</td>
<td>The managers interviewed indicated that sales on a Sunday outweigh costs of operating their stores on a Sunday. Although most respondents indicated total sales have increased as a result of Sunday Trading, the result depended on product categories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Have sales and operations costs increased as a result of Sunday Trading?)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>There was already enough time to go shopping</td>
<td>Consumers and employees disagreed with this statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Do employees and consumers believe that stores were open long enough before the Sunday Trading Act?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Trading Hours should be increased</td>
<td>The majority of employees and consumers were happy with the current trading hours and did not believe that they needed to be extended.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Are employees and consumers satisfied with current Sunday Trading Laws)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff would be forced to work and need protection</td>
<td>Most respondents were not concerned about being forced to work on Sundays or their prospects for promotion being affected if they refuse to work on Sundays.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will staff be forced to work on Sundays?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased Sunday trading would affect the family life of consumers and employees</td>
<td>Most employees and consumers family life was not affected. However, some employees believed that a reduction of time that they could spend with their families was the major concern they had with working on Sundays. Most consumers perceived that Sunday shopping was a mechanism to spend more time with their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Has family life been affected by Sunday Trading?)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday trading would affect individual’s religious commitments</td>
<td>Consumers that have religious commitments stand by such commitments and often do not shop on Sundays. Religious employees are not forced to work on Sundays.</td>
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<td>(What is the relationship between religious commitments and consumers perceptions of Sunday Trading?)</td>
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**CONCLUSION AND FURTURE RESEARCH**

In this research, perceptions of Sunday shopping have been investigated from the perspective of three major stakeholder groups. Although the focus of this paper has been on consumer’s perceptions, the results indicate that although many people still do not shop on Sundays retailer managers, employees and customers all report that Sunday trading has resulted in positive impacts. In addition, it has been revealed that some of the arguments made against Sunday trading before or around the introduction of The Sunday Trading Act in 1994 appear somewhat superfluous and may not be relevant in the new millennium. This research is primarily exploratory in nature and was conducted in one location with a relatively small sample size. Therefore, care should be taken when making generalisations relating to the results. Areas for additional research that would complement and strengthen the findings include increasing the size of the sample, analysis of longitudinal data, and conducting similar research in other geographic locations.
REFERENCES


