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Evaluation of the Impact upon Consumer Attitudes of the Format and the Assortment in Retail Internationalisation Process

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ABSTRACT

Previous experience has proved that the range of goods of any newly opened shopping centre is an important element of the retail internationalisation. An assortment of a trade object is an indication of satisfaction of consumers with the trading centre. Rarely retail companies directly inquire the opinion of the consumers before entering the market; they tend to prefer relying upon their international experience, or the results of an analysis of the trade market of the country or the region. The present paper examines and deals with the attitudes of the consumers, identifies and presents the composite parts of the elements, and provides their evaluation methodology. The study conducted and constituting the basis for the present paper proved that consumers have developed their attitude towards the assortment of the goods at the IKEA trade centre.

The object of the present study is the assortment of goods at a retail centre. The purpose of the present study and the paper is an assessment of the impact of the assortment of goods upon the attitudes of consumers. A problem identified for the purpose of the present paper was the fact that the impact of assortment of goods upon the attitudes of consumers in the process of retail internationalisation has not been studied neither from theoretical nor practical viewpoint, and no practical methodological manuals have been drawn up to assess the impact concerned.

INTRODUCTION

Based on the definitions of an assortment of goods proposed and used by Sullivan, Adcock (2002), McGoldrick (2002), Pajuodis, Pranulis,Urbonavičius, Virvilaite (2011), Urbonavicius, Dikcius, Navickaite, (2011), Virvilaite, Dailydiene (2012) - a range of goods is a collection of goods compiled at trade objects and intended for meeting the needs of consumers. In general, it is only a general concept that does not disclose its content. On the one hand, retail trade companies dedicate specific attention to the formation of their range of merchandise, the assortment being one of the most important factors of the success in a different country; on the other hand, however, building of the assortment is a commercial secret that cannot be directly accessed or studied. The assortment of the goods is one of the most important factors and conditions of competitors, and may surprise consumers in the positive, or negative direction. When studying the process of standardisation of the assortment at retail trade companies in some foreign states Swoboda, Elsner (2013) classified the process as a peripheral factors in a marketing programme. That is related to the variability of the factor. There is a direct dependence between the consumer and the range of goods. In case the consumer fails to find the required item, it is probable that the consumer will not return to the place again. Having not examined the local market and the attitudes of the consumers towards the assortment, retail companies later are forced to correct the mistakes made, which is related to additional expenses. Having studied the performance of Carrefour in Japan Dupuis, Choi and Larke (2006), noted that the Company had serious difficulties regarding the policy of the assortment of the goods, because the Japanese consumer missed a wider range of French merchandise. And conversely, when entering the American market a retail trade company Tesco performed a comprehensive survey of consumers, and developed a new type of a store – fresh and easy – offering the assortment of goods most acceptable to consumers. The examples only confirm that subject to the prevailing circumstances individual retail companies may have different approaches towards the consumer as the most important participant of the retail trade internationalisation process. When entering a foreign country a trade company plans to open a trade centre with a specific assortment of goods that affect the consumers when developing their attitudes towards the assortment of the goods. Thus in order to avoid any mistakes in the formation of the assortment in a trade centre a retail company should carry out a survey of consumer attitudes towards the assortment of goods. Quite frequently, in case a company fails to do that it has to conduct such surveys shortly after the opening of the centre.

In order to evaluate the impact of the assortment of the goods upon the attitudes of consumers, it is important to disclose the constitute elements of the factor, i.e. which of its forms are most important for building the consumer attitudes. An opinion poll among consumers would produce the means of the impacts of the assortment of the goods upon each form of the consumers' attitudes, where the only task thereafter would be to assess such means.

Authors of the present paper carried out interviews about the assortment of the goods at the IKEA trade centre among Lithuanian consumers immediately before its opening in Vilnius, and within one year after the opening.

The objective of the study is being achieved by addressing the following tasks:

- Consumers have their opinions and attitudes towards the assortment of goods at a trade centre entering the local market;
- Substantiation of the key elements of the impact of the assortment of the goods upon consumers' attitudes;
- Drawing up of a methodology for the evaluation of the impact of the assortment of goods upon consumers' attitudes;
- Consumer opinion survey carried out in Vilnius with a view to assessing the attitudes of Lithuanian consumers towards the assortment of goods at the IKEA trade centre.

Methodology For the purpose of analysis of the format in internationalization process, retailers' failure and success stories, and consumer expectations authors of the present paper used general research methods, i.e. analysis of the relevant scientific literature, comparative and systematic logical analysis.

1. ASPECTS OF THE FORMATION OF CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND THEIR THEORETICAL RATIONALE

An attitude of the consumer is perceived as his developed opinion about a subject, a phenomenon, etc. The opinion or the attitude of a consumer develops being affected by a number of factors, and it is evolving. Some factors are common for the building and development of all the attitudes of consumers, other factors are derivative from the first, and third type factors are vital for building the consumers' attitudes with regard to a specific subject or a phenomena. Since studying and examination of the actions is a separate and complex subject, further authors provide fragmented illustrations of the factors from each group. The group of common or general factors include such factors as the country's development level, its size, culture or demography. The factors assigned to the group affect the consumer's lifestyle, habits, wishes and abilities. The specific factors affecting the consumers' attitude towards a retail company entering the market, and the assortment of goods selected by it include the size of the company entering the market, the level of literacy of the consumers, presence (visiting) at the company of a specific selected trade object format in a foreign state, news about the coming trade company in the media, the information received from other consumers and other factors. The group of specific factors determines the development of each attitude of the consumer about the assortment of goods of the company entering the market. The synergy of such factors will constitute a basis for the formation of an individual attitude of each consumer regarding the composite elements of the assortment of the entering company, i.e. ranking the attributes in terms of their significance, as being most or less important, or completely unimportant. The range of such attributes may be very broad; however, a significant part of the attributes would overlap, which would permit compiling a set of most important attributes. The composite elements of format of the trade company entering the market can be readily identified both on the theoretical, and the practical level. The practical way as discussed earlier would be a questionnaire opinion poll among consumers; the findings of such opinion poll would identify the most important attributes. The theoretical analysis of research articles on the subject; the purpose of such analysis is to clearly identify consumer attitudes towards the most important attributes of the selected assortment of goods. The results produced by both methods should be similar.

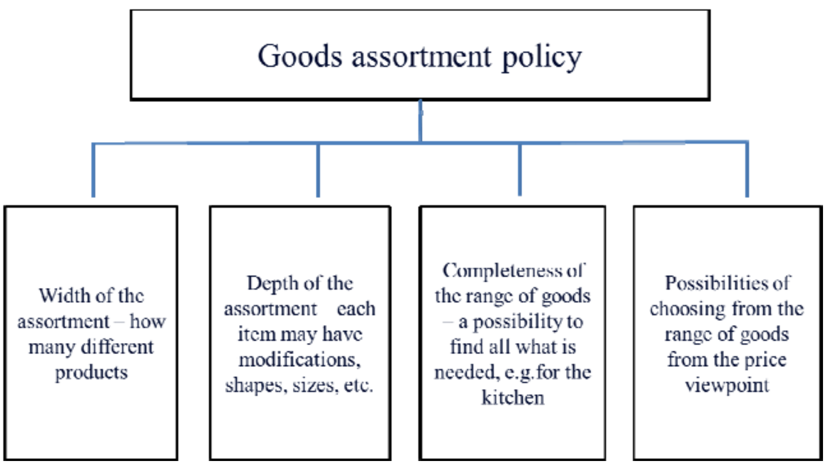
No research articles or papers examining the attitudes of consumers, their attributes, and the assortment of goods selected by the new entrant were found, mostly because such studies are the prerogative of the companies. Researchers are left with a single task – to monitor and evaluate the strategic changes in the assortment policy. There is no doubt that the trade object type selected by a trade company affect also other elements of the marketing strategy, such as the assortment policy, advertising and image. In fact all these elements are related to a brand which may be created by the trade company or a manufacturer. A trade company may have more than one trade mark, furthermore, it may have a different trade mark in each country. A brand of a store emphasises its exceptional position, and brands of corporations of retail trade contribute to the pubcations of the assortment of goods. Articles by a number of authors, such as Dick, Jain, Richardson (1997), Ailawadi, Keller (2004), Brakus, Schmitt, Zarantonello (2009), Wlodarczyk-Spiewak (2011) may be considered to be theoretical research into consumers' perception of trade marks of stores, or of retail merchandise, the experience and the process of its creation. The evolution of a brand from the manufacturer to corporation shows the essential changes in the course of the retail trade internationalisation. A brand from the viewpoint of retail trade was an object of research by Moore, Fernie, Burt (2000), Uusitalo (2001), Kent (2003), Swoboda, Haelsig, Morschett, Schramm-Klein (2007), Anselmsson, Johansson (2009), Esbjerg, Bech-Larsen (2009), Veljkovic, Bogetic, Stojkovic (2015) and others. The researchers studied the issue from several different aspect – consumers, retailers and markets. Johansson, Burt (2004) were researching purchasing of private and manufacturer's trade marks in Great Britain, Sweden and Italy. It is a complex process whereby some companies purchase trade marks created by manufacturers, while others create and produce them themselves. Harris and de Chernatory (2001) specifically noted the changes in the brands of corporations. Burghausen, Fan (2002), Burt and Sparks (2002) studied the corporation brand in the retail sector as a general object of studies. Martenson (2007), Tarnovskaja, Egl and Burt (2008) were concerned about the image of the corporate brand, and its impact upon the development of the market strategy. The area of interest of Collins-Dott, Lindle (2003) was the relation between the trade mark and the image; while Semejin, Van Riel, Ambrosini (2004) – were interested in the change of the attitude of the consumer towards a store's trade mark. Coskun, Fevrier (2008) and Ozsomer (2012), Dmitrovic, Vida (2010) were comparing the global brands with local trade marks. Lopez, Fan (2009) followed the development of a Spanish trade mark *Zara* into an international trade mark, and Tarnovskaya, de Chernatony (2011) were following the process of developing the IKEA brand to global level through culture.

Minhan, Hudleston and Bianchi (2012) carried out social studies among consumers in Melbourn inquiring their views about an American retail trade company Costco. The consumers were presented an assortment of goods with international, Australian brands and Costco Kirkland private labels. A dialogue was arranged with consumers regarding the assortment of goods; as a result, the consumers recognised most of the goods labelled with private labels, and the assortment was supplemented with goods with Australian labels. Customers also found the prices of the goods acceptable. A conclusion may be drawn in summarizing the observations above that the aspects such the breadth and the depth of the range of the merchandise, its complexity and the price. The findings were further confirmed by Tesco consumer studies carried out in the USA. A survey of consumption and purchasing habits enabled the company entering the market to present to the public a new trade object type, and compile and assortment fully meeting the needs of the local consumers.

When studying the purchasing habits in grocery stores of different types was studying the attributes of the breadth and width of the assortment, and the price attribute.

A summary of theoretical and practical studies of brands identified the attributes most important for the impact of the assortment of goods upon the attitudes of consumers; they were the breadth, depth and complexity of the assortment, as well as the selection possibility with respect to price (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Attributes of consumer attitudes affected by the assortment of goods of a trade object



Source: drawn up by authors.

The expression of the breadth of the assortment requires that the assortment satisfy customers. An opinion survey company Nielsen (2015) specified the following assortment evaluation criteria: all in a single place, i.e. available all what is required; in a single place, broad assortment, adequate stock of inventories. Consumers consider that not not only the breadth of the range of the merchandise, but also its depth is important. What is characteristic of the retailers is their trend to standardize the layout of stores, as well as the assortment of the goods, and their display pattern. Each consumer may be affected by the layout of the range of goods in a different way. A consumer whose needs are limited to a minimum basket of basic goods, are little concerned about the width or depth of the range, essentially being interested in the price factor only. And quite on the contrary for a consumer for whom the price of the goods is not the most important factor, as he might be more interested in the width or depth of the assortment, as well as its complexity. It may also be concluded that the formation of the attitudes of consumers regarding the assortment to a large extent depends on the purchasing capacity of each consumer. Therefore, the policies of assortment of goods in underdeveloped states is very different from the policies in the developing or developed countries. Furthermore, consumers in different countries differently understand the assortment of goods, and its peculiarities.

A study of opinions of consumers about attributes of the assortment at a trading centre would allow identifying the impact of each attribute of each assortment of goods, and thus derive the overall value of the factor.

2. PURPOSE AND TETHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present survey is to establish the impact of the assortment of goods at a furniture trade centre IKEA upon the consumers visiting the centre. The following tasks were defined and implemented for the purpose of attaining the objective:

1. To identify the level of the impact of specific factors upon consumers based on the attributes of the respondents, and the knowledge about the IKEA trade centre.
2. *Determine the strength of the impact of the assortment of the goods at the IKEA trade centre upon consumers;*
3. *Determine the strength of the impact of the elements of the assortment of the goods at the IKEA trade centre upon consumers.*

As one of the findings during the first study was that part of the respondents have never been to IKEA trade centres in other countries, and the results of the second study indicated that some of the respondents have never visited the IKEA centre in Vilnius as a trade object format, the following hypothesis was offered (H1): *The expectations of and the impact upon the consumers who have never visited the IKEA centre in Vilnius as a trade object format, will be less significant than those who have visited the centre.*

The theoretical rationale of the study methodology is based on the attributes of the potential impact of the assortment of the goods at the trade object upon consumers as set forth in Fig. 1. The quantitative customer interviewing method allowed identifying the strength of the impact of the factor of the trade object format and its elements. As part of the study authors of the paper examined a possible impact of the IKEA trade centre as a trade object goods assortment upon the attitudes of the consumers. The first study was carried out immediately before the opening of the IKEA trade centre, and the second study was completed one year after the opening of the centre. The questionnaire was prepared following the instructions on the preparation of questionnaire, seeking to ensure that all the necessary questions have been answered, and the purpose of the interview has been achieved. Significant attention was dedicated to the social factors of the respondents; such factors are indicative of the distribution of the respondents according to their attributes and the knowledge about the IKEA centre, and instrumental in establishing whether the potential impact upon the consumers will be affected by their gender, age, education and the knowledge about the IKEA centre. The most important task is to determine the level of the possible impact upon the consumers of each element of each factor of the assortment of goods at IKEA.

In order to obtain statistically reliable study results able to reflect the characteristics of the universal essence it is necessary to select the appropriate respondents. The opinion survey included only persons older than 18. Although persons under 18 might be decision makers in relation to purchases, they are not purchasers at the IKEA trade centre. The respondents were selected by way of probability stratified sampling method, because the population is not homogeneous, and can be broken down into strata.

Respondents from all towns and cities of Lithuania took part in the study. An identical study was carried out one year after the opening of the IKEA trade centre. The principal objective to be achieved within the framework of the repeated interview was to ensure the participation of more than half of the respondents who had taken part in the first survey. Such method of interviewing would allow a more accurate systematisation of the data, and the results will better reflect the possible impact and the evaluation.

As was earlier pointed out a factor of a trade object format is made up of four elements and five estimate sections. The breakdown may be expressed as Vnvį = (Vn/4)/5; where Vnvį – mean of the n factor with respect to the number of factors and the estimate sections; Vn – mean of the n factor; 4 – number of factors; 5 – number of estimate sections.

In this specific case the coefficient of the complex impact is:

Fk = (F1/4)/5 + (F2/4)5 + (F3/4)/5 + (F4/4)/5;

where Fk – coefficient of the complex impact of the group of factors of a trade object format;

F1, 2, 3, 4 – mean of the first, second, third and fourth element of the group of the trade object format;

4 – total elements;

5 – total estimate sections.

The coefficient of the complex impact of the group of factors of a trade object format may not be higher than 1, and that of each element is 0.25. A more comprehensive and/or accurate survey can be carried out by comparing the coefficient of the complex impact of the trade object format with the maximum possible coefficient.

3. RESULTS OF THE FIRST SURVEY AND THEIR ASSESSMENT

The first survey of the yet-to-be customers of the IKEA trade centre in Lithuania was carried out immediately before the opening of the centre in August 2013.

Total 698 respondents participated in the survey, however, only 663 questionnaires were selected as suitable to be assessed for the purpose of the study. As many as 64 respondents did not mark the box with the gender, therefore it was not possible to provide accurate statistics on the number of the respondents by gender. It should be noted that about 30 % of the respondents within the survey had visited IKEA trade centres in other countries. Therefore, for the purpose of discussing the results, this group of respondents was specifically singled out. The demographic characteristics of the respondents within the survey were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Total respondents, break down by gender, previous visits at the IKEA trade centres, and their education

	Quantity	Part (%) in total respon-dents quantity
1. All respondents	663	100
1.1. Men	347	52,3
1.2. Women	253	38,2
1.3. Not specified	63	9,5
2. Respondens those had visited other countries the IKEA stores and those who had not visited other coun-tries the IKEA stores	663	100
2.1. Had visited the IKEA stores	195	29,4
2.2. Had not visited the IKEA stores	468	70,6
3. Respondents repartition by education	663	100
3.1. Secondary education	57	8,6
3.1.1. Men	33	5,0
3.1.2. Women	24	3,6
3.2. Vocational education	79	11,9
3.2.1. Men	42	6,3
3.2.2. Women	37	5,6
3.3. Not ended university education	37	5,6
3.3.1. Men	17	2,6
3.3.2. Women	20	3,0
3.4. University education	427	64,4
3.4.1. Men	255	38,5
3.4.2. Women	172	25,9
3.5. Not specified	63	9,5

Source: drawn up by authors.

Figure 2. Mean averages of the impact of the elements of the range of goods at the IKEA trade centre upon the decisions of consumers.

Source: drawn up by authors.

The range of education of the respondents is fairly wide. As evident from the results, about 2/3 of the respondents were persons of higher education.No statistically significant difference of the results in terms of the gender (p = 0.108) was established when analysing the replies to the a statement *'Do you know when the IKEA trade centre will be opened in Vilnius'*. 56.5 % of men respondents (N = 288) and 43.5 % women (N = 222) were aware of the forthcoming opening of the IKEA trade centre.

The respondents were asked to assess (on a scale of 5, when 5 is the highest value), the impact of a specific factor towards the views of the consumers towards the opening of the IKEA centre. The responses to the question as to which attributes of the IKEA trade centre are vital for the decision of consumers to visit the centre (when the interviewing was conducted before the opening of the centre) led to a conclusion that the most important attribute was the *possibilities of selection of assortment with respect to the price* (4.22 points, see Fig. 2).

High scores, and scores of the other three attributes. This shows that the important factors for the consumers are the complexity, depth and width of the assortment of the goods at the IKEA centre. It may be concluded in this respect that the expectations of the consumers for the assortment factor are fairly high.

4. RESULTS OF THE SECOND SURVEY AND THEIR ASSESSMENT

The second survey of Lithuanian customers was carried out one year after the opening of the IKEA trade centre in Vilnius. Total 925 respondents participated in the survey. Of the total respondents 67% (N = 620) had visited the IKEA centre in Vilnius, and 33 % (N = 305) of them had never visited the centre. *Social-demographic characteristics of the survey participants* From among the respondents who have indicated their date 520 were women (56.2% of the total respondents), and 369 men (39.9%). 36 respondents (4%) did not indicate their gender.

An analysis of the distribution of the respondents by profession and the region in which the respondent was interviewed showed that the largest part of the respondents were specialists (46%, N = 410). There were 192 respondents representing Vilnius, 57 respondents were from Kaunas, 23 and 22 from Šiauliai region and Utena region, respectively. The difference between the results of the survey among the respondents that have visited the IKEA centre in Vilnius, and those who had never visited the centre was statistically significant (See Table 2).

Table 2. Mean averages of the impact of the elements of the range of goods at the IKEA trade centre upon decisions of consumers.

Feature of goods assortment	Had you visited the IKEA store in Vilnius?	Average	Standart deviation	Prob. T
Width of the assortment	Yes	3,97	1,047	0,000
	No	3,03	1,925	
Depth of the assortment	Yes	3,88	1,017	0,000
	No	3,03	1,881	
Completeness of the range of goods	Yes	4,08	,984	0,000
	No	3,09	1,929	
Possibilities of choosing from the range of goods from the price view-point	Yes	4,12	,945	0,000
	No	3,24	1,955	

Source: drawn up by authors.

The average of the impact of each element of the goods range at the IKEA trade centre upon respondents who have visited the centre range from 4.12 to 3.88, and with respect to those who have never visited the centre the average was above 3, and the range was 3.24-2.35 points. The findings of the survey supported the hypothesis of authors. The mean of each element of the respondents that had visited the centre, or those who had never visited the centre differed at 0.85-0.92 points, and could be explained by the following possible motives of the respondents:

– a visit of the respondents to the IKEA trade centre helped them to develop their final opinion about each element of the range of the goods at the centre;
– the respondents that have never visited the IKEA trade centre were to a much larger extent affected by the public opinion about the negative aspects of the trade centre (distanced, high prices, disappointing discount system, etc.)

It may be assumed that a visit to the IKEA centre would modify and better the attitude of the consumers who have not previously visited the centre, about the width, depth, complexity of the assortment, and the selection options with respect to the price. The high scores assigned by visitors to the centre for the width, depth, complexity of the assortment, and the selection options with respect to the price were positively affected by the abundance of the goods, their presentation and display, and the impressiveness of the very trading centre. The scores assigned by visitors to the centre for the impact of the individual elements upon decisions of consumers within the framework of the first study were very different from the results of the first study. The assortment bread and width score was by as much as 0.08 and 0.02 higher, and only the score for the selection possibility with respect to the price was accordingly -0.1 lower, but was still the highest of all elements. Nevertheless, price is the most sensitive element of the assortment of goods. It may be concluded that the administration of the IKEA trade centre managed to guess and meet the expectations of Lithuanian consumers. This is undoubtedly the result of IKEA as a global trade company.

5.INTEGRATED EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST AND SECOND SURVEY

The coefficient of the complex impact of the IKEA centre on the attitudes of the consumers computed for the first and second survey according to the formula submitted in the methodology part of the present paper represented the scale of the impact (see Table 3).

Table 3. Coefficient of the complex impact of the IKEA centre goods assortment on the attitudes of the consumers computed for the first and second survey

Name of survey	*Coefficient of the complex impact*	*Derogation from the maximum*
Survey I	0.8095	0.1905
Survey II	0.8025	0.1975
of which:		
earlier visitors to the centre	0.8385	0.1615
Never visited	0.6195	0.3805

Source: drawn up by authors

The overall coefficient of the complex impact during the second survey became lower by a lower coefficient of the respondents who have never visited the centre. The coefficient of the respondents who have visited the centre of the second survey was by 0.029 higher than the coefficient obtained during the first survey. The maximum possible value of the coefficient is 1.00, therefore the complex impact coefficient for the first and the second survey was relatively high. This was to an extent determined not only by a significant global experience of IKEA, but also by the surveys of the Lithuanian market. The coefficients of the impact upon consumer attitudes show a potential of such coefficients to grow, provided the administration of the IKEA centre takes appropriate measures, i.e. apply discount cards for all goods, improve the working hours of the shopping centre, and others. The results of both surveys demonstrate that the range of goods selected by a commercial company entering the market does have an impact upon the attitudes of the consumer.

CONCLUSION

The common features of the trade object format of all commercial entities are only the defined number of the forms of goods, while all other characteristics may be very different. Even the goods assortment of the same retail commercial company may be different in different countries, with an exception of the number of forms of the goods that may also differ.

National consumers in one way or another respond to an entering retail company, and the assortment of the goods the company selected to implement. Thus the consumers start to gradually build their attitudes towards the assortment of the goods the company chose to implement. A lot of factors affect the results; such factors are general, derivative from the general results and specific factors important for the formation of the attitudes of an individual subject or a user of a phenomenon.

Research literature and papers do not directly study the impact of the assortment of the goods upon the attitudes of the customers. The same is true regarding the composite parts of the attitude, i.e. elements. Such surveys may be conducted by retail companies, however, the results remain as commercial secret and the results are not made public.

The analysis carried out within the framework of the present paper of research literature on stores, retail corporations, its development and evolution, the attitude of consumers towards individual elements of the factor, the problems related to selection and implementation of the range of the goods by retail companies in individual regions of the world and countries identified four most important elements constituting a basis for the formation of the consumer attitudes towards the range of goods.

The theoretical rationale of the study methodology is based on the attributes of the potential impact of the range of the goods upon consumers. The study used the quantitative consumer inquiry method, and referred to the methodology for the computation of the coefficient of the complex impact of the range of the goods upon the attitudes of consumers.

The first survey of the yet-to-be customers of the IKEA trade centre in Lithuania was carried out immediately before the opening of the centre in August 2013. Total 663 questionnaires were recognised to be suitable for research purposes. The study conducted and constituting the basis for the present paper proved that consumers do have their opinions regarding the range of goods of the IKEA trade centre. Consumers assigned 4.22 points of 5 possible to the attribute of the possibility of choice of assortment with respect to the price. 4.08 points were assigned for the complexity of assortment, 3.95 points were assigned for the width, and 3.80 points – for the depth of the assortment.

Total 925 respondents participated in the second survey conducted one year after the opening of the IKEA trade centre, of which 67% had earlier visited the IKEA centre,and the averages of the impact of the assortment of goods upon the attitudes of the consumers were significantly higher than those which had never visited the centre. The findings of the survey supported the hypothesis of authors. The highest score – 4.12 – was assigned to the possibility to select the assortment with respect to the price. The results of the second survey proved that there should be two surveys to assess the effect of the assortment; one survey should be conducted before the opening of the centre, and the second must be at least six months after the opening of the centre. The first survey demonstrates the attitude of the consumers in the process of its formation, and the second survey shows the attitude already fully formed.

The coefficient of the complex impact upon the respondents who have visited the IKEA centre the second survey is slightly higher than the identical coefficient obtained with the framework of the first survey. The high coefficient of the complex impact shows that by its trade object format the retail trade company IKEA essentially met the expectations of the customers.

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