Marketing the downtown through geographically enhanced consumer segmentation

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify, using a case study, whether consumers in a metropolitan area can be meaningfully segmented geographically such that it can understand the way they perceive and interact with the downtown district and to delineate the implications of the findings for business improvement area marketing initiatives from a management perspective.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 650 visitors to downtown Toronto are interviewed using a pretested questionnaire. Their responses are related to their location within the metropolitan area. Correspondence analysis (CA) is applied to the data to visually identify possible market segments.

Findings – The analysis identified four distinct place-based visitor segments. Each of these segments exhibited behaviour patterns that are distinct and intrinsically meaningful. The analysis further shows that perceptions and current interactions with the district are likely to change depending on where in the metropolis its consumers live.

Practical implications – Since visitor perceptions are place dependent, it is difficult to implement a single place marketing campaign that is relevant to each segment. The results suggest that it needs to develop communication strategies that are specific to each segment, incorporating an understanding of why they visit downtown, what they think of the area, what media they consume, how they get around and what their needs are in terms of lifestage.

Originality/value – By going beyond the traditional analysis of geographic variables and incorporating consumer response variables in the analysis, this paper provides a stronger basis for market segmentation and management action with regard to place marketing. The application of CA provides a visual way to understand the segments.

Keywords Market segmentation, Consumer marketing, Business improvement, Cities, Canada

Paper type Case study

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that over recent decades many downtown areas across North America have suffered the long-term consequences of suburbanization and associated urban sprawl (Bunting and Fillion, 2007; Yeates, 1999). Downtown districts in urban areas have traditionally acted as focal points for social, cultural and commercial activities (Canadian Urban Institute, 2001). However, many lost this focus as suburban living and employment became more popular (Filion *et al.*, 2004). In the early 1900s, approximately one-fifth of Canadians lived in "urban" areas; however, by 2006, this proportion had increased to over four-fifths, against a total population that more than trebled to over 32 million (Statistics Canada, 2007). Canada, compared to the USA, has managed to comparatively maintain many of the dynamic characteristics of its major downtowns (Lea *et al.*, 2003). For example, the metropolitan markets of Toronto and Vancouver have been the preferred destination for new immigrants to

Canada, and Calgary and Edmonton have both experienced substantial population growth in recent years due to the oil sands and gas boom. Yet, despite such population growth, Canada's downtowns and their central retailing strips have suffered the consequences of the spread of large format (big box) corporate chain outlets, the suburbanization of retail and decades of structural and aesthetic neglect (Hernandez *et al.*, 2006; Yeates, 1999). Such consequences are not irreversible, and revitalization initiatives have been known to change the character, perceptions and function of downtowns, attracting new businesses, residents and visitors (Mitchell, 2001). In the 1970s, in response to concerns over urban decline, the business improvement area (BIA) concept (termed business improvement districts in the USA and UK) was created in the province of Ontario, Canada. Since then over 300 BIAs have been created. This paper provides a case study of marketing segmentation within the downtown Yonge BIA, located in the heart of Toronto, Canada's corporate capital and largest city.

While downtown revitalization is typically associated with bricks-and-mortar upgrades, its success is often measured in how well these improvements increase public acceptance and use of the area. As such, marketing campaigns are frequent cornerstones of any revitalization effort, whether as re-branding initiatives, event-specific campaigns, or simple reminders to visit the area (Torella, 2007; Bramwell and Rawding, 1996). As in any other marketing effort, it is important to understand existing perceptions of the district in order to connect fully with the audience and communicate effectively the revitalized district's appeal. This paper assesses the geographical dimensions of place marketing by examining the various ways in which local residents relate to and interact with a major downtown commercial district in Toronto. While the case study does not evaluate the economic effect of revitalization (e.g. traditional economic impact models and multipliers), it assesses the differences in the way various types of urban consumers according to their place of residence (geography) relate to the downtown, and how this can be incorporated in customer segmentation (Chakrapani *et al.*, 2006).

The paper aims to develop a more complete understanding of the relationships between residents' neighborhoods, their attitudes and their patterns of downtown visitation. It addresses and is structured according to the following objectives:

- To understand the way consumers perceive and interact with the Downtown district in relation to their location in Toronto's urban framework.
- To generate consumer research-based market segments that are aligned with the geography of the area so that marketing communications can be designed and targeted more effectively.
- To delineate the implications of the findings for BIA marketing initiatives from a management perspective.

Downtown Yonge BIA within the Toronto area

The City of Toronto is the largest city in Canada and the fifth-largest in North America in terms of population. (City of Toronto, 2007). Its broader metropolitan area, known as the Greater Toronto area (GTA), consists of five regions including the City of Toronto (population 2.5 million) and houses approximately 5.5 million residents. No longer just the site of Toronto's "bedroom communities", many of the GTA's centres have become cities in their own right, and as a consequence there are a variety of shopping, dining

and entertainment opportunities throughout the polynucleated GTA, many offering similar "chain" shopping and dining experiences to what can be found in Toronto's commercial core. The downtown Yonge BIA is a key geographic focal point for the GTA and a central place in Toronto's urban hierarchy, particularly in terms of retail shopping (Figure 1) and public transit accessibility. In 2006, there were approximately 400 retail stores within the BIA's boundaries, with stores located primarily within the Toronto Eaton Centre (a 1.6 million square foot super regional shopping mall) and along Yonge Street, famed as the world's longest street and the dividing line between the east and west of the city (Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, 2007).

Increasingly, stores on the main retail strip are oriented to a mainstream consumer who may already shop at the Toronto Eaton Centre, with major retail chains opening stores along Yonge Street. The district is also the notorious home of some seedier businesses, in part, a legacy of the past, when the downtown Yonge strip was known for its "adults only" clubs and massage parlours. The area has also been widely perceived as suffering from street crime, drug dealing and pan-handling (an entrenched image that the BIA has proactively worked hard at changing in partnership with the Toronto Police Service and local businesses).

Beginning in the 1970s, downtown Yonge experienced decay, decline and acquired a reputation as not particularly "safe". In 2001, a BIA representing about 2,000 local property owners and their tenants, was established in order to help the district seek to reclaim and maintain its desired position as Toronto's premier shopping, business and entertainment destination. Its strategy focuses on capital and aesthetic improvements, and taking steps to ensure that patrons of the district feel safe and comfortable. To date, its largest-scale efforts have included upgrading the area's sidewalks, boosting foot-patrol police presence, cleaning graffiti and providing holiday decor, installing branded street signs and branded traffic pole signage that distinguish and demarcate the district as unique, and facilitating joint marketing efforts among its merchants, such as the web site, printed visitor publications and the downtown Yonge Discovery Team (mobile ambassadors in Spring/Summer).

The success of such improvements is measured by consumer response to the area. Therefore, an understanding of the ways that Toronto-area consumers relate to downtown Yonge is critical to the BIA's success, as it facilitates strategic investments in improvements and messaging that resonate with consumers. The seasonal tourist market is not included within this analysis; instead, the paper focuses on the resident consumer base as it is the primary market for the BIA. Recent history attests that the tourist market can be highly volatile and unpredictable within Toronto with many external factors such as USA-Canadian dollar exchange rates (e.g. the recent parity strength of the Canadian "Loonie" (dollar) against the USA "Greenback" (dollar)), health concerns and safety concerns (e.g. the SARS outbreak of 2003) and Canadian foreign policy (e.g. with regard to the USA-led Iraq war) impacting tourist flows.

It has been noted that there is a strong relationship between consumer interaction with a district and their opinions of it (Atkinson, 2006). This implies that consumers' geographical distance from the district may affect their attitudes by modulating the ways in which consumers interact with the district. As such, it is useful to investigate specifically whether attitudes and usage of the downtown Yonge area vary depending on where consumers live and work. It is argued in this paper that such understanding
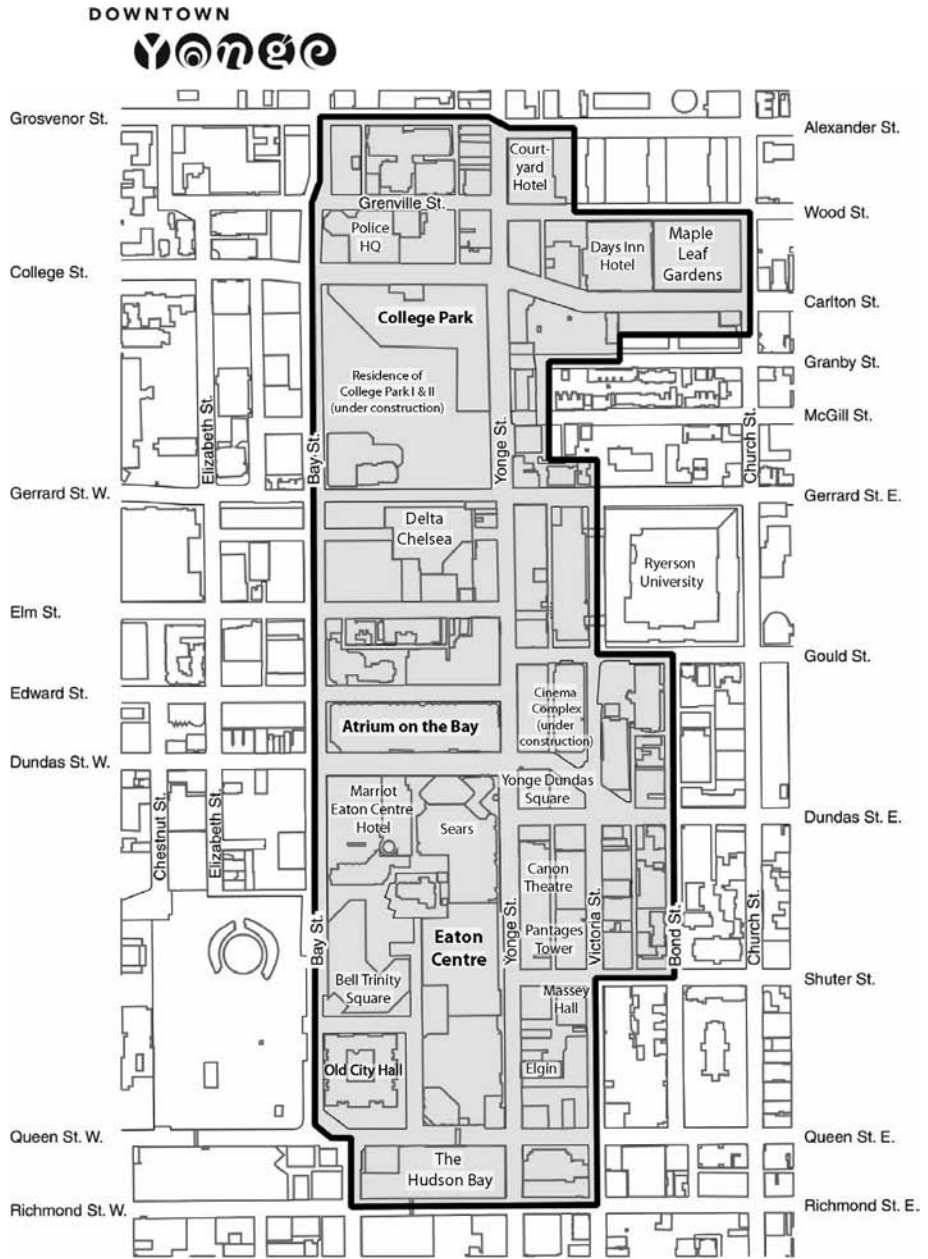
Figure 1.
Downtown Yonge BIA

enhances consumer segmentation for the BIA and can be leveraged to promote optimal use of the BIA's marketing resources.

Methodology

This paper applies correspondence analysis (CA), a visual multivariate technique (which combines elements of chi-square and principal components analyses to produce visual representations), to market research data from a large survey of Toronto area residents. The CA is used as a method of segmenting and graphically mapping survey respondents into a series of meaningful customer groups. This section provides details on the underlying survey data and the constructed variables used in the analysis.

The resident survey

In the summer of 2005, the downtown Yonge BIA commissioned a telephone survey of 650 GTA-area residents, randomly drawn over the course of two weeks from two geographically-defined samples: 225 residents in Toronto's downtown area, and 425 outside the downtown area. The data are overwhelmingly categorical, and centre around three priorities identified by the BIA marketing committee:

(1) why they visit;

(2) whether they would recommend downtown Yonge as a place to visit for specific purposes like shopping or entertainment; and

(3) perceived barriers to enjoying the downtown Yonge area (e.g. parking problems, fear of crime, etc.).

Respondents who visited the area at least three times per year were asked detailed questions relating to their attitudes of and interactions with the district. Less-frequent visitors were not asked these questions, and thus were coded as "missing" for the purposes of this research.

After the variables of interest were selected from the dataset (Table I), we explored various configurations of variable categories that would explain the maximum amount of variance while retaining a meaningful interpretive base. This resulted in many refinements of the input variables such as the combining of the two highest income and age categories; and the combining of all conditional recommendations of downtown under the category "would not recommend". To mitigate the problems associated with low counts and incomplete data, wherever appropriate, we entered them as supplementary variables, which enabled clearer interpretation of patterns in the data.

Geographic variables

In order to study the relationship between consumer geography and their behaviours with regard to downtown Yonge, a set of geographic variables were derived using the six-digit postal codes provided by the study respondents. The street-network distance between respondents' home neighborhoods to the main intersection of the downtown Yonge area at the intersection of Yonge Street and Dundas Street was calculated using a geographic information system and a comprehensive street network data set. Preliminary analytical exploration with an iterative technique yielded four categories of network distances which proved robust in a sensitivity analysis that examined other categorizations and alternative distance calculations based on Euclidean and

Abbreviation	Full variable name
18-24	Age 18-24
24-34	Age 25-34
35-49	Age 35-49
50 +	Age 50 +
< $25 K	Household income (HHI) under $25K
$25-59K	HHI between $25 and $59K
$60-99K	HHI between $60 and $99K
$100K +	HHI over $100K
Shop-Y	Would recommend for shopping
Shop-N	Not recommend for shopping
NL-Y	Would recommend for nightlife
NL-N	Not recommend for nightlife
Male	Gender: male
Female	Gender: female
Print	Primary source of info print
Broadcast	Primary source of info broadcast
Internet	Primary source of info internet
WoM	Primary source of info word-of-mouth
Monthly	Visits once a month on average
Weekly	Visits once a week on average
Daily	Visits once a day on average
1-Shop	Primary purpose is shopping
1-Dine/Ent	Primary purpose is dining/entnmnt
1-Gen Visit	Primary purpose is general visit
1-Biz/Other	Primary purpose is business/other
Work-NT	Work outside Toronto
Work-MT	Work in metro Toronto
Work-DT	Work in downtown Toronto
Work-DY	Work in downtown Yonge
< 4 km	Lives less than 4 kilometres away
4-10 km	Lives 4.1-10.0 kilometres away
10-20 km	Lives 10.1-20.0 kilometres away
20 + km	Lives 20 or more kilometres away

Table I.
Variable names and
abbreviations

urban-context measurements. The final categorization of distance used in this paper is effective in explaining the interaction among the variables, and has intrinsic meaning as a proxy of urban context. Specifically, the four urban-context categories are:

(1) downtown residents (living within 4.0 kilometres of Yonge-Dundas);

(2) inner urban residents (living between 4.1 and 10.0 kilometres from Yonge-Dundas);

(3) inner suburban residents (living between 10.1 and 20.0 kilometres from Yonge-Dundas); and

(4) outer suburban residents (living more than 20 kilometres from Yonge-Dundas).

Analysis and key findings
CA is the primary analytic technique used in this paper. CA creates perceptual Cartesian-type maps of the relationships among categorical data assembled in contingency tables (Everitt and Dunn, 2001). In essence, CA reduces the individual χ^2

distances among categorical variables into fewer dimensions using principal
components analysis (Greenacre, 2007). The relationships among the variables with
respect to the highest-contributing dimensions can then be plotted on a perceptual
map, and interpreted both mathematically and visually with respect to their positions
relative to each axis (Chakrapani, 2004; Bendixen, 1996).

Correspondence analysis results
Since we are exploring the relationship between urban geography and consumer
attitudes and behaviours, the CA input table consisted of categories of consumer
demographics, interactions and reported shopping behaviours cross-tabulated against
four distance intervals. The χ^2 statistic for the analysis was 158.9, (significant at 0.001
level) indicating significant differences among consumers living within each
geographic area. The first two dimensions extracted by CA explained
approximately 97 per cent of the total variance of all the data entered into the
analysis. Consequently, we focus on interpreting these two dimensions. The
correspondence plot depicting the relationships among all the variables is shown in
Figure 2.

If we examine the variables from left to right along the *X*-axis (ignoring how they are
placed on the *Y*-axis), we see an ordinal progression from daily to monthly visits,
suggesting that this is the frequency of visit axis. Table II, which shows the absolute
contribution of each variable to the two primary dimensions, confirms this pattern: this
dimension is clearly driven by visit frequency, suggesting that the greater the distance
between home and downtown Yonge, the lower the frequency of visit, as the concept of
distance decay suggests. Location of workplace, a supplementary variable, follows the
same pattern. A more interesting pattern is the monotonic relationship between
frequency of visit and "likelihood to recommend" on the *X*-axis: more frequent visitors
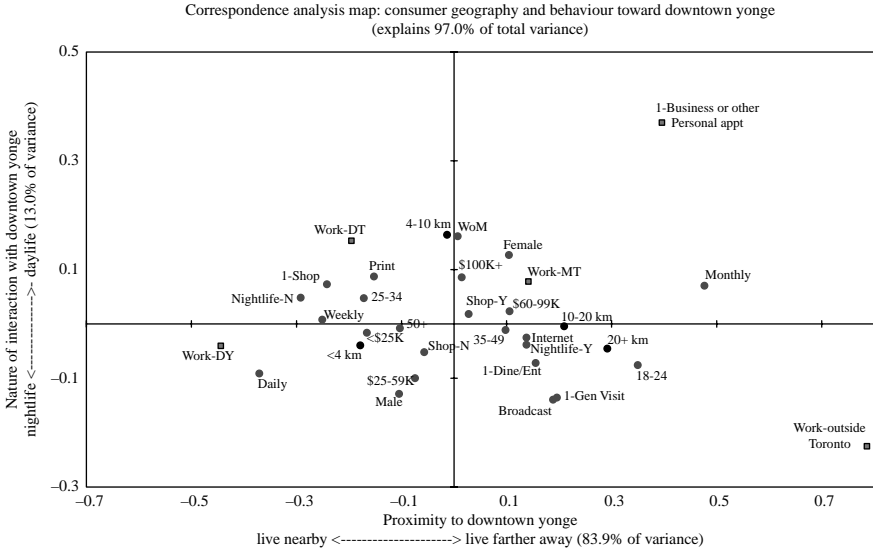are less likely to recommend the area's nightlife offerings than are monthly visitors.

Correspondence analysis map: consumer geography and behaviour toward downtown yonge
(explains 97.0% of total variance)

Figure 2.
CA highlighting key
geographies and consumer
characteristics and
behaviour

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Consumer attributes (row variables)		
Age 18-24	55.1	16.7
Age 25-34	26.3	12.9
Age 35-49	10.7	1.0
Age 50 +	9.3	0.4
HHI under $25K	10.3	0.6
HHI $26-$59K	5.3	62.0
HHI $60-$99K	10.3	3.2
HHI $100K or higher	0.2	32.6
Recommend the area for retail shopping	2.1	5.4
Does not recommend the area for shopping	2.4	13.2
Recommends DY for entertainment/nightlife	42.1	9.1
Does not recommend DY for entertainment/nightlife	87.5	15.4
Gender – male	17.5	171.6
Gender – female	19.2	182.0
Learns about DY events through print media	28.4	59.9
Learns about DY events through broadcast media	41.5	128.0
Learns about DY events through the internet	6.6	3.3
Learns about DY events through word-of-mouth	0.2	65.3
Visits DY on a monthly basis	303.4	42.5
Visits DY on a weekly basis	67.8	0.4
Visits DY on a daily basis	130.0	50.9
Primary purpose of visit is shopping	87.7	51.2
Primary purpose of visit is dining and entertainment	26.0	35.8
Primary purpose is general visiting	10.3	36.7
Consumer geography (column variables)		
Less than 4 km from Yonge-Dundas Intersection	0.4	0.1
Between 4.1 and 10 kilometres from Yonge-Dundas	0.0	0.8
Between 10.1 and 20 kilometres from Yonge-Dundas	0.1	0.0
Over 20.1 kilometres from Yonge-Dundas	0.5	0.1

Table II.
Absolute contributions to inertia (variance) by rows and columns

Notes: Supplementary variables: primary purpose is business or other appointment; works outside the City of Toronto; works in Metro Toronto; works in Downtown Toronto; works in Downtown Yonge

Frequent visitors are also more likely to be critical of the district's shopping and nightlife offerings than monthly visitors and those from farther away. This can be interpreted to mean that less frequent visitors tend to notice more of what downtown has to offer.

On the *Y*-axis, the variables that are the furthest apart, meaning that they drive this dimension the most, relate to how residents learn about events in the area (broadcast media and word-of-mouth). When we examine the points below the *X*-axis, we note that they generally deal with aspects of an evening or after-hours trip. The points above the *X*-axis are variables that relate to daytime visits, which seem to be largely oriented towards shopping. In contrast to those enjoying the area's nightlife, these daytime visitors are likely to learn about events in downtown Yonge through print media and particularly word-of-mouth. Since our preliminary analysis establishes how the two axes and the four quadrants can be interpreted, we will discuss the results with respect to these axes as well as the other plots on the map, beginning with perceptions of downtown Yonge's shopping and nightlife offerings.

Some of the other insights gained from the CA plot include:

• Shopping is not overwhelmingly recommended by any one group of visitors, perhaps because of its centrality in Toronto's retail hierarchy; however, recommendation of nightlife varies considerably with demography and visit frequency.

• The likelihood to recommend the district appears to be linked to increased distance from the area.

• Respondents aged 25-34 are the most frequent visitors to downtown Yonge of the age groups studied, and tend to be more enthusiastic about the area's shopping and other daytime activities than its nightlife. Those aged 50 and older are similar in visit frequency to this younger age group, but seem to prefer downtown Yonge's dining and entertainment offerings to its shopping.

• Lower-income respondents are more likely to use and recommend the district's nightlife than higher-income respondents, who are more likely to shop in the area, but visit less frequently.

• Broadcast media is associated with those living the farthest away and the least-frequent visitors, but also with those visitors interested in dining, entertainment and general visiting. It is also well-associated with the youngest age group. On the other hand, print media is associated with nearby, more frequent visitors interested in shopping. This may be a consequence of differing commuting modes in the suburbs and the city.

• Workplace location, entered as a supplementary variable, clearly relates to visit frequency as well as the type of visit, having overall a pattern similar to residential location.

Identifying geographically enhanced consumer segments

By more closely examining the correspondence plot, we identified four major consumer segments, each of which is defined by attributes of demography, perceptions and behaviour and closely linked to consumer geography, as shown in Figure 3. We broadly named these segments:

• inner outsiders;
• affluent insiders;
• involved outsiders; and
• casual outsiders.

A more detailed description is given as follows.

Inner outsiders

On the lower left quadrant of the plot, a cluster of the traditional nearby residents can be identified – those for whom downtown Yonge and nearby neighborhoods were home prior to its recent turnaround and accompanying condo boom. Those in this group are inner-downtown residents living within 4 kilometres from the area. They have lower incomes and while they live near downtown Yonge and visit it frequently, they would not recommend the area as a shopping destination, and may prefer to spend their time in the area at its inexpensive quick-serve restaurants and pubs.
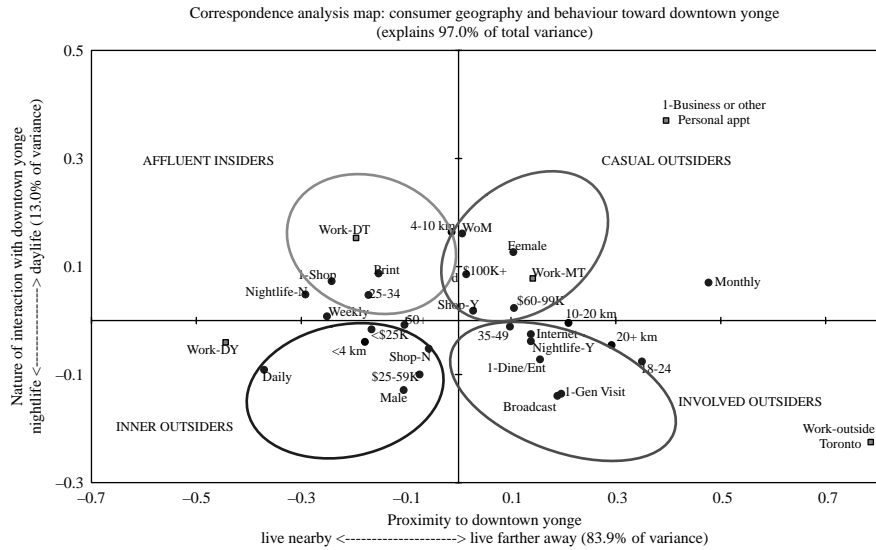
Correspondence analysis map: consumer geography and behaviour toward downtown yonge
(explains 97.0% of total variance)

Figure 3.
CA map: identifying the
consumer segments

Affluent insiders

In contrast to these residents are the consumers shown on the top left region of the map. Those in this group are inner urban residents who live within 4-10 kilometres of Yonge-Dundas. They are both younger and older adults who live and work in the outer regions of downtown Toronto, who learn about events in downtown Yonge through reading ads and articles in print or through friends and colleagues. Having generally higher incomes, this group is likely to come to downtown Yonge to shop but is still not likely to recommend the district for this purpose; perhaps their affluence and dispersion throughout Toronto lead them to recommend other neighborhoods for shopping, when asked. Furthermore, they are uninterested in the nightlife it provides – neither visiting nor recommending it for this purpose. This is likely a function of where they live as well as their tastes as both younger and older urbanites, for whom the family-oriented theatre and dining located in downtown Yonge may be less relevant.

Involved outsiders

Consumers in the lower right corner of the map are most likely to partake in and recommend entertainment and nightlife in downtown Yonge, despite living the farthest away. These outer-suburban residents live over 20 kilometres from Yonge-Dundas or in a smaller outlying urban centre. On the whole, this group appears to be "tuned in" to information about goings-on there through television or radio, and proactive seekers of this information on the internet. This is most likely related to their distance from the district – they are willing to travel to downtown Yonge for entertainment, but want to be sure there is something to see when they get there. The youngest demographic is also represented in this segment: this group is less affluent but social and likely view the area as a cheap destination to meet friends.

Casual outsiders
The segment on the upper right corner of the map consists of upper-middle-class, more family-aged women. These suburban residents live between 10 and 20 kilometres from Yonge-Dundas. They are less-frequent visitors to the area but are most likely to recommend the area as a great shopping district, although their primary purposes for visiting the region may be quite diverse. This group has enough money to enjoy the area's better stores and recommend them to their friends, with word-of-mouth communication strongly associated with these consumers.

Management implications
Despite the differences in geographic scale, these findings mirror those in the tourism studies conducted by Hunt (1975), Reid and Reid (1997) and Yuksel (2004), in that visitors from nearby locations tend to be more selective in their use of the area (e.g. enjoying a small set of activities on a reduced budget) than those from more distant origins who tend to maximize their activities, purchases and length of stay. For many surburbanites, the novelty of visiting a place that is "out-of-the-ordinary" may encourage them to take more pleasure in their downtown Yonge experience, whether an afternoon of shopping or an evening of theatre. On the other hand, for those nearby residents downtown Yonge may be a practical place to run errands, but often "passed through" in order to go somewhere else. Yet the suburbanites who choose downtown Yonge as an out-of-the-way place to enjoy their day or evening are more likely to have a good time amidst its hustle and bustle, and recommend it as such.

The literature also speaks to our findings on the demographic and lifestyle motivators of consumer interaction. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and Beerli and Martín (2004) note the correlations between individuals' socioeconomic status and life stage to their perceptions and preferences of certain areas; Jones and Simmons (1993) discuss how household composition and behavioural and psychographic "lifestyle" factors are linked to household geography and impact on the spending patterns of GTA residents in particular. Reid and Reid (1997) indicate the different ways in which "origin markets" learn about destinations, concluding that the best approach to tourism marketing speaks to different groups of consumers based on the types of media they consume, where they live, how they commute to work and their life stages.

It is likely that where consumers live with respect to downtown Yonge affects their relationship with the district not only because of the familiarity that is often a product of proximity, but also as a broad measure of lifestyle. Within each of the four consumer segments identified, geography plays a distinct and key role, with a unique residential geography dominating each consumer group and explaining much of the behaviour of that group in terms of the demographics and attitudes resulting from residential location. Since downtown Yonge is a central point in Downtown Toronto, one's proximity to it – especially when conceptualized in macro-level categories – tends to mirror life stage: younger adults living downtown, families in the suburbs and older people moving back into the core. In this sense, consumer geography both motivates and restricts time spent downtown: respondents' lifestyles, often products of where they live, predispose some nearby consumers to shop in the district but avoid its nightlife, predispose more distant groups to enjoy a night on the town with their families in downtown Yonge but shop closer to home, and predispose immediate consumers to avoid the area's shopping but enjoy its cheaper fast-food options.

The findings reported have not only theoretical implications for understanding the spatial dimensions of consumer behaviour, but also many practical uses in segmented marketing and programming, helpful to organizations like the downtown Yonge BIA and the associated urban marketing agencies that consult with them. CA, even using fairly broad-based categories of consumer behaviour and demography is useful for organizations like BIAs in that it allows them to visualize the attitudes, behaviours and characteristics of their consumer bases. It is also useful as a tool to provide further "value-add" from existing market research initiatives. This facilitates awareness and a more detailed familiarity with consumer segments. As a result, they can position their communications, respectively, gaining efficiencies by speaking directly to defined segments of differently interested people.

The insights provided by the correspondence plot suggest that traditional "broad appeal" marketing strategies, while easily devised and implemented, are not necessarily the best means for BIAs to communicate with the public: first because not everyone who likes the area enjoys it for the same reason, and second, because certain people are already more inclined to spend time there than others. This analysis reveals that the BIA may be better off communicating directly to a handful of well-understood target audiences than advertising one message to a broad audience. These efforts do not have to be expensive to be effective:

- Target e-mail communication, particularly to interested suburbanites. Using an incentive to collect e-mail addresses, postal codes and other information and then to send emails with appropriately varying messages to people who live in the suburbs, downtown, or in between.

- Increase downtown Yonge's relevance to young urbanites by linking into "hip" city-wide events and purchasing ad space on popular listings web sites.

- Help area store owners welcome area newcomers without driving longtime residents away, for example working with the "we were expecting you" Toronto tourism messaging.

A strategy often embraced by BIAs is to offer a weekend promotional event – such as a street festival, a tax-exempt day, or an art show – in order to raise awareness of the area through an advertising blitz, and lure residents back to the area (Cliche, 2007). Insights from CA techniques can help organizations plan these events as well. Understanding which people visit for what reasons helps BIAs plan and market events that encourage current visitors to see a different aspect of the district, and persuade area residents to stay and enjoy themselves. For example, a BIA may wish to demonstrate to suburban shoppers that there is life after dark in downtown Yonge by organizing a free (or cheaper) parking night, advertised in suburban newspapers with a map of the area's parking facilities, around a seasonal retail sales event such as on Labour Day or Boxing Day. It also could partner with the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) to offer promotions on public transit to or from downtown Yonge, integrated as part of a broader TTC ridership drive initiative.

In 2007, the BIA implemented a loyalty card program that offers discounts to many area restaurants and some hotels and shops upon presentation of a colourful "Downtown Yonge Experience" card (available from participating Downtown Yonge businesses). This program is positioned as a valuable incentive to motivate area residents and workers to spend more time and money in the district, particularly

because these people are already there. Our findings indicate that a print campaign – in local newspapers or subway advertisements – could have a significant effect on raising awareness of this loyalty campaign, and consequently its impact on stimulating after-hours footfall in Downtown Yonge and helping the BIA develop its customer database.

The Downtown Yonge BIA currently focuses nearly all of its marketing budget on internet-based activities. Yet even this aspatial medium can be used to communicate strategically with geographically derived target segments. For example, the loyalty campaign discussed above requires the card be registered with the BIA in order to obtain certain benefits. Registration can be done either in person or online, and involves submitting a full mailing address, including postal code. This information, particularly when collected continuously and from a variety of different campaigns, can be tabled to indicate where in the city registrants live, based on which the BIA can organize email blasts tailored to those living in the suburbs – who may want to immerse themselves in city life for a weekend – or nearby, who might choose to attend a weekend street festival if they were more aware of it.

Furthermore, by understanding where shoppers and diners originate, they may be better able to position themselves among the numerous competing shopping and dining destinations in the city, an understanding that can then be applied in internet marketing, organizing festivals and events and enhancing the potential of future loyalty-type campaigns. While an in-depth geodemographic segmentation system may be too expensive for "not-for-profits" like the Downtown Yonge BIA, even basic insights into the relationships among visitor geographies, demographics, and their attitudes toward and interactions with the area provided through analysis of in-house market research, as demonstrated in this paper, have the potential to increase both BIA marketing efficiencies and consumer interest in all aspects of the district.

Conclusion

Using a case study involving a central destination in the middle of a large metropolis, this research has attempted to shed some light on the ways in which their urban context shapes consumer relationships with a revitalizing Downtown district. Downtown Yonge historically has been a destination for shopping, dining and entertainment. The BIA, spearheading revitalization efforts, intends for it to achieve status as the true social and commercial hub of the city. Yet, in order to communicate its renaissance effectively, management need to understand the ways in which existing consumers and potential consumers currently perceive the district, as well as the changes taking place there. Our research has indicated that perceptions and current interactions with the district are likely to change depending on where in the metropolis its consumers live, and that it is difficult to implement a single place marketing campaign that is relevant to each of the identified groups of consumers. By identifying target segments in the GTA marketplace by where they live, the BIA can develop communication strategies specifically for each of – or even just one of – these groups, incorporating an understanding of why they visit downtown Yonge, what they think of the area, what media they consume, how they get around and what their needs are in terms of lifestage.

Although our findings are limited to this case study of the downtown Toronto area (and residents within the GTA), we believe the visual statistical analysis of the type

demonstrated here will enhance the value of place marketing by integrating marketing goals with a consumer-oriented framework. The approach can be further refined through designing surveys and other data collection tools with the explicit aim of collecting data for use in defining segments. The current analysis shows how the interests of different audiences such as downtowners, urbanites and suburbanites interact with the district in different ways and how the district carries different meanings and relevancies to various groups of people. Understanding these differences, it is hoped, will help the BIA develop methods of communication and programming that encourages each audience, in their own language, to enjoy the revitalized district and ultimately help ensure the vitality of the city as a whole.

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