

Influencing factors in consumer preferences in Guayaquil: brand, experience, price and quality

Factores influyentes en las preferencias de consumidores en Guayaquil: marca, experiencia, precio y calidad

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ABSTRACT

This article is part of the Research Program “Business innovation in global competitive scenarios” and the results contribute to the project titled “Practical manual for the implementation of service and process improvement methodologies, quality models and tools.” It responds to the need to analyze, based on consumer theory, the most determining factors that define the purchase intention of customers in the city of Guayaquil and peripheral areas, such as: the experience of use or consumption of the product, custom or tradition, quality, and price. In addition, the degree of understanding that consumers have about quality seals such as ISO 9001:2018, the NTE INEN certification, as well as the MUCHO MER ECUADOR quality endorsement was considered. The research is descriptive, cross-sectional, assisted by a survey. The results are shown as the preferences given by consumers in the city of Guayaquil and peripheral areas, to the main parameters or criteria that agree with the existing theories of consumer behavior, referenced in this study.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, preferences, quality seals,.

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RESUMEN

El presente artículo forma parte del Programa de Investigación “Innovación empresarial en escenarios competitivos globales” y los resultados tributan al proyecto titulado “Manual práctico para la implementación de metodologías de mejora de servicios y procesos, modelos y herramientas de calidad”. Responde a la necesidad de analizar en base a la teoría del consumidor, los factores más determinantes que definen la intención de compra de los clientes en la ciudad de Guayaquil y zonas periféricas, como: la experiencia de uso o consumo del producto, la costumbre o tradición, la calidad, y el precio. Además, se consideró el grado de comprensión que los consumidores tienen sobre los sellos de calidad tales como ISO 9001:2018, la certificación NTE INEN, así como el aval de calidad MUCHO MEJOR ECUADOR. La investigación es de tipo descriptivo de corte transversal, auxiliada de encuesta. Se muestran como resultados las preferencias que le dan los consumidores en la ciudad de la ciudad de Guayaquil y zonas periféricas, a los principales parámetros o criterios que acorde a las teorías existentes del comportamiento del consumidor, referenciadas en este estudio.

Palabras clave: Comportamiento del consumidor, preferencias, sellos de calidad, calidad.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to conduct a study regarding the valuation of factors that according to consumer theories such as the brand, the experience of use or consumption of the product, custom or tradition, quality, and price, which affect the preferences of customers of products and services in the city of Guayaquil and peripheral areas, complement the framework of the research the study the degree of understanding that consumers have about quality seals such as ISO 9001:2018, the NTE INEN certification, as well as the quality endorsement MUCHO MEJOR ECUADOR.

The generation of wealth by large companies, entrepreneurs, and even informal trade, depends exclusively on the ability of these actors to provide their customers with products or services that meet their needs. In a market as globalized and competitive as

the one we are currently witnessing, it is essential to reach the customer with value propositions that stand out from the wide range of options offered by the market.

It is in this sense that we will measure the relevance of the study, since through it we will provide information that will allow the different actors of the economic activity to establish macro profiles of the consumers of products and services in the city of Guayaquil and peripheral areas, considering demographic characteristics of the population, being this the basis for the development of commercial strategies, as well as the deployment of complementary studies focused on understanding more the aspects that this first study will reveal.

The vast majority of research works regarding this topic, have been conducted consider studies focused on a type of product or service specifically, there are analyses of consumer behavior of margarines, (Torres Palacios, 2017), studies of behavior in the purchase of home care products, (Díaz Pazmiño, 2015), analysis of automotive preferences, (Sevilla Constante, 2023), and even consumer preferences in the period of pandemic (Papanicolau Denegri, J. N. 2022); therefore, the proposal of this research will allow establishing a holistic view of the general preferences that determine consumer preferences, thus allowing in some cases to complement, compare and contrast existing studies.

Considering the previously mentioned aspects, the main problem of this research is to determine the level of relevance that customers of products and services in the city of Guayaquil and outlying areas currently give to criteria such as brand, experience of use or consumption of the product, custom or tradition, quality, and price, when making a purchase, as well as to determine the level of recognition that the ISO 9001:2018 quality seals, the NTE INEN certification, as well as the MUCHO MEJOR ECUADOR quality guarantee, have for these customers.

In the study of consumer behavior (Orellana 2022), compiles and presents the main theories of consumer behavior, taking as reference Marshall, Vevien, Maslow, Pavlov, Thorndike and Skinner, a theoretical framework is established that covers various perspectives of the factors that determine the behavior and conduct of the consumer, arriving to establish determining conclusions regarding the importance of understanding the consumer's buying attitude, and the impact that it generates to the factors of production of an economy.

This so-called cornerstone, as consumer behavior is labeled (Orellana 2022), highlights the importance of identifying and clearly knowing the criteria that affect consumers' purchasing decisions, which depend on a variety of currents that may vary from the social, psychological, emotional, or economic field of the buyer.

On the other hand, from the field of production we can understand the importance of understanding consumer preferences as a basis for maximizing the utility of production processes, and especially the utility for the consumer, since if production is based on consumer preferences, it will successfully achieve the full satisfaction of needs, which is absolutely in line with the concept of quality proposed by the ISO STANDARD, which

specifies that "The quality of an organization's products and services is determined by the ability to satisfy customers, and by the intended and unintended impact on relevant stakeholders" (ISO International Organization for Standardization, 2015).

The conceptual framework of this research will be complemented by what is exposed by (Osorio & Leriche, 2011), who in their study make a tour of the main consumer theories, which are summarized below:

- Marshall's economic theory, focused on customer behavior, emphasizes that purchase decisions are based on the utility perceived by the consumer. Marshall emphasized the importance of understanding consumers' preferences and needs, as well as the influence of factors such as price and availability of goods on their purchasing behavior (Marshall, 1890).

- Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory holds that people have a series of needs that they seek to satisfy in a hierarchical order. From basic needs to self-actualization needs, these influence customer behavior, as their purchasing decisions are guided by the satisfaction of their needs at each level of the hierarchy (Boxx, 2013).

- Pavlov's Behavioral Learning Theory, also known as classical conditioning, holds that behaviors can be learned and conditioned through the association of stimuli and responses. In the context of customer behavior, this implies that purchase responses and preferences can be influenced by external stimuli, such as marketing and previous consumption experiences, which create associations and trigger specific responses in consumers (Harre, 1993).

Based on the previously exposed theories that allow establishing a deeper understanding of the factors that affect consumer behavior, the proposed study presents an assessment of the main criteria that group the different aspects that influence the consumer, being those selected for this study the brand or reputation, the experience of use or consumption of the product, the custom or tradition, the expected quality, and the price of the product or service.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method used for this study was based on a cross-sectional descriptive approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), for the development of the same a survey was applied to a representative sample of the population of the city of Guayaquil and peripheral areas, being this the object of study of the research.

The research is considered descriptive because through the statistical process (Lind, Marchal, & Wathen, 2012), information is collected from the sample, organized, tabulated, analyzed and presented without any type of experimentation or manipulation that affects the information collected. Likewise, it is considered a transversal research since the opinion of the sample is being analyzed at a specific point in time, April 2023, obtaining a description of the current situation of the study.

The method selected for the study will allow establishing patterns, trends and/or relationships between variables of consumer preferences, which will become a solid basis for subsequent more specific or experimental research.

For the development of this research, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling was considered (Lind, Marchal, & Wathen, 2012), taking as population all the inhabitants of the city of Guayaquil, which according to the latest projections raised by INEC is close to a total of 2,723,665 people, of which the economically active population is estimated to be 1,260,987 people.

Considering this target population, the surveys were carried out during the month of June 2023, achieving a total of 400 participations, which represents a sample, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%.

Sample (n) = $(k^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N) / ([e^2 \cdot (N-1)] + k^2 \cdot p \cdot q)$

Population (N) = 1,260,987.00

Confidence level (k) = 2 (equivalent to 95%)

Sampling error (e) 5%.

Probability that it possesses (p) = 50%

Probability that it does not have (q) = 50%.

Sample (n) = 399

For the development of this study we proceeded to develop a quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive research (Cruz del Castillo, Olivares Orozco, & González García, 2014), for which a survey of objective questions was elaborated as a tool to collect information, made up of three sections, which are detailed below:

Section: Demographic Information.- In this section questions were posed to know the demographic characteristics of the sample, evaluating aspects such as, gender, age, sector of residence, and income level.

Section: Consumer preferences: In this section, questions were asked to evaluate the five criteria selected for this study, in accordance with the theories of consumer behavior previously discussed, these factors being the following:

- Quality of the product or service
- Tradition or habit of using a product or service.
- Price
- Experience with the product
- Brand

The questions in this section were closed, with multiple options based on a Likert scale and ordinal scales that allowed quantifying the opinion of the sample with respect to the criteria evaluated.

Section: Quality seals: In this last section, questions were asked to determine the level of understanding, knowledge or popularity of the main quality seals used in the Ecuadorian market, and the following quality seals were selected for the study:

- ISO 9001 seal.
- INEN Quality Seal.
- Mucho Mejor Ecuador seal.

The questions in this section allowed the study participants to determine whether they "knew the meaning of the seal", "had seen it, but did not know the seal", or "had never seen it".

Through this research tool, the study was carried out to determine the level of affectation of the mentioned factors on the preferences of the clients of products and services in the city of Guayaquil and peripheral areas, and also to know the level of understanding that they have about the quality seals.

RESULTS

The information obtained in the study has been processed through the use of descriptive statistical tools such as distribution tables, Pareto, contingency tables, graphs, as well as bivariate analysis of variables and attributes. Based on these results, the comparative analysis presented below has been developed:

Of the four demographic variables of the study were, sex, age, sector of residence, and income level, the following results stand out:

Table I. Age.

Edad	Cantidad	Valor %
<i>Igual o menor de 18 años</i>	23	6%
<i>De 19 a 24 años</i>	134	34%
<i>De 25 a 30 años</i>	81	20%
<i>De 31 a 35 años</i>	52	13%
<i>De 36 a 40 años</i>	59	15%
<i>De 41 a 45 años</i>	39	10%
<i>De 46 a 50 años</i>	6	2%
<i>De 51 a 55 años</i>	1	0%
<i>De 56 a 60 años</i>	2	1%
<i>Mayor a 60 años</i>	3	1%
Total general	400	100%

Source: Authors' elaboration

Table 2. Residential Sector

<i>Sector Residence</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Value %</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Sector Residence</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Value %</i>	<i>Value</i>
Centro	15	4%					
Centro sur	10	3%					
Daule (Villa Club - Villa del Rey - Sectores Cercanos)	21	5%					
Durán	20	5%					
Norte	213	53%					
Otros	32	8%					
Puntilla (Puntilla - Ciudad Celeste)	1	0%					
Sur (Referencia: Hospital IESS al Puerto)	52	13%					
Sur Oeste	36	9%					
Total general	400	100%					

Source: Authors' elaboration

The most relevant demographic aspects are the fact that 34% of the participants of the study are between 19 and 24 years old, followed by 20% of people between 25 and 30 years old, in general 82% of the respondents are between 19 and 40 years old, the other relevant aspect is that 53% of the participants of the study live in the northern sector of the city.

Consumer preferences

The results obtained with respect to the criteria that determine consumer priorities when deciding to make a purchase indicate that the factors evaluated have the following level of priority:

1. Quality of the product or service
2. Price
3. Experience with the product
4. Brand
5. Tradition or habit of using a product or service

The following table shows the results obtained, in which 76% of respondents considered the quality of a product or service to be "Absolutely relevant", the second most relevant

criterion was price with 54%. On the other hand, at the lower end of the table, only 43% of people consider the brand as an "Absolutely relevant" factor when making a purchase.

Table 3. Consumer preferences

Preferencias del consumidor valoradas*	Nivel de valoración					
	Irrelevante	Poco relevante	Algo relevante	Moderadamente relevante	Muy relevante	Absolutamente relevante
Calidad	0%	1%	0%	6%	18%	76%
Tradición o costumbre	3%	3%	9%	27%	29%	29%
Precio	0%	1%	3%	15%	28%	54%
Conocer previamente	1%	1%	4%	12%	32%	50%
Marca	2%	3%	6%	22%	25%	43%

* Percentage results represent a horizontal analysis of the preference criteria.

In order to obtain more relevant information on the subject of the study, an analysis was carried out considering consumer preferences, in a comparative way to their age, income level, gender and sector of residence, the most outstanding results obtained from the analysis are presented below:

Table 4. Age range

RANGO DE EDAD*	Nivel de valoración - Criterio Calidad					
	Irrelevante	Poco relevante	Algo relevante	Moderadamente relevante	Muy relevante	Absolutamente relevante
Igual o menor de 18 años	0%	0%	0%	4%	17%	78%
De 19 a 24 años	0%	0%	0%	6%	22%	72%
De 25 a 30 años	0%	0%	0%	4%	14%	83%
De 31 a 35 años	0%	0%	0%	8%	17%	75%
De 36 a 40 años	0%	2%	0%	10%	24%	64%
De 41 a 45 años	0%	3%	0%	3%	10%	85%
De 46 a 50 años	0%	0%	0%	17%	17%	67%
De 51 a 55 años	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

De 56 a 60 años	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Mayor a 60 años	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

* Percentage results represent a horizontal analysis of the preference criteria.

Table 5. Criteria Brand

EDAD*	Nivel de valoración – Criterio Marca					
	Irrelevante	Poco relevante	Algo relevante	Moderadamente relevante	Muy relevante	Absolutamente relevante
Igual o menor de 18 años	0%	4%	0%	26%	17%	52%
De 19 a 24 años	1%	4%	7%	25%	25%	40%
De 25 a 30 años	2%	2%	4%	19%	28%	44%
De 31 a 35 años	4%	4%	8%	21%	23%	40%
De 36 a 40 años	2%	0%	7%	24%	15%	53%
De 41 a 45 años	5%	0%	8%	21%	31%	36%
De 46 a 50 años	0%	0%	0%	17%	50%	33%
De 51 a 55 años	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
De 56 a 60 años	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
Mayor a 60 años	33%	0%	0%	0%	33%	33%

* Percentage results represent a horizontal analysis of the preference criteria.

Relevant aspects in relation to the age variable:

- 100% of people over 50 years of age consider quality to be an absolutely relevant factor when purchasing.
- Only 36% of people between 41 and 50 years of age consider brand to be an absolutely relevant aspect when making a purchase, brand being the least important factor for the total number of respondents.

Table 5. *Income level*

NIVEL INGRESO*	DE	Nivel de valoración – Criterio: Calidad					
		Irrelevante	Poco relevante	Algo relevante	Moderadamente relevante	Muy relevante	Absolutamente relevante
Hasta 750 USD		0%	0%	0%	6%	16%	78%
De 751 a 1200 USD		0%	3%	0%	4%	23%	71%
De 1200 a 1700 USD		0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	92%
De 1700 a 2200 USD		0%	0%	0%	15%	23%	62%
Más de 2200 USD		0%	0%	0%	25%	38%	38%

* Percentage results represent a horizontal analysis of the preference criteria.

Relevant aspects in relation to the income level variable:

- Of people with a monthly income of less than 750 USD, 78% are of the opinion that quality is the most relevant aspect when making a purchase. Of those with an income of more than 2200 USD, only 38% believe that quality is the most relevant aspect when making a purchase.

Table 6. *Sex*

SEXO*	Nivel de valoración - Calidad					
	Irrelevante	Poco relevante	Algo relevante	Moderadamente relevante	Muy relevante	Absolutamente relevante
Femenino	0%	0%	0%	5%	16%	79%
Masculino	0%	1%	0%	8%	19%	72%
Prefiero no decirlo	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%

* Percentage results represent a horizontal analysis of the preference criterion.

Relevant aspects in relation to the gender variable:

- For both men and women, quality is the most relevant aspect when making a purchase, of which 79% of women and 72% of men those who consider quality to be absolutely relevant when making a purchase.

Quality seals

To conclude the research, the level of knowledge that people have regarding the three quality seals selected for this study was consulted: ISO 9001 Seal, INEN Quality Seal, Mucho Mejor Ecuador Seal.

Table 7. Knowledge level

Nivel de conocimiento*	Sello de calidad		
	Sello 9001	ISO Sello de Calidad INEN	Sello Mucho Mejor Ecuador
Nunca lo he visto	10%	12%	0%
Lo he visto; pero no sé qué significa	27%	25%	12%
Sé lo que significa el sello	63%	64%	88%
Total:	100%	100%	100%

* The percentage results represent a vertical analysis, independent for each quality seal in relation to the sample.

The study determined that the Mucho Mejor Ecuador quality seal has the highest recognition with 88% identification, followed by the INEN quality seal with 64% and finally the ISO 9001 seal with 63%.

Considering these results, contingency tables were used to evaluate the impact of the quality seal on the importance people give to the quality of the products or services they prefer to consume, with the following results:

Table 7. Knowledge of quality seal
 ISO 9001* QUALITY SEAL

Conocimiento de sello de calidad ISO 9001*	Nivel de valoración: Criterio Calidad					
	Irrelevante	Poco relevante	Algo relevante	Moderadamente relevante	Muy relevante	Absolutamente relevante
Lo he visto; pero no sé qué significa	0%	0%	0%	1%	6%	21%
Nunca lo he visto	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%	8%
Sé lo que significa el sello	0%	1%	0%	5%	11%	47%

* The percentage sum of the values in the table equals 100% of the sample (400 people).

Table 8. Knowledge quality seal
 INEN

Conocimiento de INEN*	sello calidad	Nivel de valoración: Criterio Calidad					
		Irrelevante	Poco relevante	Algo relevante	Moderadamente relevante	Muy relevante	Absolutamente relevante
Lo he visto; pero no sé qué significa		0%	0%	0%	1%	4%	20%
Nunca lo he visto		0%	0%	0%	1%	4%	8%
Sé lo que significa el sello		0%	1%	0%	4%	11%	48%

* The percentage sum of the values in the table equals 100% of the sample (400 people).

The results of the contingency tables allow us to determine that the higher the level of knowledge of a quality seal, the greater the relevance that the quality of a product or service will have on a consumer's purchase intention.

Among the most important results, it should be mentioned that the study allows establishing a profile of customer preferences in the city of Guayaquil and outlying areas, in relation to the criteria according to consumer theories, with the first place of importance going to quality, followed by price and the experience of having previously used a product, with the last two places of importance going to the brand and tradition or custom.

Ninety-seven percent of the population evaluated in the study is between 18 and 45 years of age, which means that for this generation there is a dissociation between the concepts of "Brand" and "Quality", This takes greater weight at the time that the second most important criterion when buying a product or acquiring a service is the weight, i.e. currently the behavior of consumers in the market of the city of Guayaquil and outlying areas, are betting on giving the opportunity to new products or services that provide a quality according to their price level.

Similarly, the study has shown that the more knowledge a consumer of products or services has about quality seals, the higher the priority given to the quality of the product when making a purchase. The Mucho Mejor Ecuador seal is the one that consumers in Guayaquil are most aware of, with 88% identification.

The use of contingency tables allows us to determine that there is a direct impact between the level of knowledge of the seals and the level of priority that a consumer gives to the quality of a product, for which the following evaluations are proposed, based on the contingency table tool:

Table 8. Ai Event

Evento Ai	Probabilidad a priori, P(Ai)	Probabilidad condicional, P(B/Ai)*	Probabilidad conjunta, P(AiyB)
Conoce Sello Mucho Mejor Ecuador	352/400	267/352	267/400 = 67%
Conoce Sello de Calidad INEN	254/400	193/254	193/400 = 48%
Conoce Sello ISO 9001	252/400	188/252	188/400 = 47%

* Conditional probability is equal to the probability that the consumer values quality as an "absolutely relevant" factor, given that he/she knows a certain seal. We work with a sample of 400 people.

According to the contingency table analysis, we can determine that there is a direct relationship between the level of relevance that a consumer gives to a product or service, depending on the level of knowledge he has about a quality seal.

CONCLUSIONS

First, the study showed that in the opinion of consumers in the city of Guayaquil and its outlying areas, the order of priority of factors that are considered "absolutely relevant" when making a purchase are the following:

1. Quality of the product or service, 76%.
2. Price, 54%.
3. Experience with the product, 50%.
4. Brand, 43%.
5. Tradition or habit of using a product or service, 43%.

This allows us to determine that currently the consumer profile aims to give greater priority to the price-quality ratio that a product or service can offer, breaking the paradigm of brands, or the tradition of consumption, i.e. we are facing a consumer profile willing to undergo changes, as long as they are justified in their price-quality ratio.

In addition to this, it has been determined that quality seals have an impact on consumer preferences, as evidenced in this study, which has shown that in the city of Guayaquil and its outlying areas, consumers have a higher level of knowledge of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador seal with 88%, followed by the INEN seal with 64% and then the ISO 9001 seal with 63%.

This first result was contrasted against the criterion of the level of relevance that consumers give to the quality of a product, for which we proceeded to study those consumers who rated quality as an "Absolutely relevant" factor, with the result that 75.5% of them share this criterion.

To evaluate the incidence of the quality seals, contingency tables were tabulated using the variables described, obtaining as a result that consumers who know the Mucho Mejor Ecuador seal have a 67% probability of giving greater relevance to the quality of a product, followed by 48% of consumers who know the INEN seal and 47% of the ISO 9001 seal of quality.

Another important conclusion of the study is that there is an important segment of consumers that needs to be oriented with respect to quality seals. Among consumers who do not know what a seal means, 27% of consumers indicated that they do not know what the ISO 9001 seal means, 25% of consumers do not know what the INEN quality seal means, and 12% do not know what the Mucho Mejor Ecuador seal means.

Carrying out dissemination campaigns in the media, social networks, streaming, as well as approaching the customer through activation campaigns, are excellent options to reach that percentage of consumers who to date do not know the importance of the quality seals.

A clear result of the success of this type of initiative is precisely the case of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador seal, which has a variety of methods to promote and advertise the brand as well as the products that are part of it, obtaining the following results according to information provided by the Mucho Mejor Ecuador portal:

1. 72% of consumers look for the Mucho Mejor Ecuador brand when making their purchases.
2. The Mucho Mejor Ecuador brand generates 88% of confidence in the product.
3. It positively influences their purchase in 85%.
4. When buying a product with the Mucho Mejor Ecuador brand, consumers feel that they support the country's development by 87%.

Replicating this type of initiative, such as the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation's strategies, would encourage and increase the culture of quality among consumers in Guayaquil and its outlying areas.

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