



Mall shopping behaviour of Indian small town consumers

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ABSTRACT

Rapid development of retailing in India has led to expansion of malls in smaller cities. The current research was directed towards small city consumers ($n=276$) to understand their mall shopping behaviour. Most people in small cities are unfamiliar with the concept of malls and their exposure to the organized retail has been limited in the past. Malls bring functional and experiential benefits to them and affect their shopping behaviour. The perceived benefits, however, may differ among consumer groups. This study specifically focuses on exploring the differences across age and gender groups. ANOVA test was used for the analyses. The results show that consumers' gender and age play an important role in determining their attitude towards shopping in malls. The influence of mall attributes such as décor, layout, services, variety of stores, and entertainment facilities must be considered while planning malls in smaller cities as they have an effect on consumers' buying behaviour. The mall shopping behaviour of metropolitan city shoppers should not be generalized with that of shoppers in smaller cities.

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1. Introduction

The liberalization policy pursued by Indian government in retail sector has fueled the growth of malls in different regions of the country. Private companies are investing large amounts of money to design and create malls to provide tangential benefits of shopping and provide consumers' access to global brands. Gershman (1988) states that malls are attractive locations which facilitate social interactions and entertainment. The fascination towards malls is driven by convenience, entertainment, and assortment.

Saturation in the growth and number of malls in the metropolitan cities has forced mall operators to explore options in Tier II and III cities. The smaller cities are attractive due to low rental and operating costs (KPMG, 2009). The slowdown experienced by Indian economy in the last few years has affected the retail industry. The malls in bigger cities experienced decrease in consumer footfall and diminishing sales. This led to surge of mall investment activity in the Tier II cities of the country. The cheaper real estate prices, low entry costs and availability of space in Tier II and III cities offer excellent investment opportunities compared to bigger cities (Dwivedi, 2010). In the last decade, the smaller cities have witnessed a change in consumption preferences of the consumers (KPMG, 2009; Dwivedi, 2010). Ernst and Young state that in the last two years growth in the number of malls in smaller cities has been 55 percent compared to 26 percent in the metropolitan cities (Sinha, 2010).

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The arrival of malls in smaller cities of India promises to transform shopping and recreation in these cities. The assortment of services and products, spatial ambience and amusement facilities target the 'shopper-tourist' (Robertson, 1995). Shopping malls have become a part of a contemporary consumer shopping culture (Van Eden, 2006) where the diverse shopping behavioural needs are addressed (Ahmed et al., 2007). Malls presage more than stores and selling (Gottdiener, 1995) and promote a different lifestyle and buying phenomenon.

The metropolitan cities in India boast of tremendous development in infrastructure and services. The upsurge in mall activity is at its pinnacle, and recently there is increase in mall activity in the smaller cities where consumers have limited exposure to global brands. The consumers attitude and behaviour in the smaller cities, thus becomes an important determinant in planning the layout and ambience of these malls. This paper analyses the behaviour of the Indian consumer in a mall in a Tier II city in India.

The objective of this research was to understand consumers' perception of mall attributes and its impact across gender and age groups. Consequently, it is believed that by attending to these mall attributes, mall managers could influence the buying behaviour of various target age groups of consumers in the small city malls.

2. Literature review

Shopping as an everyday activity permeates our societal processes and social conventions (Miller, 1998). The shopping behaviour is acquired through social interaction and is context and situation-based. The shopping malls have been of much interest for researchers

in recent times (Robertson, 1995; Buss, 1997; Stassen et al., 1999; Csabe and Askegaard, 1999; Castaldo and Botti, 2001; Yavas, 2003; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Resciniti, 2004; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Ooi and Sim, 2007; Ahmed et al., 2007; Michon et al., 2008). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) posit that malls are central point of community entertainment and contribute to city's social and economic environment. This also finds support in studies from Hernandez and Jones (2005) and Padilla and Eastlick (2009).

Malls are viewed as cultural and entertainment centers (Robertson, 1995; Rintamäki et al., 2006). They help retailers satisfy the utilitarian and emotional needs of the consumers (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Bloch et al., 1994; Buss, 1997; Wakefield and Baker, 1998; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Over the past few years researchers have examined mall ambience, store factors, and facilities that contribute to mall patronage and attractions (Howell and Rogers, 1980; Finn and Louviere, 1990; Finn and Louviere, 1996; Swait and Sweeney, 2000; Darian et al., 2001; Yavas, 2003; De Juan, 2004). To attract consumers, malls combine traditional selling activity with other value-added services which make them entertainment complexes (Csabe and Askegaard, 1999). Goss (1993) suggests that shopping plays a pivotal role in consumers' life and malls are appreciated due to their theatrical and pretentious character (Belk and Bryce, 1993; El Sayed et al., 2004).

This paper looks at the mall attributes that influence consumer behaviour which were identified by Bloch et al. (1994). They are categorized as follows:

- **Aesthetics:** Belk (1975) concludes that physical and social surroundings of shopping centers are important attributes affecting shopping behaviour. The variables such as locations, décor, noise, aromas, lighting intensity, physical layout, and presence of other shoppers in a shopping environment influence consumer's shopping behaviour. The atmosphere of the store combines affective (emotional or psychological) and cognitive elements (Jackson and Konell, 1993; Babin and Attaway, 2000; Beyard et al., 2001; De Nisco and Napolitano, 2006; Ooi and Sim, 2007; Ghee and Ahmad, 2010). The environmental factors comprise of store layout, interiors, color, lighting, aisle, heating, store size, crowds, music and cleanliness (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Bellizzi and Hite, 1987; Donovan et al., 1994). The social and physical factors impact on consumers' mental and emotional processes and affect their shopping behaviour (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Gardner, 1985; Bellizzi and Hite, 1987; Hui and Bateson, 1991; Bittner, 1992; Donovan et al., 1994; Bone and Ellen, 1999). Most mall managers realize that mall ambience is a prominent contributor for attracting shoppers to stores (Phillips and Sternthal, 1977; Laroche et al., 2005; Michon et al., 2008) and plays a significant role in consumers' evaluations of products (Baker et al., 1994).
- **Escape:** Shoppers seek respite from their daily routines in the malls. The mall environment provides positive cues which have an impact on the consumers' moods (Bittner, 1992; Michon et al., 2008; Ghee and Ahmad, 2010). A mall visit is not only a family outing but also provides entertainment at low cost (Ahmed et al., 2007). The malls offer consumers with impersonal spaces, which help them to mingle in the crowd (Bowly, 1987; Chaplin and Holding, 1998; Dennis et al., 2001), interact and watch other shoppers. Bloch and Richins (1983) state that consumers' experience involvement, freedom from restrictions, fantasy fulfillment, and escapism in shopping. Malls provide an escape to the consumers and thus enhance the hedonic aspect of shopping.
- **Flow:** Mall patronage motives are also influenced by variety, entertainment, social, leisure, fashion, convenience, and relaxation (Haynes and Talpade, 1996; Klara, 1997; Kasrel, 1998;

Wakefield and Baker, 1998; Michon et al., 2005). Lui (1997) defines flow as losing sense of time as recreational facilities in the malls act as sensory stimulants. Malls are considered to be a part of leisure (Jackson, 1991) and social activities where consumers lose track of time (Bloch et al., 1994). The malls house cinema theaters, food courts, recreational centers and gaming areas where consumers relax.

- **Exploration:** Wakefield and Baker (1998) suggest that variety of shops in malls generate positive effect and excitement. The consumers' choice of retailers is influenced by assortment, price, transactional convenience, and shopping experience (Lindquist, 1973; Messinger and Narasimhan, 1997). The range of stores in malls like branded showrooms, apparel stores, book stores, household products, and entertainment areas (Abratt et al., 1985; McGoldrick and Thomson, 1992; Prendergast et al., 1998; Yavas, 2003) enable consumers to examine products.
- **Role enactment:** Tauber (1972) states, "Many activities are learned behaviours, traditionally expected or accepted as part of a certain position or role in society like—mother, housewife, husband, or student. A person internalizes these behaviours as "required" and is motivated to participate in the expected activities". The shopping motives are governed by consumers' role in society and duties they have to fulfill towards their family. The visits to malls are driven by motives for fulfilling and enacting social roles. Bloch et al. (1994) had classified consumers according to their mall behaviour and social roles. The different types of consumers visit the malls for different reasons; the utilitarian shopper visits mall for performing their responsibilities of being a father, mother or wife or husband (Wakefield and Baker, 1998).
- **Social:** Malls facilitate social interaction (Kelly, 1983). Malls increase the consumers' patronage by appealing to their social motives and offering variety in assortments (Solomon, 1983). Tauber (1972) posits "Some shopping trips may result in direct encounters with friends (e.g., neighborhood women at a supermarket)". The opportunity for social interaction and watching others' shop is enhanced in malls.
- **Convenience:** Research also suggests that convenience has the largest impact on the shopping center choices (Bearden, 1977; Kirkup and Rafiq, 1994; Severin et al., 2001). "A wide selection of products also can minimize the perceived costs (e.g., travel time, effort) associated with each shopping trip and ease the shopping task" (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006). Malls are spacious and provide shoppers with access to all kinds of products under one roof (Bellenger et al., 1977; Miceli et al., 1998; McDonald, 1999; Berry et al., 2002).

H1. The consumer attitudes towards mall attributes that influence their behaviour vary between the two genders.

Malls are focused towards catering to the younger population segments (Barak, 1998; Myers and Lumbers, 2008) and shopping behaviour of the consumer varies according to their age (Moschis, 2003). The older consumers have different concerns and their choice of retail arrangements differs from younger consumer groups (Myers and Lumbers, 2006, 2008). Shimm and Eastlick (1998) posit that mall shopping is affected by consumer shopping orientations, personal values, and social influences. Different segments of consumers project different shopping behaviour and values. For example, shopping behaviour of younger consumers' would be focused towards seeking entertainment while older consumer focuses on convenience and leisure (Myers and Lumbers, 2008).

H2. The consumer attitudes towards mall attributes that influence their behaviour vary between different age groups.

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