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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON IDENTIFYING FOOTFALL DRIVERS THAT ATTRACT CONSUMERS TO A SHOPPING MALL – WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHENNAI

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ABSTRACT

"I don't go to the malls to shop. Sure I might buy something, but it's not opportunity or need that brings me to a mall- it's the glitter and glitz, the chance to mingle. A good mall is like a good man: it offers entertainment, excitement and enlightenment." - (Gershman 1988, p. 43)

Gone are the days when people had to buy different things at different places. Those were the days when there were separate markets for various things. People used to visit general stores for purchasing daily-required household materials. Now, almost everything is available for consumers under one roof. Thanks to the numerous shopping malls that have opened across the country in the last ten years. The shopping malls have made shopping an easy activity for people now. Just a few years back, people had to make a choice among shopping, movies or hanging out on a holiday but thanks to our malls, all these jobs can be performed at the same time, under the same roof and all this results in a wonderful experience. And it is basically the experience and not the intention that counts when it comes to shopping malls.

A shopping mall is a very local business and differs from city to city. Every mall should adapt to the needs and preferences of its catchment. This research study analyses the need for shopping malls to enhance the customer experience, achieve operational efficiency, create concepts, and choose brands and categories that appeal to the catchment. The need for the hour is to attract consumer footfall, convert them into actual buyers and try to retain them in the long run. This study will be of high relevance to modern retailers as the choice of a shopping mall is in essence a lifestyle decision for many consumers.

KEY WORDS: Consumers, Footfall drivers, Mall tenant, Shopping, Shopping malls, Retailers

INTRODUCTION

Shopping malls contribute to business more significantly than traditional markets, which are viewed as a simple convergence of supply and demand. Shopping malls provide enough time for shoppers to shop and indulge in recreational activities. However, competition between malls, congestion of markets and traditional shopping stores have led mall developers and mall managers to consider alternative methods to build excitement in customers (Rajagopal, 2009)[1]. A shopping mall is not a just sum of all its stores. Shopping mall operators and retail tenants should constantly work towards creating a shopping environment, which would create a positive influence on the consumers shopping behaviour during his/her, visit to a mall. Mall operators and mall managers should try out innovative ways to keep the footfall rising. Understanding consumer's preferences and decision making styles while shopping at a mall is vital for mall managers and mall tenants. This would help them in strategizing and implementing the right footfall drivers to attract the consumer footfalls.

The present study tries to consolidate the various footfall drivers in malls that stand as a testimony to attract consumers to a mall.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are defined as the objectives of this study for conducting the research: -

- To identify mall footfall drivers that attracts consumers to a shopping mall.
- To explore the expectations of consumers regarding an ideal shopping mall.
- To identify the gaps between shopping mall footfall drivers and consumer expectations of an ideal shopping mall.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study has been undertaken among the consumers and retail tenants of shopping malls in the city of Chennai – the fourth largest metropolitan city in India and the capital of Tamil Nadu. All operational shopping malls in the city of Chennai were considered for this study. At present the city of Chennai encompass 17 operational shopping malls.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

In this study convenience sampling technique has been employed to select the sample.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

PROFILE OF CONSUMERS VISITING SHOPPING MALLS

- A majority of 42.7% and 35.3% of customers who visit a shopping mall are in the age group of 18 – 25 years and 26 – 35 years respectively.
- 54.7% and 42% of customers visiting shopping malls in Chennai are from the urban background and semi – urban background respectively.

- 33.3% of customers visiting malls in Chennai belong to the upper middle class stratum.
- A majority of 42.7% and 44% of customers visit shopping malls with their family and friends respectively.

SHOPPING MALL REQUIREMENTS

- A large majority of 98% of mall tenants feel that shopping malls in Chennai require professional mall management services to run it effectively.
- 45.3% of mall tenants want shopping malls in Chennai to operate from 10 am – 11 pm.
- A majority of 90.7% and 91.3% of retail tenants prefer a shopping mall to have 3 and 4 floors respectively.
- A majority of 98.7% and 99.3% of retail tenants prefer parking lots in a shopping mall to be situated in the basement first level and second level respectively.
- 68.7% of mall tenants feel that the food court should be in any of the middle floors of the shopping mall.
- 58% of mall tenants feel that a multiplex should be in the top floor of a shopping mall.
- 54.7% of mall tenants feel that a shopping mall should ideally have 2 pairs of escalators (Pairs refers to a combination of one upward and one downward escalator) for each floor.
- 82.7% of mall tenants feel that an ideal mall should have a combination of stairs, escalators and elevators.
- 61.3% of mall tenants want a shopping mall to have more number of anchor tenants than regular tenants.
- Only 24.7% of mall tenants want theme malls to come up in the city of Chennai.
- A majority of 68.7% and 66.7% of retail tenants feel that the popularity of a mall is due to its variety in the retail outlets and availability of entertainment options respectively.
- 86.7% of retail tenants feel that a mall should have adequate fire safety provisions which are extremely important.
- 83.3% and 82% of retail tenants feel that parking organization and preventive maintenance is essential for the infrastructure of a mall.
- 96.7%, 90% and 89.3% of mall tenants feel that a shopping mall should have a multiplex, food court and restaurants (other than food courts) respectively in its premises to increase the duration of a shopper's stay in a mall.
- 86.7 % and 86% of mall tenants want a mall to essentially have ATM's and wi – fi facility respectively.

- Only 14% and 29.3% of retail tenants feel that a mall should have a museum and a library respectively.
- 65.3% of mall tenants do not feel that standalone stores are giving them stiff competition as shopping malls in the city have their own group of loyal consumers.

IDENTIFYING SHOPPING MALL FOOTFALL DRIVERS PERCEIVED BY MALL TENANTS THAT ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ATTRACTING CONSUMERS TO A SHOPPING MALL USING FACTOR ANALYSIS

In this study 46 variables relating to shopping mall footfall drivers were posed to retail tenants in shopping malls. They had to rate the extent to which those factors attract consumers to shopping malls in Chennai on a five point Likert scale. The responses were subject to factor analysis using Principal Component Method to reduce the variables into predominant factors. Prior to factor analysis, the Kaiser – Mayer – Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity are used to determine if the study could confidently move forward to the next step.

Table no. 1: Table showing results of Kaiser – Meyer – Olkin and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for factors of shopping mall footfall drivers

Kaiser – Meyer – Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.913
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approximate Chi – Square	3858.668
	Df	1035
	Significance	.000

Table 1 reveals the Kaiser – Meyer – Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value to be 0.913. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity with approximate Chi – Square value of 3858.668 is statistically significant at 5% level. This ascertains that the sample size of the research is adequate for the factors and all the 46 variables can be considered for the research.

Factor analysis revealed that all the 46 variables possess the variance between 0.572 to 0.825. This shows that the range of variance is from 57.2% to 82.5%. Since it crosses the bench mark of 40% all the 46 variables are statistically significant in creating the new factors with considerable amount of variance.

Factor analysis reduced the 46 variables into 13 predominant factors with total variance of 72.129%. These factors also possess the individual variances – 10.248%, 6.932%, 6.308%, 6.188%, 5.795%, 5.619%, 5.532%, 5.500%, 4.912%, 4.451%, 3.854%, 3.427% and 3.363%.

The Eigen values above 1 are noticed for the 13 factors in the following order: 4.714, 3.189, 2.902, 2.846, 2.666, 2.585, 2.545, 2.530, 2.260, 2.048, 1.773, 1.577 and 1.547.

The 13 factors which are extracted from the 46 variables are explained below with the factor loadings:

Factor 1: A shopping mall's image depends heavily on its "atmosphere" – the psychological feeling and the overall shopping experience that a consumer gets when visiting a mall. For a shopping mall, atmosphere refers to its physical characteristics that projects its image and draws consumers. It includes the mall's structure, layout, ambiance, displays and its overall look. A mall's atmosphere has a positive effect on the shopping behaviour of consumers (Michon, Yu, Smith & Chebat, 2011)[2]. Providing consumers with the right atmosphere inside its premises can increase consumer footfall for the mall. This factor encompasses the following variables:

- *If the mall has wide aisles and easy to follow layout (.792)*
- *If the mall has a big lounge area / atrium (.787)*
- *If the mall has exceptional architecture and attractive interiors (.719)*
- *If the mall toilets' are extremely clean and hygienic (.651)*
- *If the shopping environment is attractive and has a nice display of merchandise (.630)*
- *If the mall has big TV screens placed strategically (.618)*
- *If the mall has clear & proper signages and / or displays along the mall (.553)*

Hence this factor is named as **"atmosphere"**.

Factor 2: Positioning a shopping mall as a unique entity distinct from other malls is an important emerging practice in today's consumption culture (Ray & Chiagouris, 2009)[3]. Mall uniqueness is a competitive advantage, which makes a particular mall different from other malls in the market area. Over time, consumers develop a favorable attitude towards a mall based on its uniqueness. This factor encompasses the following variables:

- *If the customer is able to find out unique products not available elsewhere (.803)*
- *If the mall has unique stores (.740)*
- *If the customer is able to find famous brands (.732)*
- *If the customer is able to find out new and the latest products (.607)*
- *If the customer is able to find high quality products (.575)*

Hence this factor is named as **"mall uniqueness"**.

Factor 3: Traffic management includes managing foot traffic inside the mall and at the mall's parking zone. Foot traffic management involves crowd management inside the operational area of a mall (Singh & Srinivasan, 2012)[4]. This factor encompasses the following variables:

- *If there are multiple parking lots, geographically spread around the mall, to cater to visitors approaching from all directions so that they do not have to drive all around the mall to get to the parking lot.(.787)*
- *If it has convenient parking facilities (spacious & structured parking)(.702)*

-*If the mall provides the facility of shuttle services to & from parking lots (.695)*

-*If there are multiple entrances and exits in a mall (.643)*

-*If the parking is spacious, structured, organized & the distance needed to walk to the mall is less (.548)*

Hence this factor is named as **"traffic management"**.

Factor 4: The cost of acquiring new customers usually far exceeds the cost of retaining an existing customer. As a result, customer retention has become a managerial strategy that has spurred interest in understanding and implementing store – loyalty programs (Ray & Chiagouris, 2009)[5]. Customer retention efforts undertaken by a mall enables it to be competitive and better than other existing and upcoming malls (Jangid, 2008)[6]. This factor encompasses the following variables:

-*If there are discounts / price cuts / everyday low prices (.800)*

-*If there are loyalty schemes for return / repeat trip (.715)*

Hence this factor is named as **"customer retention strategies"**.

Factor 5: A good location is defined in terms of its ease of access via roads and good visibility. Consumers' decision concerning the place they choose for shopping depends essentially on the distance to the mall (Leo, & Philippe, 2002)[7]. Location is considered as one of the prime prerequisites for a shopping mall to be successful. This factor encompasses the following variables:

-*If it has a convenient location from the work place (.860)*

-*If the travel distance to a particular mall is inversely proportional to its appeal (.779)*

-*If it has a convenient location from home (.702)*

-*The number of competing malls in a particular region would affect the drawing power of a particular mall and thereby increase or decrease the footfalls.(.698)*

-*If it is situated in a busy marketplace where other shopping options are also available (.525)*

Hence this factor is named as **"location"**.

Factor 6: Customer Experience Management (CEM) is a technique of knowing a mall's customers so completely that, mall managers can create and deliver personalized experiences that will entice them to not only remain loyal to the mall, but also to propagate to others about the mall. Over the recent years CEM has gained more momentum in India than Customer Relationship Management (Virdi, 2011)[8]. This factor encompasses the following variables:

-*If the mall has a Customer Experience Management (CEM) system (i.e) mailers, flyers, surprise elements for repeat visitors, e-mails etc are sent (.753)*

-*If the mall constantly updates information on its website (.644)*

-*If the mall has an effective centralized information / help desk where list of store schedule information, list of current sales, discount coupons, activities, schedules etc can be obtained (.624)*

Hence this factor is named as **"Customer Experience Management"**.

Factor 7: All consumers want comfort when they make a shopping trip to a mall. Mall managers have to see to it that their customers are comfortable within the mall premises. This factor encompasses the following variables:

-*If the mall provides the facility of people movers (.870)*

-*If the mall has comfortable chairs and resting lounge (.686)*

Hence this factor is named as **"comfort"**.

Factor 8: Marketing is not an add – on feature to the general operations of a shopping mall, but, it is integral to it. Through advertising, promotions and placements at every consumer contact point, shopping malls have become central to a customer's everyday existence. A combination of traditional marketing and modern promotion strategies are found to be a strong way to encourage consumers to visit and spend time at a shopping mall (Parsons, 2011)[9]. This factor encompasses the following variables:

-*If there is extensive advertising (banners, rolling displays, etc.,) inside and just outside the premises, to promote the mall (.832)*

-*If there are special exhibits and regular event promotions (.813)*

-*If there are spot promotional strategies in shopping arcades (.558)*

Hence this factor is named as **"mall marketing**".

Factor 9: Shoppers consider recreation and entertainment options in a shopping mall as an added advantage. A significant method of trying to differentiate a mall's offering is to increase the entertainment component of the mall (Kim, Christiansen, Feinberg & Choi, 2005)[10]. Most of the malls in Chennai have a multiplex, food court, gaming arena and many more entertainment and recreation options. Shoppers get a chance to mix their shopping trip and recreation. They also spend quality time with their family and friends. This factor encompasses the following variables:

-*If the mall has a multi cuisine food court (.857)*

-*If the mall has a multiplex (.812)*

-*If there are / activities / concerts / live performances and entertainment shows (.578)*

Hence this factor is named as **"recreation"**.

Factor 10: Shopping malls are constantly striving to provide several complimentary services to their consumers that go beyond the standard expectations and provide something "more" while adding little or nothing to its cost. This factor encompasses the following variables:

-*If there are other services (gift wrapping, instant photo processing , child pram services) (.625)*

-*If there is a reliable home delivery service (.549)*

Hence this factor is named as **"complimentary services"**.

Factor 11: Consumer satisfaction can be enhanced by increasing the quality of personal service encounters in malls. A shopping mall's service staffs have to be responsive and energetic in their customer interactions (Chi, Ng, Kelly & Man, 2012)[11]. Consumers will return to a mall that goes the extra mile to make them happy. This factor encompasses the following variables:

-*If the mall has pleasant, knowledgeable, available & courteous attendants (.592)*

-*If the mall has an effective & efficient complaint handling / redressal system (.582)*

-*If there are good feedback mechanism in place (.530)*

-*If the store personnel in a shopping mall is trained to handle all kinds of shoppers (.524)*

Hence this factor is named as **"service encounter"**.

Factor 12: The most important commitment for mall developers is to safeguard the lives of mall tenants, staff and consumers. Consumers change the way they shop in mall based on the safety and security measures installed in a mall (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995)[12]. A shopping mall's safety and occupational health control depends on creating long term systems, using the best technologies, preparedness and alertness on a daily basis. The city of Chennai witnessed two suicides inside the premises of two famous shopping malls thereby making malls also an unsafe place to visit (Madhavan, 2013)[13]. Every person in the mall should feel safe when he / she is inside its premises[14].

-*If the mall has CCTVs for security (.485)*

-*If it has proper security and provides a feeling of safe environment while shopping (.474)*

Hence this factor is named as **"safety"**.

Factor 13: Major shopping malls strive hard to provide a combination of services to its consumers. Value – added facilities serve to enhance the shopping experience through the convenience they bring to consumers, as they constitute an important component (Lee, Ibrahim, & Hsueh – Shan, 2005)[15].This factor encompasses the following variable:

-*If it has centralized pick up facilities (.646)*

-*If it has valet parking (.609)*

-*If the mall has have longer hours of operations (.556)*

Hence this factor is named as **"value additions"**.

The 46 variables pertaining to shopping mall footfall drivers have been reduced to 13 factors viz, atmosphere, mall uniqueness, traffic management, customer retention strategies, location,

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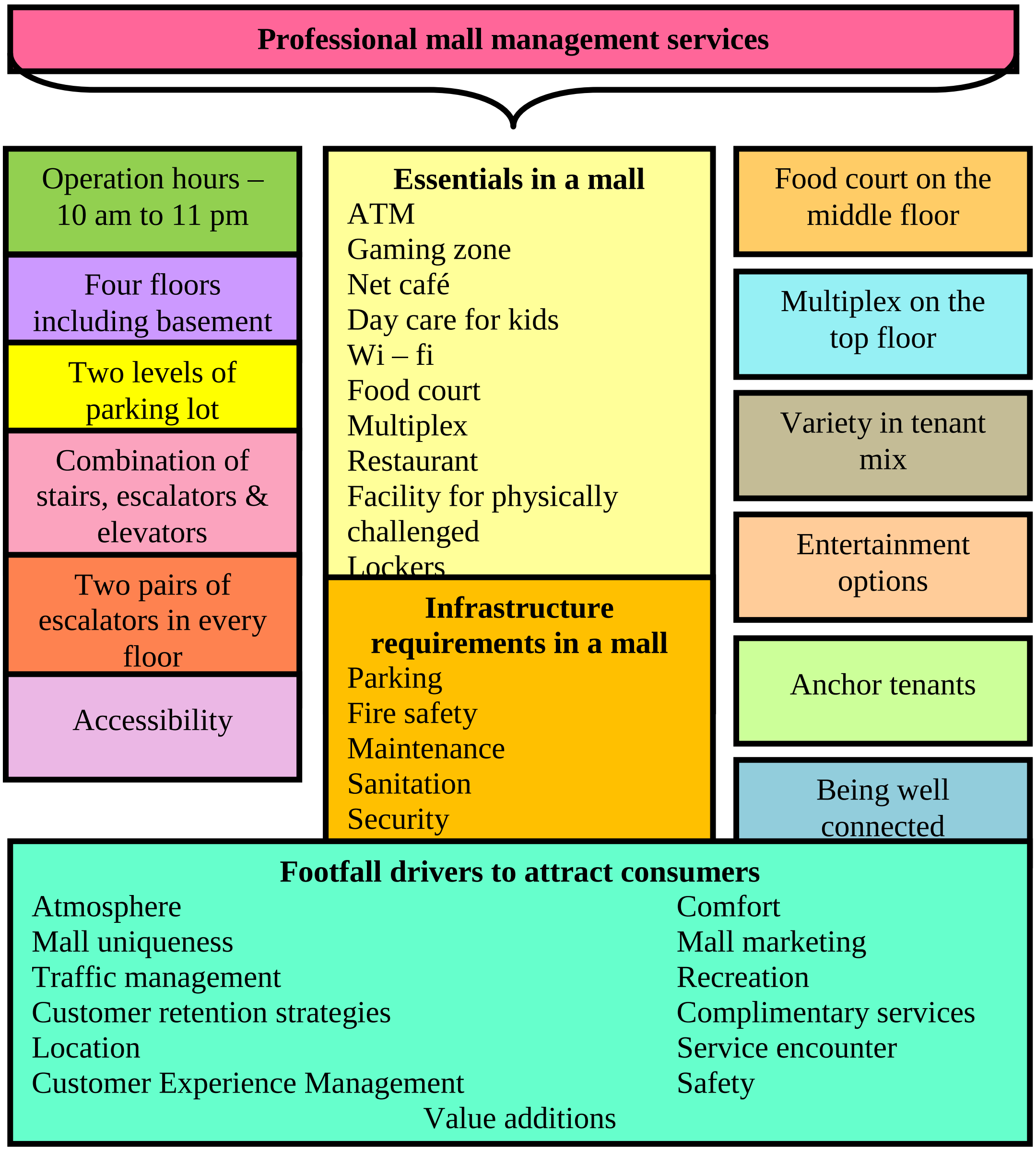
Customer Experience Management, comfort, mall marketing, recreation, complimentary services, service encounter, safety and value additions.

ILLUSTRATION OF THE IDEAL SHOPPING MALL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SHOPPING MALL TENANT

Based on the results of the percentage analysis and factor analysis, the researcher illustrates the ideal shopping mall from the perspective of the shopping mall tenant as follows:

Figure no. 1: Illustration of the ideal shopping mall from the perspective of the shopping mall tenant



EXPECTATIONS OF AN IDEAL SHOPPING MALL – FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CONSUMER

A mall is as successful as its management – probably the first stage in operating a successful shopping mall is planning a successful mall. Many things go into the making of a successful shopping mall – the right location, the ideal timeline, the best project planning, a great tenant mix, good management and the right owner[16].

The growth in Chennai's retail landscape has led to the competition between shopping malls to attract consumers to its premises. Considering the growing number of malls, shoppers tend to be more selective as they are more likely to patronize malls that are more attractive and have a wide variety of stores and merchandise that match their preferences (Anuradha & Manohar, 2011)[17].

After identifying the footfall drivers responsible for attracting consumers to a shopping mall, the researcher moves to the next issue to be addressed in this study – identifying the consumer's expectation of an ideal shopping mall.

This section of the study outlines the various services / amenities that consumer's want a shopping mall to provide them. The consumers have responded as to what are their expectations of an ideal shopping mall, and what kind of features, facilities and services they wish to be included in a shopping mall, which would make it perfect.

Opinions and statements collected from 500 mall consumers regarding the services to be provided by the ideal shopping mall accumulated to 57 different statements. The researcher grouped the statements under the 13 factors of shopping mall footfall drivers perceived by mall tenants in order to understand the point of saturation between the mall tenants' perception of shopping mall footfall drivers that are responsible to attract consumers and consumer expectations of an ideal shopping mall.

The grouping of the 57 statements is as follows:-

Factor 1: Atmosphere

○ Comfortable environment

○ Soothing background music

○ Theme based decorations

○ Non slippery floors

○ Category based store arrangement

○ Floor lighting

Factor 2: Mall uniqueness

○ Unique stores for women and kids

○ Jewellery showrooms

o Bridal studios

o Yoga studios

o Diet stores

o Gym / Health Centre/Spa

Factor 3: Traffic management

o Less parking charges

o Route maps / Navigation facilities

o Less crowding at malls

Factor 4: Customer retention strategies

o Frequent discounts and sale

o Unbranded stores

Factor 5: Location

o Well connected

o Operational malls in the outskirts of the city

o Less congestion near malls

Factor 6: Customer Experience Management

o Effective help desk

o 24*7 lost and found desk

Factor 7: Comfort

o Effective air conditioning to beat the Chennai heat

o Walkalators

o Resto – bars

o Feeding rooms

o Baby care Centre / crèche

o Massage chairs

o More lifts than escalators

o Carry bag trolleys

Factor 8: Mall Marketing

o Huge displays and drop down banners

o Attractive window displays / visual merchandising

Factor 9: Recreation

o 4D/5D theatres

o Music concert

○ Moving entertainers / Flash mobs

○ Adventure rides

○ Laser shows

○ Gaming arcades – Indoor games, Billiards lounge and Snow bowling

○ Children play area

○ Party halls

Factor 10: Complimentary services

○ Money exchange counters

○ Bank counter

○ ATM

○ Mobile charging stations

○ Wi – fi facility

○ Self-coffee/tea wending machines

○ Water coolers

○ Pay phone booths

○ Reading area / private lounge

Factor 11: Service encounter

○ Tourist Centre to guide tourist

Factor 12: Safety

○ Well trained security guards to prevent harassment of shoppers

○ Lockers for bags and valuables

○ First aid Centre

○ Doctor on call

○ Ambulance service

○ Adequate fire safety measure

Factor 13: Value Additions

○ Call taxi services

The study revealed a plethora of expectations that consumers have of the ideal shopping mall. These statements are further employed to identify the gaps between the mall tenants' perception of shopping mall footfall drivers that are responsible for attracting consumers and consumer's expectations of an ideal shopping mall in the following section of this chapter:

IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS BETWEEN SHOPPING MALL FOOTFALL DRIVERS AND CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS OF AN IDEAL SHOPPING MALL

Gap analysis has been employed in this study to identify the gaps between shopping mall footfall drivers responsible for attracting consumers to malls and consumer's expectations of an ideal shopping mall.

Gap analysis is a means used to compare the actual performance with potential performance of an organization. Gap analysis identifies gaps between the optimized allocation and integration of the resource, and the current allocation level. This reveals areas that can be improved. In this study gap analysis is used to compare the mall footfall drivers responsible for attracting consumers and consumer's expectations of an ideal shopping mall. Gap analysis would be helpful for mall operators and mall tenants to upgrade themselves against the consumers' expectations. The open ended expectations of shopping mall consumers with the mall footfall driver's statements are converted according to the **'Law of counting principle'**.

The existing benchmarks and expectations are computed independently as shown in table no. 2

Table no. 2: Table showing the compilation of shopping mall footfall drivers and the consumer's expectations of the ideal shopping mall

Factors of shopping mall footfall drivers	Total number of statements	Shopping mall footfall drivers		Customer's expectations	
		Statements	%	Statements	%
Atmosphere	13	7	53.8%	6	46.2%
Mall uniqueness	11	5	45.5%	6	54.5%
Traffic management	8	5	62.5%	3	37.5%
Customer retention	4	2	50%	2	50%
Location	8	5	62.5%	3	37.5%
Customer experience management	5	3	60%	2	40%
Comfort	10	2	20%	8	80%
Mall marketing	5	3	60%	2	40%
Recreation	11	3	27.3%	8	72.7%
Complimentary services	11	2	18.2%	9	81.8%
Service encounters	5	4	80%	1	20%
Safety	8	2	25%	6	75%
Value additions	4	3	75%	1	25%
Total Factors = 13		**46**	**639.8%**	**57**	**660.2%**
		639.8 / 13 = 49.2%		**660.2 / 13 = 50.8%**	

Table no. 3: Table showing the percentage of gap between the existing shopping mall footfall drivers and the consumer expectations

Particulars	Shopping mall footfall drivers	Consumer Expectations
Total number of factors	13	13
Total number statements	46	57
Total of percentages	639.8 / 13	660.2 / 13
%	**49.2 %**	**50.8 %**

Table no: 3 reveals that the total percentage of the existing shopping mall footfall drivers responsible to attract consumers worked out to be 49.2 % and the percentage of the consumer's expectations of an ideal shopping mall worked up to 50.8%.

This indicates that the shopping malls in Chennai are providing 49.2% of services required by customers and they have to still fill up the gap of 50.8%. This clearly shows that to reach the point of saturation and consumer expectations, Chennai shopping malls will have to provide 50.8% of the consumers' expectations to be \successful and increase their footfall. Given the high future supply of malls and increasing competitiveness within the Chennai retail market, shopping mall developers must meticulously address these gaps to ensure success in the long run.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is limited to shopping malls in the city of Chennai only. The study cannot be generalized to other parts of Tamil Nadu and India.
- Studying consumer behaviour is a very complex process as consumers are influenced by various factors – these factors can differ from one consumer to another consumer and from time to time for the same consumer.
- During the course of data collection few retailers in the shopping malls were reluctant to divulge information about their business activity.

CONCLUSION

A shopping mall is a very local business and differs from city to city, and as shopping malls are becoming consumer habitats, the 'mall culture' in Chennai is here to stay. Every mall should adapt to the needs and preferences of its catchment. The ultimate challenge lying before every shopping mall tenant is to convert mall browsers into actual consumers. However, the malls that would survive in the future would be the ones, that are run well and that which understands the consumer's expectations. The need for the hour is to attract consumer footfall, convert them into actual buyers and try to retain them in the long run.

In conclusion, the researcher proposes that an ideal and successful shopping mall should be a manifestation of the following components:

M – Mall itself

A – Atmosphere

L – Layout

L – Location

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