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Determining shopping mall visitors' perceptions on mall attributes

Abstract

The challenging retail environment requires a need to manage shopping malls effectively to understand the attributes that attract shopping mall visitors to visit shopping malls. The purpose of the study aimed to determine shopping mall visitors' perceptions or ratings towards shopping mall attributes they consider when choosing which shopping mall to visit. A quantitative approach was followed to realize research objective using interviewer-administered questionnaires for data collection. The data were collected at shopping centre in the capital city of South Africa, City of Tshwane. A descriptive analysis method was used to analyze the quantitative data. The findings of the study revealed that the shopping mall visitors' ranked adequate parking availability high. This study contributes to the current literature and provides valuable information to South African retailers and shopping mall developers, with regard to marketing communications and marketing strategies that aim to attract shopping mall visitors. Suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords: shopping mall, shopping motivations, hedonic motivation, utilitarian motivation.

JEL Classification: M31, M37.

Introduction

Shopping motivations have been researched in consumer shopping behavior over the past decades (Wagner and Radolph, 2010). Shopping mall visitors visit shopping malls not only for searching for particular products, but they also view these visits as an entertainment activity that provides fun and pleasure from the shopping experience (Kim, Lee and Kim, 2011). Shopping mall visitors tend to engage in various activities when visiting shopping malls (Farrag, El Sayed and Belk, 2010). This is further supported by Gilboa (2009) who identified activities and grouped them into hedonic and utilitarian categories. According to Gilboa (2009), shopping mall visitors can visit shopping malls to participate in mall-initiated activities as part of entertainment. These entertainment activities include children's programs and cultural events. This is backed by Farrag et al. (2010) indicating that shopping mall visitors can visit shopping malls, for example, to attend fashion shows. In addition, when family members visit these shopping malls, children are presented with an opportunity to play around at various entertainment arenas.

The research suggests that shopping mall visitors consider shopping mall attributes when selecting which shopping mall to visit (Jackson, Stoel and Brantley, 2011). Jackson et al. (2011) discovered the way in which shopping mall visitors' attitudes towards shopping mall attributes and shopping value derived from a shopping mall visit vary across gender and generational cohorts. The results of the survey indicated that there were no differences in hedonic and utilitarian shopping motivations by generational cohort, but generational differences in attitude towards mall hygiene factors, locational convenience and entertainment features tend to exist. In addition, the study discovered that females experience greater levels of hedonic shopping value from visiting the shopping

mall and also display more positive attitudes towards shopping mall hygiene factors and entertainment activities in comparison to males counterparts. There were no difference in utilitarian shopping value and attitude toward locational convenience found between gender differences.

Considering the growing numbers of shopping malls, shopping mall visitors tend to be more selective in selecting which shopping mall to visit. Shopping mall visitors may visit shopping malls that appear to be more attractive and with a variety of stores, product and services that are congruent to their needs and preferences. Therefore, it is important for shopping mall managers to understand how attractive their respective shopping malls are to different shopping mall visitors based on shopping mall attributes. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to determine shopping mall visitors' perceptions or ratings towards shopping mall attributes they consider when choosing which shopping mall to visit from a South African perspective. Understanding these shopping malls could assist retailers in planning marketing communication and marketing strategies.

The next section focuses on the literature review of previous studies regarding the shopping malls.

1. Literature background

It is notable that to draw shopping mall/centre visitors to shopping malls, it is necessary to understand the motivations of shopping mall visitors for visiting a shopping mall and the shopping mall attributes they value most. This section focuses on the literature review of previous studies and perspectives regarding the shopping mall visitors' shopping motivations and shopping mall attributes.

1.1. Shopping motivations. Different shopping motivations and shopping mall attributes they value most encourage shopping mall visitors to visit shopping malls. Motivation is defined as the process that causes customers to display a particular behavior.

It has been revealed that shopping motivations are determined by utilitarian and hedonic motivations. Utilitarian shopping motivation is focused on the functional and objective attributes of visiting a shopping mall (Barkirtas and Divanoglu, 2013). Babin et al. (1994) described utilitarian motivation as task related, rational shopping and is dependent on whether the shopping mall visitor has completed shopping successfully (getting everything done as planned). Utilitarian motives include achievement and efficiency. Achievement and efficiency motivations involve accomplishing what had been planned on a particular shopping trip in terms of finding items the shopping mall visitors were looking for, within the shortest period of time (Cardoso and Pinto, 2010).

Hedonic consumption is the joy and pleasure the customer expects from visiting a shopping mall, therefore, it is associated with feelings, thoughts and perceptions (Kang and Park-Poaps, 2010). Babin, Darden and Griffin (1994) described hedonic motivations as being more subjective in nature and individualistic, and result more from fun, as compared to task related shopping. In addition, a hedonic motivation reflects shopping to be more entertaining and has emotional fulfilment. Hedonic motivation includes gratification, idea, role, experimentation, value and social shopping. Gratification shopping involves shopping to relax and relieve stress when visitors are in a down mood (Cardoso and Pinto, 2010). According to Cardoso and Pinto (2010), shopping mall visitors may visit shopping malls if they want to treat themselves to something special. Cardoso and Pinto (2010) added that idea shopping involves shopping to keep up with the latest trends and fashion. In addition, shopping mall visitors visit shopping malls to see what new products are available at stores. Role shopping involves shopping done for others, for example, shopping for friends and family or even shopping for a perfect gift for someone. Experimentation shopping involves shopping done to seek stimulation and adventure from entertainment centres and inbuilt themes. Shopping malls offer shopping mall visitors more than just the normal grocery and clothing shopping, but also an element of entertainment and inbuilt themes are included as a strategic tool in differentiating shopping malls. Allard, Babin and Chebat (2009) added that the entertainment mix of a shopping mall may comprise of speciality event entertainment (for example, movie theatres) and food courts (for example, restaurants). These entertainment offerings motivate shopping mall visitors to extend their time spent at the shopping mall.

Value shopping involves shopping to get the best deal in terms of bargains and special offers (Cardoso and Pinto, 2010). In addition, value shopping may involve visitors who visit shopping mall in search of bargains at supermarkets/hypermarkets, seeking reduced

prices on groceries, domestic appliances, and domestic cleaning materials. However, this may differ according to demographical characteristics such as gender. Bargain hunting seems to be shared among women, as they are usually responsible for shopping for domestic products (Farrag et al., 2010). Social shopping involves visitors who visit shopping malls to socialize with others, to meet up with friends and to also shop with others as a bonding experience (Cardoso and Pinto, 2010).

In a more recent study, El Hedhli, Zourrig and Chebat (2016) investigated the effects of shopping on positive shopping mall attitudes and word-of-mouth, this study revealed that hedonic value influences positive shopping mall attitude and positive word-of-mouth more than utilitarian shopping value. This study pointed that shopping in a mall can contribute to the satisfaction of different of human needs such as economic, social, esteem, and aesthetic needs. In another recent study, Kesari and Altulkar (2016) investigated the influence of utilitarian and hedonic shopping values on satisfaction of shopping mall visitors of central India, and the findings of this study confirmed the relationship between shopping values and customer satisfaction, where both the hedonic and utilitarian shopping values show positive significant influences on customer satisfaction. Therefore, it can be concluded that shopping mall attributes are important in fulfilling shopping mall visitors' shopping motivations, as these attributes present both hedonic and utilitarian values which, in turn, provides customer satisfaction.

1.2. Shopping mall attributes. Khare (2011) investigated shopping mall visitors' behavior at the malls and this research suggests that convenience as a shopping mall attribute has the largest impact on selecting which shopping mall to visit. The availability of a wide selection of products at the shopping malls can reduce the perceived costs (for example, travel time and effort taken) associated with each shopping trip and ease the shopping task. Farrag et al. (2010) explored on the shopping mall visitors' behavior at the malls in Egypt, this study pointed that shopping mall visitors may visit the shopping mall, as they consider it to be a safe place because of security measures. Farrag et al. (2010, p. 101) add that shopping mall visitors may perceive a shopping mall to be convenient in terms of having various products and services under one roof and easy access to the shopping mall.

Kuruvilla and Joshi (2010) investigated shopping mall visitors' behavior at the malls in India, and this study pointed out that shopping mall attributes determine the shopping mall visitors' attitude towards shopping malls. According to Kuruvilla and Joshi (2010), shopping mall attributes that influence shopping mall visitors' attitude towards shopping

malls also include the shopping mall location, variety of stores at shopping mall, availability of parking, shopping mall employee behavior, price of products and services, quality of products and services, customer service, promotional activities, shopping mall ambiance, shopping mall facilities, food, refreshments and shopping mall safety. In another study, Chebat, Sirgy and Grzekowiak (2010) examined shopping mall attributes, namely: access to the shopping mall, shopping mall image and store atmosphere that may be used to draw shopping mall visitors to shopping malls. The findings of the study by Chebat, Sirgy and Grzekowiak (2010) confirmed that the shopping mall image has a positive relation to shopping mall attitude, shopping mall patronage, and word-of-mouth communications.

In another study, El Hedhli, Chebat and Sirgy (2013) identified six predictive factors or attributes of the shopping mall retail mix that influence shopping well-being, namely, functionality, convenience, safety at the shopping mall, leisure activities, atmospherics and hygiene at the shopping mall, and self-identification. El Hedhli et al. (2013) argued that these shopping mall attributes are divided into two categories, namely, utilitarian-laden factors such as functionality, shopping mall convenience, safety, as well as hedonic-laden factors such as leisure, atmospherics, self-identification. Therefore, it can be concluded that shopping mall attributes are important in fulfilling shopping mall visitors' shopping motivations. In addition, shopping mall visitors may differ with ratings of shopping mall attributes they consider in selecting a mall to visit.

The next section outlines the research methodology followed in this study.

2. Research methodology

This section outlines the research methodology followed to realize the research purpose of this study starting with the research design and data collection method, target population, sampling technique, and data analysis method used.

2.1. Research design and data collection method.

The purpose of the current study was to determine shopping mall visitors' perceptions/ratings towards shopping mall attributes which they consider when choosing the mall to visit. The study was quantitative in nature in collecting the primary data to address research objectives. This study was conducted during May 2015 among shopping mall visitors at Kolonnade Shopping Centre in the City of Tshwane, South Africa during shopping hours on weekdays and over the weekends. The interviewer-administered questionnaires could be completed in not more than 15 minutes. No incentives were given to respondents to participate in the study.

2.2. Target population. The target population in the study consisted of adult shopping mall visitors at the Kolonnade Shopping Centre in the City of Tshwane, South Africa. 101 adult shopping mall visitors participated in this study at the Kolonnade Shopping Centre. For the purpose of this study, adults were defined as male and female individuals, aged 18 years and older, of all cultural and racial backgrounds who visited the mentioned shopping mall at least once a month or more. The shopping mall visitors served as the respondents in completing interviewer-administered questionnaires. Furthermore, adult shopping mall visitors displayed more experience in terms of being able to answer the proposed questions in the survey.

2.3. Sample technique. A non-probability quota sampling plan was used in the study with quotas being filled on the basis of convenience and personal judgement of researchers at each shopping mall. The first stage of the quota sampling involved compiling the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of age, gender and race. The second stage of the quota sampling involves convenience sampling. Convenience sampling involves the selection of readily available respondents (Cooper and Schindler, 2011). Convenience sampling method was used in this study as the method is less expensive, less time-consuming and since there was no available sample frame.

2.4. Measurement levels used on the questionnaire.

In order to compile a scale of measurement for shopping mall visitors' perceptions on mall attributes, questionnaire items were adapted from previous studies by Chebat et al. (2010) and Stoel, Wickliffe and Lee (2004). Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with the statements on five-items scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The respondents were also requested to provide demographic data regarding age, gender, and race. The draft questionnaire was pre-tested using convenience sample of ten respondents of different age groups, gender and race who lately visited Kolonnade Shopping Centre in the city of Tshwane, South Africa. It was deemed not necessary to make major adjustments on the draft questionnaire except minor changes on wording, as respondents reported no problems with the questionnaire.

2.5. Data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used in this study to analyze the primary data on demographic variables of shopping mall visitors, and shopping mall attributes. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 23) was used to capture automatically on handheld devices and analyze data. The data were of good quality with few missing values. The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed by measuring internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha values.

Cronbach’s Alpha is used to measure the internal consistency reliability which is the average of all possible split-half coefficients resulting from different splittings of scale items (Malhotra, 2010). The validity of the measurement scales was assessed looking at face or content validity and used scales that proved to be previously valid.

2.5.1. *Variables used in the analysis.* In line with the overall research objectives of the study, Table 1 in the next page depicts the variables (age, gender, race, and shopping mall attributes) analyzed during the data analysis.

Table 1. Variables used in the data analysis

Variable name	Level of measurement	Univariate descriptive statistics
Age	Nominal scale	Percentages, mode
Gender	Nominal scale	Percentages, mode
Race	Nominal scale	Percentages, mode
Shopping mall attributes	Interval scale	Range, mean, standard deviation

The next section presents the results of this study.

3. Results

This sub section presents the findings and interpretation of the data generated during in the study.

3.1. **Demographic profile of respondents.** This section presents the demographic profiles of respondents in terms of age, gender, and race. These demographic data were collected to understand the profiles of shopping mall visitors.

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic variable	Kolonnade shopping centre	
	N	%
Gender		
Male	51	50.5
Female	50	49.5
Total	101	100
Race		
Black	50	49.5
Coloured	0	0
Indian	0	0
White	51	50.5
Total	101	100
Age group		
18 to 24 years	11	10.9
25 to 34 years	31	30.7
35 to 49 years	30	29.7
50 years and older	29	28.7

3.1.1. *Respondents’ age, gender, and race.* Table 2 provides the age groups of the overall respondents who participated in the study. Table 2 indicates that overall, the majority of the respondents were within the age group of 25 to 34 (30.8%), followed by respondents within the age group of 35 to 49 (29%) and respondents within the age group of 50 years and

above (27.5%). Therefore, the majority of the respondents at Kolonnade Shopping Centre were over the age of 25, and the minority of the respondents were within the age group of 18 to 24 years old (12.7%). Therefore, the majority of the respondents were over the age of 25. The minority of the respondents were within the age group of 18-24 years old (12.7%). The male respondents at Kolonnade Shopping Centre were the majority with 50.5% and female respondents at 49.5%. The races of the respondents who participated in the study were white at 50.5% and black at 49.5%, with white respondents exceeding black respondents.

3.2. **Shopping mall attributes.** Table 3 provides the findings regarding the ratings of shopping mall attributes, such as parking availability at the shopping mall, accessibility to the shopping mall, operating hours at the shopping mall, shopping mall convenience, and the hygiene factors of restrooms.

Table 3. Shopping mall/centre attributes

Attribute	Kolonnade Shopping Centre	
	M	SD
The shopping mall/centre offers a variety of services	4.43	0.742
Offers a variety of stores	4.49	0.743
Provides quality services	4.36	0.782
Offers a wide assortment of products	4.37	0.869
Sells quality products	4.42	0.828
Offers products that are new in style	3.94	0.917
Carries good brand names	4.21	0.909
Offers value for money	4.23	0.811
Is conveniently located	4.17	1.141
Is easily accessible	4.20	1.049
The hours that the mall is open suit me	4.38	0.881
Provides convenient parking	4.57	0.669
Is well-designed	4.01	1.204
The restrooms are comfortable	4.21	0.868
Provides good eat out/take out options	3.81	1.247
Provides adequate entertainment facilities	3.39	1.211
People who shop at this mall/centre are similar to me	2.91	1.340
The general atmosphere is appealing	4.02	0.969
Provides adequate safety	4.20	0.788
Hosts appealing events/exhibits	2.65	1.202
Displays clear signage in and outside the shopping mall/centre	3.89	1.154
Is unique when compared to other shopping malls/centres	3.04	1.296
The help desks provide the information I require	3.42	1.201
Provides adequate facilities for the disabled	3.36	1.387
Provides suitable facilities for children	3.27	1.367
The design is visually appealing	3.76	1.274

Respondents indicated that they agreed the most with the statements “Provides convenient parking” (mean = 4.57), “Offers a variety of stores” (mean = 4.49) and “The shopping mall/centre offers a variety of services” (mean = 4.43). The respondents agreed the least with the statements “Hosts appealing exhibits/events”

(mean = 2.65), “People who shop at this mall/centre are similar to me” (mean = 2.91) and “Is unique when compared to other shopping malls/centres” (mean = 3.04). The standard deviation (SD) for the 26 statements ranged between 0.669 and 1.386.

The next section provides the conclusions and discussions of this study.

Conclusions and discussions

The purpose of this study was to determine shopping mall visitors’ perceptions/ratings towards shopping mall attributes they consider when choosing which shopping mall to visit. This study provides insight about utilitarian and hedonic motivations of shopping mall visitors, as identified by Cardoso and Pinto (2010), El Hedhli et al. (2016), and Kesari and Altulkar (2016). El Hedhli et al. (2013) pointed that shopping in a mall can contribute to the satisfaction of different of human needs such as economic, social, esteem, and aesthetic needs. These shopping needs and motivations have influence on shopping malls’ architecture and design which define the shopping malls’ attributes. In this study, the shopping mall attributes that were ranked highest at the Kolonnade Shopping Centre are the shopping mall’s convenience and stores assortment available, respondent agreed the most with the statements “Provides convenient parking”, “Offers a variety of stores” and “The shopping mall/centre offers a variety of services”. The findings of this study concur with Khare (2011) and Jackson, Stoel and Brantley (2011) that convenience and availability of a wide selection of products at the shopping malls, as shopping mall attributes have the largest impact on selecting which shopping mall to visit. The findings of this study are also in line with the findings of the study by Kuruvilla and Joshi (2010) that shopping mall attributes that influence shopping mall visitors’ attitude towards shopping malls also include the shopping mall location, variety of stores at shopping mall, availability of parking.

The next section provides the recommendations to stakeholders involved in developing and managing shopping malls formulated based on results and conclusions made in this study.

Recommendations

The shopping mall developers should create entertainment facilities in the shopping mall to cater for the entertainment needs of the different shopping mall visitors. In order to enhance shopping mall

leisure, the shopping mall managers should recruit retailers who host events, offer arcades and a playhouse for children. In addition, the shopping mall managers could recruit retailers to develop an assortment or a variety of retail stores that cover the full spectrum of consumption needs. Moreover, to achieve a high level of shopping mall convenience, shopping mall managers could work closely with town council officials to develop road signs guiding traffic towards the mall and ensure adequate parking facilities. Furthermore, the shopping mall managers could install signs and directions within the mall at various strategic places, such as security offices.

The shopping mall managers should promote the mall in marketing communications as a unique brand by considering shopping mall attributes such as architecture, interior design, decorations, convenience and safety, as these attributes seem important to attract shopping mall visitors to visit shopping malls. Shopping mall managers and retail store managers at the shopping malls could develop promotional programs showing image of a typical shopper consistent with how shopping mall visitors view themselves, ultimately, to attract shopping mall visitors with similar demographic profiles. Furthermore, in developing shopping malls, it is imperative to consider convenience as the shopping malls’ attribute by considering accessibility of transport facilities to and from shopping malls and having access to a variety of stores under one roof by shopping mall visitors.

The next section provides the limitations of this study and future research directions.

Limitations and directions for future research

The use of a non-probability sample in the study served as a limitation, because findings cannot be generalized to the population. Future studies should endeavor to include a more representative sample of shopping mall visitors below the age of 25. As the study was conducted in one shopping mall in the city of Tshwane, in Gauteng province of South Africa due to limited budget and time constraints, similar studies are recommended in other cities and other provinces of South Africa.

The last two sections provide acknowledgement and reference list of source consulted in writing this paper.

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