

Mall Shoppers and Their Decision-Making from Indian Perspective - A Critical Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper critically reviews the existing literature pertinent to the decision-making styles of mall shoppers in India. It also provides insights for mall owners, store managers, retailers, and sales staff on maximizing the experience of Indian mall shoppers in the light of competition and emerging technologies.

Methodology: The paper critically analyzes existing conceptual and empirical literature on consumers' buying decision-making styles, focusing on Indian mall shoppers.

Findings: Indian malls have constantly undergone adaptation and changes in both style and substance to entice increasingly sophisticated, fussy, and capricious consumers. Findings suggest that Indian mall shoppers widely exhibit price, recreational, quality, and novelty consciousness decision-making styles but are confused over choice and variety seeking.

Implications: The findings draw the attention of mall owners and retail marketers to understand shoppers' insights and orientation regarding product decision-making and store selection. Further, the study connotes specific facts for retailers and mall developers facing dilemmas about choosing the appropriate strategy for targeting shoppers and attracting greater footfall.

Originality: This study contributes to understanding the decision-making styles of mall shoppers in India through the literature. It provides valuable insights for academic researchers and marketers about the decision-making of Indian mall shoppers.

Limitations and directions for future research: Further research on the buying decision-making styles of Indian mall shoppers, including their changing tastes and preferences, could significantly contribute to design strategies by mall owners and retail marketers. Comparative analyses of mall-preferring shoppers and consumers preferring unorganized retail outlets could add value to understanding decision-making factors.

Keywords: Mall Shoppers; Retailing; Decision-making; Price Consciousness; Recreational Consciousness; Quality Consciousness; Novelty Consciousness

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INTRODUCTION

Shopping malls are envisaged to be frontrunners for the sprawling of organized retailing (Pookulangara & Knight, 2013). A *shopping mall* is a huge building or group comprising various stores and other business establishments solely selling various products or brands in retailing mode (Narahari & Kuvad, 2017). They are closed, climate-controlled, lighted shopping centers with retail stores on one or both sides of an enclosed walkway (Levy *et al.*, 2012). Modern shopping malls confer many entertainment alternatives, lifestyle products, and services, such as luxury shopping, game zones, beauty salons, cinemas, and food joints, to enhance shoppers' experience (Ibrahim & Ng, 2002). Modern-day malls are known to endow shoppers with the experiential and functional benefit of shopping from various merchandise, namely apparel, food, groceries, entertainment, convenience, and leisure, under a single structured roof with on-site parking (Dey *et al.*, 2019). These malls can be regarded as *One Stop Shop* that bestows a combo of services, quality time, entertainment, socialization, pleasure, and fun, merchandise to its consumers in the form of convenient access to a desirable mix of retailers and facilities within a managed environment to provide a satisfying and safe, shopping and leisure experience. Malls are viewed as embarking upon a new culture of branded products, quality lifestyle, recreation, and shopping.

Indian malls invariably have a hypermarket, a multiplex, a department store, a food court, and various brand outlets (Singh & Sahay, 2012). Malls have significantly transformed the lifestyles and behaviors of Indian consumers by offering them branded products (Dwivedi, 2009). In the past, Indian consumers had limited product choices owing to the compulsion to buy from nearby stores with limited assortment (Lysonski *et al.*, 1996). However, today, organized retailers, hypermarkets, and supermarkets offer more product variety to consumers. Undoubtedly, this leads to customers getting delighted and excited about getting what they desire conveniently in one location. A good location is among the most critical factors of a shopping mall (Bozdoğan, 2015). The physical visibility and feel of the product are other essential experiences that any mall can provide customers (Khare, 2012).

The mall boom in India has led to the mushrooming of malls across the different regions of the country (Kuruville & Joshi, 2010). The expansion of Indian retail can be visualized as rambling shopping centers, multi-plex malls, and huge complexes that offer shopping, entertainment, and food courts under one roof (Sathish & Raju, 2010). Indian consumers are currently characterized by a paradigmatic shift in buying motives, personality, interests, beliefs, values, and attitudes while leapfrogging from traditional Kirana stores to modern-day shopping malls (Shekar *et al.*, 2016). Thus, the retail industry in India has shown significant potential for development. The market indicates unprecedented growth, supported by favorable government policies and technological advancements.

This research aims to critically examine the perspectives of Indian mall shoppers in decision-making by extensively reviewing the literature. The following section reviews conceptual and empirical studies, including mall attributes influencing consumer buying decision-making and shopping orientation. This is followed by a review of Indian mall shoppers' decision-making styles, and the final section presents the conclusion and study implications.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Empirical studies show several benefits that attract mall shoppers, including their changed perspectives and lifestyles. Studies explored the roles played by malls in imparting functional and experiential benefits to people in small towns, although they are alien to the concept of malls. Also, studies reveal that male and female shoppers perceive differences between malls regarding social interaction issues (Khare, 2010).

Mall Attributes Influencing Consumer Buying Decision-Making

The availability of different retailing alternatives provides more options and choices to consumers. According to Areni and Kim (1993), the retail environment and attributes are important in eliciting positive responses about stores. A retail environment with positive stimuli motivates consumers to purchase, whereas an unattractive layout conveys negative cues, leading to displeasure and dissatisfaction (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Russell, 1979). The size of malls and the quality of the facilities are persuasive in drawing consumers to the stores, and unfavorable

design elements dissuade them from visiting the malls (Brown, 1999). Malls with multiplexes, food courts, and recreational areas for children are emerging as one-stop locations for family outings and centers for teenagers' socialization (Martin & Turley, 2004).

Malls play a significant role in consumers' lifestyles (Terblanche, 1999) and accomplish the consumers' personal and social needs (Rintamäki et al., 2006; Tauber, 1972). Malls are also focal points of community entertainment and interaction (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), contributing to the socio-economic environment (Hernandez & Jones, 2005). The ambiance, layout of facilities, and the provision of entertainment (Babin et al., 1994; Jones, 1999) enhance the attractiveness of malls, which affects consumers' emotions (Bloch et al., 1994). The malls add an element of fun and entertainment to shopping experiences (Kumar & Karande, 2000; Napolitano et al., 2003). Recreational and entertainment facilities assist retailers in differentiating themselves (Beyard et al., 2001) by providing sensory stimulants (Bloch et al., 1994).

Kelemen and Kemeny (2019) analyze a short-term retail event similar in success to Black Friday but driven by different consumer motivations. Using a mixed-method approach such as phenomenological interviews and an online survey of 761 respondents, the study applied exploratory factor and hierarchical cluster analyses, followed by ANOVA, to identify three distinct shopper groups: Loyalists, Enthusiasts, and Newbies. Each group varies in task and social orientation and uses different strategies to achieve personal shopping goals. This study contributes to retail shopping orientation literature and provides strategic insights for retailers to enhance performance by targeting the most valuable customer segments.

The study of Yaaminidevi (2013) in Madurai, India, alludes to malls satisfying the utilitarian value searched by customers and offering them the desired recreational benefits. Ahmed and Mayya's (2015) study in the city of Mangalore in India revealed that consumers terrifically benefitted from the organized retail outlets in terms of a wider choice of products and well-known brands, one-stop shopping, new market arrivals, festive offers, huge discounts, and other benefits. Kaveh et al. (2021) examine how customer engagement in sales promotions influences purchase intention, using theories of value co-creation and customer engagement. Through PLSc-

SEM analysis, the findings show that when customers choose promotional discounts that suit their preferences, their purchase intention is positively affected, mediated sequentially by perceived value and customer satisfaction. The study highlights the practical benefit of involving customers in promotional strategies to boost interest and engagement.

Environmental factors such as interior design, store layout, lighting, color, music, and overall cleanliness induce varying degrees of customer emotional reaction (Babin & Attaway, 2000; Babin et al., 1994; Bitner, 1992). A pleasant environment elicits positive behavior (Mehrabian et al., 1997). Mall ambiance and attractiveness are perceived as a key contributor to attracting shoppers to stores (Laroche et al., 2005; Michon et al., 2008) and play a significant role in consumers' evaluations of products (Baker et al., 1994). Due to their architectural design, layout, ambiance, and synergies among retailing, eating, and entertaining (Beyard et al., 2001; De Nisco & Napolitano, 2006), malls have become tourist destinations (Ooi & Sim, 2007). The mall environment favors consumers' moods and augments their shopping experience (Michon et al., 2008). The malls archetypally house cinema theatres, food courts, recreational centers, and gaming areas where consumers can relax. The glamour of malls with sparkling hinterlands and multiple of stores is considered a breather from the hectic metropolitan lifestyles. Thus, the malls offer a wide range of stores such as departmental stores, apparel stores, and entertainment and leisure facilities (Abratt et al., 1985; Babin et al., 1994; McGoldrick & Thomson, 1992; Prendergast et al., 1998) are regarded as attractive destinations (Hernandez & Jones, 2005). According to Hook (1989), the impression of the mall is based upon the types of stores and entertainment facilities, a combination of tangible or functional factors and intangible or psychological factors. The choice of malls depends on several factors (Teller et al., 2008), with convenience having the most significant impact (Severin et al., 2001). Instead of visiting different retailers for different product categories, consumers visit malls and purchase all their household requirements. A wide selection of products can also lessen the perceived costs of travel time and effort associated with each shopping trip and ease the shopping task (Pan & Zinkhan, 2006).

Customers prefer malls based on attributes such as special ambient conditions, air conditioning facilities, scope for window shopping, food courts, entertainment like movie theatres, game zones, and others (Khare, 2012). In order to entice increasingly sophisticated, choosy, fussy, and fickle consumers, malls have continually exhibited adaptability and changeability in style and substance (Kushwaha *et al.*, 2017). Shopping malls could magnetize higher customer traffic with factors such as ambiance, store assortment, sales promotions, and comparative economic gains (Rajagopal, 2009). Mall shoppers' perception of malls is influenced by dimensions of variety, quality, satisfaction value, and parking (Hauser & Koppelman, 1979). Thus, shoppers' perceptions can be measured in various dimensions, such as price, layout, ease of reaching the mall and parking, visual appearance, reputation, merchandise, services, hours of operation, and atmosphere (Downs, 1970).

The study of Hu and Jasper (2007) identified five major factors: convenience, choice, crowds, ambiance, parking, and hedonic shopping orientation, which stood very important for experienced and mature adults during mall shopping. Yavas's (2003) study connotes important attributes of shopping malls, including quality, price, cleanliness, courtesy, assortment, security, store hours, accessibility, and atmosphere. Zhuang *et al.* (2006) analyzed the impact of 13 situational factors on mall shoppers' choices, including assortment, atmosphere, convenience, and quality. The study on UAE shopping malls from the shoppers' perspective by El-Adly (2007) reported six mall attractiveness factors: comfort, entertainment, diversity, mall essence, convenience, and luxury. Research advocates that a shopping mall's image can be measured on five dimensions: access, price/promotion, store atmosphere, cross-category assortment, and within-category assortment (Hedhli & Chebat, 2009). A study on shopping mall preferences of teens of 12 - 17 years showed that significant attributes relate to the friendliness of malls, presence of cool stores, conduciveness for hanging out with friends, and attractiveness (Wendy & Sandra, 2005). A study on Southern Africa highlighted various features in shopping malls, such as merchandisers, accessibility, service, amenities, ambiance, promotion, entertainment, security, and many more influencing shoppers' buying behavior (Dubihlela & Dubihlela, 2014). Several studies infer that shopping center image has been

influenced by four principal attributes: merchandise mix, accessibility, services, and atmospherics (Dennis *et al.*, 2001; Finn & Louviere, 1996; Frasquet *et al.*, 2001). A high level of performance management with apt customer support and service also popularizes malls among shoppers (Forslund, 2015). Retail mall stores use discounts, loyalty cards, price-offs, and freebies as promotional tools (Khare & Mayo, 2010). Shoppers also get captivated by factors like discounts and sales schemes, even if they have minimal requirements. The study also recognized the prominence of private labels or retailer brands and the price difference they offer as the main reason for increased footfall (Burt & Davies, 2010). The retailer's brands provide standardized quality and greater quantity than national brands. Retailer brands contribute more profits by curtailing channel incentives, influencing a mall's success. According to Kushwaha (2017), consumers' behavior in malls is influenced by service experience, internal environment, convenience, utilitarian aspects, acoustics (music), proximity, and demonstration.

Othman *et al.* (2022) explore factors influencing customer purchase intention in a shopping mall context in Malaysia, focusing on product offerings, store environment, perceived value, and price. Using a correlational design and hierarchical regression analysis on 157 survey responses, the findings reveal that price and product offerings significantly drive purchase intention, while perceived value predicts customer satisfaction. However, customer satisfaction does not mediate the relationship between these factors and purchase intention. Further, Chen *et al.* (2021) use in-store ambulatory eye-tracking to examine how lateral and vertical biases influence consumer attention in a grocery store. Analyzing shoppers' visual fixations and movements, the researchers found that shoppers pay more attention to products on their right side when walking down aisles. However, contrary to common belief, eye level is not the most attention-grabbing area. Instead, products located about 14.7 inches below eye level—around chest level—receive the most visual attention. These findings challenge traditional retail assumptions about product placement.

Shopping Orientation

Consumers visit malls and make buying decisions with a specific attitude or style. Different categories of

products and services involve different shopping attitudes. Dholakia (1999) pointed out that the behavior related to shopping for gifts is different from the behavior related to shopping for groceries. According to Vijayasathy (2003), consumers' motivations and attitudes play a significant role in determining consumers' shopping orientations.

Sproles and Kendall (1986) proposed that consumers' decision-making style is their mental orientation toward shopping for a product or selecting a store. According to the authors, consumers may espouse a composition of more than one style while arriving at a buying decision. Based on wide-ranging studies, Sproles and Kendall (1986) developed a Consumer Style Inventory (CSI) entailing eight dimensions of decision-making: perfectionism, brand-consciousness, novelty and fashion consciousness, recreational-hedonistic consciousness, price and value-for-money consciousness, impulsiveness, confused by over choice and habitual and brand-loyal orientation as thumb rules.

A clear understanding of the consumers' orientation toward shopping can assist retailers in crafting effective retail promotional strategies and planning appropriate strategies for maximizing satisfaction and fulfilling consumers' shopping needs (Seock & Sauls, 2008). Studies show that consumer decision styles or CSI are significantly related to the choice and evaluation of stores (Lumpkin & Hawes, 1985; Moya & Kincade, 2002; Seock & Chen-Yu, 2007; Seock & Sauls, 2008).

Perfectionist consumers have greater expectations and seek the best overall quality and functionality of the products and services. Brand-conscious consumers purchase reputed and well-known brands and perceive that high-priced products are better quality. They prefer to buy products and services at specialty stores. Novelty and fashion-conscious consumers seek excitement and pleasure in new and innovative items; these consumers update themselves with the latest styles, fads, and trends. Recreational, hedonistic consumers find shopping pleasurable, fun-filled, and enjoyable. Price-conscious or value-for-money-seeking consumers often compare products, look for discounts and price-offs, and consider the lowest-priced products. Impulsive consumers go on shopping trips casually and are least concerned about price and quality, but they often regret their purchases. Confused

by over-choice, consumers find it challenging to make decisions because of multiple options and information overload. Habitual and brand-loyal consumers are loyal and stick with their favorite brands and shops. Thus, consumers approach the marketplace with a specific attitude toward buying the products or services.

Watanabe *et al.* (2019) evaluate how culture, store image, and customer satisfaction influence purchase intention in Brazilian supermarkets. Using survey data from 443 consumers and structural equation modeling, the findings show that store image and customer satisfaction significantly enhance purchase intention, while the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism has no direct effect. The study highlights that store layout, service, product variety, and quality are key to increasing satisfaction and purchase intention. The study fills a gap in the literature by examining these relationships in the supermarket context, although limitations include convenience sampling and the exclusion of vertical/horizontal cultural distinctions. Likewise, Diallo *et al.* (2018) examine how mall service quality influences customer loyalty across three developing countries such as Morocco, Senegal, and Tunisia, including how cultural context moderates these relationships. Using data from 750 customers, the research reveals that service quality and its dimensions, such as physical aspects, reliability, problem-solving, and staff attention, affect loyalty through the mediation of customer satisfaction and perceived value. However, the impact varies by country: service quality strongly drives loyalty in Morocco and Senegal, while customer satisfaction more significantly influences loyalty in Senegal and Tunisia. The findings highlight that cultural context shapes how service quality affects customer loyalty, resulting in differing patterns across countries.

DECISION-MAKING STYLES OF INDIAN MALL SHOPPERS

In recent years, very few studies have reported on the constituent factors of shopping malls in India and how they influence decision-making (Kushwaha *et al.*, 2017). According to Bailey (2003), Indian consumers prefer shopping malls as they offer easy access to all products under one roof. A survey to investigate the shopping motivation of Indian customers unveiled nine factors divided into two dimensions: utilitarian and hedonic. All nine factors vaulted different areas, such as economic, enjoyment, gratification, and idea

shopping, affecting the motivation of Indian customers to do shopping at shopping malls (Patel & Sharma, 2009). The study of Devgan and Kaur (2010) reveals that Indian mall shoppers want to get the best value for the money they spend.

Research reveals that shopping malls' image is the most essential dimension of attractiveness in India (Banerjee, 2012). The shopping mall image is a holistic entity entailing retail mix, infrastructure, and atmosphere (Leo & Philippe, 2002). It is a multidimensional concept encompassing tangible (functional attributes), such as its physical features, and intangible attributes, which include its atmospheric qualities (McGoldrick, 2002). Further, studies suggest a strong correlation between the frequency of visits (Haynes & Talpade, 1996), amount of purchase (Spies *et al.*, 1997), desire to stay (Wakefield & Baker, 1998), and re-patronage intention (Spies *et al.*, 1997; Wakefield & Baker, 1998).

Patel's (2008) study exhibits Indian mall shoppers' decision-making styles of price consciousness, quality consciousness, recreational, confused by over-choice, novelty consciousness, and variety seeking. Similarly, Ravindran *et al.* (2009) study in Kerala State, although it confirmed the decision-making styles of Indian mall shoppers, as revealed by Patel (2008), could not confirm brand consciousness, fashion-consciousness, impulsiveness, and brand loyalty. However, male and female consumers were considered quality-conscious and price-conscious, and the young consumers were more recreational than older. Overall, the study reveals whether young, middle-aged, or old shoppers hailing from Kerala State in India were found to be variety seekers, novelty conscious, and confused by over-choice.

Studies of Indian mall shoppers identified six decision-making styles: price consciousness, quality consciousness, recreational facilities, confusion by over-choice, novelty consciousness, and variety consciousness (Sahoo & Dash, 2010). However, it is very imperative to study the decision-making behavior of Indian customers as more and more domestic and international players are entering the Indian retail sector (Sahoo & Dash, 2010). Most studies conducted in different regions of the country reveal similar things. The study of Kaurav *et al.* (2011) in central India, in the State of Madhya Pradesh (Gwalior), alluded that mall shoppers were price-conscious, quality-conscious, recreational, novelty-

conscious, and variety-seeking. The study of Singh and Tripathi (2012) in the State of Madhya Pradesh (Bhopal) explored nine decision-making styles of mall shoppers towards the purchase of food products, namely shopping enjoyment, habitual buying, brand consciousness, perfectionism and quality consciousness, brand loyalty, confused by over choices, impulse buying, and store loyalty.

Considering the gender dimension, female shoppers in India tend to do more planned shopping. According to Narahari and Kuvad (2017), male consumers exhibited preponderance towards price-consciousness and hedonistic-recreational buying. Studies of customers from the younger and older generations reveal interesting findings. Khare's (2012) study in North India suggests that older consumers (40–50 years and 50 years and above) differ from younger consumers (20–30 years and 30–40 years) in their shopping orientations as younger consumers look for more variety and recreation. The findings indicate that younger consumers were more conscious about branded products, sought new products and novelty in their purchase decisions, and emphasized the recreational aspects of shopping. Thus, the availability of branded products, new styles, and fashions has redefined shopping for the younger generation, who are more aware of global brands and prefer expensive brands. Bedi and Lal's (2014) findings reveal that Indian youth were brand-conscious, quality-conscious, recreational, impulsive, confused by choice, and brand-loyal. They were not price-conscious, as they could afford more for brands and quality. Linson and John (2018) arrived at the result that mall-preferring shoppers and consumers preferring unorganized retail outlets differed from other shoppers in the traits of price consciousness, quality consciousness, recreational facilities, confused by over-choice, novelty consciousness, and variety consciousness based on their study conducted in Thrissur and Ernakulam district in the Kerala State.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study unfurls research on consumers' buying decision-making styles, focusing on Indian mall shoppers. Decision-making is a complex area in the context of consumer behavior, as behaviors are uncertain to predict and analyze. There is limited research on the decision-making styles of Indian shoppers in malls. The review of studies revealed that

Indian mall shoppers widely exhibit the decision-making traits of price consciousness, quality consciousness, recreational hedonism, novelty consciousness, confusion over choice, and variety-seeking. The literature also shows that brand consciousness, fashion consciousness, brand loyalty, and impulsiveness are less discussed themes. Thus, this calls for the attention of mall owners and retail marketers.

India scores higher on the collectivistic dimension, so whether it is metros or small towns, shopping is a shared experience with family, friends, and known people for significant chunks of people. Although emerging online product stores provide products and services at higher discounted prices and deliver the products conveniently to doorsteps, people still yearn for a common destination to gather, socialize, connect, and engage. For teenagers, malls are becoming the best-opted centers to hang around, and for other age groups, malls are locations for quality time spent with family and socialization. So, shopping malls are being developed to provide a space for activity centers in the social fabric of communities, giving higher prominence to cultural consciousness. The influence of mall attributes such as decor, layout, services, variety of stores, and entertainment facilities must be considered while planning malls in smaller cities. Also, mall retailers must understand the tastes and preferences of the consumers and strategize their promotional plans. The greater impetus should be directed towards managing stores, staff, service, and layout because malls epitomize umbrella services encasing different goods and services. Retailers should provide value for the money spent by the customer and effectively position the products as the current customer is more empowered, well-informed, and ready with well-grounded homework, and after all, they want the utmost value for the money they spend.

Mall owners and developers should emphasize developing the recreational dimensions of malls so that shoppers can enjoy a pleasant shopping experience with family and friends.

Store managers should focus on brand assortment and stocking qualitative merchandise at affordable prices, as Indian mall shoppers tend to be price and quality-conscious. Marketers must formulate effective pricing strategies that consider cultural milieus.

Retailers should offer novel and fashionable items that may seem exciting and trendsetting to shoppers. In the current context, youths are highly influenced by fashion influencers. So, marketers need to do more groundwork on building fashion consciousness across demographics. Most importantly, mall stores should focus on having greater variety.

The store managers should instill brand awareness and brand familiarity among consumers. They should accentuate the penchant for brand loyalty among frequently visiting shoppers through loyalty programs or other relevant strategies. In order to stimulate impulsiveness among shoppers, different forms of visual merchandising, like product displays, warm interiors, mannequin displays, visuals, light effects, color combinations, acoustics, and promotional signages, should be incorporated. Since the perceived benefits may differ among consumer groups based on demographic variations, strategies should be customized and conscious of sub-cultural dimensions.

The sales staff should be highly competent and well-trained to cooperate with shoppers, provide requisite brand or product information, and effectively demonstrate the products' utility. This may delight customers and deter their confusion and dissatisfaction.

As customer-generated reviews on social media, blogs, websites, etc., minimize retailers' control over customers, it has become customary to understand customer behavior and preferences. Further, understanding and molding rural consumers' mindsets should be a priority for mall retailers.

Additional research should focus on understanding the buying decision-making styles of mall-visiting consumers and aligning marketing strategies to increase mall productivity and boost sales.

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