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Determining consumers' reasons for visiting shopping malls

Abstract

The level of competition in the retail market is high and demands a need to manage shopping malls appropriately and understand the general consumer behavior during visits at shopping mall in terms of their main reasons for visiting the mall and attitude in order to attract shopping mall visitors to visit these malls. The purpose of the study aimed to determine consumers' main reasons for visiting the shopping mall and their frequency of visits at the mall. A quantitative approach was followed to realize research objective using interviewer-administered questionnaires for data collection. The data were collected at regional shopping mall/centre in the capital city of South Africa, Pretoria. A descriptive analysis method was used to analyze the quantitative data. The findings of the study revealed that the consumers visit the shopping mall with certain reasons in mind and the frequencies of visits of these consumers vary. This study contributes to the current literature and provides valuable information to South African retailers and shopping mall managers, with regard to marketing communications and marketing strategies that aim to increase the frequency of visits of consumers at the shopping mall. Suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords: shopping mall, shopping reasons, consumption activities, mall-initiated activities, social activities.
JEL Classification: M31, M32.

Introduction

Shopping malls play an important role in a retail sector and these malls have been in existence for more than 90 years. They have adapted to new designs and tenant varieties to meet the changes in consumers' needs, desires, values, and lifestyles (Telci, 2013). Juhari, Ali and Khair (2012) point that there are different types of shopping malls, namely, convenience shopping mall, neighborhood shopping mall, community shopping mall, regional shopping mall and super-regional shopping mall. In this study, a regional shopping mall was of the primary focus. Regional shopping mall is defined by having two or four major tenant stores in a building and with the floor area between 250,000 to 800,000 square feet. This shopping mall offers business products, domestic appliances, a variety of services and entertaining equipment (Juhari et al., 2012). Shopping malls are characterized as venues that provide a comfortable shopping experience and have turned into social centres and recreational and entertainment facilities for various activities (Telci, 2013).

Therefore, it becomes imperative to understand visitors' reasons for visiting shopping malls and activities they engage in during their mall visits. Understanding the consumers' reasons for visiting shopping malls could assist in the segmentation of these consumers which will provide valuable input into the development of marketing communications strategies to attract more consumers to visit the shopping malls, and further increase their frequency of visit at the mall, specifically Kolonnade Shopping Centre. Kolonnade Shopping Centre is located in Montana Park, Pretoria which is the capital city of South Africa. This 74 220 m² regional shopping mall is considered to be one of the most successful shopping malls in Gauteng province. It has 155 tenants ranging from all the major fashion stores, nationals and specialty stores. This is also one of the few shopping malls with both Dion Wired and Game under one roof. Kolonnade Shopping Centre's entertainment area includes Mega Magic Company, Ster-Kinekor, Bingo and a bowling alley (Vicinity, 2013).

The next two sections provide the theoretical background of this study and literature review.

1. Theoretical background

Shopping mall customers 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 during shopping malls visits (Farrag et al., 2010). This view is further supported by Gilboa (2009) who identified activities and grouped them according to the following categories:

1.1. Consumption activities by shopping mall visitors. Consumption activities are activities that involve visiting coffee-shops/restaurants, gaining new knowledge regarding new products and trends, and window shopping (Gilboa, 2009). Kuruvilla and Joshi (2010) added that, within a shopping mall, shopping mall visitors may be categorized into groups that differ in their shopping reasons such as browsing, purchasing clothing, shoes, accessories and gifts. Kuruvilla and Joshi (2010) pointed that different shopping mall visitors patronize the shopping mall and can have interest in different groups of products. Some may have purposeful shopping activities like having refreshments or watching a movie, while others may visit the

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shopping mall for window shopping with no firm objective of buying. Farrag et al. (2010) indicated that window shopping involves a situation where a shopping mall visitor browses or goes through window displays to feel part of shopping mall culture and environment. This browsing on window displays allows shopping mall visitors to keep track of fashions and keep themselves informed of the latest changes in the retail market. Shopping mall visitors also visit restaurants and coffee shops at the shopping mall just to have a cup of coffee or for lunch. In addition, family members can also go to these restaurants together for family bonding (Farrag et al., 2010).

1.2. Participation in shopping mall-initiated activities by shopping mall visitors. 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 to attend fashion shows. In addition, when family members visit these shopping malls, it can present children with an opportunity to play around at various entertainment arenas. Shopping mall visitors can visit the shopping mall to access primary services offered by the shopping mall, such as visiting the gym, post office and banks (Gilboa, 2009).

1.3. Social activities and entertainment. Social activities are activities that involve human interaction and include strolling; social meetings, sitting in public places, speaking with strangers and watching other shop (Gilboa, 2009). Shopping mall visitors indulge in consumption of experiences and shopping malls have become important meeting places, especially for young people (Kuruvila and Joshi, 2010). Shopping mall visitors can visit shopping malls to watch movies at movie theatres and watch soccer matches at different restaurants (Farrag et al., 2010; Gilboa, 2009; Kim et al., 2011).

The next section provides literature review of previous studies conducted on shopping malls.

2. Literature review

Telci (2013) examined the shopping motives of shopping mall visitors living in Turkey to understand the shopping mall consumer small patronage behavior. Khare (2011) also examined the influence of hedonic and utilitarian shopping motives on shopping mall consumers' attitudes towards shopping malls in the smaller cities of India, and the results revealed that shopping mall consumers visit malls for both hedonic and utilitarian shopping motives. In addition, Farrag et al. (2010) investigated utilitarian and hedonic motives using ethnographic methods to establish an understanding of the shopping mall experience as perceived by Egyptian shopping mall visitors. In United States of America (USA), Jackson et al. (2011) investigated the extent to which consumers' attitudes towards shopping mall attributes and shopping value derived from a shopping mall visit differ across gender and generational cohorts. Chebat et al. (2010) in Canada examined shopping mall attributes such as access to the shopping mall, shopping mall image and store atmosphere that may be used to draw shopping mall visitors to shopping malls. In another study, Gilboa (2009) investigated a typology of Israeli mall customers based on their behaviors, examined socio-demographic characteristics of customers and activities consumers engage in during mall visits and presented a segmentation of Israeli shopping mall customers.

Khare (2011) examined consumers' behavior at the shopping 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. In Israel, Gilboa and Vinai-Yavetz (2013) explored on consumers' shopping experiences in order to identify key components of mall experience, and the results of the study revealed that can be conceptualized as a subjective phenomenon accompanied by cognitive and emotional components. Gonza'lez-Herna'ndez and Orozco-Go'mez (2013) investigated shopping mall attractiveness dimensions from Mexican perspective in order to segment consumers based on perceptions of attractiveness, the results of this study uncovered six attractiveness attributes, namely, mall essence, popularity and promotional programs, personal service, recreational options, internal atmosphere, and external atmosphere. A cluster analysis conducted in this study revealed three types of consumers with significantly different perceptions of shopping centres: serious, enthusiast, and basic. In another study, Gudonaviciene and Alijosien (2013) investigated the main image attributes determining shopping centre selection in Lithuania, and the results revealed merchandizing, accessibility, service, facilities, atmosphere, amenities, ambulance

availability, entertainment, and mall security as aspects that determine mall image.

Park (2016) investigated the relationship between the values of consumers' shopping behavior. The results of this study revealed that the shopping orientation has a mediate effect between shopping value and purchase intention. In another recent study, El Hedhli, Zourrig and Chebat (2016) studied 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 that utilitarian shopping value. This study revealed 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) examined 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.

Considering the challenging retail environment and the fact that most of the preceding studies were conducted in other parts of the world such as Canada, China, India, Israel, Turkey and United States of America excluding South Africa created a gap for the proposed study to be conducted. In addition, the preceding studies discussed above focused much on hedonic, motives, utilitarian motives, and shopping mall attributes not necessarily on customers' shopping main reasons for visiting shopping malls and visit frequency patterns of these consumers created a gap for this study. Therefore, the problem statement of this study was structured as follows: to determine consumers' main shopping reasons for visiting shopping malls from South African perceptive and their frequency of visit at the mall.

The next section briefly outlines the research objectives of this study.

3. Research objectives

Research objectives of this study can be summarized as follows:

- to determine the main shopping reasons for consumers to visit the shopping mall;
- to determine consumers' frequency of visits at the shopping mall.

The next section outlines the research methodology followed to realize the research purpose of this study.

4. 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.

4.1. Research design and data collection method. To determine shopping malls visitors' main shopping reasons for visiting shopping malls from South African perceptive and their frequency of visit at the mall. 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 Gauteng province, 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 this study.

4.2. Target population. The target population in the study consisted of adult shopping mall visitors at the Kolonnade Shopping Centre in Gauteng province, 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.

4.3. 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.

4.4. 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 Gauteng province, 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.

4.5. 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 no 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.

4.6. Variables used in the analysis. In line with the overall research objectives of the study, Table 1 below depicts the variables (frequency of visitation at the shopping mall and activities) analyzed during the data analysis.

Table 1. Variables used in the data analysis

Variable name	Level of measurement	Univariate descriptive statistics
Shopping reasons	Nominal scale	Percentages, mode
Frequency of visitation at the shopping mall	Nominal scale	Percentages, mode

The next section presents the results of this study.

5. Results

This section presents the results of this study that aimed to determine the respondents' general shopping mall behavior with regard to the reasons for visiting shopping malls and their frequency of visits at the mall.

5.1. Shopping reasons. Table 2 provides the results regarding general shopping mall behavior in terms of shopping reasons at the shopping mall under consideration.

Table 2. Consumer reasons for visiting shopping malls

Main reason for visiting current shopping mall/centre		
Reason	Kolonnade Shopping Centre	
	N	%
Buying groceries	65	13
Buying clothing and accessories	80	15
Buying homeware	38	7
Buying specialty products	39	8
Eating out	72	14
Having a drink	45	9
Going to the movies	40	8
Meeting friends / socializing or celebrating	47	9
Meeting clients / work related purposes	12	2
Window shopping	36	7
Keeping up to date with trends in technology, clothing, homeware, etc.	25	5
Other (banking, cash withdrawal, ice skating and paying accounts)	19	4
Total	518	100

The majority of the consumers at Kolonnade Shopping Centre visit the shopping mall for buying groceries and accessories (15%), eating out (14%) and buying groceries (13%). The minority of the respondents visit the shopping mall for meeting clients/work related purposes (2%), keeping up to date with trends in technology, clothing, and homeware (5%) and other reasons (4%) such as banking, cash withdrawal, ice skating and paying accounts. (7%) of consumers visit the shopping mall to buy homeware, (8%) of consumers visit the mall for viewing movies, and (9%) of consumers visit the mall for socializing or celebrating events and for just having a drink.

5.2. Frequency of shopping mall visitation the shopping mall. Table 3 provides the findings regarding the frequency of visitations of consumers at the shopping mall under investigation.

Table 3. Frequency of visitations of consumers at the shopping mall

Frequency of visiting the shopping mall/centre		
Frequency	Kolonnade Shopping Centre	
	N	%
More than once a week	19	18.8
Once a week	24	23.8
Twice a month	32	31.7
Once a month	26	25.7
Total	101	100

At Kolonnade Shopping Centre, the majority of consumers visit the shopping mall twice a month (31.7%) and the minority visit the shopping mall more than once a week (18.8%). However, 23.8% of consumers visit the shopping mall at least once a week and 25.7% of consumers visit the mall once a month.

Conclusions and discussions

The dual purpose of this study was, firstly, to determine the consumers' main reasons for visiting shopping malls from South African perspective and, secondly, to determine the frequency of visits of consumers at the shopping mall, specifically Kolonnade Shopping Centre. Gilboa (2009) investigated the consumers' behavior at the shopping mall in terms of visiting pattern or frequency, which concur with the findings of the current study that the frequency of visits among consumers at Kolonnade Shopping Centre varied. Kim et al. (2011) revealed that shopping mall customers 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, these findings are supported by the findings of the current study that consumers visit shopping mall for entertainment purposes such as watching movies, celebrate special occasions, and for eating out, not for just buying groceries, homeware, and the use of mall facilities such as cash withdrawals and paying accounts at automated teller machines (ATM). The findings of the current study are in line with the findings of the study by Telci (2013) that shopping malls are now characterized as venues that provide a comfortable shopping experience and have turned into social centres and entertaining facilities for various activities.

Recommendations

The shopping mall managers should recruit retailers that offer a variety of products which include groceries, homeware, clothing and accessories in order to cater the needs of the shopping mall visitors. In addition, the shopping mall developers should provide sufficient eat out options that meets the expectations of different shopping mall visitors. Furthermore, the retailers at the shopping malls should develop promotional programs that make shopping mall visitors to perceive shopping mall eat out options as venues to celebrate special occasions.

The frequency of visitation by consumers visiting the mall more than once a week was lower at 18.8%, as a result, shopping mall managers could host fashion shows and competitions that can increase frequency of visits of these consumers. The shopping mall retailers could offer weekly sales promotion campaigns on grocery products in order attract more consumers to visit the mall.

Future research implication

In this paper, a non-probability sample method was used which 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 and respondents above the age of 50. 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 parts of South Africa. In addition, it is recommended that multiple shopping malls can be considered for future research and the results regarding main shopping reasons of consumers and frequency of visits at different malls be compared to add more insight.

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