

Customer Behaviour towards Shopping Malls – A Study in Bhavnagar (Gujarat State, India)

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ABSTRACT

The retail sector in Indian has seen a drastic transformation and rapid growth since the last decade. Till date it is being dominated by small and unorganized entrepreneurs like Khirana shops, standalone stores, boutiques, traditional family business stores etc. However, with the growing global economic powers, new economic policies, FDI relaxations and unique marketing strategies the new kind of retailers like shopping malls tend to hook the consumers even in Tier II and Tier III towns. Organized retail sector is growing at rapid speed, more jobs are being created, town plans are getting modernized, and thus the consumer behavior too. While the transition is happening at global level in various forms, the shopping behavior of consumer is also likely to change with the growing choices and trends. Shopping in malls has become a major leisure activity. In this scenario, the current study aims at analyzing the purchasing behavior of 'shopping mall customers' in Bhavnagar, Gujarat.

Keyword: Customer, retail sector, shopping malls, purchasing behaviour, advertising

1. INTRODUCTION

The retail sector in Indian has seen a drastic transformation and rapid growth since the last decade. While attracting global investors, and international equity management firms, the Indian retail industry has matured to fifth largest global hub in the retail space with US \$600 billion in 2015 and is expected to grow to US \$ 1.3 trillion by 2020 (www.ibef.org, 2016). Also according to the Department of Industrial Policies and Promotion (DIPP), The Indian retail trading has received Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) equity inflows totaling US\$ 537.61 million during April 2000–March 2016 (Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India, 2016). The Organised retail is anticipating a hike of 24 per cent of the overall retail market by 2020. Currently, the key retailer players like V-Mart, Liberty, Provogue, Joyalukkas, Bharati, fabindia, Bata, Reliance, Aditya Birla, Spencer's, Westside, Shoppers Stop, Big Bazaar, Pantaloon, Lifestyle etc., have already entered Tier II and Tier III cities and various small towns pan India reaping crores of business.

1.1. Shopping Malls - Growing Beyond Metros:

It is of no doubt that shopping malls – the so called organized retailers have gone beyond metros and mushrooming even in to small towns of India giving the small town and rural consumers a special tang of shopping culture. Mostly the district headquarters are easy targets for developing shopping complex infrastructures and brand promotional activities. All most all the district headquarters are booming and are prospective center hubs for various fields like trade and commerce, education, health sector, entertainment sectors like cinema halls, cultural centres etc. Establishing organized shopping malls would not be a big challenge under such potential circumstances and vicinity.

District headquarters also attract masses from nearby rural areas for any of the above mentioned requirements. However, RV Rajan, president, Rural Marketing Association of India (RMAI), and chairperson and managing director, Anugrah Madison, believes that malls in small towns still have a long way to go, as it is observed that the traditional trade still holds strong in rural areas, due to special bonding and healthy relationship between retailer and rural consumer (Khan, 2009).

One solid reason for the spread of shopping malls to small towns is the massive potential customers who are ready or eager to tryout this trend. Today, an average person in a tier-II or tier-III city is well travelled, has an increased exposure to all kinds of media and is aware of all kinds of brands across different segments leading to big retail spending scope, says Dungarwal (2016). Other demand factors could be the growing youth segment and working women population even in small towns, rising income and increasing purchasing power as explained above, changing consumer preferences and growing urbanization even in small towns, increasing number of HNI's (high net worth individuals) and rising internet penetration regarding awareness.

Focusing the retailers' point of view, the reasons for such spread could be the *saturated market* in the cities. Which means, every key location of popular cities have already set with 4 to 5 malls giving tough competition to each other. *Land acquisition* is a costly affair in bigger cities and is throwing a big challenge to retailers in the current scenario. Setting up branches in small towns could be cheaper and can guarantee better returns rather than going for another branch in a same city which demands high land costs. And it is a known fact that end-consumer of the small town i.e., either upper class, middle class, businessmen, employee groups will have better spending capacity with higher disposable cash compare to city end-users, as the cost of living in cities are absolutely high. Hence, luring the small town masses is always a fetching strategy to the retailers.

1.2. Concept and Importance of Shopping Malls:

A shopping mall is a huge building or group of buildings that contain various stores and other business establishments (or) solely sells various products / brands in retailing mode. If it is a collection of multiple stores, they are connected by walkways so that consumers can easily walk and shop between the stores. Malls can be built in an enclosed or in an open-air format. However, in India most of the leading shopping malls are with a primary motto of acting like '*One Stop Shop*' that provides all most all the required products and brands right from grocery, lifestyle products to durables like furniture under one roof. Customers will be obviously happy if they get what they want conveniently in one location.

The mall was originally conceived of as a community center where people would converge for shopping, cultural activity, and social interaction (Gruen & Smith, 1960). And one can easily say that malls have succeeded in achieving the age old purpose of bringing them into existence. Thus, in today's consumer culture "Mall" is the center of the Universe (Feinberg & Meoli, 1991).

Shopping 'per se', can be done even in e-commerce websites. As a matter of fact, the various online product stores are offering products and services at higher discounted prices and delivering the products at door steps conveniently. However people still crave for a common locality to gather, socialize, connect, and engage. In India, either metros or small towns, for majority of people, shopping is a *shared experience* with family, friends and known people. For teenagers, malls are becoming best opted place to hang around. Shopping malls are being developed with a concept of providing a space for 'activity centres' in the social fabric of communities giving higher prominence to culture and consciousness (Nielsen Report, 2014).

Physical visibility and feel of the product is another key experience that any mall can provide to the customer. Special ambiances, Air conditioning facilities, scope for window shopping, food courts, entertainment like movie theatres, game zones etc in shopping malls are added boosters for customers to opt for malls. Thus, malls serve the purpose of giving quality time and place for entertainment, socialization, pleasure and fun besides selling required products and services. Small town consumers are no exception for this kind of combo offerings. Whatever might be the concept they come with, consumers of urban or small town wants shopping malls to provide a 'One-stop Shop' for retail as well as entertainment which they can't get through online shopping or any Khirana shops.

1.3. Understanding the Customer Behaviour in Shopping Malls – Why is it important?

For any retailers, either organized or unorganized, enhancing the customer traffic and sales are always important. However, in the current context of online retail and e-commerce evolution, both traffic and sales are declining day by day, leaving little choice to retailers, especially to big mall retailers. The current customer is more empowered, well informed, ready with well-grounded homework and after all they want utmost value for the money they spent.

Now a days, customer generated reviews on social media, blogs, websites etc., is minimizing the control of retailers on the customers. Thus it became customary to understand the customer behavior and preferences. Apart from that, small town malls are encountering various varieties of challenges – malls tend to generate new kinds of ideas related to lifestyle which could be alien to prevailing cultural practices, especially in small town, rural conservative societies. Understanding and molding their mind sets is on priority to mall retailers. Secondly, traditional unorganized retail sector can always remain a competitor. Procuring trained or professional sales men in small towns who could handle varieties of customers could be another challenge.

Hence, a great deal of research is focusing worldwide to know – How consumer shop, what factors convinces them to visit shopping malls, the rationale behind their shopping behavior, consumer decision making process, the key role players in decisions etc. Accordingly the mall retailer can strategize their promotional plans, work for the betterment of the product and services, focus more on mall management and provide the value for the money spent by the customer.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a need to understand shopping as a fundamental feature of modern society, says Dennis (2005). His empirical investigation carried over a three-year period, of four UK shopping centres focused in finding out the role of attributes such as transport links, parking, choice of major stores, attractiveness of malls, basic facilities, seating areas, helpfulness of staff, friendly atmosphere, quality of products etc. And the study concluded that the people are attracted to different shopping centres for different reasons. Another crucial study by Taushif and Gupta (2013), attempted to investigate the relationship of various factors, with impulse buying tendency of consumers in the Delhi region also concluded that same. On the other hand, Applebaum (1951) argues that the buying behavior of customer is influenced by the needs and preferences of the consumers for whom the products are being purchased. Sohail (2015), in his empirical research study compared men and women for differences in mall shopping. Based on a survey of 513 shoppers across Saudi Arabia, the study suggest that factors such as value perceptions, lifestyles and shopping orientation differ across genders and have a significant impact on mall patronage (Sohail, 2015).

A cross-cultural study by Wijnen et al., (2011) analyzed how shopping centre attributes can be adapted to culture related shopping behavior of emigrants. The results, based on an online survey among British, Japanese and American emigrants living in Amsterdam and Amstelveen (the Netherlands), reflect a universal lifestyle among emigrants, while they also emphasize cultural values and differences (Wijnen et al., 2011). A quantitative empirical research by Heij (2012) was performed among consumers of two inner-city shopping areas in The Netherlands. The researcher focused in finding out “Which – and how do – atmospherics of an inner-city shopping area contribute to the experiential value of the consumer, differentiated by age?” On the other hand, Kanoga et al (2015) investigated the effect of place mix dimension on performance of shopping malls in the Kenyan context.

The article by Rajagopal (2010) discusses how consumers' decision-making styles shift towards shopping at malls as well as street markets in Mexico City. Based on exploratory data and using a theoretical model of consumer-decision making styles, this study addresses the causes and effects of coexistence of shopping malls and street markets. As discussed earlier, Age factor is an important composition in understanding the purchasing behavior of the customer. In this regards, Rousseau, G.G., & Venter, D.J.L. (2014) argues that retailers often give high priority to other market segments while ignoring the mature consumers, because they perceive that they have limited purchasing power. But the study concluded that mature mall shoppers have specific needs and preferences.

The Indian consumer seems to be undergoing a shift in terms of personality, buying motives, interests, attitudes, beliefs and values when he or she is making a shift from ‘kirana’ stores towards shopping malls (Shekar et al, 2016). In India, there is huge potentiality for the future development of the retail industry as the market is growing, government policies are becoming liberal and the technological developments in the country are favourable for operations in India (Taneja, 2007).

Shekar et al., (2016) studied the overall customer satisfaction, response of customers with regard to the availability and quality of products and services offered at shopping malls and the comfort level of the respondents towards shopping in the shopping malls. Sharma (2012) research carried in Mumbai also assessed the overall customer satisfaction. The researcher analyzed the response of customers with regard to the availability and quality of products and services offered at shopping malls and the comfort level of the respondents towards shopping in the shopping malls. On the other hand, research study carried out by Yaaminidevi (2013) in Madurai city, Tamilnadu with a sample of 100 respondents focused on Facility Management like ambience, infrastructure and traffic were analyzed particularly. She suggested that malls not only cater to the product needs of the customers, but also a source of entertainment, recreation. Khare (2010) on a different note researched the mall shopping behaviour of Indian small town consumers. She focused on how these malls bring functional and experiential benefits and affect the shopping behaviour among small town people, though they are unfamiliar with the concept of malls. The findings show that men and women differ in their perception towards malls on the issue of social interaction and the role of cultural restriction is clearly visible here.

Ravindranet *et al.* (2009) investigated decision-making styles like price consciousness, quality consciousness etc., of Indian shoppers in shopping malls and the variations in these styles across different demographic variables. Madhavi and Leelavati (2013) studied the impact of visual merchandising on consumer behaviour, especially towards women apparel. The study concluded that retailers can help customers to find the right products and enhance desirability of products through focused merchandising, intelligent store design and layout, and other visual merchandising practices, such as product displays, packaging, and signage. The survey findings of Ahmed and Mayya (2015) in Manglore region on the perceptions of the customers of shopping malls clearly indicate that consumers have gained lot of benefits from organized retail on multiple counts like wider choice of products and well-known brands, one stop shopping, new market arrivals, festive offers, huge discounts, and other benefits.

3. AIM OF THE STUDY

As explained in the Introduction for a retailer, either organized or unorganized, enhancing the customer traffic and sales is always is on high-priority. Shopping malls are of no exception to this strategy. While the shopping malls culture is growing at a rapid speed even in district headquarters and small towns, they are encountering various challenges to keep a hold on customers. Similarly, customers are also witnessing a new kind of shopping experience on the whole, that is quite distinctive to that of traditional shopping methods. Also there is research dearth on these kinds of studies, especially in Gujarat. And Gujarat being a business and commerce centric state, there is a necessity to focus on this kind of study. Thus, the current study aims at analyzing the purchasing behavior of 'shopping mall customers' in Bhavnagar, The district headquarters of Bhavnagar District, Gujarat.

4. OBJECTIVES

- To understand the purchasing behavior of customers who visit shopping malls.
- To identify gender differences if any, in terms of purchasing behavior.
- To identify the overall level of satisfaction among customers.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study is a quantitative analysis. Survey method is implemented in and near three popular shopping malls of Bhavnagar. They are Himalaya Shopping Mall, K-Mart and ABM Mall. Out of three malls, the Himalaya Mall is quite big and busy with floating population. The sample size is 100, and care has been taken that there is equal representation of gender i.e., 50 male respondents and 50 female respondents. Purposive random sampling method has been adopted which means purposively three malls are selected in Bhavnagar, and then randomly picked the respondents who visit malls for the survey. As the study is on overall purchasing behavior of 'shopping mall customers' in Bhavnagar, the questions are not addressed targeting any mall in particular, and not compared.

6. ANALYSIS

6.1. Demographic Details of Respondents:

- Out of 100 respondents 50 are male and 50 are female.
- Majority of customers fall into the age group 30 -60 (i.e., total of 63%) compare to customers who are less than 30 years (i.e. 31%).
- Around 70% of women who fall in the age group of 31to 60 visit shopping malls.
- Male who is less than 30 years are frequent visitors (56%) to shopping malls.
- A fair amount of respondents (48% male and 48% female) are graduates.
- 34% of women are job holders.
- For male respondents 72% are Job holders and only 20% are business men.
- Considerable amount of respondents i.e., 32% (34% female and 30% male) belong to moderate income group i.e., Rs. 20,000/- to Rs. 30,000/-.
- 23% of respondents fall between 30,000/- to 40,000/- income group.
- Regarding family status a large majority falls in Middle class family status (52% female and 54% male), followed by Upper middle class (32% female, 26% male).
- A significant number of respondents (64% female and 46% male) have got double income earning sources at family.

6.2. Regarding the time spent in malls and the occasions for visiting malls:

- Though the customers are not very regular visitors (like daily visits) to shopping malls on daily basis, around 40% visit sometimes (like weekly thrice) and 43% visit occasionally (weekly twice or once).
- A majority of customers i.e., 52% have been visiting the shopping malls since 3-5 years and 46% have been visiting since 1 to 3 years.
- There is no significant difference between female and male regarding the year since they initiated the habit of visiting malls.
- A considerable amount of respondents i.e., 49% (50% of women and 48% of men) spend good time i.e., 2 -3 hours when they visit a mall.
- 39% spend 1 to 2 hours in a mall for shopping.
- Only 12% opined that they spend 3 to 4 hours in a mall. No one agreed that they spend more than 4 hours in a mall.
- A significant amount of customers i.e., 69% (62% of women and 76% of male) gave highest priority to weekend visit.
- Visits during festivals became the next best occasion as 48% of women and 46% of male opted for it. Offers and special discounts are given least priority.

6.3. Opinion on Services being offered in Malls:

Figure 1 and 2 proves that customers are happy with the overall ambience of malls in Bhavnagar. 54% of female and 42% of male said ambience of malls is excellent. 70% of female and 72% of male said AC facility is good. Regarding cleanliness 90% female and 88% male opinioned it is good. Same scenario is visible with Parking facility (46% female and 80% male), Guidance of staff (72% female and 74% male), and Sanitary/ Toilet facilities (68% male and 78%). All the three has got **good remarks**.

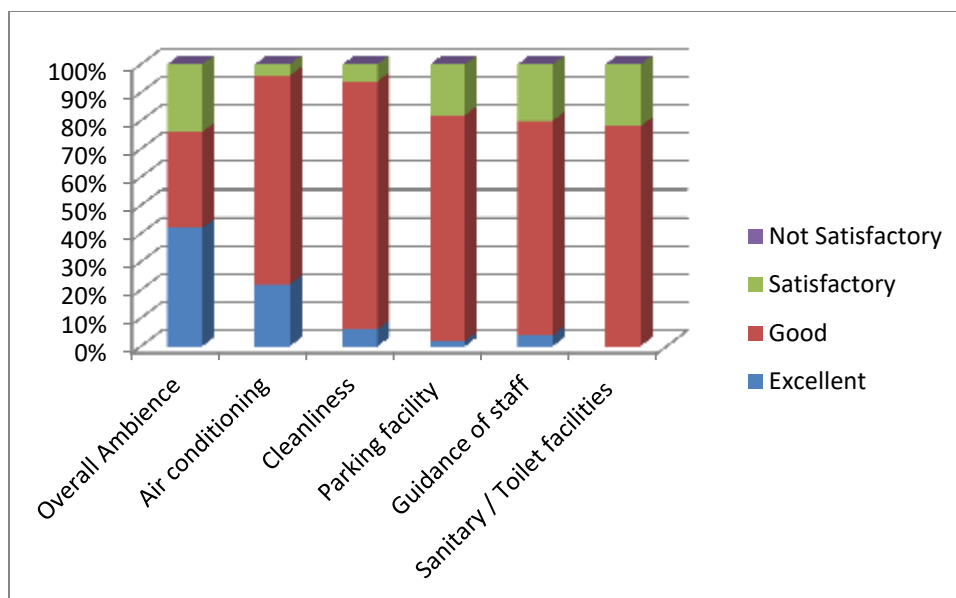


Figure 1: Opinion of Men on “Services being offered in Malls”

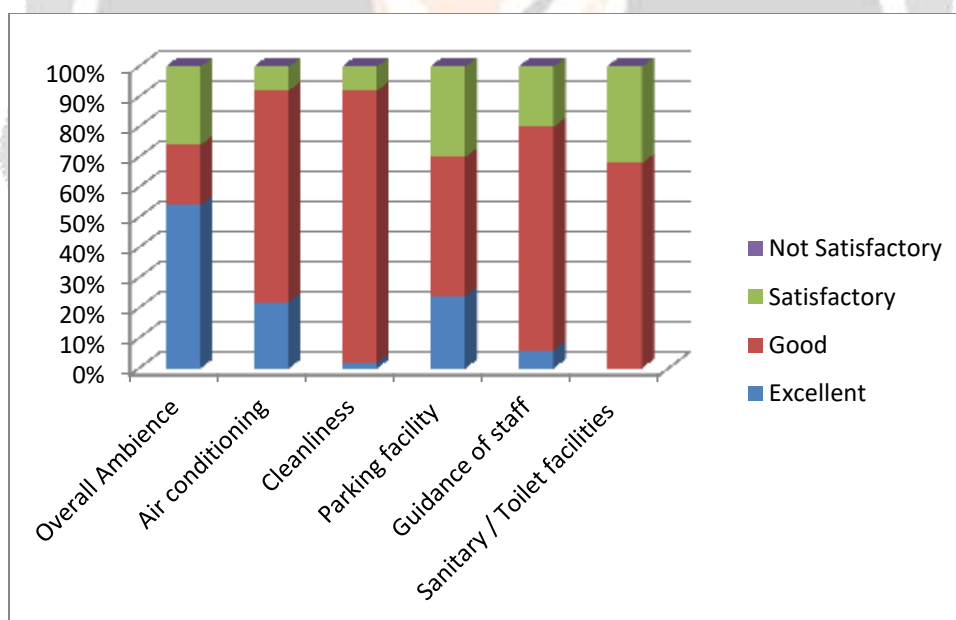


Figure 2: Opinion of Women on “Services being offered in Malls”

6.4. Opinion on Product Satisfaction

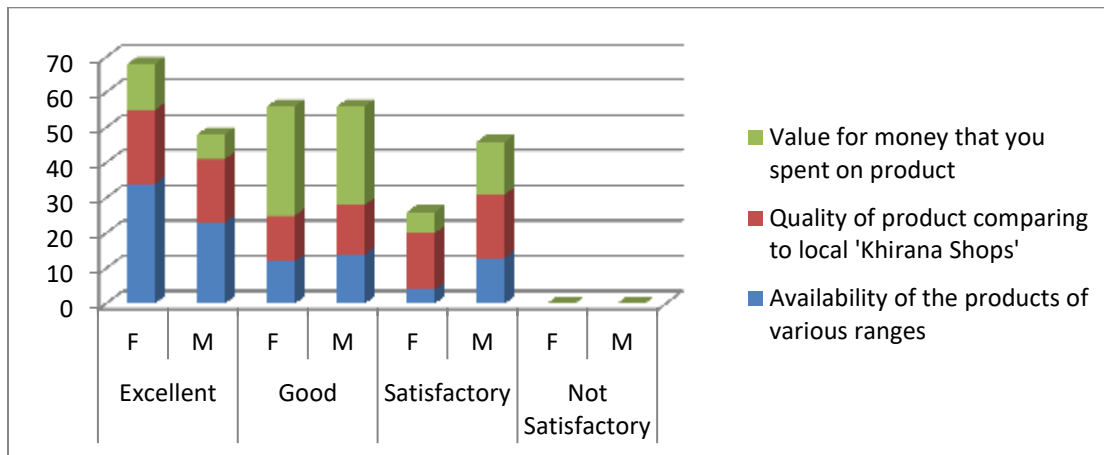


Figure 3: Opinion of Respondents on “Product Satisfaction”

It is of no doubt that 68% of women are quite happy with the availability of the products of various ranges in shopping malls, whereas only 46% agreed that range of product availability is excellent. Noticeable point in the above graph 4.15 is that there is an equal distribution of opinions regarding the quality of product when compared with local ‘Khirana shops’. Because only 42% of female and 36% of male agreed that quality is excellent, and 26% of female and 28% male agreed quality is good and 32% of female and 36% of male agreed quality is satisfactory. It is evident from this distribution that the bonding for Khiranas continues to exist, especially in towns like Bhavnagar.

Similarly with regard to value for money being spent in shopping malls only 26% of female and 14% of male agreed it is excellent (refer to figure 3). 62% of female and 56% of male said “good” and rest all agreed the value they get is satisfactory. Another good noticeable point regarding the satisfaction about products, no one said they are not satisfied. That’s a healthy sign to shopping mall retailers.

6.5. Opinion on Purpose of Visit

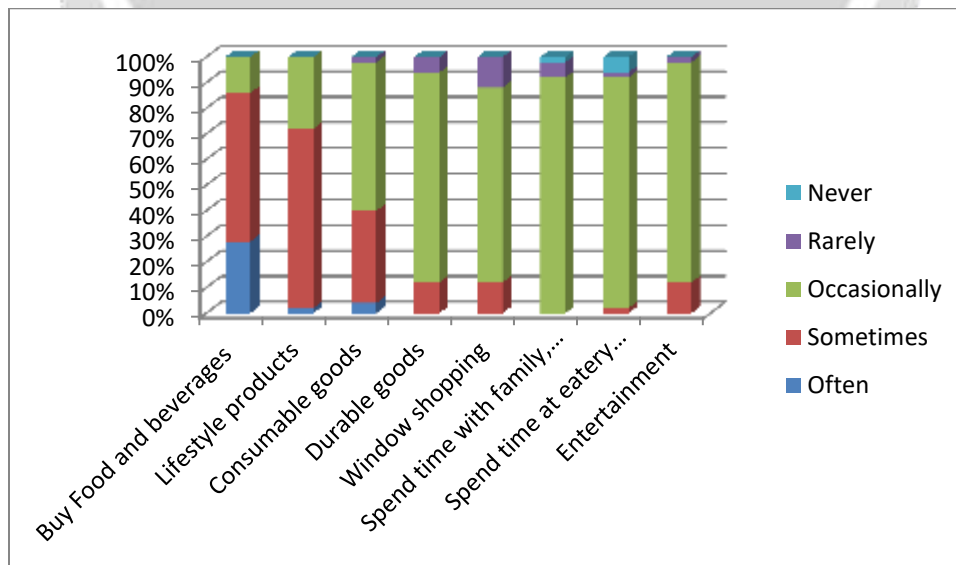


Figure 4: Opinion of Female Customers on “Purpose of Visit”

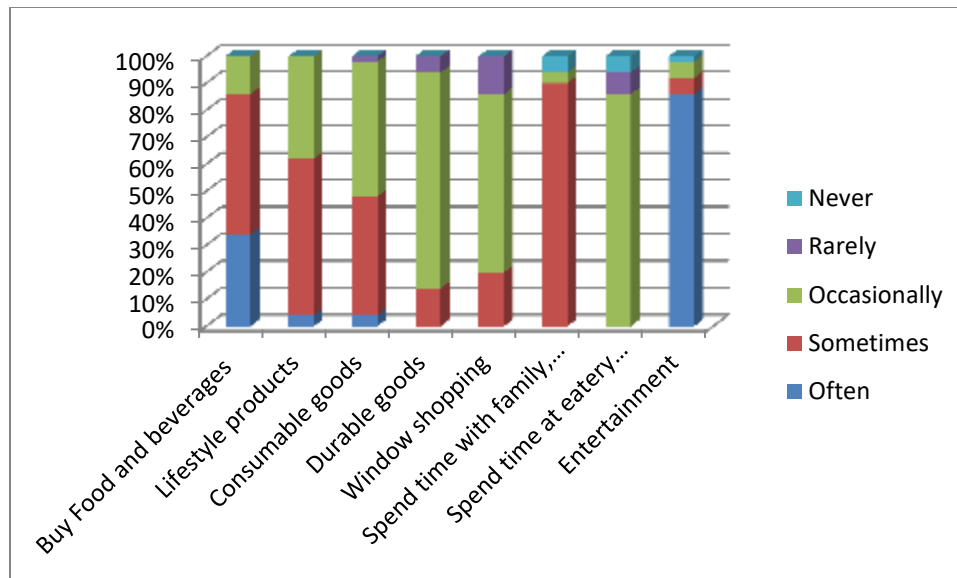


Figure 5: Opinion of Male Customers on “Purpose of Visit”

From both the graphs 4 and 5, regarding the purpose of visit, it can be understood that only 28% of women and 34% of men are ‘often’ visiting to make purchases of products of food and beverages. Though not frequent the considerable amount of respondents visit malls (sometimes) to buy food and beverages (58% female, 52% male), lifestyle products (70% female, 58% male), consumable goods (36% female, 44% male).

82% of women and 80% men visit malls occasionally to purchase durable goods. 76% of women and 66% of men are interested in window shopping and visit malls for that purpose occasionally.

However, noticeably, a significant amount of men i.e., 86% frequently visit malls for entertainment, whereas 86% women visit malls occasionally (though not very often) exclusively for fun and entertainment. 90% of men visit malls “sometimes” to spend time with family and friends, whereas 92% women agreed they visit malls “occasionally” to spend time with family and friends. Similarly 90% female and 86% of men visit restaurants and eatery in malls “occasionally”.

6.6. Opinion on Purchasing Behaviour in Malls

With regard to overall purchasing behavior (refer to figure 6 and 7) opinions are taken on points like how they plan for shopping, what motivates them to make purchasing decisions etc. Results say that 50% of women and 40% of men ‘often’ plan before they make purchases in shopping malls. Whereas, 40% female and 48% male plan “Sometimes”. Similarly, regarding Advertisements by malls, 54% female and 50% male were “sometimes” inspired by Ads to make purchasing decisions. 40% female and 42% male agreed that ads motivate them occasionally. 50% female and 64% male opined that offers and discounts attract them “occasionally” but not on regular basis. Whereas 38% female and 26% male are “sometimes” motivated to by the products on offers and discounts.

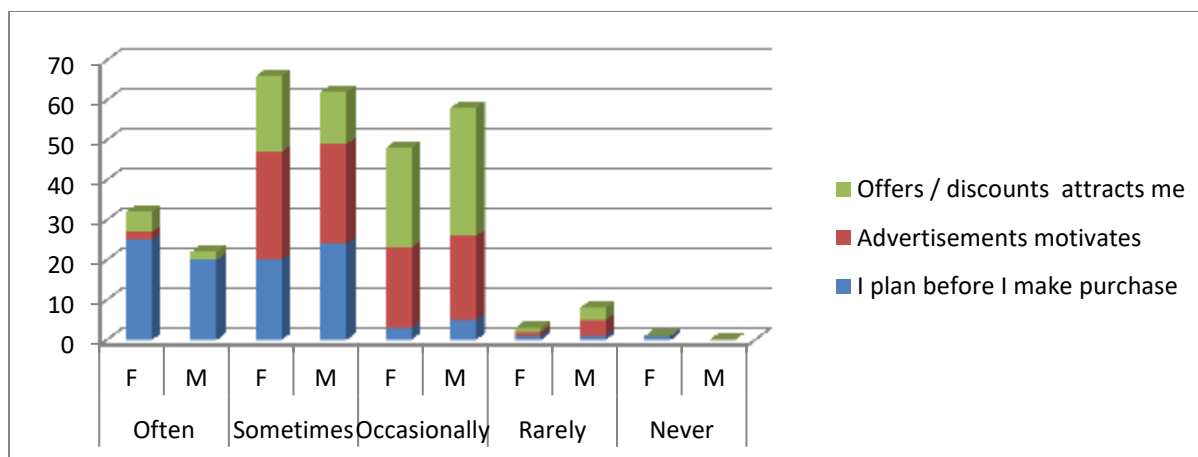


Figure 6: Opinions on “Purchasing Behaviour in Malls”

Though not often, 60% of women and 61% of men agreed that internal advertisements in the malls and proper signage motivate them “occasionally” to make purchasing decisions. Similarly, 48% female and 60% male are ‘occasionally’ tempted to buy products with its visibility in the malls. Actually this statement goes in correlation with pre-planning before visiting malls. If someone visits malls with proper pre-planning there is a scope to avoid the temptation created by internal advertisements and the visibility of the products.

Regarding purchase payments in shopping malls of Bhavnagar, surprisingly a great majority of respondents i.e., 64% of female and 74% of male are making payments through cash only. Only 22% of women and 14% man are using debit and credit cards for purchase payments that too very rarely.

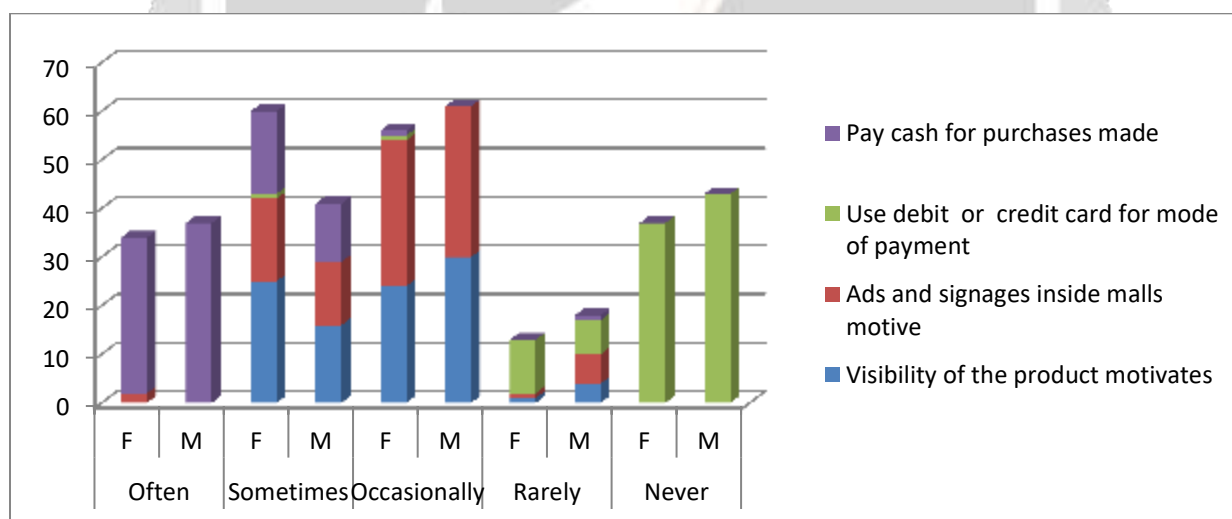


Figure 7: Opinions on “Purchasing Behaviour in Malls”

6.7. Opinion on the kind of attributes they check for choosing a mall

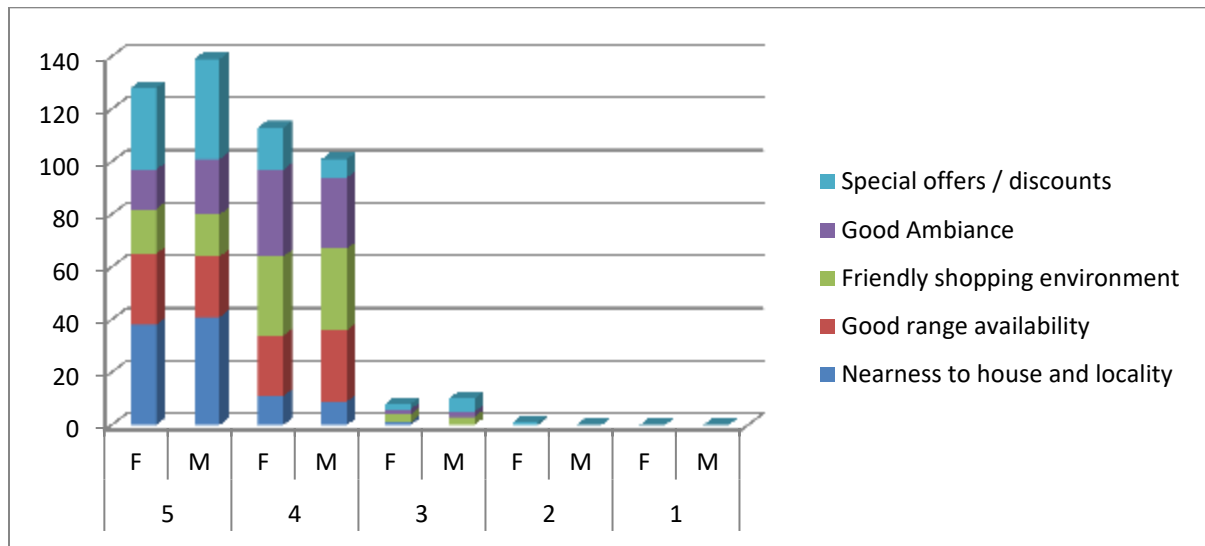


Figure 8: Opinion on “Attributes they check to select the malls for shopping”

When customers were asked to choose on which attribute they would prefer to visit the malls, the majority of them (76% female and 82% male) felt they would choose mall that is in proximity or nearness to house and locality. Special offers and discounts became another good parameter as 62% women and 76% men opted for it. Regarding the range of products availability it has been given third priority as 54% female and 46% male opted for it. Good ambience, however, already been given credit by respondents to malls, only 30% of female and 42% of male said they would choose a mall if it has good ambience. Similarly, only 34% female and 32% male gave high priority to friendly environment.

6.8. Awareness of Customers on safety measures taken by malls

When customers were asked whether they ever inquired the management about the safety measures they take in the malls, surprisingly all the 100 respondents said NO. This shows that customers’ level of awareness on safety and security measures could be negligible.

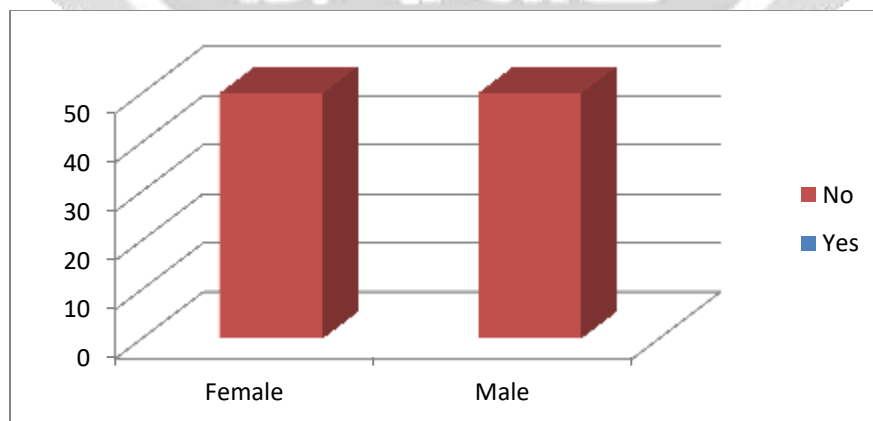


Figure 9: Opinion of Respondents on “Awareness on Safety Measures taken by Malls”

6.9. Opinion on safety measures taken at malls

With regard to opinion on various safety measures (refer to figures 10 and 11) taken in the malls they frequently visit, almost all the respondents (100%) opined that actually they have no idea that malls can provide various kinds of safety measures like ‘help during theft’, ‘assist in medical emergencies’, and ‘finding lost children’ in the malls etc.

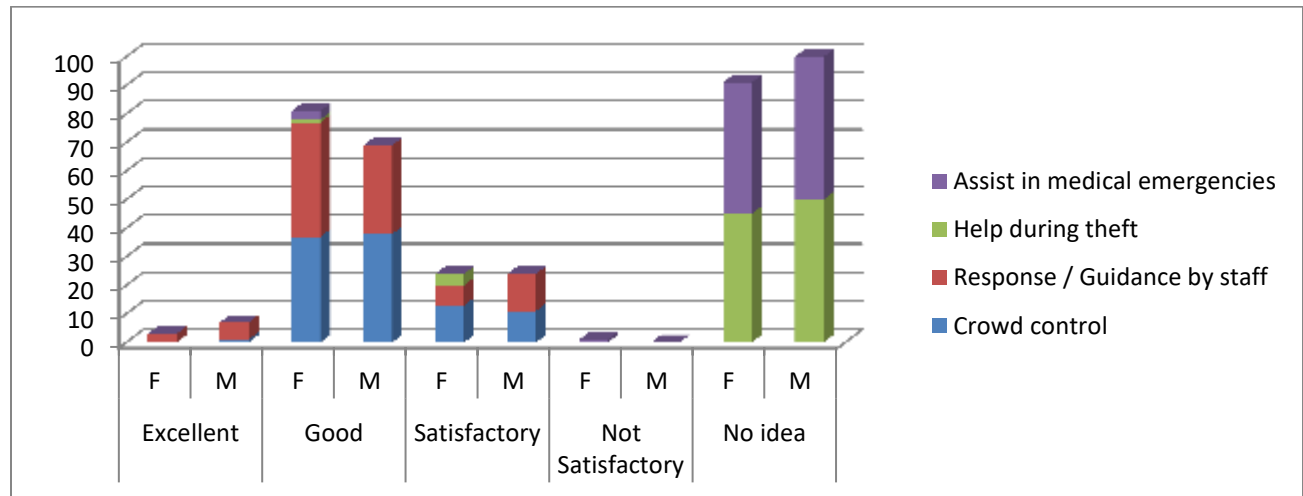


Figure 10: Opinion of Respondents on “Safety measures in the Malls”

However, regarding other facilities like ‘Crowd control’, 74% women and 76% men opined measures are satisfactory. 80% female and 62% male agreed ‘response and guidance by staff’ is also satisfactory. Regarding ‘Guidance at parking area’ 90% female and 78% male felt satisfactory. For ‘fire extinguishers set up in malls’, 86% female and 76% male felt satisfactory. One solid reason could be that these facilities are visible in terms of set up and approach. Whereas measures like ‘help during theft’, ‘assist in medical emergencies’, and ‘finding lost children’ in the malls are situational based and hence, everyone opined they have no idea.

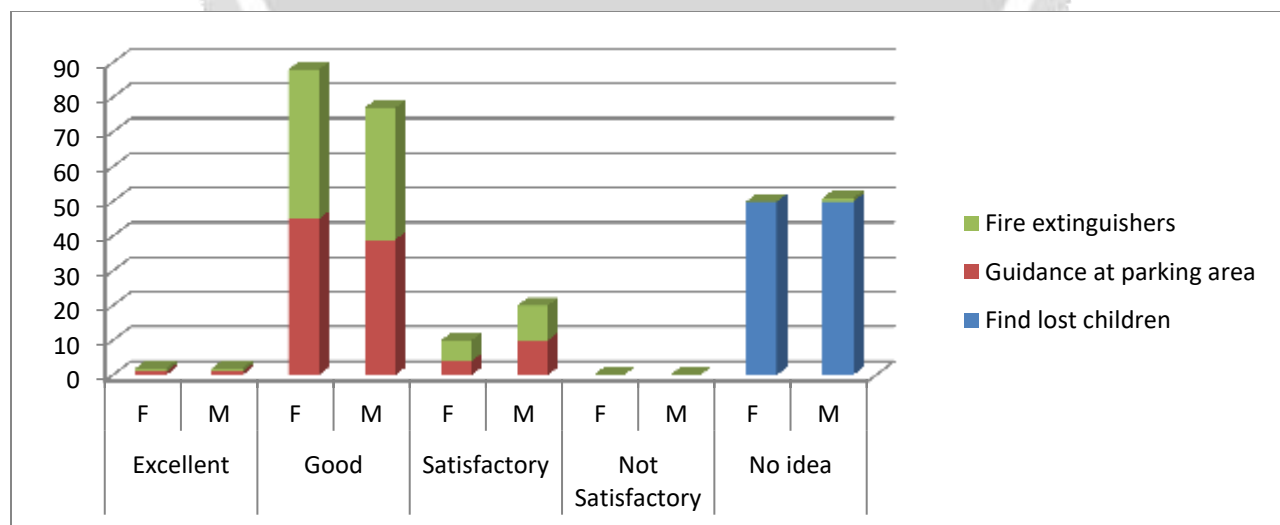


Figure 11: Opinion of Respondents on “Safety measures in the Malls”

6.10. Overall satisfaction of customers who visit malls in Bhavnagar, Gujarat

Regarding overall satisfaction with shopping mall experience, the respondents are quite happy. 26% women and 26% men felt the experience is excellent. Another 54% of women and 60% men are having good experience, and remaining 20% women and 14% men are satisfied with mall experience. There is no one who complained or opined that they are not satisfied.

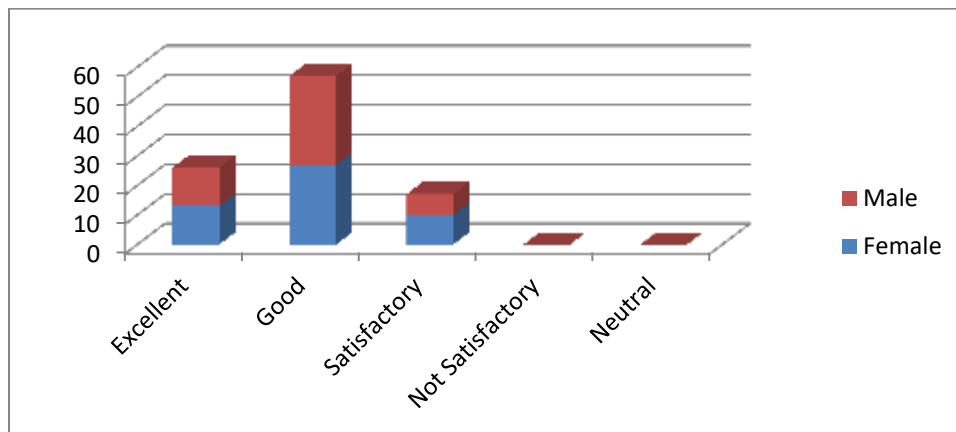


Figure 12: Opinion of Respondents on the Overall Satisfaction of Shopping Malls Visit in Bhavnagar

From the figure 13 it is evidently proved that there is 100% comfort to shop in shopping malls as everyone agreed that they are “One-Stop Shops” for all the required products and services.

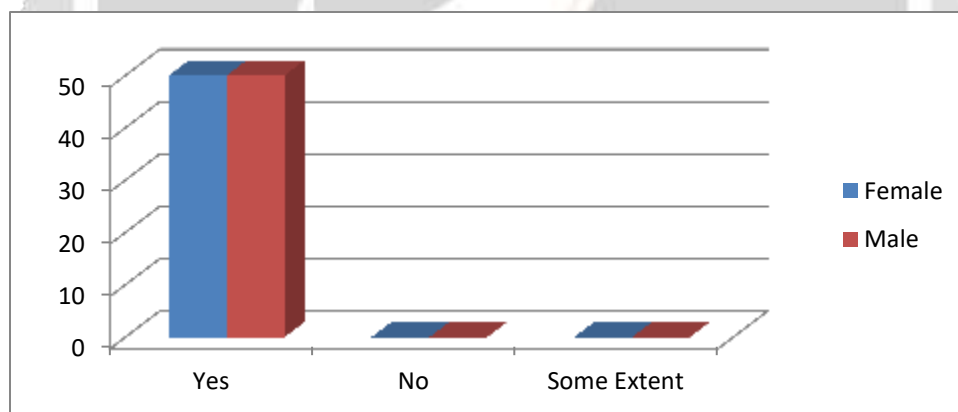


Figure 13: Opinion of Respondents on the statement “Shopping in Malls are Comfortable as it is ‘One-stop Shop’”

7. CONCLUSION

The study predominantly proves that the Bhavnagar customers are quite happy with overall shopping mall experience and absolutely comfortable as they consider it as “One-Stop Shop” for wide range of products and brands. The value they get for money they spend in malls is considerably good. Bhavnagar shopping malls scored good marks with regard to services like overall ambience, AC, cleanliness, parking facility, guidance of staff, sanitary/ toilet facilities etc. However, regarding the safety measure, there is huge dearth of awareness among customers. They are, in fact, not aware about what kind of safety measures can be demanded in a shopping mall. Mall management can focus more in this area, by making arrangements for such facilities as well as keeping the customers informed about the same through proper signage setups and proactive responses.

Overall, the study finds that there are no predominant differences between men and women in their shopping experiences, choices and purchasing decisions. This is a healthy sign for the enhanced role of women. However, there is a slight variation in opinions in case of purpose of visit, when men agreed they visit malls often for entertainment, but women agreed they visit for entertainment occasionally. The research also proves that shopping malls are best locations for socialization, especially for younger generation to hangout, spend quality time with family, dine out other than shopping. The percentage of women job holders indicates that it is a positive note for any growth and proliferation of shopping malls. Working women plays a key role in purchasing decisions and enhancing the living standards. The study also proved the strengthened spending capacities of middle and upper middle class families. Also the double income in families is a good indication for survival of shopping malls.

Regarding purchasing decisions, pre –planning for shopping is the new concept buzzing especially in the context of Internet proliferation. Researching on products to be purchased, cross checking the blogs, online opinions is the common trend going on. Bhavnagar is no different to this concept, as majority of customers opined that they plan prior to shopping. Though advertising plays a major role in attracting customers – it is the handy information; awareness and planning that influence the purchase decisions. However in malls, the in-house advertisements and signage has a larger scope to tempt the customers towards purchases, as a considerable customers visit malls for window shopping. Thus malls retailer can focus more in this particular area to attract the customers. Pre-planning and in-house advertising together gives clarity and customer can go for better purchasing decisions.

The study also proves that the bonding for Khiranas continues to exist, especially in towns like Bhavnagar with regard to quality of product being offered in malls. Also majority opted for “Proximity of Malls” as one key parameter to choose for shopping, there is always a scope for other retailers to cherish. If the purpose of shopping is only the purchase of products, they need not travel to malls all the way, rather would choose a better Khirana or a nearby small mall for the same.

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