

# **Consumer's patronage intention towards shopping malls: The role of experiential, atmospheric and service components**

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## **Abstract**

Experiential marketing has garnered attention in both industries and academia in recent years. Consumers are increasingly prioritising spending on leisure and experiences rather than products and services. The service sector has recognised this trend and is striving to fulfill its consumers' experience requirements by providing them with experiences that bring pleasure and satisfaction. Researchers have also begun incorporating the experiential aspect into various service industries such as tourism, events, hotels, restaurants, and cafes. These services incorporate all the elements of the experience, including the environment, décor, music, lighting, fragrance, taste, and more. Also, the use of multiple senses such as sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste has been found remarkable in the creation of memorable multisensory experiences. This study aims to find the impact of overall components related to shopping malls; therefore, it has bifurcated them into three parts: the experiential component, the atmospheric components, and the service component.

The first component encompasses the experiential aspects of the shopping mall, which involve engaging multiple senses and targeting consumer emotions, feelings, behavior, and intellect. It aims to create an immersive experience for shoppers, fostering a deeper connection between them and the mall. In an increasingly competitive market and with the rise of online shopping, retailers are continuously seeking ways to enhance the in-store experience. The second component is the atmospheric aspect, which includes factors such as props, ambience, design, social elements, and merchandise. These factors contribute to the overall experiential quality of the shopping mall. Retail businesses are now more focused on creating specific atmospheres that enhance visitors' experiences, prolong their stays, and encourage spending. Factors such as splendid store interiors, pleasant ambience, soothing lighting, store design, background music, appealing scents, aesthetically pleasing product displays, and excellent staff all contribute to the atmospheric component of the retail environment. The third and final component is the service component, which involves the human factor in retail environments. This component is particularly significant as retail organisations can differentiate themselves through the quality of their customer-facing services. Service is a fundamental requirement for shoppers, and they expect helpful and knowledgeable staff in stores. The retail store staff plays a crucial role as customer assistants, providing guidance and assistance. A positive interaction with competent staff creates a lasting impression on consumers.

Despite the growing recognition of experiential elements in the retail environment, there is a paucity of research that fully captures the role of the consumer's experience in shaping their intentions to visit, commitment, and loyalty towards retail stores. The present study seeks to address this gap by investigating the impact of experiential, atmospheric, and service components on consumers' patronage intentions and then store commitment towards the shopping mall. To achieve this research objective, the study proposes a conceptual framework based on inference theory, shopping patronage theory, and service encounter theory that demonstrates how experiences, atmospheric, and service contribute to the creation of patronage intentions and commitment roles among consumers.

The shopping mall experience provides shoppers with both tangible and intangible value, and it is crucial to consider this aspect. Perceived value in the shopping experience encompasses the benefits derived from the store's environment, goods and services, events, and social interactions. It is the result of a personal evaluation that compares the overall perceived advantages with the perceived compromises or costs. Similarly, satisfaction is another essential component that determines whether shoppers are pleased with the product or service. Satisfaction is widely studied in the marketing literature as an outcome of customer experience in a retail setting. It is vital for promoting positive consumer behaviours such as recommendations, loyalty, and commitment. In the context of the shopping experience, satisfaction refers to shoppers' assessments of the amusement and enjoyment they derive from the retail store. Therefore, this study aims to explore the mediating role of perceived value and satisfaction in the relationship between mall components and patronage intention. It examines how the various components of the mall influence shoppers' perceived value and satisfaction, which in turn impact their intention to patronise the mall. Furthermore, the study also investigates the moderating role of hedonic motivation, which refers to the impulses that drive consumerism in pursuit of imagination, happiness, satisfaction, and sensory experiences. Shoppers motivated by hedonic factors participate in shopping for the sheer excitement and adventure it brings. The current study seeks to explore how hedonic motivation affects the relationship between the experiential and atmospheric components of the mall and shoppers' patronage intentions.

The mall-intercept survey technique was used to obtain data from shoppers using a self-administered questionnaire. Data were gathered over the course of 3 months from August-October 2022, encompassing weekends, holidays, and festivals, by reaching out to shoppers in malls in four cities in India. In each city, two large malls were targeted; the malls encompassed an area of more than 500,000 square feet and included national and international brands, a food court, multiplex theatres, a gaming zone, and other amenities. The people who were present in the mall were the intended participants. Respondents were selected and approached via a convenient sampling method and offered to complete a self-administered questionnaire while they entered malls, during purchases, at food courts, and at the time of exit. A total of 380 responses were gathered and analysed through Smart PLS 4.0 software. The responses were initially checked for validity and reliability, and then the hypothesis testing was done.

The findings of the study indicate that the experiential and atmospheric components of the shopping mall have a positive and significant impact on shoppers' patronage intentions, while the service component does not. An interesting new finding is that the atmospheric experience strongly influences the experiential component of shoppers in the mall. Additionally, shoppers' patronage

intentions also influence their store commitment. The study also reveals that perceived value partially mediates the impact of the experiential and atmospheric components on patronage intention. However, it fully mediates the impact of the service component on patronage intention. Surprisingly, satisfaction does not have a mediating effect on the relationship between mall-related components and patronage intention. Furthermore, hedonic motivation only moderates the relationship between the atmospheric experience and patronage intention, suggesting that shoppers' pleasure-seeking motives influence their intention to patronise the mall. These findings have significant contributions for both the literature and retailers and mall owners. Mall owners can benefit from understanding that the atmospheric component has a stronger impact on shoppers than the experiential component. This knowledge can help them focus on creating enhanced sensory experiences in the mall environment. Additionally, the study is valuable for academics in the field of experiential marketing, as it highlights the importance of exploring and developing multisensory experiences in various forms of retail. Overall, the study provides valuable insights that can guide retailers and mall owners in enhancing the shopping experience, increasing patronage intention, and fostering store commitment. It also opens up avenues for further research in the field of experiential marketing and sensory experiences in retail.