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INDEX

Sr. No.	Title	Author	Subject	Page No.
1	Cost of capital: an empirical case study of hindustan unilever limited	Dr. Vinod K. Ramani	Accountancy	1-2
2	Self Revolution	Mohanapriya.P	Arts	3-4
3	Wound healing activity of Cestrum elegans	V. Subhaa, Dr. D. Sukumarb, Dr. V. Elangoc	Chemistry	5-6
4	Anti Bacterial Activity of Apigenin 7-0-(6"caffeoyl) neohesperidoside from chrysanthemum indicum	M.Jerome Rozario, Dr.A.John Merina, Dr.V.Srinivasana	Chemistry	7-10
5	Adsorption Studies of Cu (II) and Cr (VI) from metal solution using crosslinked chitosan-g-acrylonitrile copolymer	Shankar.P, Gomathi T., Vijayalakshmi.K, Sudha P.N	Chemistry	11-13
6	An Insight into Derivative Markets: Indian Perspective	Dr. C.Shobha, Dr. T. Hanumantha raya	Commerce	14-16
7	Vision and Planning	Dr. J. K Sehgal	Commerce	17-18
8	An Analytical Study of Employee's Productivity in Some Selected Nationalized Banks of India	Dr. Jyotindra M. Jani, Manish B. Raval	Commerce	19-20
9	New Products of Tourism in India	Dr. M. K. Maru	Commerce	21-22
10	Inventory Management in Sugar Mills - A Comparative Study	Promila	Commerce	23-25
11	Price -Mix Straregy of Jammu and Kashmir Co-Operatives Supply and Marketing Federation Limited in Jammu District of J&K State	Tarsem Lal	Commerce	26-28
12	Warehouse Management Information System: A New Perspective in Supply Chain Management	Dr. Vipul Chalotra	Commerce	29-30
13	A Study on Consumer Satisfaction of Aavin Milk in Salem City	Dr.A.Vinayagamoorthy, Mrs. M.Sangeetha, C.Sankar	Commerce	31-33
14	Hybrid Attribute Selection Process for Decision Tree Based Classification Algorithms	Mr. A. Jebamalai Robinson, Mrs. S. C. Punitha, Dr. P. Ranjit Jeba Thangaiah	Computer Science	34-36
15	Visualizing the validation of UML diagrams	Lavleen Kambow	Computer Science	37-38
16	Effectiveness of coconut palm insurance scheme in the coastal belts of India-A SWOT analysis	Prof. (Dr.) D. Rajasenan, Bijith George Abraham	Economics	39-41
17	An Analysis of the Efficiency of Selected Public and Private Banks in India during 2005-2011	Dr.Dinesh Kumar, Sanjeev	Economics	42-44
18	Measurement of Emotional Development of the Students	Dr. Nivedita K. Deshmukh	Education	45-46
19	A comparative study of effect of method of lecture and dramatization of Marathi teaching	Dr. Nivedita K. Deshmukh	Education	47-48
20	Peer pressure-problems and solutions	V.Vaithyanathan, Dr.P.Sivakumar	Education	49-50
21	Language Anxiety In Indian L2 Learners: Male or Female Learners - Who Scores High?	S. Gandhimathi, Dr.R.Ganesan	Education	51-52

22	Topological Characteristics of ECG Signal using Lyapunov Exponent and RBF Network	Abinash Dahal, Deepashree Devaraj, Dr. N. Pradhan	Engineering	53-55
23	Development of slicing package of solid model for cone and sphere in rapid prototyping	Dineshkumar M. Patel, Prof. P.D.Solanki	Engineering	56-58
24	Hardware modeling Simulation with COSSAP	Krunali Amrutlal Ratanpara, Devendra Soni, Shrenik Rajesh Golwelkar	Engineering	59-61
25	Coordination Of Pss And Statcom To Enhance The Power System Transient Stability	Lalit K. Patel, Kaushik M. Sangada, Sunil S. Changlani , Ankit M. Patel	Engineering	62-64
26	Cooling Performance Analysis of Heat Sink	Mr. Pritesh S. Patel, Prof. Dattatraya G. Subhedar, Prof. Kamlesh V. Chauhan	Engineering	65-67
27	Thermal Modeling and Analysis of Friction Stir Welding	Rankit Patel, Prof. Bindu Pillai	Engineering	68-70
28	Review on shrinkage defect – A case study	Mr. Ravi N. Kalotra, Mr. Gajanan Patange, Mr. J.K. Gohil	Engineering	71-75
29	Stream Function Formulation of Lid Driven Cavity	Mr. Zankhan C. Sonara, Prof. Dattatraya G. Subhedar, Mr. Kartik Patel	Engineering	76-78
30	Implementation of ABT (Availability Based Tariff) - its Treatment & Proceedings	Dilip m.Bhankhodiya, Dipak t. Vaghela	Engineering	79-82
31	Active Filters for Power Quality Improvement	Dipak t. Vaghela, Dilip m. Bhankhodiya	Engineering	83-87
32	Design and Analysis of Air Bearing using Orifice and Feed Hole Pocket	Nileshkumar T. Raval, Prof. M.Y.Patil	Engineering	88-90
33	Drip irrigation technique enhancing water and fertiliser use efficiency in cauliflower	Dr. S.S. Yadav, Dr. R.S. Meena	Engineering	91-92
34	Experimental and FEA Evaluation of Hybrid Joint Strength of Single Lap joint.	S. S. Kadam, P. A. Dixit	Engineering	93-96
35	CFD Analysis of Mixed Flow Submersible pump Impeller	Mitul G Patel, Subhedar Dattatraya, Bharat J Patel	Engineering	97-100
36	EVA: An Innovative Parameter for Shareholders' Wealth Measurement	Shri. Arvind A. Dhond	Finance	101-103
37	Profitability and consistency analysis of Textile Sector in India	Dr. K. S. Vataliya, Rajesh Jadav	Finance	104-107
38	Harmonious Relationship between Art and Music Critical vision (comparison)	Dr. Marwan Imran	Fine Arts	108-109
39	Land Use Pattern and Crop Combination Region in Satara District : A Geographical Study	Dr. Rathod S. B., Mane-Deshmukh R. S.	Geography	110-111
40	Garlic---Benefits and Uses	Dr. Sneh Harshinder Sharma	Geography	112-114
41	An Assessment of Thermal Comfort Zones in Terms of Tourists: A case study of Karveer Tehsil	Mr. Prashant Tanaji Patil, Miss. Mane madhuri maruti, Miss. Mugade Nisha Ramchandra	Geography	115-117

42	Hematological changes due to the impact of Lead nitrate on economically important estuarine fish Mystus gulio	Dr.S.Palani Kumar	Horticulture	118-119
43	Stress Management level in the employees of Manufacture Industries By considering key parameters with reference to Bhavnagar city	Dr. K. S. Vataliya, Adv. Ajay H. Thakkar	Human Resource	120-122
44	The Case of ABC Group-A Case on Performance Appraisal System	Shivani Sah	Human Resource Management	123-124
45	A Study On Performance Appraisal of Employees in Health Care Industry in a Private Multi-Speciality Organization	Dr. C. Swarnalatha, T.S. Prasanna	Human Resource Management	125-126
46	(Upanyas - Jansi ki Rani Laxmibai (vrundavanlal varma)	Dr. Sneh Harshinder Sharma	Literature	127-128
47	“Educational Technology for Professional Development of English Teachers: A Case Study of the College Teachers of English in Jammu Province”	Dr. Wajahat Hussain	Literature	129-130
48	The Reality of Sultana’s Dream: A step towards success Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein	Riju Sharma, Ruchee Aggarwal	Literature	131-132
49	Road blocks of Match Industry in Andhra Pradesh: Certain Issues and Concerns	Anuradha Averineni	Management	133-134
50	Government’s Assistance Towards the Development of Small Scale Industries in India with Special Reference to Krishnagiri District	B. Mohandhas, Dr. G. Prabakaran	Management	135-140
51	Effects of Role Stress on Employee Job Satisfaction and Turnover	Dr. T.G.Vijaya, R.Hemamalini	Management	141-144
52	“MNP – A major concern of Telecom Operators in Gujarat”	Mohsinali Momin, Dr. Deepak H. Tekwani	Management	145-147
53	A Study on Fiscal Support Provided by Vijaya Bank to Msme in Coimbatore City	Mrs. G. Murali Manokari, Mr. G. Lenin Kumar, Mrs. G. Sathiya	Management	148-150
54	Competencies for HR Professionals	GAYATHRI. M	Management	151-153
55	Cost and Strategic Management - Application, Framework and Strategies for the Growth of Sme Sector	Manisha gaur	Management	154-156
56	Development of Management Education System in India	Mr. Goudappa Malipatil	Management	157-158
57	Study on Volatility and Return of Major Indices of Indian Stock Market with Reference to Sensex And Nifty	Mr. Mukesh C .Ajmera	Management	159-160
58	A Need for an Epitome Shift in Management Education A study on Conceptual Teaching practices	Mrs. Vanishree K. Jamashetti, Mr. Sanjeev Rathod	Management	161-162
59	Personal Social Responsibility – A novel thought	Parul Jain, Dr. N.C Pahariya	Management	163-164
60	Green Marketing – A Consumer’s Perspective in the Indian Scenario	Nidhi Srivastava, Preeti Pillai	Management	165-166
61	Challenges and Opportunities of Mobile Banking - An Indian Scenario	Sandhya.Ch.V.L	Management	167-169
62	A pragmatic study of civilizing amortment among The diverse countries	Mr. Vimal P. Jagad, Mr Mukesh .C Ajmera	Management	170-171
63	Celebrity Endorsement in India An Effective Tool of Sales Promotion	Piyush Shah, Dr. N C Pahariya	Management	172-176

64	A Study of Prominent Character Strengths and Their Relationship with Well Being Among Business Management Students	GarimaKamboj, DikshaKakkar	Management	177-180
65	Coffee Consumption in India: An Exploratory Study	Shri. Arvind A. Dhond	Marketing	181-183
66	Applicability of Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) in India	M. Ramakrishnan, Dr. Sudharani Ravindran	Marketing	184-186
67	Account Holders perceptions towards Self Service Technologies: a study of selected Private Sector Banks	Dr A Kumar, Prof Ankur Gangal	Marketing	187-189
68	Impact of Sales Promotion on Sales figures of Select International FMCG Brands	Dr.Sharif Memon	Marketing	190-193
69	Factors Affecting Green Product Design: Marketing Professional's Perspective	D. S. Rohini Samarasinghe	Marketing	194-196
70	The Impact of 'Ambience' and Variety on Consumer Delight: A Study on Consumer Behaviour in Ahmedabad	Dr A Kumar, Prof Vineeta Gangal	Marketing	197-200
71	Co-Relation of Social Justice with Human Rights: A Review	Dr. Monica Narang	Marketing	201-202
72	Study of Iron Status and Free Radical Activity in Plasmodium Falciparum and Plasmodium Vivax Malaria Infection	Sangita M. Patil, Ramchandra K. Padalkar	Medical Sciences	203-205
73	GOAL SETTING TENDENCIES, COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND WORK MOTIVATION VIS-À-VIS AGE DIFFERENCE – A STUDY ON PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATION	Dr. Swaha Bhattacharya, Dr. Monimala Mukherjee	Psychology	206-208
74	Role of NGOs in Social Mobilization in the context of SGSY	Dr.Veershetty C. Tadalapur	Sociology	209-211
75	Age at menarche and its secular trend in rural and urban girls of bathinda district	Jyoti Sharma, Dr. Ajita	Sports Science	212-213
76	Effect Of Resin Finishing On Stiffness And Drape Of Khadi Fabric	Dr. Suman pant, Ms. Noopur Sonee	Textiles	214-216

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Research Paper Marketing

The Impact of 'Ambience' and Variety on Consumer Delight: A Study on Consumer Behaviour in Ahmedabad

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: The liberalization policy pursued by Indian government in retail sector has fueled the growth of malls in various regions of the country. Shopping malls have become a part of a contemporary consumer shopping culture. Malls are attractive locations which facilitate social interactions and entertainment. The fascination towards malls is driven by convenience, entertainment, and assortment as they address the diverse shopping behavioral needs of the consumer. With the increase in competition, one of mall managers' primary goals is to retain current shoppers. The key factor in gaining market share and developing sustainable competitive advantage is by making the shoppers loyal. This paper is an attempt to understand whether the ambience and variety of a mall are factors which can lead to a positive consumer behavior translating from consumer delight and ultimately increasing customer loyalty.

Methodology: We would be using a Structured Schedule to survey a sample size of 150 respondents, through convenience sampling 50 from each of the three corporate malls of Ahmedabad namely Iscon Mall (S.G. Highway), Himalaya Mall (Gurukul), Alpha One (Vastrapur).

Research Limitations: The research would be conducted only in the city of Ahmedabad.

Practical Implications: Shopping malls- appear to be in a mature phase of the retail life cycle where market shares and sales may be leveling off. The challenges that face developers within this context are to become more consumer oriented. This paper would be an attempt to study the impact of Ambience and Variety on the success or failure of a mall. Can better creativity in the mall ambience and variety increase customer loyalty by ultimately delighting the consumer and giving them more than what they perceived – is what this paper is attempting to explore.

Keywords : Consumer Behaviour, Malls, Ambience

INTRODUCTION

Retailing in India is one of the pillars of its economy and was estimated to be at US$ 450 billion (Rs 22500 billion) in 2007, (Mckinsey, 2007) to grow up to US$ 833 billion (Rs 41650 billion) by the year 2013 and reach US$ 1.3 trillion (Rs 65 trillion) by the year 2019, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10% (Northbridge Capita, 2010). India has been ranked fourth in a Global Retail Development Index of 30 developing countries, and as one of the most attractive emerging retail markets of the world (AT Kearney, 2011). As for India, retailing contributes about 15% to its GDP and 8 % of the employment (Mckinsey, 2005).

Organized retail is best represented by the malls, and they are expected to grow at a frantic pace in metros, mini-metros and spread to not just cities but also to semi urban and rural areas (Mitra, 2006). With the western retail markets being saturated giants such as Wal-Mart, Carrefour and Tesco, and single brand majors such as IKEA, Nike, and Apple are also poised to enter India, one of the fastest growing retail market of 1.2 billion people. (The Economist, 2008).

All this is leading to a shopping revolution in India, Currently, India has a population of over 1 billion, and 60 % of her people are under 30 years of age; 54 % of the population are under 25 years of age, while 80 % are not yet 45 years old. India has around 192 million households, about 6million of which are 'affluent,' i.e., have household incomes in excess of INR 215,000 (US $ 5,000) per annum. Another 75 million households are in the category of 'well off,' earning between INR 45,000 (US $ 1,000) and INR 215,000 (US $ 5,000) per annum. This means the majority of the population is young and employed and has high purchasing power. The low median age of the population means a higher current consumption rate, which augurs well for the retail sector. Consumer spending in India has grown at over 12 % since the mid-1990s, and 64 % of India's GDP is accounted for by private consumption (Marketing Whitebook, 2006, p. 109).

Over the last decade, average Indian spending has gone up from INR 5,745 (US $ 130) in 1992-93 to INR 16,457 (US $ 400) in 2003-04, and it is expected to grow around its trend rate of 12 %. This is a sizable consumption base offering an excellent opportunity for organized retailers.

All this is leading to a shopping revolution in India; the retail industry is bound to be on an upswing. The number of malls in the country are likely to swell to 280 in 2011-12 from 190 in 2010-11, and around 5 million sq ft of retail space was added in 2010 and approximately 15 million sq ft of space is lined up to get operational in 2011-2012 (TOI, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intensive efforts have been made to find the relevant studies carried out on customer shopping experience in shopping malls with entertainment centers. Only a limited study is available in this field especially in India. A summary of the literature reviewed is reported here.

Malls play a major role in consumers' lifestyle (Terblanche, 1999). They have become not only a centre for shopping but also a community centre for social and recreational activities (Ng, 2003). Stores, food courts, restaurants, cinemas, children's play areas, interactive entertainment, social use areas, relaxation spaces and promotional areas are now major components of any mall (Terblanche, 1999).

With the increase in competition, one of mall managers' primary goals is to retain current shoppers (Babin and Attaway, 2000). The key factor in gaining market share and developing sustainable competitive advantage is by making the shopper's loyal (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Wright and Sparks, 1999). No wonder that over the last decade mall loyalty has become a topic of extensive research in retail marketing (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006). Over the past few years researchers have examined mall ambience, store factors, and facilities that contribute to mall patronage and attractions (Howell and Rogers, 1980; Finn and Louviere, 1990; Finn and Louviere, 1996; Swait and Sweeney, 2000; Darian et al., 2001; Yavas, 2003; De Juan, 2004). To attract consumers, malls combine traditional selling activity with other value-added services which make them entertainment complexes (Csabe and Askegaard, 1999). Malls are appreciated due to their theatrical and pretentious character (Belk and Bryce, 1993; El Sayed et al., 2004).

For clearer understanding of the consumer behaviour towards malls we require variable attributes of malls which influence the consumer behaviour of consumers towards these malls. There are seven major mall attributes that influence consumer behaviour (Bloch et al., 1994). They are categorized as follows: Aesthetics, Escape, Flow, Exploration, Role Enactment, and Social Convenience

Besides this some other relevant work in the field of retail management are by Reimers and Clulow (2004) did a survey to understand the importance of spatial convenience in shopping strips and shopping centres .The findings yielded three important insights (1) The shopping centre was found to offer consumers' greater spatial convenience (2) the findings also said that if a shopping mall was unable to satisfy the needs of a convenience-oriented society it lead to its gradual demise (3) while the shopping strip may be at a competitive disadvantage in terms of spatial convenience, market mechanisms. Michon et al. (2005) explored the role of mall atmospherics and its interaction effects of the mall environment on shopping behavior. The results of the study indicate that ambient odors positively influence shoppers' perceptions only under the medium retail density condition. Also that mood has little direct effect on the perception of product quality. Wesley et al. (2006) explored consumer decision-making styles and mall shopping behavior using exploratory data analysis and the comparative method. The results reveal that gender is a prime antecedents associating with consumer decision-making styles. Michon et al. (2008) identified the influence of mall environment on female fashion shoppers' value and behaviour. The results indicate that mall atmospherics has no or little effect on the utilitarian value of low- or high-fashion oriented shoppers. Rajagopal (2009) has focused on the impact of growing congestion of shopping mall in urban areas on shopping conveniences and shopping behavior. The findings reveal that the perspectives of shopping mall ambience and shopping satisfaction effectively become a measure of retailing performance, customer attraction and propensity to shop for urban shoppers.

This review was gives us an understanding that a lot of systematic attempts has been made across the world on the various factors which influence shopping behaviour, but research has been performed keeping the Indian consumer and the kind of Indian malls in mind

RESEARCH PROBLEM IDENTIFIED

The purpose of this paper is to understand whether the ambience of the mall has an impact on the selection of malls with entertainment centre's in Ahmedabad. This research also aims to explore the difference in preferences on the basis of gender, and also on the impact of external and internal variables on the choice of mall.

OBJECTIVES

The study has the following objectives:

1. To study the impact of Aesthetics on the selection of a mall
2. To determine the relative importance of criteria which influence the overall attractiveness of mall
3. To study the impact of gender on the external and internal variables of the mall
4. The most popular mall in Ahmedabad.

METHODOLOGY

Most of the previous research on malls with entertainment centers, focused only on one mall, this study has attempted to conduct research across 4 different malls in Ahmedabad. The data collection was conducted in the four major malls of Ahmedabad Iscon Mall, Himalaya Mall, Acropolis Mall, Alpha One Mall all these malls, attract the urban middle income consumers and they also fit commonly in terms of varieties of entertainment offered such as size, shopping outlets, entertainment outlets, theatres, rides for children, parking , accessibility etc.

The survey instrument used is structured personal interview questionnaire. Interview was conducted from a random sample of mall shoppers from each of these malls. The data collection was done at major exits of the mall to complete the questionnaire:

The questions focus on the following areas: average number of visit, whether prominence was given to ambience, type of shop, or parking; detail features of ambience; type of shops and the overall rating of the mall

In all the malls the data was collected in the month of February 2012. The questionnaire was filled by some 213 shoppers of which only 200 were considered. The collected data was analyzed using likert Scaling technique, simple ranking method, percentage, chi square test, was used wherever necessary.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Of the 200 sample size considered the male female break up was as shown in Table: 1.

GENDER	TOTAL
MALE	118
FEMALE	82
TOTAL	200

Table: 1

Frequency of Visit to Malls: Table: 2

FREQUENCY OF VISIT		%
WEEKLY	56	28
MONTHLY	64	32
QUATERLY	08	4
UNPLANNED VISIT	72	36
TOTAL	200	

Table: 2

Of the 200 people who were interviewed it was found that going to a mall was usually an unplanned affair, with the mood, time and day and company playing a major role.

Prominence given to: before selecting a mall

PROMINENCE GIVEN TO	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
AMBIENCE	32	27	16	20
TYPE OF SHOPS	62	53	60	73
PARKING	24	20	6	7
TOTAL	118		82	

Table: 3

Here in Table 3, it was found that both male and female's gave preference to the variety of shops in the malls as compared to ambience, and another notable feature was that males also

considered ambience and parking as a very important factor in their decision.

Features of ambience which are considered attractive

FEATURES OF AMBIENCE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
ELEVATION	10	8	16	20
LANDSCAPING	22	19	2	2
WINDOW DRESSING	20	17	20	24
LIGHTING	66	56	44	54
TOTAL	118		82	

Table: 4

Both Male and females considered the Use of lighting/ Color play/ comfortable sitting in the central area (lounge) as one of the most important factor, but the other factors varied in both the genders as shown in Table: 4. Males gave the second preference to external landscaping outside the mall which was the least important for females. Males felt that the elevation, size of the mall was of least importance, but this factor was particularly important to females. Females also considered the kind of Window shopping as a very important factor in aesthetics

To further understand the preference in ambience with respect to gender we performed chi test

Where Ho = The features of ambience are independent of gender

	A	B	C	D	
MALE	4	2	8	16	30
FEMALE	0	0	8	8	16
	4	2	16	24	46

Table: 5

The P value = 0.182685
This P value is higher that 5% of significance so Ho is accepted
Type of shops which are considered

KIND OF SHOPS	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
SHOPPING	46	39	66	81
MOVIEPLEX	28	24	6	7
EATERIES	28	24	4	5
GAMING ZONES	16	13	6	7
TOTAL	118		82	

Table: 6

It was found that both Male and females preferred the options available in shopping, i.e brands, variety, etc as a major factor for selection of a mall, Males also gave importance to the type of movieplex, and eateries. Whereas for females only the kind of shops were important. Shown in Table: 6.

To further understand the preference in shops with respect to gender we performed chi test

Where Ho = The type of shops selected are independent of gender

Table: 7	A	B	C	D	
MALE	26	10	22	14	72
FEMALE	50	2	0	8	60
	76	12	22	22	132

The P value = 8.44422E-08

This P value is lower than 5% of significance so Ho is rejected

Importance of Parking

PARKING	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
YES	84	71	74	90
NO	34	29	08	10
	118		82	

Table: 8

In this analysis it was found that females consider the availability of parking as more important as compared to males shown here in Table 8.

Ranking of the mall

	RANK 1	RANK 2	RANK 3	RANK 4
ISCON MALL	24	30	34	16
HIMALAYA	31	27	36	7
ACROPOLIS	10	12	11	62
ALPHA ONE	35	32	18	17

Table 9

On the basis of the simple ranking method Table 10 shows the ranking of Malls in Ahmedabad:

ALPHA ONE	1ST RANK
HIMALAYA	2ND RANK
ISCON MALL	3RD RANK
ACROPOLIS	4TH RANK

Table 10

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Shoppers visit malls for shopping purpose and consider the kind of shop, variety of brands available as a major source for decision of the mall. Besides this they spend additional time at food court, multiplexes ,stores in the mall The analysis concludes that the type of shops in the malls were a major reason for attraction among females, but for men the emphasis was also on entertainment facilities, as well as food joints. But in all the ambience and look of the mall doesn't have much of an appeal on the selection. The findings will help the owners of shopping malls to meet the needs of the visitors of shopping malls. It also serves as an encouragement to the store owners in shopping malls to cater for the needs of the shoppers.

The study has the following limitations in terms of one location considered for the study was only Ahmedabad, and that the sample size was limited to 200.Therefore, generalization of the findings requires enough caution. The researcher recommends that the study may be extended in the following lines: by including large number of samples; covering all the major cities in India; The comparative number of malls may be increased. Besides this one can also include factors such effect of age, average time spent, and average amount spent etc, average distance traveled, activities within the mall etc.

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