

Print ISSN: 1738-3110 / Online ISSN 2093-7717  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15722/jds.14.2.201602.5>

# Hierarchy of Shopping Experience at Indian Malls: A Conceptual Model using Interpretive Structural Modelling

Sanjeev Prashar\*, Harvinder Singh\*\*, Pappu Raja Sekhara Sarma\*\*\*

Received: January 8, 2016. Revised: January 16, 2016. Accepted: February 15, 2016

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The present study examines the interrelationship between various components constituting shopping experience in the context of the Indian shopping malls.

**Research design, data, and methodology** – Extracting components of shopping experience from the literature review, the study used Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) to propose a conceptual model. The study adopted a mixed methods research involving theoretical constructs from past research, qualitative assessment of relationship between the constructs and imposing definite order and direction to qualitative relations based on mathematical computations.

**Results** – Proposed model indicates that the five components of shopping experience (ambience, physical infrastructure, convenience, marketing focus and safety and security) do not converge directly into shopping experience. Rather, they operate following a hierarchy of influences in which marketing focus plays the role of the initiator.

**Conclusions** – This model points at the order of preference of different components of shopping experience and can be a useful guide for retail industry, especially mall developers and supermarket/hypermarket, may use the findings in key decisions about development of physical infrastructure, which are based on marketing focus.

**Keywords:** Shopping Experience, Shopping Malls, Mixed Methods Research, Marketing Focus, Interpretive

Structural Modelling (ISM).

**JEL Classifications:** M30, M31, M39.

## 1. Introduction

Consumer researchers, over the years, have emphasized upon looking beyond the act of buying, to include the experiential aspects of shopping. As per Csaba et al. (1999), shopping experience constitutes the core of consumer research and shopping behaviour. These experiential aspects are manifested in the form of experiences that comprise a complex array of feelings associated with the act of shopping (Prus & Dawson, 1991). When product differentiation becomes minimal, shopping experience becomes the key differentiator offering a sustainable advantage to the retailers. It accessorizes the offers and creates emotional connect when product and price fail to touch the buying motives of the target segment (Poullsson & Kale, 2004). In context of malls, positive shopping experience of shoppers leads to increased retailer loyalty (Terblanche & Boshoff, 2006). Thus, creating a superior shopping experience becomes a key requisite for ensuring success of a retail store or a mall.

Retail formats evolve as a marketers' response to the socio-economic landscape of a market they operate in. The formats and business practices are customized to respond favourably to the needs of the respective markets (Goldman, 2001). The traditional Indian market places, despite being smaller and with poorer infrastructure, limited variety and uncompetitive prices, had held their forte against the onslaught of shopping malls over the years. Many attribute it to the India-specific shopping experience offered by them (Singh & Prashar, 2014). Contrarily, Indian shopping malls have evolved in a decade's time as a replica of malls in the developed world. Housing tenants from organized retail sector, these malls are identical and seriously lack distinction. Hence, shopping experience can be a real differentiator (Singh & Sahay, 2012). It becomes pertinent for shopping malls to create the requisite differentiator by crafting a shopping experience that touches the heart and soul of Indian shoppers. This experience in shopping is orchestrated by

\* Professor, Indian Institute of Management (IIM), GEC Campus, Sejbahar, Raipur-492015, Chhattisgarh, India. Tel:+91-90-3903-9499, E-mail: dr.sanjeev.prashar@gmail.com

\*\* Professor, Institute of Management Technology (IMT), Raj Nagar, Hapur Road, Ghaziabad-201001 U.P., India. Tel: +91-120-300-4369, E-mail: hsingh@imt.edu

\*\*\* Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Management (IIM), GEC Campus, Sejbahar, Raipur-492015, Chhattisgarh, India. E-mail: prsarma@iimraipur.ac.in

a wide range of entities operating at the back-stage and the front-stage (Csaba & Askergaard, 1999). It is extremely critical to identify the components that constitute shopping experience and understand the linkages between these components that eventually lead to the creation of this experience. Understanding of the hierarchical relationship, followed by these components while orchestrating shopping experience, shall be of strategic and tactical significance to the mall developers.

## 2. Objectives of Study

Different studies have identified various elements contributing to shopping experience. However, it is imperative to understand the exact nature of the relationship between those elements in terms of 'antecedent- consequent' relationship and decipher the hierarchy of influence on shopping experience. A qualitative study was envisaged to achieve the following objectives:

- Understanding the primacy of different elements defining shopping experience;
- Interpreting the nature and direction of relationship between different elements that converge into shopping experience;
- Developing a conceptual model of shopping experience; and
- Examining the model in terms of implications for managerial decisions governing shopping experience.

## 3. Literature Review

Since organized retail formats and shopping malls are relatively recent phenomenon in markets like India, there are only a few studies on Indian malls, and specifically on shopping experience in Indian malls (Singh & Sahay, 2012). Generally, these studies have focused on examining the general perception of shoppers towards shopping malls and impact of malls on un-organized retail stores. Other set of studies have concentrated on descriptive analysis of shoppers visiting shopping malls. Very few studies are available on specific experiential aspects and shopping experience.

Globally, numerous studies on shopping experience have been conducted in context of retail stores, online shopping as well as shopping centres or Malls (Falk & Campbell, 1997; Swinyard, 1993; Machleit & Eroglu, 2000; Menon & Kahn, 2002; Singh & Prashar, 2014). Most of these studies were conducted in the US or Europe and understandably so. Of these, the studies on significance of shopping experience have been the mainstay. In reference to retail stores, it has been posited by researchers that shoppers do not shop merely for product acquisition. Experiential and emotional motives are equally strong drivers in shopping. Defining shopping, according to traditional information processing approach, must be augmented with symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic aspects of shopping (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). It was also noted that perceived shopping experience plays a significant role in explaining consumers' 'value perception' of a retail store (Kerin et al., 1992). Customer

mood and involvement, along with shopping experience, also impact shopping intentions (Swinyard, 1993). Another study highlighted the significance of shopping experience by observing that 69% of shoppers enjoyed shopping as a leisure-time activity. Such shoppers were labelled as 'recreational shoppers' (Bellenger & Korgaonkar, 1980).

Some of the recent studies on shopping experience have focussed on contextual applications. Prominent among these include studies on impact of companion on shopping experience (Borges et al., 2010; Lindsey-Mulliken & Munger, 2011), impact of shopping experience on equilibrium pricing and price advertising strategies (Iyer & Kuksov, 2012), distinction between impulse purchase and opportunistic purchase in case of a specific shopping experience (Massara et al., 2013), and different value assigned to time by different shoppers and consequent impact on shopping experience (Lloyd et al., 2014).

Though the concept of shopping mall is inseparable from that of shopping experience, the availability of academic literature on shopping experience in the context of shopping malls is somewhat constrained. Citing the works of Victor Gruen, Csaba, & Askergaard (1999) revealed that Gruen had distinguished buying from shopping as early as the 1960s. They posited that shopping experience is orchestrated by the interplay of two sets of forces. One set operates at the front stage whereas the other operates at the back stage. As per Babin et al. (1994), 'total shopping experience' is a comprehensive assessment of shopping experience in terms of all the qualitative and quantitative factors.

There have been various attempts on empirical validation of shopping experience indifferent contexts. These comprise studies related to retailers and customers (Jones, 1999), teen girls (Baker & Haytko, 2000), internet shopping (Menon & Kahn, 2002), older consumers (Kim et al., 2005), on differences across genders (Hart et al., 2007), tourists (LeHew & Wesley, 2007), across regions in the US (Tsai, 2010) and select Indian cities (Singh & Sahay, 2012; Singh & Prashar, 2014). Most of the studies have posited that a set of antecedents/ enablers lead to an expected or desirable shopping experience. However, the relationship between these parameters and the hierarchy-of-affects culminating into a shopping experience is not thoroughly probed. This paper fills this vital gap by exploring the interrelationship between shopping experience and its constituent parameters. The study culminates into a conceptual model exhibiting the hierarchy-of-affects resulting in shopping experience. This resultant conceptual model can be tested empirically in future, outlining the direction for future research on this theme.

## 4. Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods research involving theoretical constructs from past research, qualitative assessment of relationship between the constructs and imposing definite order and direction to qualitative relations based on mathematical computations.

**<Table 1>** List of Variables

Variable Label	Variable Name
V1	Shopping Experience
V2	Ambience
V3	Shoppers' Convenience
V4	Marketing Focus
V5	Safety and Security
V6	Physical Infrastructure

Key enablers for this study were derived from the research conducted on malls' shoppers in the Indian city of Mumbai (Singh & Prashar, 2014). The study indicates that shopping experience is orchestrated by the interplay of five components, namely ambience, convenience, marketing focus, safety and security and physical infrastructure. However, the study did not examine interrelationship between the factors themselves. List of six variables (including shopping experience) was shared with an expert group comprising of two academicians researching on shopping malls, two domain experts working with two different consulting firm and one mall manager having experience of more than a decade in managing shopping malls. These experts were asked to:

- (a) Confirm the existence of relationship between each pair of constructs; and
- (b) Specify the associated direction of relationship.

The observations of the group were recorded, summarized and analysed using the Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) framework.

#### 4.1. Interpretive Structural Modelling: Introduction

The present study is an attempt to analyse the interrelationships among the enablers of shopping experience using the Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM). An interactive learning process, Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) is a modelling technique used for developing a structured system by imposing definite order and direction on complex relationship of different and directly related elements of the system (Warfield, 1974; Sage, 1977). Mainly intended as a group learning process, ISM identifies and summarizes inter-relationships among specific items comprising or contributing to issue or problem (Mandal & Deshmukh, 1994; Jharkharia & Shankar, 2004). Through this methodology, a complex system is converted into simple, well defined structure using the specific interconnections among the antecedent variables. The resultant directed-graph, also referred to as diagraph, depicts the relationship that exists among the elements defining a problem (Sage, 1977). As per Sushil (2012), ISM explains 'how' and 'what' in the theory building process.

The reliance on judgement of the group, to decide whether and how the variables are related, makes this technique qualitative and interpretative. This methodology is structured as the final outcome is manifested through the overall structure depicting the relationships. Since, this involves conversion of object

systems into a well-defined, descriptive system, as portrayed vide a designed patterns in the form of diagraph, it inherits the characteristics of a modelling technique (Sharma et al., 1994). With the explanation of relevant contexts, these diagraphs become final interpretative structural model.

In its simplest form, ISM examines the influence of one element on other elements. Incorporating subjective judgments and knowledge base of experts in a most systematic manner, ISM reduces computational efforts, besides providing scope to review judgments (Thakkar et al., 2007). ISM facilitates in converting otherwise unclear and vaguely articulated representations of a system into logically well defined, hierarchal / sequential and comprehensive systematic models (Mandal et al., 1994). Understanding complex systems becomes easier with the structuring of experts' collective knowledge and thereupon modelling the interrelationships that exists between the components. As the influence between the elements gets scrutinized, a solution to the systems' complex problems is generated.

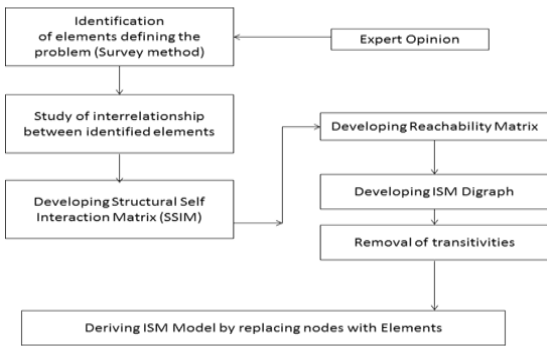
Over the years, ISM has been used in different fields and in different contexts. It has been used in Some of these contexts include enablers in vendor selection process (Mandal & Deshmukh, 1994), barriers in reverse supply chains (Ravi & Shankar, 2005), barriers impeding IT enablement in supply chains (Jharkharia & Shankar, 2005), risk mitigation factors in supply chain (Faisal et al., 2006), enablers of flexibility in global supply chains (Kumar et al., 2008), inhibitors in service supply chains in safety health environment and risk consultancy service sector (Prمود & Banwet, 2010), and structural flexibility in supply chains (Sarma et al., 2010). The potential of this tool has not been must utilized in marketing domain. Only a handful of research papers exists using ISM in context of marketing decision making (Srivastava & Singh, 2010). Hence, the present study fills an important gap by applying ISM in context of shopping experience. Figure 1 presents various steps followed in ISM technique.

#### 4.2. Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM)

To identify the key elements (variables) defining shopping experience, the issue was discussed with domain experts as is suggested by ISM methodology. The experts deliberated upon the initial list of variables provided to them. They examined the presence/absence of relationship between different variables and also the direction of relationship. For analysing the constituents in developing SSIM, the four symbols are used to denote the direction of relationship between the elements (i and j) as presented in Table 2.

**<Table 2>** List of Dimensions and Respective Symbols

Dimension	Symbol
Variable i facilitates achieving of Variable j	V
Variable j facilitates achieving of Variable i	A
Variables i and j will facilitate achieving of each other	X
Variables i and j are unrelated	O



<Figure 1> Steps Followed in the Process of ISM

<Table 3> Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM)

Enablers		6	5	4	3	2
V1	Shopping Experience	A	A	A	A	A
V2	Ambience	A	O	A	O	
V3	Shoppers' Convenience	A	O	A		
V4	Marketing Focus	V	O			
V5	Safety and Security	A				
V6	Physical Infrastructure					

Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM) was developed by determining a contextually relevant pair-wise relationship among the select variables. Following the consultation and approval of domain experts, the final SSIM representing the pair-wise comparison of the elements was developed. This requires depicting dependence among all possible pairs of elements by choosing a contextual relationship showing which elements lead to which other element. The developed SSIM is shown in Table 3.

4.3.Reachability Matrix

SSIM is, then converted into a binary matrix called "Initial Reachability Matrix." It is established by substituting V, A, X, and O by 1 and 0, as per the rules of ISM methodology. The Initial Reachability Matrix for the relationships among the select elements is made and is shown in Table 4.

<Table 4> Initial Reachability Matrix

Enablers		1	2	3	4	5	6
V1	Shopping Experience	1	0	0	0	0	0
V2	Ambience	1	1	0	0	0	0
V3	Shoppers' Convenience	1	0	1	0	0	0
V4	Marketing Focus	1	1	1	1	0	1
V5	Safety and Security	1	0	0	0	1	0
V6	Physical Infrastructure	1	1	1	0	1	1

<Table 5> Final Reachability Matrix with Driving Power and Dependence

Enablers		1	2	3	4	5	6	Driving Power
1	Shopping Experience	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
2	Ambience	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
3	Shoppers' Convenience	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
4	Marketing Focus	1	1	1	1	0	1	5
5	Safety and Security	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
6	Physical Infrastructure	1	1	1	0	1	1	5
Dependence		6	3	3	1	2	2	

Initial Reachability Matrix is treated for transivities. The concept of transivities is explained with illustration. If one element A leads to element B (A => B) and element B leads to element C (B => C), then element A should also lead to element C (A => C). The Final Reachability Matrix is developed and is shown in Table 5.

5. Analysis

5.1. Classification of Elements: MICMAC Analysis

Based on the Dependence and Driving Power, the elements under study are subjected to MICMAC Analysis. MICMAC Analysis (Duperrin & Godet, 1973) is applied on the elements to understand the driving power and the dependency among the elements. As per MICMAC, all the elements are categorised into four quadrants, namely Autonomous, Dependent, Linkage and Independent (Driver) (Duperrin & Godet, 1973). The driving power and dependence of the elements in this study is indicated in Figure 2 that represents the categories of elements on shopping experience. The four sectors Autonomous, Dependent, Linkage and Independent (Driver) are represented by sectors I, II, III and IV respectively. The first sector has 'autonomous elements' that have weak driving power and weak dependence, reflecting their being relatively disconnected from the system. Ambience, Shoppers' Convenience and Safety and Security emerged as autonomous factors. The second sector, with weak driving power but strong dependence, represents 'dependent elements.'The element Shopping Experience has emerged to be Dependent element, with the highest dependence on other elements.

On the other hand, 'linkage elements,' as present in third sector, have both strong driver power and strong dependence. These elements are most unstable in the system, as any action on them will create ripple effect on other elements and also have a feedback on self. The 'driver or independent elements' have low dependence and high driving power. As per Mandal et al. (1994), these elements condition the rest of the system. The key variables, ones with a strong driver power, fall into the category of independent or linkage elements (Ravi & Shankar,

2005). In this case, the key elements viz., Physical Infrastructure and Marketing Focus have fallen in the Independent sector in the MICMAC Analysis, thus emerging as the Drivers for shopping experience.

Driving Power	8								
	7		IV						
	6							III	
	5	4	6						
	4								
	3		I				II		
	2		5	2,3					
	1						1		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Dependence									

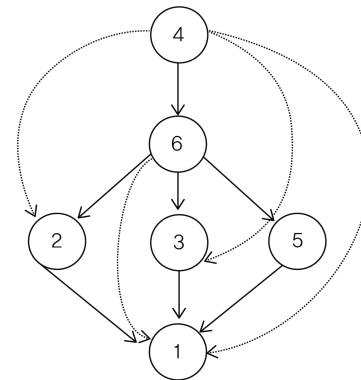
<Figure 2> MICMAC Analysis

5.2. Level Partition

The reachability set and the antecedent set for each criteria are depicted in Table 6. The structural model has been derived from the connective information contained in the ISM digraph shown at Figure 4.

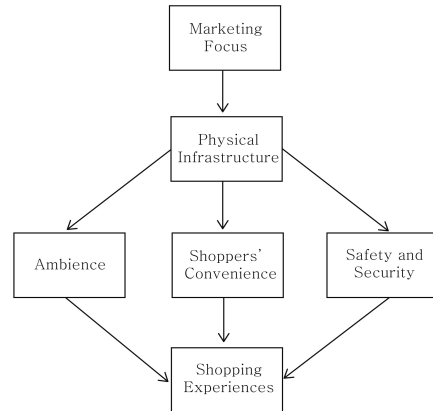
<Table 6> Partition of Reachable Matrix for Antecedent Factors

Reachability Set	Antecedent Set	Level
1	1 2 3 4 5 6	I
1 2	2 4 6	
1 3	3 4 6	
1 2 3 4 6	4	
1 5	5 6	
1 2 3 5 6	4 6	
Reachability Set	Antecedent Set	Level
2	2 4 6	II
3	3 4 6	II
2 3 4 6	4	
5	5 6	II
2 3 5 6	4 6	
Reachability Set	Antecedent Set	Level
4, 6	4	
6	6	III
Reachability Set	Antecedent Set	Level
4	4	IV



<Figure 3> ISM Diagram

The details of the sub-elements are indicated in the respective boxes with indicated relationships as depicted in the Figure 3.



<Figure 4> ISM Model for Shopping Experience

The ISM digraph derived is found to be consistent and intuitive in logic. The marketing focus which forms the first level if ISM hierarchy is defined as the activities and tactics offered in order to attract the target customers to the shopping mall. One of the important and long lived approaches for attractiveness is the physical infrastructure of the mall. Ambience is a hedonic experience for attracting customers, cleanliness, illumination, landscaping, etc. which is again dependent on the structural design of the shopping mall. The ambience is driven by physical infrastructure, which is the resultant of marketing focus. Therefore the transitivity between Marketing focus (node-4) and Ambience (node-2) is removed in the final digraph.

Depending on the target audience of the shopping mall, the physical infrastructure like parking space, size of mall, open space, etc. is to be designed. The physical infrastructure hence, is the overall structural design of the shopping mall. The shopping convenience is identified as the availability of infrastructure convenient for shopping inside the mall like, lifts, escalators and location of shops within the mall, which is intuitively dependent on structural design and physical infrastructure of the mall. This results in removal of transitivity between Market focus (node-4)

and Shopper's convenience (node-3).

Similarly, the safety and security aspects of the shopping mall define the availability of safety infrastructure to protect and avoid incidences of accidents like fire extinguisher, stairs, locations of security guards within the mall, CCD cameras, etc. The combination of Physical infrastructure leading to ambience, safety and security aspects and shopping convenience contribute to shopping experience. This leads to removal of transitivity between Market focus (node-4) and Shopping Experience (node-1).

All the elements considered in the study are resulting in the targeted element of shopping experience for the customers. As shown in the flow of the digraph, the element marketing focus with high driving power is resulting in improved customer oriented goal of maximizing the customer's shopping experience, with high levels of dependency on all other elements of the study.

## 6. Discussion of Results

The conceptual model arrived at using ISM technique indicate that shopping experience is a multi-layered construct. Five antecedents are arranged in a hierarchy of three layers to culminate into shopping experience. Marketing focus lies at the first level. It is the pre-requisite for a favourable shopping experience and also works as important ingredient in the strategic planning and development of appropriate physical infrastructure. Physical infrastructure leads to the creation of adequate ambience, convenience to shoppers and also contributes towards ensuring basic safety and security in the system. These three factors (Ambience, Shoppers' Convenience and Safety and Security) are front-end operations, as indicated by Csaba and Askergaard (1999) and contribute directly to the creation of shopping experience. Marketing Focus and Physical Infrastructure act as the back-end operations.

Apart from explaining the hierarchy, the proposed model also describes the primacy of factors affecting shopping experiences. This arrangement also reflects the time-horizon and nature of decisions. For instance, marketing focus and physical infrastructure are strategic, long term decisions and are relatively inflexible. Once established, it is challenging for mall developers to make substantial changes in physical infrastructure. Since, marketing focus gets reflected in the form of physical infrastructure, it is extremely tough to adopt a marketing focus at a later stage. These two decisions become irreversible in nature. However, ambience, shoppers' convenience and safety and security are relatively short-term and flexible decisions. Organizations do have the option of managing these for a given infrastructure, to the extent possible, in the short or medium.

From mall management, this model has practical implications from the perspectives of recruitment and training of personnel, besides planning and execution of management functions for shopping malls. Since 'marketing focus' is the basic element in creation of favourable shopping experience, internal marketing

becomes most critical and pertinent tool in pivoting the systems, processes and people around it. This can be ensured by benchmarking every aspect of mall management on this parameter. All the rudiments in planning like purpose, vision, mission, objectives, policy, strategy, programmes, procedures and rules must be oriented around marketing focus. It would also mean that conceptualization and development of shopping malls would begin with an assessment of what prospective shoppers expect. Adequate time and resources must be allocated during planning phase to the field surveys for assessing shoppers' expectations from the mall.

Once assessed, customer expectations must be translated into elements of physical infrastructure for the proposed mall. The planned infrastructure must deliver three benefits:

- Convenience to shoppers in terms of locating, reaching, accessing, navigating inside and shopping in the mall;
- Superior ambience that attracts and holds the shoppers and arouse positive feeling among them for the mall and the process of buying in the mall; and
- Safety features that invoke a sense of security in the shoppers. This in turn, would allow them to concentrate on the core act of shopping without getting distracted by negative thoughts about safety.

Convenience, ambience and safety being the front-end activities, must be managed and improved with the changing times. This requires mall managers and executives to observe the shoppers' needs and expectations on a real-time basis. As shopper expectations regarding convenience, ambience and safety changes, efforts should be made to align the mall with the new set of expectations. However, this turns out to be a challenging task because these expectations are to be met with the limitations posed by the inflexible elements of physical infrastructure. Managers and executives must continuously strive to find innovative and creative ways of building compatibility.

## 7. Conclusion

The study reveals that marketing focus is of the utmost importance for creating favourable shopping experience in shopping malls. The relationship between different factors and shopping experience has been proposed in the formal conceptual model. The model explains the sequence in which respective components contribute to each other as a 'hierarchy of experience.' This hierarchy eventually leads to a favourable shopping experience. The next stage can be the empirical testing of this conceptual model. For this, specific scales for each of these factors with appropriate response format needs to be developed. Once the scales are in place, data may be collected to statistically test these relationships.

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