

A STUDY ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES TOWARDS PURCHASING PERSONAL PRODUCTS IN RETAIL MALLS WITH REFERENCE TO SULTANATE OF OMAN

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ABSTRACT

Retail business is increasing rapidly due to global, regional and local competition. It is noticed that lot of competition is existing between traditional and modern retailers to sustain in the market. The main objective of the study is to know the consumers preference towards shopping in malls on various product categories and their satisfaction levels. It is an exploratory study conducted to know the parameters considered by consumers to prefer shopping malls on various product categories. The research instrument has been designed by the method of 5-point likert scale to generate the data from the respondents. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been used to analyze the spending behavior based on age, education and family size. Whereas, Chi square test has been used to analyze whether there is any difference of opinion on buying branded products in relation to gender and marital status and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the factors considered towards purchase of various categories of branded products such as apparels, personal care and footwear. The shopping preferences are different among the people based on the age, educational background and family size. Most significant contributors for the people to transform from traditional to modern shopping mall culture are availability of quality and wide varieties supported with international brands.

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Shopping malls, branded products, apparel, personal care and footwear, consumer preference, Customer satisfaction.

JEL Code:

D23, O15

Article History:

Received: 10 Jun 2019

Revised: 10 Aug 2019

Accepted: 24 Dec 2019

Available Online: 15 Jul 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

Unlike other countries, the consumers in Oman are found to be shopping in malls on various product categories. During early 2000's the shopping malls are confined to only capital city Muscat but later on they are being expanded in other towns like Nizwa, Salalah, Sohar, etc. Simultaneously, there are new shopping malls have opened in Muscat and many more are yet come, among which Mall of Muscat is the latest one and Mall of Oman will be largest in Oman all expected to open in first quarter of 2021. The successes of these malls not merely depend upon locals but there are considerable number of expatriates living here and continuous flow of tourists from different nations visit the country in good amount. The achievements made by the retail area in Oman today, positively shaping the monetary scene. Throughout the years from 2015 to 2017, the retail division has contributed around eight percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), speaking to a yearly commitment of over OMR two billion. The hopeful view in regards to this promising division is based on statistical data points, as it is required to accomplish improvement of more than \$300 billion in the GCC by 2021. Specialists in the area anticipate that it should create in the Sultanate throughout the following three years to represent 10 percent of the GDP, in light of gauges of development of the travel industry part on account of an enlarging system of air terminals. This implies Oman is ready to make a huge number of immediate and backhanded occupations. Shopping centers are being worked the nation over at a quick cadence, as huge development cranes seek predominance of the horizon of Oman. In spite of the fact that the long haul essentials stay solid, the retail market in Oman is currently under pressure because of economic slowdown. The CRM practices by the retailers like offering Shukran cards to customers making them increase the percentage of retention rate. Though the retail stores are located in the prime areas and cities, people from surroundings will visit the stores and make bulk breakings to cater their monthly needs of the households. The assortments of various product categories offered by retailers enables their customers to choose from a wide selection of products, brands, sizes, and prices at one location.

1.1 Research problem

In today's competitive retail world, as consumer is available with many retail outlet choices as well as different brand choices, it becomes a difficulty for the consumer to make a decision regarding purchase of personal products as there are many factors influence consumers like price, quality, promotions, brand name etc. The need has been felt to address this issue in this research on how would consumer make the choices in purchasing the personal products.

1.2 Objectives of the study

1. To study the opinions of respondents towards purchasing branded products.
2. To analyze the spending behavior of respondents towards purchasing branded products.
3. To identify the factors influencing in purchasing personal products by respondents.

1.3 Significance of the study

The study is useful to the retailers in order to know the preferences and choice in consumers who purchase the personal products and tailor their marketing strategies according to the needs of the consumers. It is very much significant to the student groups who are pursuing their marketing related courses which will provide new insights into latest market trends and consumer choices and finally it is more useful to the teaching fraternity who can update themselves as well as quote the results of this study in their classroom sessions.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ahmad and Thyagaraj (2015) in their study entitled Understanding the Influence of Brand Personality on Consumer Behavior explained the role of brand personality in the process of consumer behavior. The research was done based three phases of action in consumer behavior. These three phases of action were brand personality as a medium to express functional benefits of a brand, as a reflective symbol of the self of consumer and as a way to establish consumer brand relationship. One of the factors they revealed in the study was the brand personality plays major role in making the purchase choice of branded and personal products. Ailawadi et al. (2001) revealed that National brands use limits, while private brands are normally offered as items with ordinary low costs. Private brand advancements draw in customers with psychographic qualities identified with monetary advantages and expenses. Davies and Brito (2004) said that national brand items use publicizing and advancements to arrive at the buyer, private brands can reduce expenses by limiting these costs. Castaldo (2009) opined that to endure and develop, firms need to teach the trust of their focused on purchasers in themselves just as their contributions. Retailing firms can utilize private name brands to build the trust for themselves in the brains of their clients. The trust for a retailing firm is created because of consumer loyalty with private name items and clients' apparent incentive for cash of the private name items. The examination underscores that the customary conviction that private mark items are purchased because of trust in the retailing association may not be legitimate. Or maybe, private name buy can prompt trust in the retailing firm selling them. The examination has been led in Italy however it is applicable with regards to Indian retailing firms additionally as they have been utilizing the private mark systems at different phases of their reality to guarantee endurance just as develop.

Dholakia (1999) in his article shopping recurrence is likewise a huge idea while examining customer shopping conduct. It is characterized as the quantity of rates when an item is bought by somebody face to face. The shopping recurrence is abstract to the time and exertion that is put by an individual and shopping duty regarding the family. It is likewise controlled by the shopping setting. Gabrielsen and Sorgard (1999) found that Retail globalization positively is expanding the compass of private mark items, and modern provider advancement implies neighborhood players overall are growing quickly. For some mid-advertise retailers, the passage value purpose of private name brands help them to manufacture deals from the discounters, and premium private name brands have pulled in deals from expert stores and specialty players. The client eventually expands the expansiveness of the private mark items bought. Goswami & Mishra (2009) studied the variables for the support of stores by clients to purchase staple goods and dissect the clients' needs that influence market decision. The examination was directed in Kolkata, Mumbai, Jamshedpur and Nagpur. The examinations were made among disorderly and sorted out stores for different store characteristics. The creators reasoned that the sorted out retail locations were favored for purchasing basic food item things because of neatness, offers, and restrictive store brands. Disorderly store groups or convenience stores were favored because of their area and plausibility of multi-store shopping. The creators opined that the helpful area of convenience stores may not give a long haul upper hand as the sorted out retail firms were lessening the size of their outlets to find their stores in the business spaces that were nearer to the neighborhoods.

Kotler (2004) clarified customer inclination as that-when the item favored by him was not accessible with one seller, made him to stroll to other vendor for a similar item. When the client loves the item there are more odds of buying it once more. 34 Consumer decisions are key players in the shopping inclinations and they can be isolated into two principle parts: positive and negative inclinations. To handle the two sections specialist can't preclude the segment factors and the psychographic factors that adjust purchaser choices and buying propensities. Kumar, G. Devakumar (2019) has conducted a

study to identify green consumer purchase behavior for organic apparel products in India, and found out that several green generation consumers like Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z portray uniqueness in their consumption pattern for green apparels and consumers' preference is rising towards organic clothing to avoid health and social hazards. Marcel Corstjens and Rajiv Lal (2000) revealed that quality store brands can be an instrument for retailers to produce store separation, steadfastness and gainfulness, in any event, when the store brand doesn't have an edge advantage over the national brand. It is additionally proposed that there is an integral connection between store brands and national brands. The previous make store separation and reliability, while the last empower the retailer to raise costs and increment store productivity. Family unit scanner board information offers experimental help for the postulation.

Prasad and Reddy (2007) clarified that Indian nourishment and staple retail division is in the change mode for different reasons like solid full scale monetary basics. The evolving financial scene drives the conventional and the little scale retail outlets into sorted out retail arranges which are planned for obliging the advancing tastes and needs of the observing buyers. In any case, the extremely quick changing patterns in nourishment and dietary patterns of shoppers have contributed hugely to the development of 'Western' position typologies, for example, comfort stores, departmental stores, markets, claim to fame stores and hypermarkets. This has occurred for different obvious reasons to be specific interest and supply, socio-social, segment, psychographic, monetary and innovation headways like a huge portion of youthful populace, a quickly extending white collar class, rising pay levels, developing education, expanding number of working ladies and family unit structures which thus have made a huge interest for shopper products and made ready for present day retail organizations.

Tammie (2005) stated that the future soundness of shopping center research may rely upon shopping center office proprietors' responses to existing issues, and their capacity to benefit from the shortcomings of mindfulness. The shopping center for solid buyer examine and that might be more significant later on than it has ever been. The present investigation was center around the shopper conduct and buyer enthusiasm of various sorts of wares in the Malls. The Malls are set up for fascination of the shopper changing conduct of time to time. Thomas and Garland (1996) elucidated that composed shopping records fundamentally diminish the normal consumption, whereas, the nearness of youngsters going with the customers altogether expands the use and the time spent coming up. Henceforth the retailers must urge clients to invest more energy in store by giving offices and amusement to the clients and the people who go with them. Whelan and Davies (2006) said that private brand buyers can't be portioned into a solitary fragment by utilizing segment or attitudinal factors. Psychographic classification of buyers was in this way recommended in writing since segment arranging alone was not ready to altogether decide qualities of the private brand nourishment buyer.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is an exploratory study conducted to know the customers preference towards the branded products of select categories. A structured questionnaire has been administered through google forms by using 5-point Likert scale with statements ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree that consists of eleven variables for each product category apart from the information on demographic profile. The target respondents were the customers who prefer to visit shopping malls for their regular as well as occasional purchases Data has been collected from a sample of 200 respondents by using convenient sampling method covering different parts of Oman Viz, Muscat, Nizwa, Ibri, Ibra, Sohar etc. The study has been conducted from January to March 2020.

3.1 Statistical tools used for data analysis

Chi square- the test of independence has been used to analyze the opinions of respondents towards purchasing branded products. Analysis of variance has been used to analyze the spending behavior of respondents towards purchasing branded products, Coefficient of variance has been used to analyze the factors influencing in purchasing personal products by respondents and the descriptive statistics were used to analyze the brand preferences of customer towards various product categories.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Age with category of spending behavior

Ho = All age group respondents have same spending behavior towards purchasing branded products.

Ha = All age group respondents have different spending behavior towards purchasing branded products.

How do you categorize your spending behavior on branded products?

Table 1. ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	36.956	3	12.319	15.581	.000
Within Groups	154.964	196	.791		
Total	191.920	199			

ANOVA test has been conducted to know spending behavior of respondents in purchasing a branded products and it shows that there is significant impact of different age groups on spending behavior $F(3,196) = 15.58$, $p = .001$. Hence, it is observed that respondents of different age groups are having different spending behavior towards purchasing a branded product. (Where p value is less than $\alpha = 0.05$). We reject null hypotheses.

4.2 Education with category of spending behavior

Ho = Different education level respondents have same spending behavior towards purchasing branded products.

Ha = Different education level respondents have different spending behavior towards purchasing branded products.

How do you categorize your spending behavior on branded products?

Table 2. ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	23.063	3	7.688	8.924	.000
Within Groups	168.857	196	.862		
Total	191.920	199			

ANOVA test has been conducted to know spending behavior of respondents in purchasing a branded products and it shows that there is significant impact of different education level of respondents on spending behavior $F(3,196) = 8.92$, $p = .00$. Hence, it is observed that respondents with different education level are not having the same spending behavior towards purchasing a branded product. (Where p value is less than $\alpha = 0.05$). We reject null hypotheses.

4.3 Family size with category of spending behavior

Ho = Different family size of the respondents have same spending behavior towards purchasing branded products.

Ha = Different family size of the respondents have different spending behavior towards purchasing branded products.

How do you categorize your spending behavior on branded products?

Table 3. ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	19.202	3	6.401	7.264	.000
Within Groups	172.718	196	.881		
Total	191.920	199			

ANOVA test has been conducted to know spending behavior of respondents in purchasing a branded products and it shows that there is significant impact of different family size of respondents on spending behavior $F(3,196) = 7.26$, $p = .00$. Hence, it is observed that respondents with different family size are not having the same spending behavior towards purchasing a branded product. (Where p value is less than $\alpha = 0.05$). We reject null hypotheses.

4.4 Chi-square-Test of independence

Ho= There is no difference of opinion on buying branded products in relation to gender

Ha= There is a difference of opinion on buying branded products in relation to gender

Table 4. Gender* Do you prefer to buy branded products?

		Do you prefer to buy branded products?			Total
		Always	Depends on Product	Depends on Occasion	
Gender	Male	Count	12	99	12
		% within Gender	9.8%	80.5%	9.8%
	Female	Count	0	73	4
		% within Gender	0.0%	94.8%	5.2%
Total		Count	12	172	16
		% within Gender	6.0%	86.0%	8.0%
		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		9.872 ^a	2	.007	
Likelihood Ratio		14.092	2	.001	
Linear-by-Linear Association		.911	1	.340	
N of Valid Cases		200			

The preference of branded product by male respondents depends on the product (80%) compared to females (95%). A Chi-square test of independence revealed that female respondents significantly more than males in terms of choice that depends on product when preferring a branded product $X^2(2, N=200) = 9.87, p = .007$. (X^2 table value at d.f: 2 is 5.991 at $\alpha = 0.05$). The calculated value is more than table value. We reject the null hypotheses. We accept the alternate hypotheses and infer that there is difference of opinion in buying branded products among male to female respondents.

H_0 = There is no difference of opinion on buying branded products in relation to marital status.

H_1 = There is a difference of opinion on buying branded products in relation to marital status.

Table 5. Marital status * Do you prefer to buy branded products?

			Do you prefer to buy branded products?			Total
			Always	Depends on Product	Depends on Occasion	
Marital status	Married	Count	12	161	12	185
		% within Marital status	6.5%	87.0%	6.5%	100.0%
	Unmarried	Count	0	11	4	15
		% within Marital status	0.0%	73.3%	26.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	12	172	16	200
		% within Marital status	6.0%	86.0%	8.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.339 ^a	2	.015
Likelihood Ratio	6.787	2	.034
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.032	1	.008
N of Valid Cases	200		

The preference of branded product by married respondents depends on the product (87%) compared to unmarried (73%). A Chi-square test of independence revealed that married respondents significantly more than unmarried in terms of choice that depends on product when preferring a branded product $X^2(2, N=200) = 8.33, p = .015$. (X^2 table value at d.f: 2 is 5.991 at $\alpha = 0.05$). The calculated value is more than table value. We reject the null hypotheses. We accept the alternate hypotheses and infer that there is difference of opinion in buying branded Products among married to unmarried respondents.

4.5 Factors considered towards purchase of Apparel

Table 6. Factors considered towards purchase of Apparel

Sl.No	Reason for buying Apparel	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variance
1	Brand itself	3.35	1.15	34%
2	Cordial and helpful Personnel at Mall	3.31	0.89	27%
3	Brand Endorsement by Celebrity	2.42	1.14	47%
4	In store media/point of Sale	2.93	1.03	35%
5	Electronic and Social media	3.04	1.02	33%
6	Print Media	3.08	1.04	33%
7	Hoardings	2.9	1.06	36%
8	Word of Mouth	3.43	1.07	31%
9	Quality	4.17	0.99	23%
10	Availability of More Varieties	3.94	0.94	24%
11	Sales Promotions	3.97	0.95	24%

Factors influencing towards purchase of Apparel is analyzed. The mean value shows that they purchase apparel because of quality with the highest value of 4.17. The second highest factor that consumer preferred is the sales promotion with a mean value of 3.97. To know the consistency of these factors, coefficient of variation is calculated. It is found that the consistency is high for quality. The second most consistent factors are availability of more varieties and sales promotions of the product. It is also clear that consumers do not give importance to brand endorsement by celebrity and advertisements on hoardings

Table 7: Factors considered towards purchase of Personal care products

l.No	Reason for buying Footwear	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variance
1	Brand itself	3.82	1.06	27%
2	Cordial and helpful Personnel at Mall	3.41	1.08	31%
3	Brand Endorsement by Celebrity	3.01	1.23	41%
4	In store media/point of Sale	3.21	1.16	36%
5	Electronic and Social media	3.22	1.14	35%
6	Print Media	3.08	1.10	35%
7	Hoardings	3.05	1.11	37%
8	Word of Mouth	3.60	1.05	29%
9	Quality	4.10	1.06	26%
10	Availability of More Varieties	4.04	1.15	28%
11	Sales Promotions	3.92	1.01	26%

Table 8: Factors considered towards purchase of Footwear

Sl.No	Reason for buying Personal care products	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variance
1	Brand itself	3.66	1.88	32%
2	Cordial and helpful Personnel at Mall	3.29	1.02	30%
3	Brand Endorsement by Celebrity	2.76	1.19	43%
4	In store media/point of Sale	3.11	1.02	33%
5	Electronic and Social media	3.24	1.13	35%
6	Print Media	3.22	1.11	34%
7	Hoardings	3.03	1.01	33%
8	Word of Mouth	3.64	1.04	28%
9	Quality	4.12	1.09	26%
10	Availability of More Varieties	3.90	1.02	26%
11	Sales Promotions	3.88	0.95	24%

Factors influencing towards purchase of personal care products are analyzed. The mean value shows that they purchase apparel because of quality with the highest value of 4.12. The second highest factor that consumer preferred is the availability of more varieties with a mean value of 3.90. To know the consistency of these factors, coefficient of variation is calculated. It is found that the consistency is high for sales promotions. The second most consistent factors are availability of more varieties and quality of the product. It is also clear that consumers do not give importance to brand endorsement by celebrity and electronic and social media. Factors influencing towards purchase of footwear is analyzed. The mean value shows that they purchase apparel because of quality with the highest value of 4.10. The second highest factor that consumer preferred is the availability of more varieties with a mean value of 4.04. To know the consistency of these factors, coefficient of variation is calculated. It is found that the consistency is high for quality and sales promotions. The second most consistent factors is brand of the product. It is also clear that consumers do not give importance to brand endorsement by celebrity and hoardings.

5. FINDINGS:

1. Respondents of different age groups revealed different spending behavior towards purchasing a branded product.
2. Respondents with varied education levels and family size witnessed different spending behavior towards purchasing a branded product.
3. There is difference of opinion in buying branded products among male to female respondents. Preference of females are leading with 95% over males (80%) in terms of nature of product.
4. There is difference of opinion in buying branded products among married to unmarried respondents. Preference of married respondents leading with 87% as compared to unmarried (73%) in terms of nature of product.
5. Factors considered while purchasing an apparel is high for quality followed by availability of more varieties and sales promotions of the product.
6. Factors considered while purchasing personal care products are sales promotions followed by availability of more varieties and quality of the product.
7. Factors considered while purchasing footwear is quality and sales promotions followed by brand of the product.
8. It is noticed that consumers are not giving importance to brand endorsement by celebrity and hoardings while purchasing apparel, personal care products and footwear.
9. Consumers are giving more importance to quality over other factors, while purchasing different products like apparel, personal care products and footwear.

6. CONCLUSION:

The increasing number of shopping malls and customers' preference towards purchasing personal products in Sultanate of Oman has been transforming from traditional to modern shopping in a cumulative manner. It has become a lifestyle in the country for both local citizens and expatriates to prefer purchasing at malls for their needs in all product categories right from groceries to consumer durables. The shopping malls are continuously putting efforts in increasing their standards and persuading customer by offering various sales promotion and advertising strategies to attract them. Most of the cities in Oman have adapted themselves to mall culture and that has brought a drastic change over last decade. Shopping malls are not just a place for shopping but customer prefer to visit malls as they attract new shopping experience along with socialization with enormous brand choices. It is witnessed that shopping preferences are different among the people based on the age, educational background and family size. Most significant contributors for the people to transform from traditional to modern shopping mall culture are availability of quality and wide varieties supported with international brands.

7. SUGGESTIONS:

As there is an expeditious growth of shopping malls in Sultanate of Oman, the competition in the retail industry will further escalate in future. Therefore the Malls have to come up with innovative strategies through which they can identify and meet varied needs of customers proactively. The following suggestions based on this study might surely contribute for better understanding and satisfying the needs of customers. Since the spending behavior of different demographics like age, family size, education and income level vary towards branded products, the Malls have to make sure that it caters the needs of all demographic profiles by customizing the products by using modern technology like artificial intelligence. (Kiosk marketing) Most of the consumers give preference to quality in case of apparels. It is suggested that to always maintain the best quality products at reasonable prices in the shopping malls so that every customers can afford to buy the products of their choices in shopping malls. It is found that the consumers of personal products and foot wear are not much attracted by brand ambassadors, electronic or social media. Ultimately what counts is the quality of the products and availability of varieties. Hence it is suggested to always give customers a wide variety of choices with excellent quality products. After all, personal care products and footwear are mostly used to have an appealing look and self-grooming.

8. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:

Present study can be extended to different consumer products like consumer perishables and consumer durables that plays a significant role in consumers' life. To make a research more effective an attempt can be made by adding the monetary value of products in each segment. Researcher can also compare traditional method of purchasing in small shops to modern malls.

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