# A STUDY ON THE ATTITUDE AND PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS TOWARDS SHOPPING MALLS IN THOOTHUKUDI DISTRICT

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## ABSTRACT

*In this modern era, the word marketing does not mean mere buying and selling for a consideration. It emerges dramatically time to time in the same time it focuses the customers in every time and every dimension. Thus the customers get importance and they are the boss in the marketing process. The attitude and perception of the customers directly influence the strategy and policy of the marketers. Satisfaction can be achieved only by fulfilling the expectation and perception of the customers. Whether it may be commodity or service, the product has to satisfy the customer needs. Thus the marketer has to be educated about the customer perception towards the products. Perception of a person induced by his characteristics, specially his attitude. Thus the attitude and perception of a customer are directly influencing the buying behavior. Shopping mall is an important format of retailing in this customized era. The expectation and attitude of the customer also changes time to time. Hence, it is necessary to study the attitude and perception of the customers to identify the driving factors and to develop and change the existing mode of retail to form an optimal one.*

*Key words: Marketing, attitude, perception, buying behavior.*

## INTRODUCTION:

In this modern era, the word marketing does not mean mere buying and selling for a consideration. It emerges dramatically time to time in the same time it focuses the customers in every time and every dimension. Thus the customers get importance and they are the boss in the marketing process. The attitude and perception of the customers directly influence the

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strategy and policy of the marketers. Street hawking shops, petty shops, small retail outlets, big retail stores, medium size supermarkets, shopping malls, hypermarkets and e-Commerce are the existing main forms of marketing. In the beginning of E-Commerce, the door delivery and order the product anywhere were considered as its important feature and it attracted people. It influenced the other forms of marketing specially malls, supermarkets and hypermarkets to provide the phone order placement facility to its customers.

When E-Commerce was introduced, the experts in the retail field felt that the development of e-commerce will influence the downfall of the shopping malls and big size outlets. In the same time, E-Commerce and shopping malls have emerged as a leading form of this decade's retail. Hence it its proved that the development of E-Commerce did not affect the shopping malls and their business in a considerable level.

Different experts have different opinion on the above stated case. The considerable reasons are entertainment in the shopping malls, physical presentation of products and satisfaction in the customer services. These reasons differ from person to person, culture to culture and society to society. Attitude and the perception of the customers towards the manufacturing will be the main factors determining the people to prefer one mode to other. Thus, the study focuses on the attitude and the perception of the customers towards the shopping malls in Thoothukudi District.

## Significance of the Study

Marketing is everywhere and every economy depends on how the marketing function is running smoothly. It may be marketing of services or marketing of commodity. The marketing simply means the satisfaction of customers by meeting their needs and getting consideration for that. The retail sector is in the end of the marketing chain and the consumers are being dealt with the retail formats. Thus the customer satisfaction is important factor in the retail format.

Satisfaction can be achieved only by fulfilling the expectation and perception of the customers. Whether it may be commodity or service, the product has to satisfy the customer needs. Thus the marketer has to be educated about the customer perception towards the products. Perception of a person induced by his characteristics, specially his attitude. Thus the attitude and perception of a customer are directly influencing the buying behavior.

Shopping mall is an important format of retailing in this customized era. The expectation and attitude of the customer also changes time to time. Hence, it is necessary to study the attitude and perception of the customers to identify the driving factors and to develop and change the existing mode of retail to form an optimal one.

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**Review of Literature**

1. Sirohi N., Mclaughlin E.W. and Wittnik D.R. (1998) in their study they studied the perception and intention of the customers towards the loyalty, selection of store, continue shopping in the same store, merchandise quality and service quality. And they revealed that the service quality is the main factor which influences the loyalty. And also stated that the service quality is most important factor which influences the merchandise quality perception.

2. Sinha P.K, Banerjee A and Uniyal D.P.(2002) in their study they tried to reveal the behavior of the customers towards choice of store and drivers of choice of stores. They revealed that convenience and merchandise are the main reasons for selecting the stores. Stores dealing in appealers. Books and music are chosen based on ambience. Customer durable stores are chosen based on merchandise and personal referrals available with ambience.

3. Gupta C.P. Agarwal R. and Sinha M. (2008) in their study they tried to identify the customer's perception about the variety of products and services available at organized retailing. And they tried to identify the impact of organized retailing on the consumer's buying behavior. And they found in the study that the consumers were accepted that they prefer shopping malls to Kirana Stores. They added that they are willing to travel 10 to 14 kms for their shopping.

4. Mittal K. C. and Prashar A.(2010) tried to understand the differences in retail purchase behavior conditioned by demographic and geographic factors and its implications on retail marketing. They tried to study the diversity in retail purchase behavior and the influence of place and demographic factors on it. They revealed that purchase patterns of grocery remains same across geographies to large extent and people prefer grocery stores to be nearby. Proximity and price are more important than others.

5. Tripathi A. P. (2011) studied the emerging trends and consumer shopping behavior in modern retail formats in Indian contest. In this study he revealed that master and serving class people do not shop at the same store, lower middle class people prefer hypermarkets and discount stores and the upper middle class prefers departmental stores, specialty chains and supermarket.

6. Haiyan Hu (2011) in his study, he examined the perception of store image among Chinese consumers. Chinese consumers perceived store image as a multi faciated concept. They demonstrate a utilitarian orientation in shopping. The study revealed that Chinese consumer's shopping tendencies correlate highly with merchandise and store congeniality. Their average expenditure during each shopping trip is affected by merchandise, service, advertisement, store congeniality and consumer's income.

7. Kenhove, Wulf and Waterschoot, (1999) made a study on the choice of stores, many of the people prefer restricted to the same formats i.e., super markets and discount stores.

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8. Bhatnagar and Ratchford, (2004) studied the customer's attitude towards the non durable goods, they revealed that the attitude of consumer is to reduce the total cost of the purchase, for that, they prefer supermarkets.
9. Mokhatarian and Tang, (2009 and 2011) stated that the perception about the channels characteristics are influencing the choice of choice of channels.

## Objectives

1. To study the socio economic profile of the customers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi District.
2. To assess the attitude of the customers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi District.
3. To ascertain the factors influencing the customer behavior towards shopping Malls.

## Scope

The study is confined to the perception of the customers of shopping malls, their attitude and the factors determining the attitude of the customers to prefer shopping malls. This study covers entire Thoothukudi District. The people who avail the shopping mall service in the process of their purchase are the population of this study.

## Methodology

It is a field study that aims at finding the attitude and perception of customers in making their purchase in the shopping malls. The place identified for the study is Thoothukudi District of Tamilnadu state where there are the mall cultures is picking up.

## Pilot Study

A pilot study was undertaken to validate the Questionnaire, and to validate the value of the questions to elicit right information to answer the primary research questions. The main objective of conducting a pilot study was to correct the problems with the questionnaire and data collection. A sample of 70 respondents, surveyed in Annanagar, Thoothukudi, was examined as a pilot survey for this study. The responses received from respondents through pilot study helped in making necessary changes in the questionnaire.

## Sampling

The multistage clustered stratified sampling technique was adapted to select the sample of this study. The population was clustered and the selected sub clusters were stratified in to

urban, semi-urban and rural and every stratum was given equal weight in the participation of the sample.

## Data Collection

Data were collected through interview schedule. The well designed and structured interview schedule was prepared and the researcher personally met the respondents and collected the needed data for the study.

## Tools for Analysis

- Likert score is ascertained and the factors influencing the attitude of customers were ranked by the likert score.
- One Way ANOVA is adapted to check the difference between the mean score of the factors influencing the attitude and profile of the respondents.

**Analysis**

| Demographic Profile | | Gender | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Male | | Female | | Total | |
| | | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage | Count | Percentage |
| Age | Below 20 | 7 | 2% | 35 | 11% | 42 | 13% |
| | 21-30 | 42 | 13% | 86 | 26% | 128 | 38% |
| | 31-40 | 6 | 2% | 105 | 32% | 111 | 33% |
| | Above 40 | 32 | 10% | 20 | 6% | 52 | 16% |
| | **Total** | 87 | 26% | 246 | 74% | 333 | 100% |
| **Marital Status** | Single | 57 | 17% | 75 | 23% | 132 | 54% |
| | Married | 19 | 6% | 135 | 41% | 154 | 32% |
| | Others | 11 | 3% | 36 | 11% | 47 | 14% |
| | **Total** | 87 | 26% | 246 | 74% | 333 | 100% |
| **Income** | Below 5000 | 14 | 4% | 27 | 8% | 41 | 12% |
| | 5001 – 10000 | 29 | 9% | 87 | 26% | 116 | 35% |
| | 10001 – 20000 | 44 | 13% | 88 | 26% | 132 | 40% |
| | Above 20000 | 0 | 0% | 44 | 13% | 44 | 13% |
| | **Total** | 87 | 26% | 246 | 74% | 333 | 100% |

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| Educational Qualification | Illiterate | 12 | 4% | 46 | 14% | 58 | 17% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Up To SSLC | 13 | 4% | 60 | 18% | 73 | 22% |
| | Up To H.Sc | 16 | 5% | 87 | 26% | 103 | 31% |
| | Degree and Above | 46 | 14% | 53 | 16% | 99 | 30% |
| | **Total** | 87 | 26% | 246 | 74% | 333 | 100% |
| **Nativity** | Rural | 18 | 5% | 49 | 15% | 67 | 20% |
| | Semi Urban | 25 | 8% | 135 | 41% | 160 | 48% |
| | Urban | 44 | 13% | 62 | 19% | 106 | 32% |
| | **Total** | 87 | 26% | 246 | 74% | 333 | 100% |

The above table reveals that most of the shopping mall customers in Thoothukudi district are females (74%) among those 21 to 30 years and 31 to 40 year are more in numbers. In male customers the age group of 21 to 30 is more in numbers followed by above 40 years of age. It shows that the married young women often visit the shopping malls and the young males are going to shopping malls very often in Thoothukudi District.

The same situation is revealed by the marital status. Married women often visit shopping mall and unmarried men often visit shopping malls.

The income of the customer pays a vital role in attracting customers towards shopping malls. The middle and high income people who get salary above 5,000 (88%) prefers shopping malls and lower income people (12%) hinders to go to shopping malls .

Educated people who at least pass the SSLC (83%) are having much awareness and they prefer shopping malls and the illiterate people (17%) do not prefer shopping malls in a greater extent.

Sub urban (48%) and urban (32%) people are using the shopping malls in a greater percentage in the same time the rural people (20%) contribute very less in percentage of the shopping mall customers in Thoothukudi District.

**Factors Inducing the Customers toward Shopping Malls**

There are three types of factors extracted from the review of earlier studies namely, merchandise management, store ambience and proximity management. The sub factors in those three main factors were listed and the respondents valued the factors with the help of

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five point likert scale. Finally the likert score was calculated for every factor and rank was given to the factors in each section.

### Table 1

| Merchandise Management | Likert Score / Gender | | | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Total | |
| Product / Service Quality | 270 | 723 | 993 | 5 |
| Value for Money | 251 | 749 | 1000 | 3 |
| Availability of Product | 258 | 752 | 1010 | 2 |
| Variety of Products | 244 | 685 | 929 | 6 |
| Sales Person | 280 | 719 | 999 | 4 |
| Discount | 279 | 750 | 1029 | 1 |

Table 1 reveals that discount is the main factor (Rank 1) which induces the attitude of customers towards the shopping malls and followed by availability of product and value for money. The customers are not induced by variety and quality in Thoothukudi district. The male in that area differs with the overall attitude. They are induced by sales person, discount and quality of the product.

### Table 2

| Store Ambience | Likert Score /Gender | | | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Total | |
| Location | 266 | 680 | 946 | 4 |
| Convenience | 257 | 692 | 949 | 3 |
| Infrastructure | 289 | 702 | 991 | 1 |
| Entertainment Value | 258 | 684 | 942 | 5 |
| Amenities / Add-on Facilities | 237 | 690 | 927 | 7 |
| Store Image | 265 | 717 | 982 | 2 |
| Display | 224 | 706 | 930 | 6 |

Table 2 shows that Infrastructure, store image and convenience are the main factors with ranks of 1, 2 and 3 respectively and these are the main factors of store ambience which affects the attitude of customers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi district. Their attitude is not much induced by add-on facilities and display of products. In store ambience male's attitude is similar as female's attitude in the same time male customers gives more important to location while comparing to female consumers.

### Table 3

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| Proximity Management | Likert Score / Gender | | | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Total | |
| Loyalty | 278 | 710 | 988 | 2 |
| Shopping Experience | 232 | 699 | 931 | 6 |
| Private Tables | 290 | 731 | 1021 | 1 |
| Sales Promotion | 226 | 748 | 974 | 3 |
| CRM | 240 | 717 | 957 | 4 |
| Information Technology | 250 | 684 | 934 | 5 |

Table 3 reveals that private tables are the factors which induce the attitude of the customers much and followed by loyalty, sales promotion and customer relationship management in the same time the past experience and the information available in to the customers other than the private tables do not affect the attitude of the customers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi district. Sales promotion is the only factor which does not affect the attitude of the male customers much than the female customers.

**ANOVA**

The mean variance of the demographic profile and the various factors is studied and the test of difference between the demographic profile and the factor is tested here.

**Merchandise Management**

$H_0$: there is no significant difference between the mean variance of merchandise management and the demographic profile of the customers in relation with the attitude of the customers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi district.

**Table 5 ANOVA**

| Merchandise Management | Age | Income | Education | Marital Status | Nativity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Product / Service Quality | 0.088 | <0.001* | 0.176 | 0.748 | 0.002* |
| Value for Money | 0.221 | 0.307 | 0.001* | 0.011* | 0.951 |
| Availability of Product | 0.044* | 0.002* | 0.400 | 0.081 | 0.064 |
| Variety of Products | 0.014* | 0.042* | 0.274 | 0.197 | 0.046* |
| Sales Person | 0.002* | 0.241 | 0.096 | 0.032* | 0.065 |
| Discount | 0.001* | 0.027* | <0.001* | 0.133 | 0.005* |

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Note: P value is mentioned in the table and above 0.05 is accepted at 5% significant level and the below 0.05 is rejected at 5% significant level and marked by *

The attitude of the customers is induced by the merchandise management and the different aged consumers are differing in the opinion about the availability of product, variety of products, sales person and discount.

The various income based group of people have different mindset in the factors quality of the product, availability of the product, variety of products and discount. The mean variances were differed in those factors among the different income based consumers.

The education made an impact and the value for money and discount are the factors which mean variances are differed with education. And there is a significant difference between the marital status and value of money and sales person.

Product quality, variety of products and discount are the factors which mean variances are differing with the nativity.

**Store Ambiance**

$H_0$: there is no significant difference between the mean variance of Store Ambience and the demographic profile of the customers in relation with the attitude of the customers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi district.

**Table 6 ANOVA**

| Store Ambience | Age | Income | Education | Marital Status | Nativity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Location | <0.001* | 0.198 | 0.019* | 0.316 | 0.552 |
| Convenience | 0.008* | 0.116 | 0.459 | 0.260 | 0.329 |
| Infrastructure | 0.203 | 0.007* | 0.220 | 0.081 | 0.001* |
| Entertainment Value | 0.023* | 0.041* | 0.328 | 0.167 | 0.226 |
| Amenities / Add-on Facilities | 0.145 | 0.618 | 0.139 | 0.166 | 0.677 |
| Store Image | 0.005* | 0.173 | 0.960 | 0.002* | 0.192 |
| Display | 0.019* | 0.031* | 0.078 | 0.203 | 0.649 |

Note: P value is mentioned in the table and above 0.05 is accepted at 5%  significant level and the below 0.05 is rejected at 5% significant level and marked by *

In relation to the attitude of consumers, there is no significant difference between the mean variances of store ambience and age of the consumers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi district except infrastructure and add-on facilities.

There is a significant difference between the mean variances of infrastructure, entertainment value and display and the income of the consumers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi district. Only location of the malls' mean variance is differs with the educational qualification and the store image differs with marital status. And the infrastructure differs with nativity. All other store ambience factors do not differ with various educational groups, marital status groups and the nativity of the consumer.

**Proximity Management**

$H_0$: there is no significant difference between the mean variance of proximity management and the demographic profile of the customers in relation with the attitude of the customers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi district.

**Table 7 ANOVA**

| Proximity Management | Age | Income | Education | Marital Status | Nativity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Loyalty | 0.056 | 0.214 | 0.022* | 0.002* | 0.028* |
| Shopping Experience | 0.008* | 0.044* | 0.146 | 0.829 | 0.069 |
| Private Tables | 0.129 | 0.574 | 0.003* | 0.375 | 0.816 |
| Sales Promotion | 0.009* | 0.660 | 0.336 | 0.001* | 0.004* |
| CRM | <0.001* | 0.103 | 0.332 | 0.442 | 0.305 |
| Information Technology | 0.010* | 0.199 | 0.578 | 0.268 | 0.994 |

Note: P value is mentioned in the table and above 0.05 is accepted at 5% significant level and the below 0.05 is rejected at 5% significant level and marked by *

In connection with the attitude of consumers towards shopping malls, there is no significant difference between the proximity management and the age of the consumers except the factors, loyalty and private tables. And the various income group consumers differs in the mean variances with shopping experience and all other proximity factors do not differs with the mean variances of the income level of the consumers.

Marital status and nativity are the two factors which mean variances are significantly differs with the loyalty and sales promotion and all other proximity management factors are affected by both marital status and nativity.

**Findings**

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1. Most of the shopping mall customers in Thoothukudi district are females (74%) among those 21 to 30 years and 31 to 40 year are more in numbers. Married women often visit shopping mall and unmarried men often visit shopping malls.
2. The middle and high income people who get salary above 5,000 (88%) prefers shopping malls and lower income people (12%) hinders to go to shopping malls.
3. Discount and other attractive marketing strategies are the only one factor which affects the attitude of the customers of all demographic groups in merchandise management.
4. Add-on facility does not have any mean variance with the demographic profile and the age is the only factor differs in mean variances of convenience among the store ambience factors.
5. The mean variances of age significantly differ with proximity management except private table and loyalty.

**Suggestions**

- Discount should be focused and the products which attract the female like grocery and cosmetics should be offered for sale in the marketing process with discounts to facilitate more number of buyers.
- CRM and information technology should be developed and an executive team should be appointed with well equipped infrastructure to enable people to feel comfortable with the initiatives of CRM. The customers should be educated towards the proximity especially about the information readily available to the customers about the products.
- Customers are to be respected and attended to as and when the demand for the same and this will attract the customers and take a positive attitude about the mall management.
- Today's marketing is called as perceived one, under this the perception about the product, service, CRM, ambience and other related aspects play a major role in the process of marketing and hence the mall management must aim at addressing all these as special issues to enhance and enable faithful customers.

**CONCLUSION**

To conclude, this study is a systematic research which applied a pilot study in a small level and the practical difficulties in the construction of questionnaire and the collection of primary data are identified and the remedial actions were carried over in the main study. Further this study finds that the female in Thoothukudi frequently access the malls to purchase their home needs and grocery items. The middle aged people are the frequent visitors of shopping malls in Thoothukudi. The customers of shopping malls in Thoothukudi can be attracted by

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providing discount and other means of marketing attraction. In the wide area coverage of market it is difficult to find the attitude of the customers towards shopping malls, but it is important to evaluate and find the ways and means of studying the attitude of the customers in order to develop a right and attractive strategies for strengthening marketing activities through shopping malls.

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