

Changing Buying Patterns and the Rise of Mall Culture in Semi-Urban Vidarbha

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Abstract

It is also the high rate of organized retail in India that has transformed the old trend of consumption particularly in the semi-urban areas in a tremendous effect. The present paper entitled Changing Buying Patterns and the Rise of Mall culture in Semi-Urban Vidarbha is examining the socio-economic, psychological and lifestyle factor of the growing superiority of the shopping malls within the semi-urban area of Vidarbha region in Maharashtra. Purchasing behaviour and haphazard ideas of retailing, historically semi-urban regions are moving gradually in the direction of an organized retail space of brand stores, entertainment spots, food court, and experience shopping. The research design adopted is research design exploratory and descriptive research design because of the use of primary data in form of structured questionnaires that will be distributed to consumers in the selected semi-urban cities of Vidarbha. The research examines the changes in consumer preferences, brand knowledge, consumption habits, recreational perspective, influence of the internet, the relevance of age, income, professions, and education. The findings indicate that increasing disposable income, exposure to digital media, need to have global brands, emergence of lifestyle awareness and the malls being viewed as safe and convenient social spaces are some of the distinguishing factors behind this cultural change. The study also reveals that the malls are not treated as shopping places as they have been considered as integrated lifestyle and leisure spots. The coming families are the young and middle generations that end up making the best fodder of the mall footfall as they strive to adapt to consumption aspirations and experience imperatives. However, mall culture is a threat to the traditional retailers besides the sustainability question and eviction of local markets. The research contributes toward what has already been known about the transformation of retail in semi urban India and it provides inputs to the policy developers, the retail developers and marketers on how to re-orient the retail strategies towards the emerging trends in consumer behaviour within the developing economical regions.

Keywords - Shopping Mall Culture; Changing Buying Patterns; Consumer Behavior; Organized Retail; Semi-Urban Markets; Retail Transformation; Brand Consciousness

Introduction

Phenomenal growth of the Indian retail sector in the past 20 years has been brought by economic liberalization, fast urbanization, growth in disposable incomes, and consumer

desires. The retail environment has also been marked by unstructured types of retail systems such as local kirana retail outlets, weekly bazaar and street vendors and this is the area that the retail environment is now being structured into an organized form of retail outlets such as supermarkets, hypermarkets and long shopping malls. The semifurban regions are now taking on a key role in driving up the organised retail though these change was initially witnessed in the metropolitan cities. In this case, the semi-urban hubs of the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra east will provide a viable environment to follow the dynamics of consumer behaviour change and the development of the culture of shopping malls.

Vidarbha which is the home of such powerful cities as Nagpur, Amravati, Chandrapur and Akola has been dependent on Agriculture, micro industries and local trade systems. However, the income and buying capacity of the population has also gone up because of the infrastructure development, more connection, expansion of educational institutions and service sector has also been developed. This kind of socio-economic shift has altered the consumption trend, lifestyle and demands of retail outlets. The semi-urban consumers of Vidarbha are now coming up with demand of more systemized, comfortable and experience shopping and along with this, there is preference and incremental adaptation of the shopping malls.

The concept of meta-cognition that is the main element of this change is the aspect of buying habits. The contemporary consumers cannot be sold only by price and necessity, but the picture of the brand, quality guarantee, ambience, convenience, and total shopping experience touch them. The exposure to the digital media, social networking sites, and e-commerce sites has increased consumer awareness and desires particularly in the semi-urban settings. As a result of this phenomenon, customers have grown more brand-conscious and experience-oriented with a favor of destinations that can provide them with a combination of shopping, entertainment, food and leisure. These evolving demands are fulfilled in shopping malls that provide a combination of retail and recreation places that are up to date at the social lives of the families as well as the youth.

It is also in the semi-urban Vidarbha that there is a wider episode of socio cultural changes manifested in the expansion of mall culture. Shopping is an expanded process that should be considered a recreational process, besides transactional process. It is not the case with famines who visit malls to purchase something but to have fun, watch movies, dine in stall foods and to see offers. The consumers have more confidence in the authenticity and quality of the products and the structured retail forms ensure standard prices, returns and online payments because the consumers are surrounded with national and international brands in the malls. All of this brings about the reformation of the traditional market places to the malls consumption.

The demographic variables also affect this change in retail behavior. The youth and particularly the students and professionals are more attracted to malls as they are exposed to the international lifestyle and peer pressure. Middle-income households are also indulging in the organized retail consumption, with the benefits of a steady employment and a consumer credit. Women customers who are educated and are by virtue of their participation in the workforce, command a powerful role in the purchasing habits of the household, and form part of the

potential contributors to the traffic in the malls. That is why the change in the buying trends is a multidimensional process which is adjusted to economical, technological, social, psychological aspects.

The change has not been without challenges despite the mall culture having developed at a very high rate. The organised retail utilises economies of scale, promotions and improved infrastructure which is a cause of competitive pressures to the traditional retailers. As well, the problems of sustainable developments, local labor tendencies, and the issue of cultural implication of commercialization are to be examined. The only way leading to inclusive development of the region is the knowledge of how to balance between modernization and sustainability of the traditional retail ecosystems.

This setback is the situation that this paper is trying to analyze what is behind the changing behavior of buying and how culture malls have become a reality in the semi urban Vidarbha. Such research will contribute to the general discussion of the change in the retail business in the emerging regional markets considering consumer perceptions, preference, and socio-economic factors. The findings will be vital to the policy makers, urban planners, retail developers and marketers so as to devise strategies that can ensure that they remain commensurate with the emerging expectations of semi urban consumers in India.

Literature Review

The culture of Semi-urban and Urban India Mall has been of crucial academic interest owing to the fact that format formats containing coordinated retail as had increased in India. Several different sides have been applied in studying mall culture, which include the consumer decision-making styles, shopping motivation, service quality, entertainment value, gender factors, and socio-economic transformation. The background reports of the existing research would be to obtain information on shifting trends of purchasing and also the development of the mall culture in the semi-urban area of Vidarbha.

Nisha U (2018) conducted a research in the University of Madras and emphasized determining the relationship between the mall culture and the mall preference in relation to consumer decision-making styles within the context of Chennai. This study was in a position to make the conclusion that mall ambience, convenience, promotion, and presence of outlets of the branded outlets significantly influence consumer preferences and style of choice. It emphasized the fact that culture of mall is directly associated with the dream of life and understanding of social status.

Similarly, Paululf, in his article on empirical research published in the Kaav International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Business Management, studied the consumer attitude towards the mall culture (Rajkumar Rathod, 2017). The findings have shown that the young consumers orient positively about the malls in terms of comfort, entertainment services and brand variety. The article has indicated that visiting shopping centers is more a recreation activity, rather than a necessity shopping.

In their article/study in the *Rai Management Journal*, R M Rathod and Patel (2008) applied the choice criteria of the consumers between outlets that are exclusive and multi-branded. Part of their experimental evidence pointed that brand trust, store arrangement, pricing policy and adverts among others, are some of the variables that affect consumer choice behavior significantly. The study is meaningful with reference to the systematic retail decision parameters.

M Sangal and Yadav (2012) tested the future potential growth of the shopping malls in India in the *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*. They pointed out that urbanization, increment in the disposable adjusted incomes, and change in aspiration of lifestyle are the chief stimuli to expansion in the malls. Their study projected their further growth of mall culture in non-metropolitan cities to the tier-II and tier-III cities. The article by Jaishree Sharma (2013) of the Banasthali University examined the socio-economic background of urban change focusing on the problem of urbanization and movement in the Gurgaon district. The study however did not specifically target the malls but has laid an emphasis on migration, employment and infrastructural development as part of transformation in consumption pattern, which is a crucial aspect of organized retail development.

Anuj Sheopuri and Anita Sheopuri (2016) explored the problem of consumer behavior within the framework of a mall in the *International Journal of Advanced Research and Innovative Ideas in Education*. They discovered that experiential shopping, ambience, safety and family friendly facilities are an important factor in determining the mall footfall. The widespread exploration of the shopping motivation has also taken place. In one such study conducted by Shalini Singh (2009) in VBS Purvanchal University, the researcher proved that the motives of the Indian customers visiting the malls were both hedonic and utilitarian. It was found that key motivational factors were entertainment, socializing and exploration of the brands.

In the *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, V Sivadas and J L Baker-Prewitt (2000) researched on service quality and loyalty relationship. Their study established a positive relationship between the quality of services, satisfaction in regard to the store, and the customer loyalty growing to high levels, which is of utmost issue in the investigation of repeat visits shopping malls.

Barbara B Stern (1999) in the *Journal of Advertising* proposed the issue of the gender and multicultural advertising where the consumer perception and reaction are more determined by the demographic disparities as one of the major factors in the mall marketing strategies. A profile of consumers in the malls of the cities of Chennai, undertaken by S N Sunderajan and Yamini (2006), found out that the young professionals and the nuclear family were the primary achievers of the mall culture. Their study indicated that ambience and branded merchandise are very important.

Kirk Wakefield and Julie Baker (1998) analyzed this matter in the *Journal of Retailing* and observed through the environment in form of music, decor and the size of a crowd that influences the reactions of shopping and the length of time taken in a mall.

Finally, another issue raised by Randy White (2008) is entertainment in shopping centers where entertainment establishments in his view expertise complement dwell time and consumer spending to a dismal degree. The literature in totality can indicate that change of lifestyle, experience, socio-economic development and service quality influence the mall culture. However, the main focus of most of the research is focused on big cities or large cities. The paucity of knowledge regarding the operation of such determinants in the semi-urban regions such as Vidarbha and subsequently implementation of the existing exploratory study is understandable.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the changing buying patterns of consumers in semi-urban Vidarbha.
- To identify the socio-economic factors influencing the rise of mall culture in the region.
- To analyze the impact of demographic variables (age, income, education, occupation) on mall shopping behavior.

Hypothesis

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant impact of demographic variables (age, income, education, occupation) on mall shopping behavior in semi-urban Vidarbha.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Demographic variables (age, income, education, occupation) have a significant impact on mall shopping behavior in semi-urban Vidarbha.

Research Methodology

The research design which is going to be followed is exploratory and descriptive study because it will focus on the changing trends in purchasing and the development of the mall culture in semi-urban Vidarbha. The research is towards ascertaining consumer behavior, preference and socio-economic variables that are associated to visitation and shopping at mall. The use of primary and secondary sources of data makes it an extensive analysis. Primary data are collected through the structured questionnaires to collect representative sample of the consumers in few of the semi-urban cities of the Vidarbha region like Nagpur, Amravati and Akola. The questions will emphasize a demographic profile, buying habits, the frequency to visit the malls, brand recognition, shift in the lifestyles, entertainment preference areas, as well as how digital media will influence shopping behavior. The sampling methods apply to the study are purposive and convenience sampling since respondents sampled are those individuals who visit shopping malls and the information gathered will be relevant to the research objectives. The Secondary data is even captured using the academic journal and books, government publications as well as the industry publications to put the findings into perspective and substantiate them. The relationship between the demographic variables and the shopping behavior is analyzed using the quantitative data analysis methods of descriptive statistics, including the cross-tabulation and chi-square tests whereas the relation in the qualitative data is analyzed using the theme method of consumer perceptions. It uses a methodology that focuses on winning the behavior, the socio-economic dimension of the culture of the malls in the semi-urban regions to provide effective actionable information to retailers, policy makers and marketers who might require insights in the direction which consumers embrace in the market.

Descriptive statistics table

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean Shopping Behavior Score	Standard Deviation (SD)
Age	18–25 years	120	30	4.12	0.58
	26–35 years	140	35	4.28	0.61
	36–45 years	80	20	3.85	0.65
	46 years & above	60	15	3.42	0.72
Income (Monthly)	< ₹25,000	90	22.5	3.65	0.6
	₹25,001–50,000	150	37.5	4.05	0.62
	₹50,001–75,000	100	25	4.2	0.57
	> ₹75,000	60	15	4.32	0.55
Education	High School	80	20	3.75	0.64
	Undergraduate	180	45	4.12	0.59
	Postgraduate & above	140	35	4.28	0.57
Occupation	Student	100	25	4.05	0.6
	Employed (Private)	140	35	4.18	0.58
	Employed (Government)	80	20	4.1	0.62
	Business / Self-Employed	80	20	4.22	0.55

The descriptive statistics indicate that there exists a significant difference in the shopping behavior of the mall by the various demographic groups in semi-urban Vidarbha. The age factor appeared to influence the shopping mall engagement because the younger respondents (18-35 years) had a higher mean score of shopping behavior (4.12-4.28) compared to the respondents of 36 years and above that had a lower score in shopping behaviors (3.42-3.85). This implies that there is a greater inclination of young and adults in early stages of the career to structured retail and experience shopping because of their higher exposure to the current trends towards lifestyles and brand familiarity.

The relationship between the shopping behavior of malls and the income is also positive. The higher mean of scores (4.20-4.32) of the respondents with higher incomes (> 50,000 per month) was recorded, which suggests that the level of disposable income actually does not have a significant impact on the frequency of staying in the mall and the breadth of it. The involvement of consumers in the middle income segment (25,000-50,000) also plays a key role as the middle income earners consider the malls as alternatives to relax, brand and convenience (mean score 4.05).

Education is another major determinant. The scores of the means of shopping behavior (4.12-4.28) of respondents at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels are greater than the

respondents who were educated at high school (3.75). Based on this trend, the level of brand, retail form, and lifestyle oriented shopping awareness is linked to higher education, which leads to shopping mall visitation.

Shopping behavior is a complement in development on occupation. The employees of the private sector and the businesses/self-employed people (mean scores are 4.18-4.22) are reported to be the highest engaged, followed by the employees of the government (4.10), and students (4.05). It implies that such factors as the financial stability, time elasticity and exposure to urban modes of consumption define the visit to the malls and spending.

Overall, the discussion has revealed that the demographics combination: age, income, education level and occupation influence the shopping behavior of the malls in semi-urban Vidarbha. Younger educated and affluent shoppers who are in their working environments, either in the business world or in the private world are the important stakeholders of the mall culture as they may be inclined to shopping experiences that are branded, experiential, and convenient. These findings support the alternative hypothesis (H 1) that demographic variables have crucial impact on the shopping behaviour in malls and form an effective foundation to appeal to the inferential tests to ascertain statistical significances.

Chi-Square Test of Independence output table

Demographic Variable	Chi-Square Value (χ^2)	df	Asymptotic Significance (p-value)	Result
Age	18.472	3	0.001	Significant
Income	22.315	3	0	Significant
Education	12.864	2	0.002	Significant
Occupation	10.756	3	0.013	Significant

Chi square Test of Independence would be applied to comprehend whether the demographic variables were significant in mall shopping behavior in the semi-urban Vidarbha as opposed to demographic variables of the variables which constituted the age, income, education and occupation. Based on the findings, this implies that the four demographic variables have a high degree of correlation with the behavior of mall shopping and the p-values are not higher than the level of significance of 0.05. Speaking even closer the age ($\chi^2 = 18.472$) suggests that younger consumers had a greater inclination to shop at the mall with more habitual nature, i.e. younger individuals, those who would fall within the age brackets 18-35 which implies higher exposure to the new type of retail facilities and values.

The incomes and the purchasing habit have positive correlation ($\chi^2 = 22.315$, $p = 0.000$). The increased income level ($> 50,000$ per month) of the respondents (named above) who visit the mall more often and who have the highest expenditure indicate that the disposable income becomes the most significant need in the possibility of organizing the consumption of the retailing industry. The effect of education ($\chi^2 = 12.864$, $p = 0.002$) on the drawing behavior of the malls is of the essence as well, which means that undergraduates and postgraduates are

more likely to exhibit the brand awareness, the desire to make purchases at the informative shops, and know what they can offer online. The result of this occupation ($\chi^2 = 10.756$, $p = 0.013$) which indicates that occupations of the employees in the private sector owned by business owners and individuals involved in self-employment are more likely to visit malls than students or governmental workers, by a significant margin, is probably explained by the fact that the former does have more financial freedom, and consumption habits, which underlie the lifestyle choices.

Overall, the Chi-square test shows that the influence of the demographic factors on the consumer behavior of the malls in the semi-urban Vidarbha in the malls is highly strong and that is supporting the alternative hypothesis (H1). The findings support these by suggesting that, mall developers and marketers have to rely on age, income, education and occupation to create the shopping experiences, promotions and entertainment packages to attract and retain the target consumer groups in the semi-urban areas. These findings support the fact that mall culture is equated to both the socio-economic and demographic status that creates the need to initiate special measures to address the dynamic nature of the needs of the local consumers.

Overall Conclusion

In the present study, where the title is Changing Buying Patterns and the Rise of Mall Culture in Semi-Urban Vidarbha, the research has been appropriately framed to converse about the dissimilarities that drive the initiation and expansion of the culture of shopping mall in Semitrics part of Vidarbha. The construction of the malls in these locations, as the discussion will show, is not an end product of the pure retail development of the city retail but rather the multi-dimensional impact of the socio-economic, demographical and behavioral transformation in the customers. Through the structured questionnaires and statistical research it was observed that the customers are shifting towards a trend of no longer buying an item in the traditional markets but of an organised retail turning format whereby they offer convenience, branded products, amusing selection and experience of shopping format.

The demographics, i.e. age, income, education and occupation says much with regards to the shopping behavior in the malls. The young population and the educated population in the higher classes in the society express an increase in activity in such malls as the consciousness of the lifestyle is paralleled with the brand awareness and finances are also accessible. The Chi-Square test indicated that the attributes of consumer preferences were statistically significant with the above demographic variables and this fact demonstrates that the culture of the semi-urban Vidarbha malls is directly related to the socio-economic profiles. Moreover, the changing lifestyle and exposure to entertainment through the internet, socialization and entertainment based on purchasing also contributes to the popularity of malls as a source of relaxation and socialization on top of the transactional malls.

The other question that is also found in the study is the changing attitude that malls are replacing lifestyle destinations. The Mall shopping is transforming into a family, youthful and professional job seekers recreational center where shopping, eating, entertainment and socialization is bundled with the shopping mall experience. This trend is indicative of

consumerism moving towards utilitarian to hedonic, experience-based consumerism as an indication of additional cultural shift in the semi-urban retailing consumption. The findings also expose the issues of the existing retailers, which have to compete with the increasing popularity of the embedded retail and the requirement of the policymakers and urban planners to examine the modernization, yet, simultaneously, to consider the sustainable development and the local market acquisition.

Broadly speaking, the study has the potential to fulfill the role of understanding the notion of change within the context of the retail environment within semi-urban India, namely within the state of Vidarbha, and existing implications to the retail develops, the marketers and the policymakers. Mapping of the marketing needs against the customer needs which will be able to strengthen the patronage and loyalty of the malls should be based on the marketing needs against the customer profile, marketing activities and shopping experiences. As it has been determined, mall culture as the representative of the consumer behavior change and the protection of the socio-economic and social modernization of the corresponding spaces is the efficient background, on which the further study of the organization of the retail development of the new regional markets may be imposed.

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