OPEN ACCESS   ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Tug of War for Survival and Sustainable Growth: The Race for Services Offered by Shopping Malls for Consumers' Loyalty

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ABSTRACT

Shopping malls in Pakistan consist of a billion dollar market that provides a wide variety, choices, convenience, and an environment containing entertainment as well. There occurs a tug of war among the significant mall players, who strive hard to snatch market share from each other in the era of survival of the fittest. Consumer loyalty plays a pivotal role in consumer buying decisions and purchases choices from shopping malls. This probe critically examines the variables affecting shopping malls and dimensions of consumer loyalty. In this inquiry, pragmatism research philosophy is applied with inductive cum deductive approaches to ascertain this context by conducting mixed methods' research with multi-method of data collection, which includes in-depth interviews followed by survey questionnaires. The purposive sampling method is used to take input from consumers in shopping malls, and 200 survey forms are filled from consumers of three leading malls in Karachi: Ocean Mall, Park Towers, and Dolmen Mall Clifton, Karachi-Pakistan. The data is analyzed via many techniques, including Grounded Theory for interviews and Cron Bach Alpha, Factor Analysis, One-way ANOVA, Correlation Matrix, and Multiple Regression for survey analysis. First, the qualitative results explored essential factors and then, the quantitative results explicated positive cum significant relationship among pertinent variables including Environment (of the Shopping Malls), Brands Diversity, Entertainment, and Accessibility and Convenience as having a substantial impact on consumer loyalty towards the shopping malls. The findings of this research have practical implications as they appear beneficial for the shopping malls owners, business people, and brands to increase consumers' attraction leading toward their loyalty cum patronage.

Keywords: Consumer loyalty, environment, entertainment, brands diversity, accessibility and convenience.

JEL Classification: D15 D23 D41 F43

Cite this article: Shah JA, Qureshi JA, Samad A. Tug of War for Survival and Sustainable Growth: The Race for Services Offered by Shopping Malls for Consumers' Loyalty. RADS Journal of Business Management. 2019; 1(1): 38-48.

1. INTRODUCTION

There exist various vital factors which make modern shopping malls different from traditional shopping markets. Ever since the malls first appearance in the 1920s in America, the social, recreational activities and pattern of shopping are being changed. Moreover, malls now are found all over the world, which make a billion dollar market (Brown, 1992; El-Adly, 2007). Out of many, the main reason behind the creation of such type of shopping arena was to bring about the superior shopping environment and gaining enhanced operational performance. Furthermore, the negative aspects related to shopping could have been easily eliminated in this type of organized shopping settings, which led to providing superior consumer buying experiences that lead to making loyal consumers.

In one study, loyalty as a construct has been classified into two approaches: behavioral and attitudinal (Bowen and Chen, 2001). The first behavioral approach, which defines loyalty to be a way of behavior which suggests continuous and repetitive purchases are the loyalty indicators. However, every repetitive purchasing cannot be considered as loyalty; this repeat purchases could be possible due to situational effects that can be proximity and or low price (Hartmann and Ibanez, 2007). In order to use these behaviors, shopping malls come up with different marketing activities through which these consumers do shopping. However, a need arises of research in Pakistan in order to find the impact of services offered by the shopping malls that cause consumers' loyalty. Since the mall culture is prevailing, and various shopping malls in Karachi-Pakistan are being constructed at a fast rate, the consumers get lots of options in this regard. Also, due to this, some of the shopping malls succeed over the period, whereas other malls lose their identity in this sector. Therefore, to find out what type of services can positively influence the perceptions of consumers and make them loyal to a particular shopping mall. This research gap filled and some of the most valuable insights gathered to understand those peculiar services offered by shopping malls that keep consumers loyal.

1.1. Research Problem and Significance

Pakistan's retail industry possesses a tremendous value of US$152 billion (Shaikh, 2017). The consumers' preferences are rapidly changing over time as they are visiting different shopping malls based on a variety of services offered by shopping malls. A shopping mall creates the consumers' attraction through location, ambiance, interior cum exterior designs, brands diversity, entertainment such as fun areas, play areas for children, food courts, cinemas, celebrities' arrival in various events, festivals, etc. The services offered by shopping malls in Pakistan play a significant role with respect to the consumers' decisions, shopping experiences, creation of value, and their loyalty towards shopping malls (El-Adly, El-Adly, Eid, and Eid, 2017; Hartmann and Ibanez, 2007; Kim, Christiansen, Feinberg, and Choi, 2005; Kumar and Shah, 2004). Since shopping malls appear billion rupees (and dollars) and ever-escalating market, where long-haul survival cum sustainable growth of these malls in an era of stiff competition pose significant threats, so this probe explores and explicates various factors that impact on consumer preferences and rapid changes in their i.e., consumer loyalty over time.

1.2. Research Questions

The key research questions are delineated here under:

1- What are the various factors shaping consumer loyalty towards shopping malls?

2- What is the relationship cum impact of essential variables on consumer loyalty towards the shopping mall?

3- How can consumer loyalty be built by shopping malls by adding various services to increase consumers' attraction?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: literature review is given in section two, section three explains the research methodology and data descriptions are reported in section four, section five outlines results of study and conclusions, suggestions and recommendations are given in section six.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the first part of the investigation applies qualitative method; hence, the substantive literature review in nexus with shopping malls is presented in general. A shopping mall is a place where several different shops are present. These shops offer different types of products and services with walkway corridors for pedestrians. Moreover, their corridors and atriums are used for various activities such as sampling, new product launch, promotions, and multiple events. The origin of shopping malls belongs to ancient bazaars, which used to be outdoor places where people purchase goods from grocery sellers and farmers. However, the positive development was observed in the late 1920s, and since afterward the progress in the development of shopping malls increased and nowadays, these malls have not only become the place of shopping but also as a visiting and fun place for people of all ages (Haytko and Baker, 2004). The influence of consumer preferences of one shopping mall over the other is due to various factors offered by the malls. These factors include location, brand multiplicity, environment, sales promotional schemes, and entertainment (Dalwadi, Rathod, and Patel, 2010).

Consumer Loyalty is an essential construct that many researchers studied in different ways by understanding the impact of loyalty on consumer decision. There are a number of factors that affect consumer loyalty of shoppers that includes the shopping malls attraction, ambiances, services, quality of products, and availability of brands. The extant literature covers various theoretical frameworks comprising different variables in nexus with the buying decisions of customers, including location, brands availability, image, social factors, and others. Consumer loyalty is developed when people feel satisfaction from their services, image, variety, and environment of shopping malls. Shopping malls create a variety of customer attractions to attract them for visits; as customers visit malls, they get involved in buying decisions and buy products from different stores. The different branded outlets market their products and brands, but shopping malls also increase their image by adding various factors such as salespeople for guidance, mall colors cum ambiance, music, sources of enjoyment, and so forth. The consumer loyalty is derived from the environment, convenience, brand diversity, and shoppers' satisfaction and loyalty (Hartmann & Ibanez, 2007; Kim, Christiansen, Feinberg, & Choi, 2005; and Kumar & Shah, 2004).

The atmospherics of a mall has very high salience since these features act as environmental signs that consumers use to imply the quality of a shopping mall. These environmental atmospherics can bring change in consumers' attitude and behavior. Color and lighting, on the other hand, also play a significant role in the emotional situation of the consumers. Ambience, interior and exterior designs, shops layout, interior displays, space, signs/symbols, music, chosen fragrance, location, variety of brands, discounts and ongoing deals, entertainment facilities like play areas for children and restaurants, cinemas, parking, availability of banks and ATMs, and security play a key role in attracting the consumers and creating an exclusive environment within mall for fantastic shopping experiences and value (Anselmsson, 2006; Baltas and Argouslidis, 2007; Berman and Evans, 2010; Bloemer and Ruyter, 1998; Dickson and MacLachlan, 1990; El-Adly, El-Adly, Eid, and Eid, 2017; Ghosh, Tripathi, and Kumar 2010; Terblancheand Boshoff, 2006; Wilhelm and Mottner, 2005).

Accessibility and convenience are also significant features offered by a mall. Accessibility can be divided into two parts: macro-accessibility and micro-accessibility. Macro-accessibility refers to the proximity of the mall from the consumers' place of residence or work and road conditions leading towards the shopping center

whereas micro-accessibility refers to the parking facilities and ease of navigation within the shopping malls (Bridson, Evans, and Hickman, 2008).

Cronin and Taylor (1992) investigated that service quality is also an essential feature of the services offered by shopping malls. The consumer perceptions regarding services quality vary due to a variety of factors, which include people or staff's attitude (who serve consumers), cleanliness, lighting, and temperature related services are part of services quality. Their purchase intentions are built based on the quality of services, malls being closer to peoples' homes or workplaces, guiding about stores, variety of brands, and other services at shopping malls. The decor and layout of shopping malls and stores also affect customer decisions and turn deriving forces to enhance their footfall.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research is pragmatism in nature as we probe the new insights from the customer through interviews and then the survey through a questionnaire, which assists in determining various factors affecting the customer loyalty towards shopping malls. This research is conducted through inductive cum deductive approaches, as based on exploration as well as theory; we explore and explicate the essential factors affecting consumer loyalty. The research technique used is mixed methods i.e. qualitative and quantitative probe. The qualitative probe applies grounded theory on the data derived from consumers through interviews, for which purposive sampling methodology was employed. The quantitative research technique is applied to investigate the services offered by shopping malls that impact on the loyalty of the consumers in the retail sector. With mixed methods of research, deeper insights of a phenomenon are generated for robust findings cum triangulation of results, as either the analysis of results supports each other or vice versa; in either case, the reasons for analogous results or deviations are ascertained (Bashir, Syed, and Qureshi, 2017; Denzin, 2007; Zikmund, 2012).

For the qualitative investigation, ten interviews are conducted based on purposive sampling and almost equally from the consumers of each of the three shopping malls. These are analyzed via Grounded Theory as it helps in identifying concepts and categories in the open coding process, which undergo re-examining those categories, their properties, and relationships during axial coding, and eventually determining core categories during selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Then the authenticity cum credibility of the data is diligently checked (Suddaby, 2006). The themes discovered via grounded theory are illustrated on the next page in Figure **1**, and the broad categories consist of the environment of shopping malls, entertainment, accessibility, brands and products' availability, and consumers' loyalty towards shopping malls. For quantitative survey study, the sample size included 200 respondents from these shopping malls, selected based on purposive sampling with a confidence interval of 95% significant level and 10% margin of error, based on the criteria set by Parker and Rea (2011). Participants are selected based on their education that they should be at least high school graduates or beyond and mature in age i.e., 18 plus so that they can understand the questionnaire and provide required input, whereas income, socio-economic class, and other matters are ignored. An almost equal number of samples are drawn from each of three shopping malls, which fall in top-five malls in Karachi, while the total number of top-tier or modern shopping malls in Karachi city comprises ten malls including few branches of few of them (Trip Advisor, 2019). The questionnaire was deliberated with two academicians' and two shopping mall experts, who assured that it does not miss out any essential dimensions. Pilot testing of the questionnaire furthered the reliability and validity of the scale or measurement instruments. Eventually, the results are matched with those of the findings of identical studies to re-assure their validity (Bashir, Syed, and Qureshi, 2017; Zikmund, 2012).

4. DATA

The data is collected based on multi-method approach, as first researchers conducted in-depth interviews with open-ended questions from consumers of selected shopping malls and evaluated the pertinent factors with open coding, then axial and selective coding are applied to analyze the behavior. At the second stage, the data was collected through survey questionnaires from 200 respondents by visiting the shopping malls.

4.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

The participants of the inquiry were asked about their experiences towards the environment, entertainment sources, products and services, location, and other factors affecting the consumer loyalty towards the shopping malls. First, the consumers are concerned with the environment at shopping malls, as they require neatness and cleanliness with good security and service-oriented employees as salespersons. Besides, ambiance, interior, and exterior designs, displays, shops' layout, space, and availability of prayers' area like mosque and restrooms represent an exclusive environment within malls. The availability of domestic to global brands and a wide range of products enhance consumer's footfall toward the malls. Most of the consumers not only visit the malls for shopping but come for entertainment, as all the malls under the probe offer a variety of entertainment options like food courts, events celebrations and particularly festivals, play areas for children, and cinemas in some malls. Accessibility of the mall refers to the proximity of the mall from the consumers' place of residence or work and convenience of the malls refers to the parking facilities and ease of navigation within the shopping malls. Since, due to massive traffic jams and ever-escalating rush, consumers appear profoundly concerned with the issues of accessibility and convenience, as they prefer those malls which have proximity to their location and have proper parking facilities. Eventually, the four most essential factors (having various themes inside them) emerged in nexus with Consumer Loyalty consist of Environment, Brands Diversity, Entertainment, and Accessibility and Convenience. Hence, the conceptual framework emanated out of the qualitative probe is portrayed beneath in Figure **2**, which is followed by forming hypotheses for empirically testing them.

5. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Although the variables that are found correlated affect each other's relationship in some way, for the sake of empirically testing their relationship and impact on Consumer Loyalty, they are segregated for testing through Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis.

H1a: There is a significant positive relationship between environment of shopping malls and consumer loyalty.

H1b: There is a significant positive impact of environment of shopping malls on consumer loyalty.

H2a: There is a significant positive relationship between the diversity of brands at shopping malls and consumer loyalty.

H2b: There is a significant positive impact of diversity of brands at shopping malls on consumer loyalty.

H3a: There is a significant positive relationship between entertainment at shopping malls and consumer loyalty.

H3b: There is a significant positive impact of entertainment at shopping malls on consumer loyalty.

H4a: There is a significant positive relationship between accessibility and convenience of shopping malls and consumer loyalty.

H4b: There is a positive and significant impact of accessibility and convenience of shopping malls on consumer loyalty.
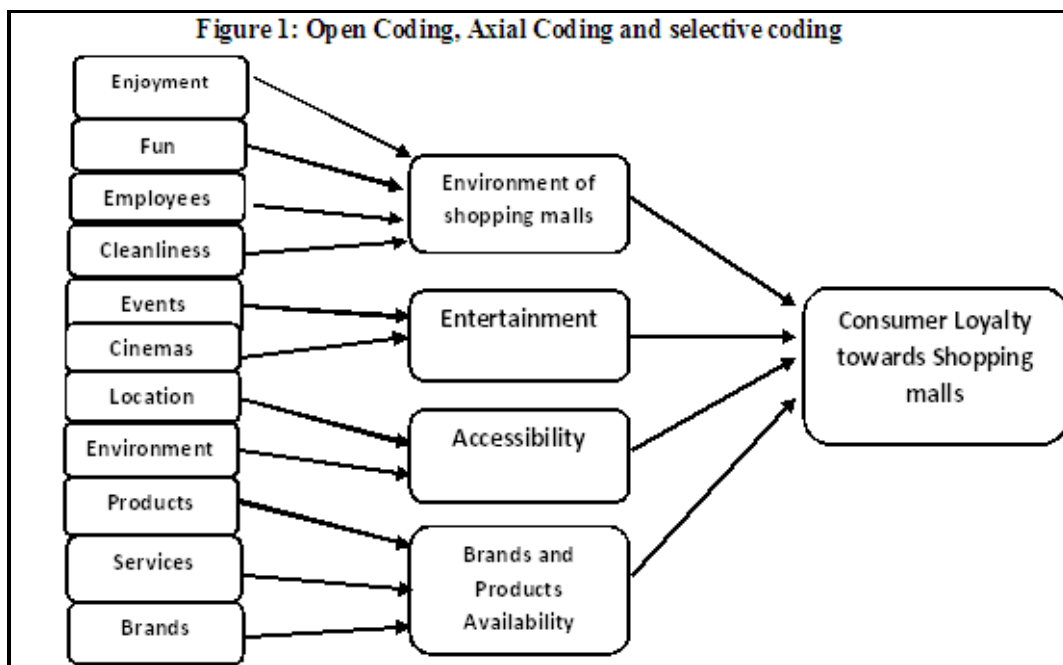
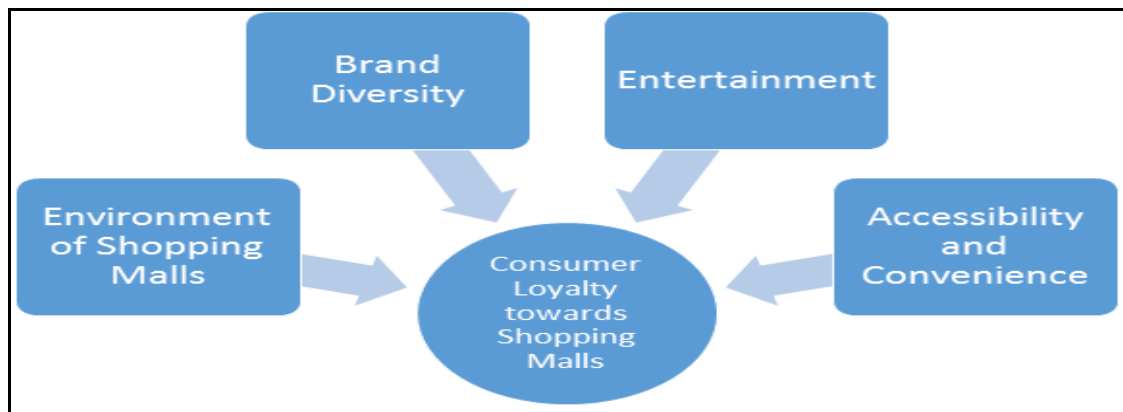**Figure 1.** Concepts and Categories in Nexus with Shopping Malls.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework.

5.2.   Reliability Analysis

The Table **1** above exhibits that all the items and individual variables appear highly reliable since their minimum to maximum values seem higher than the benchmark value of (0.7), and they range between (0.75) to (0.85). The descriptive statistics portrayed the normality of data as the values of Kurtosis and Skewness range between ±2.5 (Kline, 2010).

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha.

Variables	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Environment of the Malls	12	0.820
Brand Diversity	07	0.856
Entertainment	06	0.806
Accessibility and Convenience	08	0.751
Consumer Loyalty towards Shopping Malls	04	0.854

5.3. Correlation Matrix

The Table **2** displays that all the variables appear positively and significantly associated with each other, as their range varies between (0.70) to (0.88), whereas their correlation with consumer loyalty also appears positive cum significant. Accessibility and convenience had the highest correlation with consumer loyalty with the score of (0.88), followed by entertainment (0.82), environment (0.80), and brand diversity (0.77) had the lowest association, since almost all the modern malls have the same brands or at least a wide variety.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Matrix.

Variables	Environment of Malls	Brand Diversity	Entertainment	Accessibility and Convenience	Consumer's Loyalty towards Shopping Malls
Environment	1				
Brand Diversity	0.742**	1			
Entertainment	0.731**	0.701**	1		
Accessibility and Convenience	0.711**	0.732**	0.725**	1	
Consumer's Loyalty	0.05**	0.823**	0.772**	0.884**	1

** Significant at the 1 percent

5.4. Multiple Regression Analysis

In Table **3**, the adjusted R square is (0.852) that portrays that 85% change in the outcome or dependent variable is due to the independent variables. The test, re-test method, and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was applied, which showed a value of less than five and assured that there is no risk of multicollinearity among variables. The F-Statists with a score of (143.998) and a significance level of (0.000) corroborates that the overall model falls significant (Malhotra, 2007).

Table 3. Regression Model Summary.

R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of the Estimate	F statistics	Significance
0.927	0.858	0.852	0.39814	143.998	0.000

The Table **4** shows the intercept and slopes of the Regression model. The beta coefficient of independent variables reflects the values that impact as a unit change independent variable. The Environment of malls is significant at (0.203; 0.005), which shows that the (0.203) change in the Environment of malls affects the 1 unit change in consumers' loyalty towards the shopping malls. The Brand Diversity is significant at (0.177; 0.002). Entertainment is significant at (0.229; 0.001). Accessibility and convenience emerged as the most significant variable with a standardized coefficient of beta (0.420; 0.00) and with significance level below (0.05). All the four independent variables appear significant with t statistics ranging above the benchmark value of (1.96 or approximately 2). Moreover, the results of ANOVA exhibited the F value of 70.107, which confirmed the model's suitability for testing.

The results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) confirmed that five factors contributed the most in the model, whose Eigen values fall more significant than the benchmark of 1. One Way ANOVA was performed to check that whether the means of the data (derived from three sets of) samples (i.e., from the three selected malls) are

the same; the results fail to reject this common hypothesis of this test, which means that there is no significant difference in the opinions of the consumers of the three selected malls.

Table 4. Beta Coefficients and *t* Statistics.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	*t*-statistics	Significant
	B	SE	B		
(Constant)	0.298	0.083		0.854	0.005
Environment of Malls	0.204	0.071	0.203	2.861	0.005
Brand Diversity	0.200	0.062	0.177	3.231	0.002
Entertainment	0.240	0.070	0.229	3.401	0.001
Accessibility and Convenience	0.403	0.073	0.420	5.539	0.000

5.5. Hypothesis Testing

It was mentioned earlier that the variables that are found correlated affect each other's relationship in some way, but for the sake of empirically testing their relationship and impact on Consumer Loyalty, they are distinctively mentioned and tested via Correlation Matrix and Multiple Regression Analysis.

5.6. Testing Correlation Hypotheses

As depicted in Table **5**, all of the hypotheses appear supported since there exists a strong cum positive and significant relationship among all the variables including the association of independent ones with each and their relationship with the dependent one.

Table 5. Alternative Hypotheses (for Correlation Matrix).

Alternative Hypotheses	Accepted / Rejected	Significant level (2-tailed)
H1a: There is a positive significant relationship between the environment and Consumer Loyalty towards the shopping malls.	Accepted	0.00
H2a: There is a positive significant relationship between the Brand Diversity and Consumer Loyalty towards the shopping malls.	Accepted	0.00
H3a: There is a positive significant relationship between the Entertainment and Consumer Loyalty towards the shopping malls.	Accepted	0.00
H4a: There is a positive significant relationship between the Accessibility and convenience and Consumer Loyalty towards the shopping malls.	Accepted	0.00

**: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5.7. Testing Regression Hypotheses

The Table **6** on the next page also displays the same case, i.e., all the hypotheses appear supported, since the values of adjusted R^2, F statistics, and t- values with significance levels, all support the hypotheses set for empirical testing.

Table 6. Alternative Hypotheses (for Regression Analysis).

Alternative Hypotheses	Accepted / Rejected	t- Statistics	Significant level
H1b: There is a positive significant impact of environment of the shopping malls on Consumer Loyalty towards the shopping malls.	Accepted	2.861	0.05
H2b: There is a positive significant impact of Brand Diversity on Consumer Loyalty towards the shopping malls.	Accepted	3.231	0.02
H3b: There is a positive significant impact of the Entertainment on Consumer Loyalty towards the shopping malls.	Accepted	3.401	0.01
H4b: There is a positive significant impact of the Accessibility and convenience on Consumer Loyalty towards the shopping malls.	Accepted	5.539	0.00

6. DISCUSSION

Consumer loyalty plays a vital role in buying decisions of customers. Shopping malls attempt to provide well-organized services to shape the consumer loyalty of the customers. This research attempted to unearth essential factors in nexus with consumer loyalty for shopping malls by employing qualitative research methodology. Moreover, at the second stage, it empirically tested those factors composed into broad variables by employing quantitative research methodology. The criterion variables include Environment of the Malls, Entertainment, Brand Diversity, and Accessibility and Convenience. The consumer loyalty spurs the consumers to visit, pass the time around, and shop around. It provides the services to customers to engage them, so that they may buy and develop attention towards the shopping malls.

The inferential statistics comprised several tests but mainly based on results derived from Correlation Matrix and Multiple Regression tested the strength of association between and among these variables, along with their significance cum effect on the outcome variable. The Correlation Matrix analyzed that there is a positive cum significant relationship between Environment of Shopping Malls, Entertainment, Brands Diversity, and Accessibility and Convenience, which varies in the range of (0.70 - 0.88). The Regression Analysis proceeds to predict and explain the relationship between the variables, as the value of adjusted R square stands (0.85), which shows the independent variables cause 85% variability in consumer loyalty due to these four elements. The T statistics substantiate that all the variables appear significant and vary in the range of (2.86 – 5.53; 0.00). Hence, all the hypotheses were supported. In general, the results of this probe fall consistent with those of the analogous studies conducted in different countries and contexts (El-Adly, El-Adly, Eid, and Eid, 2017; Hartmann and Ibanez, 2007; Kim, Christiansen, Feinberg, and Choi, 2005; Kumar and Shah, 2004). The triangulation of qualitative and quantitative analysis revealed consistent results, which ensured robust findings.

7. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATION

7.1. Conclusion

It is concluded that in Pakistan, the shopping malls have to take care of these variables seriously in a bid to build long-haul consumer loyalty to attract consumers and for gaining more sales and profitability.

7.2. Recommendations and Research Implications

The owners, managers, and marketing specialists of shopping malls can benefit from this study undertaken in the localized and indigenous context. It pertains to the discipline of consumer behavior, and it can be applied for crafting marketing strategies of shopping malls to build consumer loyalty for enhancing their traffic to

increased financial returns cum intangible gains such as malls reputation, goodwill, and brand equity (of the mall as a brand). It discovers four significant variables affecting consumer loyalty towards shopping malls containing environment, brand diversity, entertainment, and accessibility and convenience. The shopping malls' administration can prioritize these variables and their sub-variables in a typical order, since priority wise, the local populace attaches more value to the environment, then entertainment, brand diversity, and accessibility and convenience.

7.3.   Limitations and Areas of Further Research

This research stands limited in its scope as it is undertaken mainly in the domain of variables concerned with consumer loyalty in shopping malls. Further inquiries can be conducted about different demographics and psychographic characteristics, as well as in various geographies by ascertaining consumer experiences and other pertinent variables, whereas two or more malls with low to the high footfall of consumers can be cross-compared in terms of visitors' attraction and consumers' mall patronage intentions.

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