


The place marketing factors that impact shopping centre patronage among Millennials

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ABSTRACT

The 'retail apocalypse' has disrupted traditional retail, forcing retailers to find innovative ways to reach customers. As Millennials are a significant and growing consumer demographic with a relatively high purchasing power, it is essential for shopping centres to attract them. This study aimed to identify the place marketing factors that impact shopping centre patronage among Millennials. An exploratory research design was used, and data was collected by means of four focus group sessions with 40 participants, who were selected using purposive sampling. The data was analysed using the Morse and Field approach and Atlas.ti 23, and rigour was ensured by confirming Guba's criteria. The findings indicate that Millennials are attracted to shopping centres through a variety of shops and products, location, and product engagement. Additionally, the findings suggest that desired place marketing factors for Millennials include design, parking, entertainment, hygiene, staff, signage, bathrooms, and safety. In contrast, insufficient parking, low levels of hygiene, overcrowding, safety, insufficient staff, and car guards discourage Millennials from visiting shopping centres. Although the study only represents the opinions of Millennials aged 18 to 35, excluding those aged 16 and 17, for ethical reasons, it is the first to investigate the place marketing factors that affect this generational cohort's patronage of shopping centres in South Africa. Shopping centres can remain relevant and increase footfall and sales by appealing to Millennials and their preferences in the rapidly evolving retail landscape.

Keywords: Place marketing, Millennials, Generation Y, retail apocalypse, retail industry, shopping centres

INTRODUCTION

The survival of shopping centres has been severely impacted since 2010 due to several factors. The retail apocalypse and the rise of online shopping, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, have taken a toll on shopping centres (Butler, 2018; Helm *et al.*, 2020; Dyason *et al.*, 2022). Even before the pandemic, customers showed decreasing interest in visiting shopping centres (Bitterman & Hess, 2021; Calvo-Porrall & Levy-Mangin, 2019), leading to financial struggles for many retailers and the closure of several shopping centres (Righini, 2020).

While the impact of COVID-19 on shopping centres has been studied (Al-Kadhimi *et al.*, 2021; Soucy *et al.*, 2021), the use of place marketing strategies to bring customers back has not been investigated. However, place marketing has been effectively applied in a range of settings, such as tourism (Iaffaldano & Ferrari, 2021), human resource management (Simonova & Zyryanova, 2021), and cities (Warnaby & Medway, 2021). The authors propose that shopping centres can be considered products that can be marketed to customers by leveraging place marketing factors (Abelina, 2014; Kotler *et al.*, 2002). A key aspect of place marketing is to identify, attract and satisfy the needs of target groups (Kompaniets, 2022; Kotler *et al.*, 2002; Zanker & Beckman, 2012), and therefore target marketing is a key concept in place marketing. Millennials, the most powerful consumers in the world (Gapper, 2018) and frequent shoppers at malls (Accenture, 2018), represent a significant target market for shopping centres. With their high purchasing power (Moreno *et al.*, 2017:135), it would be beneficial for shopping centres to develop marketing strategies that appeal to this generational cohort and bring them back to physical retail spaces.

Shopping centre management must implement strategies to navigate this challenging retail landscape (Grimmer, 2022). The South African Council of Shopping Centres (SACSC) similarly emphasises that considering the current state of shopping centres and the decrease in foot traffic, the main goal for all shopping centres should be to bring customers back (SACSC, 2020). As such, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ. What are the place marketing factors that impact shopping centre patronage among Millennials?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section provides a comprehensive literature review pertaining to the underlying theory of this research, place marketing factors and shopping centres.

GENERATIONAL THEORY AND MILLENNIALS

Generational theory suggests that an individual's stage of life influences his/her perspective on the world (Strauss & Howe, 1997). A generation is a cohort group whose length reflects the life stage, with boundaries determined by shared experiences and personality traits. Members of the same generation are typically exposed to similar social, political, and economic events and have similar attitudes towards family, lifestyle, consumption, and purchasing behaviour (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Generational theory is relevant to marketing as it aids in segmentation and targeting strategies (Lazarevic, 2012; Parment, 2013).

Understanding the purchasing power of different generations is important for shopping malls, since buying power influences visits and spend. Research prior to the Covid pandemic suggested that although there was an increase in South African consumers visiting shopping centres, the consumers who visited less frequently, stated that it is due to their declining purchasing power (Mason *et al.*, 2019). More so, after the Covid pandemic, most South African consumers have 34% less purchasing power in 2022 compared to 2016 (Daniel, 2022). Shopping malls should therefore understand and investigate specific generational cohorts with the required purchasing power.

The generation known as Millennials encompasses consumers born between 1986 and 2005 (Markert, 2004). With approximately 1.8 billion individuals globally, this generation surpasses the Baby Boomer cohort and is now the largest living generation (Neufield, 2021). As one of the world's most significant and influential consumer segments, Millennials, also known as Generation Y, cannot be overlooked by marketers (Brant & Castro, 2019; Fromm & Garton, 2013). Being the first generation to grow up with the internet and social media, this group is influenced by cutting-edge mobile technology (Escandon-Barbosa *et al.*, 2021). Given their large size, marketers are eager to gain a deeper

understanding of their buying habits. Studies show that South African Millennials value convenience and prefer shopping at physical stores close to their residences (Dobbelstein & Naidoo, 2020). Millennials, as a cohort, is the group of consumers with the strongest buying power (Emamdin *et al.*, 2020). Research indicated that Millennials are important for marketing as they are a lucrative market in terms of buying power, have high switching intentions and are technologically advanced (Kadam, 2021). For this reason, the study focuses on Millennials, due to the significant purchasing power of the cohort.

PLACE MARKETING FACTORS

Place marketing encompasses the strategic application of marketing techniques that focus on customer-centricity to develop, promote, deliver, and exchange offerings associated with a particular location. The goal of place marketing is to create a location that is in high demand, tailored to meet the needs of its target market. The success of place marketing can be measured by the level of customer preference for that location over other competing options (Boisen *et al.*, 2018).

Place marketing factors encompass the unique attributes of a location and comprise elements such as attractions, facilities, image, and quality of life. These factors are employed to construct the 'place product' and identity and pertain to the various aspects of a location that can be used to promote and market it (Abelina, 2014; Kotler *et al.*, 2002:46). All these factors are relevant to the marketing of shopping malls. In terms of attraction, a well-designed shopping environment, pleasant music and vivid atmosphere make a shopping mall more appealing to consumers (Thanasi-Boçe *et al.*, 2020). These authors furthermore indicate that shoppers consider different facilities such as convenient parking, banks and postal services when deciding to visit a shopping mall. Based on a comprehensive literature review, Gomes and Paula (2017) indicated that a shopping mall image is based on both tangible and intangible aspects. Tangible aspects include location, retail offer, leisure offer and facilities, whereas intangible aspects refer to the atmosphere and self-congruity of the mall. In addition, the quality of life that customers experience in their shopping is a critical factor that encourages the intention to revisit a mall and can be used as a competitive advantage for shopping malls (Ahmad & Aureliano-Silva, 2021).

Shopping centres play a vital role in marketing a city as a product, with a shopping centre being seen as a standalone facility that can be marketed as a separate entity (Van Den Berg *et al.*, 2002). Shopping centres are vital to the marketing of a city, since a shopping mall can create value for a city and can contribute to the image of the city as well as to the cultural heritage and tourism of a city (Bravo *et al.*, 2020; De Frantz, 2018; Kestane, 2019).

Furthermore, a city can be marketed as a memorable experience due to the shopping opportunities it provides (Florek & Insch, 2020). Effective place marketing efforts should take various place marketing factors into account and target specific audiences to achieve the desired outcomes.

SHOPPING CENTRES

A shopping centre is an intricately designed and planned commercial development that encompasses a range of retail stores, trade areas and services, all under one roof. The site on which a shopping centre is built is shared by several architecturally joined commercial buildings and is developed, owned, and managed as a single operational unit (Abad *et al.*, 2020; Cassazza *et al.* 1985). The collection of retailers and service providers within a shopping centre works cohesively to ensure the centre's sustainability, while each member of the centre benefits from being a part of this network of businesses (Hänninen & Paavola, 2021). Shopping centres are vibrant, bustling environments that create a lively atmosphere and exude energy. This is reflected in the descriptions provided by Ferreira and Paiva (2017), who describe shopping centres as spaces that are full of life and vitality. The lively atmosphere, combined with the diverse range of stores and services, makes shopping centres a popular destination for consumers looking for a convenient and dynamic shopping experience.

Shopping centres around the world are facing an increasing number of challenges, such as decreases in consumer spending, visits and closure of retailers (Hammond & Cook, 2022; Sanburn, 2017; Mahlaka, 2021; Business Insider, 2020). Times Magazine reports that 25% of shopping centres in the USA might close by 2022 (Sanburn, 2017). In

March 2022, it was reported that shopping malls' spending figures in the UK remained 25% lower when compared to before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hammond & Cook, 2022). Hyprop Investments is one of the major shopping centre owners in South Africa and has reported a decline of 7.6% in average monthly foot count from 2020 until June 2021 (Mahlaka, 2021). A prominent shopping centre owner, listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, Intu Trading, had crumpled when some of its larger retail anchor tenants had to close (Business Insider, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

To gain a deeper understanding of consumer perceptions, qualitative research was utilised. This research approach is effective in uncovering the underlying meaning and new perspectives on existing data. The use of qualitative research allows for a more in-depth examination of consumer perceptions and contributes to a greater understanding of the topic (Leavy, 2020).

The place marketing factors that both encourage and discourage Millennials from visiting shopping centres were studied by means of exploratory research. This type of research is a valuable tool for delving into and gaining a preliminary insight into complex or vaguely defined research problems, mainly when the primary objective of the study is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the specific needs or challenges faced by consumers (Chernev & Kotler, 2023).

The study adopted a non-probability, purposive sampling approach due to its exploratory nature. Non-probability sampling involves selecting participants in a way that does not provide equal opportunities for all individuals in the population to be included (Thomas, 2021). Participants in this type of sampling are often selected based on their availability or through the intentional selection of the researcher. Purposive sampling involves explicitly selecting participants with a specific objective in mind (Lohr, 2022).

The criteria for selecting participants through purposive sampling in this study were as follows:

- People who are between the ages of 18 and 35, thereby representing the Millennial consumer segment at the time of conducting the study. Participants aged 16 and 17 were excluded from the study due to ethical concerns.
- People who visited a shopping centre in the North West Province.
- People who reside in the North West Province.
- People who are literate in the English language.
- People who are willing to partake in the study.

Ethical concerns in the study were addressed by excluding participants aged 16 and 17 due to their potential vulnerability. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, ensuring they had a clear understanding of the study's purpose and their rights. Measures were taken to protect participant confidentiality and anonymity, and the study underwent ethical review and approval. The study aimed to uphold ethical principles by prioritising participant well-being, privacy, and informed decision-making.

Focus groups are qualitative research techniques comprising four to 12 participants who are brought together to discuss a specific topic or issue (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2022). Data was gathered from 40 participants by means of conducting four focus groups (10 participants in each focus group). This method provided rich and detailed data about the experiences and perspectives of the participants, which could be used to identify common themes and patterns. An interview guide was used to structure the conversation during focus groups. The interview guide comprised the following questions, which were derived from the research aim:

1. When you think of a shopping centre, what are some of the features and facilities that it should have to make it a comfortable, convenient, and enjoyable shopping experience for you?
2. What are some of the reasons that will prevent you from visiting a shopping centre?

Thematic analysis, a method used to analyse qualitative data, was implemented to identify, understand, and describe the themes and patterns that emerged from the data. This method of data analysis was used to explore and make sense of the experiences, perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes of participants regarding visiting a shopping centre. Thematic analysis is instrumental when the research question explores subjective experiences, opinions, and attitudes (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

To prevent bias, the study utilised purposive sampling and set clear selection criteria for participant inclusion. Ethical concerns led to the exclusion of participants aged 16 and 17. To address errors, the researchers documented the research process, engaged in reflexivity, and sought peer review for validation. Triangulation was employed by using multiple data sources, and thematic analysis facilitated the identification of themes and patterns. Overall, the study aimed to minimise bias through transparency, thoughtful participant selection, and rigorous quality control measures while addressing potential errors through reflexive analysis and external review.

RESULTS

The responses collected during the focus group discussions were analysed using the Morse and Field approach, a systematic methodology for coding and categorising qualitative data to uncover significant themes and patterns (Morse & Field, 1996).

Theme: Participants highlighted various factors that attract them to shopping centres and expressed their concerns about factors that deter them from frequenting these centres.

The theme addresses the following objective: Determining the place marketing factors that impact shopping centre patronage among Millennials. The participants shared their perspectives on shopping centres, explaining that although they typically prefer shopping online, there are specific features that make shopping centres more appealing to them. They revealed the place marketing factors that currently attract them to shopping centres, as well as the factors that they would like to see offered to enhance their shopping experience. Additionally, the participants discussed the negative aspects that deter them from visiting shopping centres.

The identified theme comprises three categories that are described below:

PLACE MARKETING FACTORS CURRENTLY PRESENT IN SHOPPING CENTRES THAT ATTRACT MILLENNIALS

Participants mentioned that when considering visiting a shopping centre, there are several place marketing factors they find attractive, including the variety of shops and products, the convenient location, and the opportunity for product engagement.

- **Variety of shops and products**

Participants mentioned that a shopping centre offers a wide range of shops and products that cater to their diverse needs. They prefer shopping centres that house a diverse range of retailers, including fashion stores, grocery stores, electronics stores, and more. Participants specifically emphasised their attraction to a shopping centre if the centre comprises a pharmacy or toy store. By having access to a wide range of products, participants can complete all their shopping needs under one roof, making it more convenient for them.

- **Convenient location**

Participants enjoy visiting shopping centres when they are easily accessible and located conveniently, especially if the shopping centre is centrally located. This allows participants to reach the shopping centre quickly and with ease, making it more likely that they will visit. In addition, shopping for goods and services at a nearby shopping centre can save participants a significant amount of time compared to ordering products online and waiting for delivery.

- **Product engagement**

Participants want to be able to interact with products before they make a purchase. Shopping centres that offer product engagement opportunities, such as interactive displays and product demonstrations, allow participants to see, touch, and try out products before they buy. This helps them make more informed purchasing decisions and increases the likelihood that they will make a purchase. Product engagement is especially important for participants when opting to buy technologically-advanced or expensive products.

PLACE MARKETING FACTORS DESIRED BY MILLENNIALS FOR A MORE ENJOYABLE SHOPPING CENTRE EXPERIENCE

The participants shared their desire for a diverse range of place marketing factors to be provided or enhanced by shopping centres. Despite recognising that some centres offer such factors, they emphasised the need for improvement to make these offerings more attractive to customers. They believe that the presence of these place marketing elements would encourage them to visit shopping centres more frequently instead of relying solely on online shopping. As shown in Figure 1, Millennials have specific expectations for the place marketing factors offered by shopping centres.

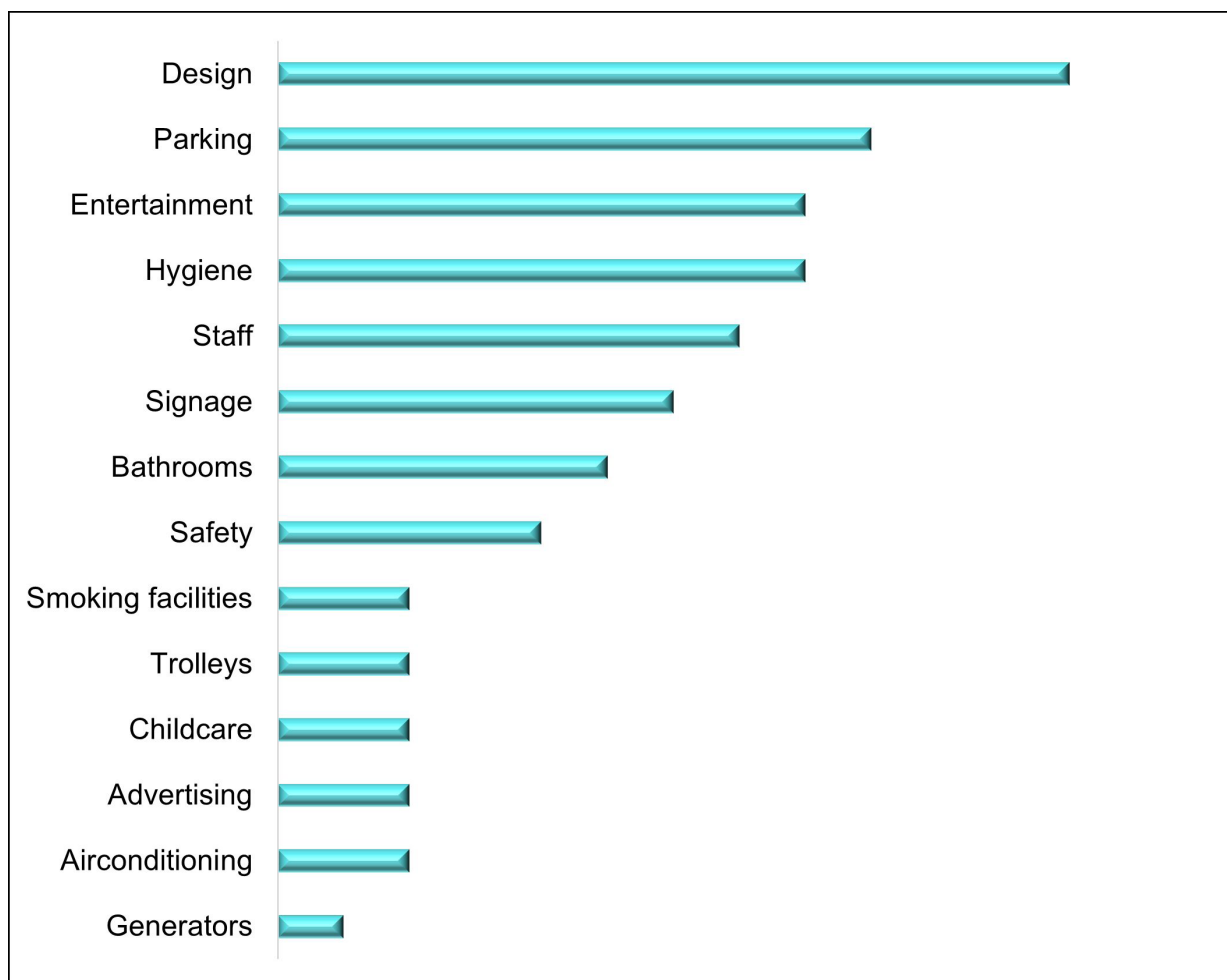


FIGURE 1: PLACE MARKETING FACTORS DESIRED BY MILLENNIALS

- **Design**

The most frequently mentioned place marketing factor by participants in the focus groups was design, specifically the layout and appearance of the shopping centre. Participants expressed a preference for a well-organised layout with multiple, easily accessible entrances and broader aisles to avoid overcrowding. In addition, participants valued the provision of ample seating in public areas and the use of non-slippery tiles to ensure safety. Good lighting and ventilation were also noted as essential considerations in the design of the shopping centre.

- **Parking**

Participants emphasised the importance of secure and easily accessible parking facilities. Adequate covered parking spaces must be available to protect shoppers' vehicles from the elements and charging for parking should be kept to a minimum or avoided altogether. Convenient access to the shopping centre's main entrance was also a key factor, as participants noted that the parking experience could significantly impact the overall shopping experience.

- **Entertainment**

Participants identified the lack of entertainment options as a gap in the offerings of many shopping centres. They suggested that shopping centres could enhance the overall shopping experience by incorporating more recreational activities such as cinemas, ten-pin bowling, and ice skating. Additionally, they felt that hosting events and competitions could add a fun and engaging aspect to the shopping centre, encouraging customers to spend more time there and potentially making it a destination in and of itself. Furthermore, participants believed that the inclusion of background music could enhance the atmosphere and add to the overall ambience of the shopping centre.

- **Hygiene**

Participants highlighted the importance of a clean and well-maintained environment as a critical factor in the overall shopping experience. They emphasised the need for enough dustbins both inside and outside the shopping centre to keep the area tidy and free of litter. Additionally, the installation of air fresheners or diffusers was seen as important in eliminating any unpleasant odours and ensuring that the shopping centre has a pleasant and inviting atmosphere. Participants noted that a clean environment not only enhances the overall shopping experience, but also leaves a positive impression and reflects well on the shopping centre as a whole.

- **Staff**

Participants emphasised the critical role that shopping centre staff play in the overall shopping experience. They stressed the importance of having sufficient, competent, and well-trained personnel available to assist shoppers in a friendly and professional manner. Participants noted that the presence of knowledgeable and helpful staff could significantly enhance the shopping experience, as they are often the first point of contact for customers and play a crucial role in creating a positive impression of the shopping centre. Additionally, participants felt that staff should be well equipped to handle inquiries and resolve any issues that may arise during the shopping experience.

- **Signage**

Participants emphasised the need for clear and sufficient signage to direct customers to different shops and facilities within the shopping centre, as well as a well-staffed information kiosk that can assist shoppers with any questions or directions. They noted that easy navigation and access to information could greatly enhance the shopping experience and make it more convenient and enjoyable for customers. Moreover, participants felt that effective signage and information displays could help to reduce frustration and confusion, leading to a more positive overall experience.

- **Bathrooms**

Participants noted the importance of accessible and clean bathroom facilities within the shopping centre. They stressed the need for enough bathrooms located at convenient points throughout the centre, ensuring that shoppers are never far from a bathroom when they need it. Participants noted that having clean and well-maintained bathrooms is crucial in creating a positive shopping experience, as dirty or inaccessible bathrooms can leave a lasting negative impression on customers. Additionally, they felt that the availability of accessible and clean bathrooms is essential for shoppers who may have disabilities or special needs.

- **Safety**

The safety and security of shoppers were identified as a top priority by participants in the focus groups. They emphasised the need for a safe and secure shopping environment and stressed the importance of visible security personnel and CCTV cameras in creating a sense of security and peace of mind for shoppers. Participants noted that the presence of security personnel and cameras could serve as a deterrent to criminal activity and create a sense of security for shoppers, particularly when shopping alone or at night. Additionally, participants felt that a secure shopping environment could foster a sense of trust and confidence in the shopping centre, leading to increased footfall and repeat business.

- **Other**

While less frequently mentioned by participants, several other place marketing factors were still considered vital to the overall shopping experience. These included the availability of designated smoking areas and well-maintained shopping trolleys. Participants also mentioned the convenience of a play area for children, with a supervised child-minder to help parents relax and enjoy their shopping experience. Another factor mentioned was the availability of air conditioning, as it can provide a comfortable and enjoyable shopping experience during hot weather. A few participants also noted the importance of backup power sources, such as generators or solar-powered electricity at shopping centres, considering the energy crisis and rolling blackouts (load shedding) facing South Africa when conducting the study.

PLACE MARKETING FACTORS THAT DETER MILLENNIALS FROM VISITING SHOPPING CENTRES

Several place marketing factors negatively affect participants, deterring them from visiting a shopping centre and causing them to prefer shopping online instead.

- **Insufficient parking**

Participants noted that parking is a critical aspect of the shopping experience, and it can have a significant impact on their decision to visit a shopping centre. Poor parking facilities can cause frustration and inconvenience for participants, reducing their overall shopping experience and potentially deterring them from visiting the shopping centre in the future.

A shopping centre with inadequate parking space can be a significant deterrent for participants. If the parking lot is constantly full or has limited space, participants said they would instead go to another shopping centre that offers more convenient parking. Participants emphasised that they do not want to waste time searching for a parking spot, especially if they are in a hurry. If the parking lot is poorly designed, with confusing or narrow aisles, it can be difficult for them to find a parking spot, making it less likely that they will visit the shopping centre again.

The cost of parking is also a significant deterrent for participants. If the cost of parking is too high, participants would instead opt to go to another retail outlet that offers free or more affordable parking. In addition, participants want to feel safe when they park their cars. If the parking lot is poorly lit, has limited security, or is known for car theft, participants would rather avoid the shopping centre altogether.

- **Overcrowding**

One of the significant place marketing factors, which acts as a deterrent for participants when it comes to visiting a shopping centre, is overcrowding. When a shopping centre is overcrowded, it can lead to long lines, crowded stores, and an overall chaotic atmosphere, which make shopping a less enjoyable experience. Participants will therefore avoid the shopping centre or instead shop online.

One of the main reasons overcrowding deters participants is that it can be overwhelming and stressful. If a shopping centre is crowded, it can be challenging to navigate, find what you need, and have a pleasant shopping experience. Long lines can be frustrating and cause participants to feel like they are wasting their time.

- **Hygiene**

Hygiene was mentioned as a crucial place marketing factor that can significantly impact participants' decision to visit a shopping centre. Poor hygiene practices can deter participants from visiting and reduce the overall shopping experience.

A shopping centre with unclean facilities is considered a major deterrent for participants. If the floors, bathrooms, and public areas are not kept clean, participants feel uneasy and choose to avoid the shopping centre altogether.

- **Safety**

Participants emphasised that safety is a critical place marketing factor that affects their decision to visit a shopping centre. When participants feel unsafe, they are less likely to frequent that area, even if it offers the products or services they want.

A shopping centre with a reputation for being unsafe or a history of crime is particularly off-putting for participants. They feel uneasy about visiting such a centre, particularly if they are concerned about being mugged or becoming a victim of crime.

Inadequate security measures also make participants feel uneasy about visiting a shopping centre. For example, if a shopping centre does not have security personnel on hand or has limited surveillance, participants feel less safe.

Crowded conditions and poor lighting also make a shopping centre feel less safe for participants. Crowded conditions make it difficult for participants to move around, and they sometimes feel at risk of being knocked over or injured. Poor lighting makes it difficult for participants to see and be seen, which makes them feel vulnerable.

- **Convenience**

Another essential place marketing factor noted by participants is convenience. If a shopping centre is not open at times convenient for them, such as evenings or weekends, it can be a significant deterrent. Additionally, if a shopping centre does not offer extended hours during holidays or special events, it makes it less convenient for participants. The inconvenience offered by shopping centres leads participants to avoid visiting the shopping centre.

- **Incompetent/insufficient staff**

When participants encounter staff who are not knowledgeable about the products and services offered at the shopping centre, it creates a negative impression. It leads to dissatisfaction, resulting in participants not returning to the shopping centre in the future.

Participants stated that if a shopping centre does not have enough staff to meet their demands, it can lead to long lines and wait times, which can be frustrating. Additionally, if staff are not adequately trained or equipped to handle inquiries and complaints, participants experience poor customer service, which is a significant deterrent.

- **Car guards**

Participants emphasised their irritation with car guards when visiting a shopping centre. If a car guard is perceived as aggressive or intrusive, they make participants feel uncomfortable and less safe. This makes participants feel uneasy about visiting the shopping centre and makes them less likely to return in the future. Additionally, if car guards are not adequately trained or are perceived as unprofessional, it creates a negative image of the shopping centre and detracts from the participants' shopping experience.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The shopping centre is a hub of activity, attracting people from all walks of life for shopping, entertainment, and relaxation. To attract Millennials, who are known for their high purchasing power and proclivity for digital and technological advancements, it is crucial for shopping centres to consider improving or offering various desirable place marketing factors.

The results of the focus group discussions indicate that shopping centres can attract and retain Millennials by focusing on certain place marketing factors. The variety of shops and product categories, convenient location, and ability to interact physically with products before purchasing are all important considerations for this demographic. A study conducted by Harris *et al.* (2011:43) supports these findings by stating that Millennials expect the availability of a wide range of product categories and prioritise convenient shopping locations. Therefore, by offering a diverse range of products and being in convenient locations, shopping centres can meet the needs of Millennials and ensure they are more likely to frequent these physical retail locations.

Moreover, the ability to physically interact with products before purchasing is crucial for many Millennials, who value the ability to see, touch, and try out products before making a purchase decision. Besenthal and Pohl (2018:58) found that Millennials are motivated and driven to shop at physical stores by the opportunity to touch, feel and try on merchandise, which supports the results of this study. This highlights the importance of product engagement opportunities in shopping centres, such as interactive displays and product demonstrations. By providing these opportunities, shopping centres can help to differentiate themselves from online retail and enhance the shopping experience for Millennial patrons.

Shopping centres can attract millennials by focusing on the improvement or provision of several key place marketing factors, including design and layout, parking, entertainment, hygiene, staff, signage, bathrooms, and safety. Calienes *et al.* (2016) support this notion by stating that Millennials demand much of their physical shopping store experience in terms of design, layout and hygiene, and that the effective implementation of all of these elements could ultimately contribute to customer loyalty and other long-term benefits. A well-designed shopping centre should have a modern and interactive appearance, with technology and digital signage playing a pivotal role.

Convenient and accessible parking is essential, as Millennials increasingly rely on alternative modes of transportation. Entertainment options such as cafes, restaurants, and gaming arcades can provide a more immersive shopping experience. Hygiene and cleanliness are crucial, and shopping centres should ensure that public areas and bathrooms are well-maintained. Friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable staff can enhance the customer experience for Millennials, while clear and effective signage helps them to navigate the centre. Well-maintained and easily accessible bathrooms are necessary for providing essential services, and safety measures such as adequate lighting and security personnel should be in place to ensure customer security.

The shopping centre industry faces significant challenges in attracting Millennials, and several factors have been identified as deterrents. Firstly, parking is a significant issue, with inadequate parking space, high parking costs, poor parking design, and a lack of safety measures all contributing to a negative shopping experience. Secondly, overcrowding, poor hygiene, perceived lack of safety, inconvenience, insufficient or incompetent staff, and aggressive car guards are other factors that discourage Millennial shoppers from visiting shopping centres.

To address these challenges and attract more Millennial customers, shopping centres must focus on improving the shopping experience. This can be done by providing ample and safe parking facilities, addressing overcrowding and poor hygiene, ensuring that staff are well trained, providing a high level of customer service, and ensuring that the shopping centre is a safe and secure place to visit. By doing so, shopping centres can establish a competitive advantage in the retail industry and attract more Millennials, who are increasingly looking for convenient and enjoyable shopping experiences.

According to a report compiled by McKinsey (2017), parking can be one of the more prominent factors to affect Millennials' decisions to shop at a physical shopping centre or not, which is in support of the findings of this study. Implementing technology-enabled parking solutions could offer various benefits and possibilities for optimising parking systems. This includes the utilisation of robot parking valets to provide efficient parking services and maximise parking

space availability. Integrating parking apps and sensors can assist shoppers in locating and accessing available parking spaces. Furthermore, the redesign of car parking structures can involve the establishment of dedicated e-hailing pick-up zones, shared economy parking areas, and fast-charging stations for electric vehicles.

In today's highly competitive retail market, it is essential for shopping centres to understand the needs and preferences of Millennials and work towards creating a shopping experience that meets these needs. By addressing the deterrents identified above, shopping centres can establish themselves as a preferred destination for Millennials, who are looking for convenient, enjoyable, and safe shopping experiences.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has several limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the use of purposive sampling and the focus on a specific age group and geographical location limit the generalisability of the findings. The study would benefit from a more diverse sample to capture a broader range of perspectives. Secondly, the study's scope and depth could be expanded by including a larger sample size and incorporating additional data collection methods.

To address these limitations, future research should consider several recommendations. Firstly, there should be an emphasis on sample diversity by including participants from different demographic groups and geographic locations. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of customer preferences. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in capturing changes in attitudes and behaviours over time. Comparisons across different consumer segments and cultural contexts would offer insights into variations and influences on shopping preferences. Lastly, utilising a mixed-methods approach by combining qualitative and quantitative methods would provide a more holistic understanding of the topic. By incorporating these suggestions, future research can enhance the generalisability and depth of knowledge in the field of shopping centre experiences and customer preferences.

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