"The effect of mall ambiance, layout, and utility on consumers' escapism and repurchase intention"

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

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THE EFFECT OF MALL AMBIANCE, LAYOUT, AND UTILITY ON CONSUMERS' ESCAPISM AND REPURCHASE INTENTION

Abstract

Shopping malls are visited for both functional as well as entertainment values. They provide emotional comfort and escape from boredom and stress to the shoppers. This study investigates the relationship of ambiance, layout, and utility of a mall with escapism and repurchase intention using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. Using a survey instrument, a convenience sampling procedure was adopted to obtain data from 316 respondents (mall visitors of the Delhi National capital Region in India). Delhi is the mall capital of India, with the highest population density in the world. The relationships between utility-escapism (β = .0265, p = .018), layout-escapism (β = 0.269, p = .012), layout-utility (β = 0.776, p < 0.001), utility-ambiance (β = 0.480, p < 0.001), layout-ambiance (β = 0.407, p < 0.001), and escapism-repurchase intention (β = 0.708, p < 0.001) are validated. However, the relationship between ambiance-escapism (β = 0.073, p = .509) is not supported. The results indicate that mall layout facilitates escapism followed by utility, whereas ambiance does not play a vital role. The purpose of the mall visit moderates this effect. Mall managers can create engaging shopping experiences to help shoppers escape boring routines/stress through improved layouts and enhanced functional values. The study establishes a strong linkage between mall layout, utility, and escapism.

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INTRODUCTION

Malls are cathedrals of consumption (Ritzer, 1999) and also places to escape stress, boredom, or bad weather, as shopping can change the mood and improve customers' well-being (Davis & Hodges, 2012). In addition, malls provide multipurpose shopping and leisure opportunities like cinemas and food courts (Teller et al., 2008; Makgopa, 2016). Well-designed layout, availability of a variety of goods (utilitarian value), and pleasant ambiance can enhance the value of a shopping trip and facilitate an escape from monotony and stress.

The layout determines how retail stores, facilities, parking, and entertainment areas are set up in shopping centers. It provides a sense of power and control (Aaker et al., 2012), influences comfort (Ainsworth & Foster, 2017), and impacts the duration of customer stay for leisure and spending (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996). Mall layout can support escapism by ensuring faster transaction completion with clear directions and simple placements (Bitner, 1992). On the other hand, a bad layout can tire shoppers, diminish the desire to stay at the shopping center (Reimers & Clulow, 2014), and result in negative arousal (Szymkowiak et al., 2021).

Utilitarian or functional values play a significant role in customer choices. Shoppers are excited when they can get the goods they desire, as the variety and density of stores in a shopping mall can increase shopper arousal (Idoko et al., 2019). Utilitarian values and problem-solving can delight customers even in non-hedonic scenarios (Parasuraman et al., 2021).

Mall atmosphere and ambiance lure customers to spend time and money (Ahmed et al., 2007; Idoko et al., 2019) and promote mental rejuvenation by heightening escapist, curiosity, and compatibility sentiments (Rosenbaum & Wong, 2015). Customers are comforted by the natural dimensions of service escapes (van den Berg et al., 2003; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011) and experiences like virtual reality (van Kerrebroeck et al., 2017).

Earlier research focused on psychological reasons for consumers seeking escape to the malls but how these customers navigate a mall and fulfill their shopping goals was generally evaded. The goal of the current study is to fill in this knowledge gap by demonstrating how the atmosphere, mall layout, and practical features of a mall influence escapism and explaining this relationship using the Stimuli-Organism-Response (SOR) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Furthermore, malls face stiff competition from e-commerce, so they must design efficient and enjoyable shopping experiences.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

With the growth in the number of malls, it is imperative to pay attention to factors that can help to attract shoppers and urge them to revisit more frequently. Utilitarian aspects, a well-planned layout, and ambiance can add to the shopping value. They also help in providing an escape to shoppers from their routine stress. According to the theory of consumption values, consumer choices are a result of functional, constrained, affective, scholastic, and social values (Sheth et al., 1991). Each value is independent and contributes different proportions in different choice situations (Sheth et al., 1991). Therefore, utility and ambiance contribute differently to escapism, a mall, and repurchase intentions. The relationship between utilitarian values, layout, ambiance, escapism, and repurchase intention in a mall can also be explained by Stimuli-Organism-Response (SOR) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Utility, layout, and ambiance form the stimulus; escapism is the organism, while repurchase intention is the response.

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology (n.d.), escapism is the tendency to escape the real world to the delight or the security of the fantasy world. Another way of understanding escapism is moving from an undesirable state to a desirable state (Evans, 2001). Escapism may take two different forms: escape unfavorable emotional events (also known as avoidance coping) and escape boredom (caused by a lack of stimulating activities) (Panova & Lleras, 2016). It comprises controlling unpleasant emotions and irrational impulses as well as a strategy for overcoming stress, hostility, and anxiety (Bowditch et al., 2018).

This is based on escape theory (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991), which posits that self-awareness of a problem can create so much suffering that consumers would engage in a self-destructive and urgent action as an escape, such as binge eating or obsessive shopping. Consumers can avoid bad feelings by visualizing alternate outcomes and relaxing (Darrat et al., 2016). Individuals who are less capable of managing their unpleasant emotions are more prone to engage in emotion regulation consumption (ERC) (Kemp & Kopp, 2011). According to the Appraisal Tendency Framework, emotions can impact the perception of the monetary value connected with consumption (Lerner et al., 2007).

Another option is to engage in disengaged coping methods such as issue avoidance, wishful thinking, social detachment, and self-criticism (Bowditch et al., 2018) by temporarily losing touch with reality, which may lead to compulsive purchase (Darrat et al., 2016). Escape theory concedes that people focus on the immediate environment to avoid facing one's limitations as they harbor feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1991) because they cannot meet the ideal standards (Mandel

& Smeesters, 2008). When a confident self-image is even momentarily threatened, people tend to choose products that reinforce that perception (Gao et al., 2009). Urban customers use shopping malls as leisure destinations where they may unwind (Rajagopal, 2009) and browse (Bloch & Nelson, 1991); they frequently stay there for a long time (Rajagopal, 2009). To lift their spirits, they turn to retail therapy for escape (Atalay & Meloy, 2011).

Retail therapy has two dimensions – one to compensate for psychosocial deficiencies with compensatory consumption and the second to restore and lessen negative feelings and emotions (Kang & Johnson, 2011). Compensatory consumption is defined as consumption that is motivated by self-threats, and individuals may use consumption to reclaim their sense of worth (Mandel et al., 2017). Sadness increases the sense of loss and helplessness, which triggers higher consumption (Garg & Lerner, 2013). Shopping gives people a sense of more personal control because there are always options involved, which lessens sadness (Rick et al., 2014).

Utilitarian shopping values are obtained from instrumental, functional attributes (Voss et al., 2003), efficiency of shopping processes (Teller & Reutterer, 2008), convenience (Patel & Sharma, 2009), provision of parking facilities (Makgopa, 2016), choice of store location (Teller & Reutterer, 2008), and ability to complete shopping tasks (Babin et al., 1994). The utility of shopping centers (Dellaert et al., 1998) is a result of the distance between the consumer's home and shopping center and the range of product categories available (Rajagopal, 2009). Shoppers' motives include bargain hunting, convenience, and safety (Farrag et al., 2010). The utilitarian component is tied to instrumental, functional features, whereas the hedonic component is related to the sensory experience of product attributes (Voss et al., 2003). Consumers who buy a specific product and economize on time spent browsing and shopping are strictly utilitarian; browsers do more browsing, and committed shoppers are interested in both utility and pleasure (Millan & Howard, 2007).

Facility layout is the most efficient arrangement of several departments in a facility while taking into account various constraints such as the forms of the building and departments (Kulturel-Konak, 2012). The spatial structure of shopping facilities

such as distance, store category availability, presence of specific retail chains, and new shopping facilities impacts shopping choices (Dellaert et al., 1998). Mall layout, architecture, interior décor, and music can generate excitement and a desire to remain longer (Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Spatial layout and functionality include the design and arrangements of seats, aisles, hallways, restrooms, entrances, exits, and these influence the comfort of customers (Bitner, 1992) because of proximity to customers and intra-center spatial convenience (Reimers & Clulow, 2014). While designing the layout needs anchor tenants, popular retail stores and customers should be considered (Rolbina et al., 2016). Consumers prefer to combine the purchase of multiple types of products in a single shopping trip or trip chains to reduce overall travel (Dellaert et al., 1998). Stores with high intensity of client interchange, if positioned in proximity, will minimize the time and energy of shoppers for getting information, product appraisal, and purchase (Clulow & Reimers, 2009).

One of the many reasons Indian customers come to a mall is the aesthetic ambiance (Patel & Sharma, 2009). Ambient conditions include temperature, lighting, music, noise, and scent (Bitner, 1992). Hedonists are pulled by music, aroma, or light (Teller & Reutterer, 2008). Indian mall shoppers are predominantly utilitarian rather than hedonic, and convenience is far more critical than mall aesthetics and ambiance (Prashar et al., 2017). Satisfaction, which is influenced by perceived value for money, shop service offerings, and awakened emotions, has the most significant influence on future patronage intentions (Grace & O'Cass, 2005).

The present study seeks to establish a linkage between ambiance, mall layout, and utilitarian aspects of a mall upon escapism and explain it by applying the Stimuli-Organism-Response (SOR) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Ambiance, utility, and layout stimulate a customer to escapism, which is the organism resulting in their response to purchase intention. It further checks for the effect of escapism on the re-patronage intention by the customers. This paper also looks at the moderating effect of gender and the purpose of visits to the mall. Therefore, this study hypothesizes (Figure 1 shows the model suggested in this study):
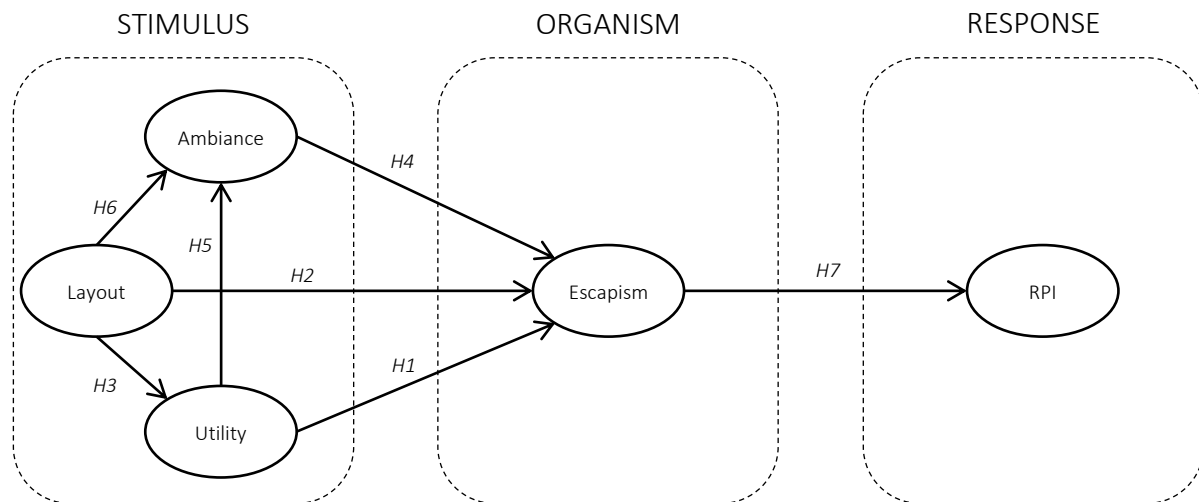
Figure 1. Projected model

H_1: The utilitarian aspect of a mall is positively associated with escapism.

H_2: The mall layout is positively associated with escapism.

H_3: The mall layout is positively associated with the utilitarian aspects of a mall.

H_4: The mall ambiance is positively associated with escapism.

H_5: The utilitarian aspect of a mall is positively associated with ambiance.

H_6: The mall layout is positively associated with ambiance.

H_7: Escapism leads to re-patronage intention.

2. METHODOLOGY

Figure 1 formed the basis for creating a survey instrument comprising 21 items. These items are scales adopted from different constructs already applied robustly in previous studies. The scales for utility were adapted from Babin et al. (1994) and Paridon and Carraher (2009). The scale for ambiance was adapted from Baker et al. (1994). The three-item scale by Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) was assumed to capture layout. Another variable, escapism, used the four-item scale conceptualized by Bloch et al. (1994). The survey in-strument captured the psychometric properties on a 7-point Likert scale where '1' indicated a minor agreement and '7' implied the uppermost echelon of conformity with the statement. A pretest was conducted on ten mall visitors and two mall managers before the actual test so that any flaws in the questionnaire could be removed.

Convenience sampling in urban areas was applied to select the sample. Data were collected from mall visitors using a self-administered English questionnaire. The respondents were implored to select their preferred malls and provided the questionnaire to fill up their responses. The study considered Delhi National Capital Region malls for this study mainly because these malls are designed to stimulate and satisfy customers' shopping experiences, in addition to their need for escapism. Delhi has the highest population density in the world (29259.12 people per mile) (World Population Review, n.d.). It is considered the mall city of India as the top operational malls are located here (Indianfoline, 2015).

Four hundred survey instruments were circulated in person and online modes. If participants agreed, they were served the instrument, resulting in 316 appropriate responses, connoting an answer tempo of 78.75%. The demographic profile of the sample is shown in Table 1. The bulk (78.6%) of the sample was in the age group of 20-35. 71.4% of respondents were male, while 59.4% were post-graduates. Most respondents visited the Mall of India, followed by Select City Walk and Great India Place, with the majority of young visitors.
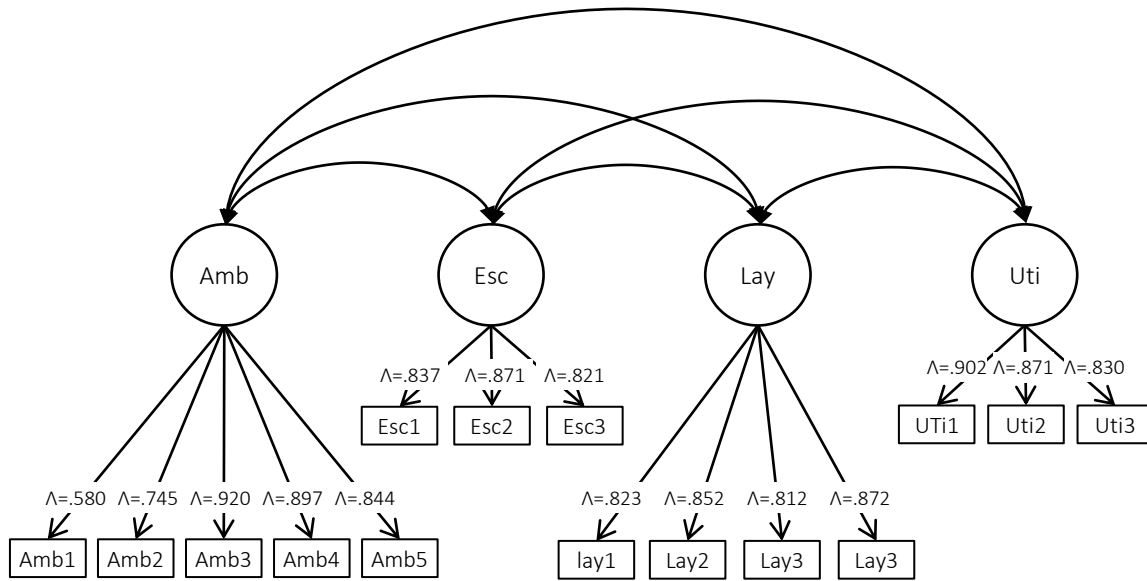
Figure 2. Measurement model

SPSS was applied to entail the descriptive statistics and reliability measurements (Table 2). Constructs mean ranges from 3.072 and 3.882. The kurtosis and skewness of each item within ±2 renders the numbers normal (Kline, 2005).

Table 1. Demographic profile

Category	Variable	Count	Percentage
Gender	Female	159	50.3
	Male	157	49.7
Education	Graduate	110	34.8
	PG	134	42.4
	School	72	22.8
Income	Up to Rs. 50,000 (US $ 703) per month	73	23.1
	50,000 (US $ 703) – Rs. 1.5 lakh (US $ 2110) per month	133	42.1
	Rs. 1.5 lakh (US $ 2110) – Rs. 2 Lakh (US $ 2813) per month	48	15.2
	Above Rs 2 lakh per month	62	19.6
Favorite Mall	Mall of India	150	47.5
	Select City Walk	59	18.7
	Great India Place	28	8.9
	Ambiance	19	6.0
	Others	60	18.9
Visit Purpose	Shopping	167	52.8
	Other than shopping	149	47.2

3. RESULTS

Statistics for general goodness-of-fit (GOF) were utilized to evaluate the accuracy of the measurement model (Figure 2). The standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker Lewis index (TLI), and chi-square value (2) are used to analyze the GOF. When CFI and TLI values are greater than 0.9 and RMSEA, and SRMR values are less than 0.08, the model is deemed tolerable (Hair et al., 2009; Kline, 2015). After doing the confirmatory factor analysis for this empirical study, the measurement model arrived at 2/df = 2.836, p = 0.0001, RMSEA = 0.076, CFI = 0.958, TLI = 0.948, and SRMR = 0.0482.

Two separate tests ascertained the reliability of the constructs. All constructs achieved the recommended cutoff point of 0.60 for Cronbach's alpha (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and had coefficient values above 0.88. Additionally, the composite reliability of each construct is above the threshold limit of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1975) with coefficients above 0.88, as mentioned in Table 3. Items of each construct with a factor loading higher than 0.7 and construct reliability above 0.800 make them acceptable (Wang & Stanley, 1970). These two tests advocate that the things gauging the chosen constructs are dependable. Moreover, the values of both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are similar.

Table 2. Statistical data

Construct	Item	Mean	Std Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis	Loading
Utility (Babin et al., 1994; Paridon & Carraher, 2009)	I was satisfied with the items I purchased.	2.573	1.5341	1.263	.766	0.902
	The shopping trip was worthwhile.	2.655	1.4922	1.131	.649	0.871
	I accomplished just what I wanted to on the shopping trip.	2.864	1.4727	.939	.394	0.83
Ambiance (Baker et al.,1994)	The mall plays music that I like.	2.956	1.5133	.573	−.255	0.58
	Mall music is played at an appropriate volume.	2.826	1.5990	.976	.197	0.745
	The mall lighting is appropriate.	2.532	1.7608	1.374	.757	0.92
	The mall temperature is comfortable.	2.639	1.7754	1.283	.588	0.897
	The smell in the mall is pleasant.	2.832	1.7239	1.040	.114	0.844
Mall Layout (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996)	The layout makes it easy to get to the stores you want.	2.896	1.5691	.705	−.343	0.823
	The layout makes it easy to get to the food areas.	2.703	1.6485	1.027	.102	0.852
	The layout makes it easy to get to the restrooms.	2.956	1.6343	.836	−.100	0.812
	Overall, the layout makes it easy to get around.	2.883	1.5843	.859	−.055	0.872
Escapism (Bloch et al., 1994)	When I am bored, the mall is an excellent place to go.	3.193	1.7828	.667	−.563	0.837
	When I am alone and need something to do, the mall is an excellent place to go.	3.541	1.8469	.394	−.901	0.871
	When I am stressed, the mall is an excellent place to go.	3.791	1.8067	.201	−.976	0.821

Table 3. Psychometric properties

Variable	Mean	SD	α	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Layout	Ambiance	Escapism	Utility
Layout	2.859	1.421	0.905	0.906	0.706	0.608	0.908	0.840			
Ambiance	2.757	1.419	0.901	0.901	0.651	0.634	0.933	0.780	0.807		
Escapism	3.508	1.628	0.880	0.881	0.711	0.258	0.883	0.508	0.461	0.843	
Utility	2.697	1.370	0901	0.902	0.754	0.634	0.907	0.776	0.796	0.494	0.868

Face validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and nomological validity form the validity of the constructs (Hair et al., 2009). Before the fieldwork, an academician and a mall expert checked the constructs and confirmed their validity. The average variance extracted (AVE) estimates evaluated the convergence validity (Table 3). AVE estimates should indicate sufficient convergent validity if they are 0.5 or higher (Hair et al., 2009). All four constructs surpassed these limits.

When the inter-construct correlations are less than the square root of the AVE, a construct is said to have discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2009). The discriminant validity of the constructs is demonstrated in Table 3. By using Harman's (Harman, 1976) single-factor test, it was possible to rule out the common method bias because the first component accounted for less than 50%, or 28.59%, of the variance.

Chi-Square, GFI, CFI, and RMSEA structural fit information are 385.575, 0.882, 0.935, and 0.080, respectively, which verify a satisfactory fit for the assessment (Bollen, 1989) of the postulated association. Furthermore, the ratio of $\chi 2$ to the corresponding degrees of freedom is 3.012, which is inside the 5.0 limit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For the investigation, the marginal fit indices IFI, AGFI, and NFI yielded values of 0.935, 0.842, and 0.906, respectively, above the cutoff confines of 0.8 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Furthermore, the parsimonious fit indices PNFI and PCFI obtained values greater than the cutoff limit of 0.5 (Mulaik et al., 1989), showing model resilience.
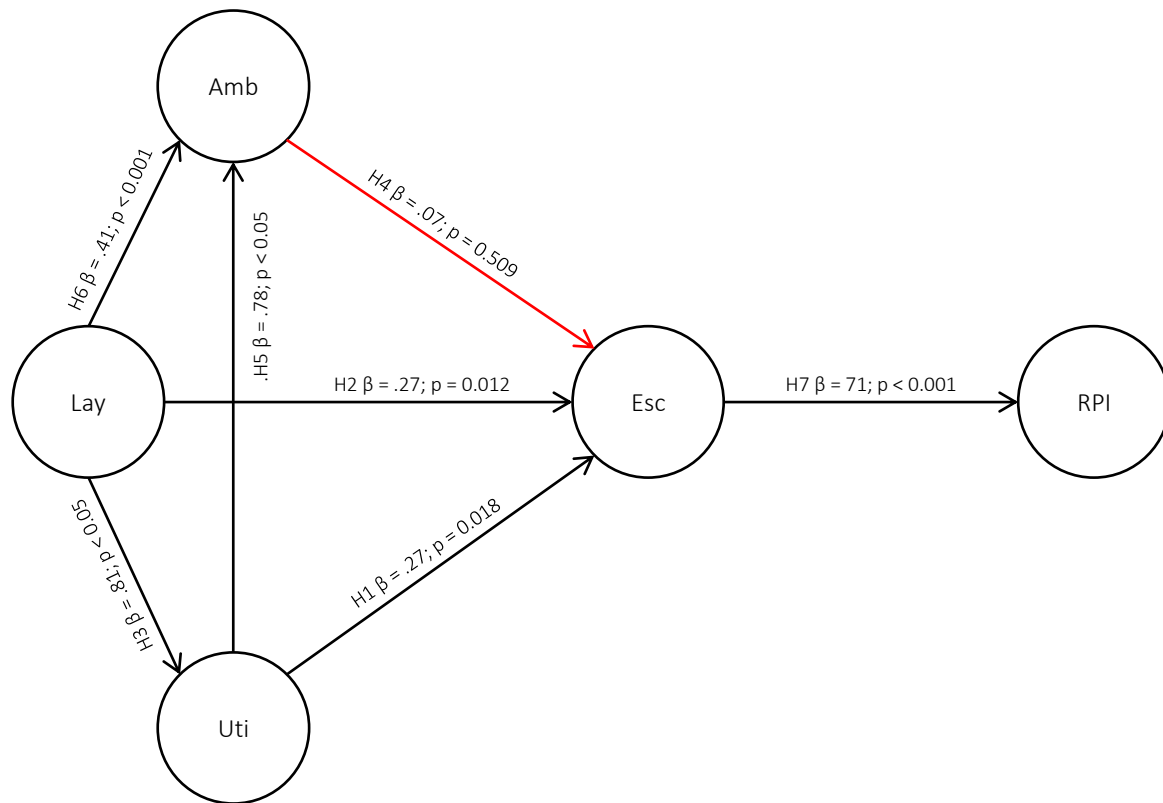
Figure 3. Structural model

To test the hypotheses, the study used structural equation modeling for the entire structural model (SEM). Table 4 shows that the standardized path estimates have substantial connections with their respective critical ratios. The p-values reflect whether or not the association is stable. Table 4 shows the maximum probability estimates for each variable, indicating that the antecedents of purchase intent are consistent with the theoretical explanations. It also shows that six of the seven presented hypotheses are significant. The layout-utility link was the most impactful of all the associations, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.776 (p < 0.001), followed by the escapism-RPI path, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.708 (p < 0.001). The utility-escapism approach was the least essential path (β = 0.265, p = .018).

Figure 4 shows that as the layout improves, the utility means more to men than to females. Again, the purpose of the visit is the most critical moderator. It significantly moderates layout-ambiance, utility-escapism, and escapism-RPI relationships (Figure 5-7 and Table 7).

Table 4. Hypotheses summary

Hypotheses No.	Path	Standardized path coeff	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Decision
H1	Utility → Escapism	.265	.141	2.362	.018	Supported
H2	Layout → Escapism	.269	.119	2.511	.012	Supported
H3	Layout → Utility	.776	.050	13.604	***	Supported
H4	Ambiance → Escapism	.073	.106	.660	.509	Not Supported
H5	Utility → Ambiance	.480	.093	6.707	***	Supported
H6	Layout →Ambiance	.407	.081	5.798	***	Supported
H7	Escapism → RPI	.708	.051	10.613	***	Supported

Note: *** means less than 0.001.

Table 5. Gender moderation

Hypotheses No.	Hypothesized Path	Male		Female		z–score
		Estimate	P	Estimate	P	
H1	Utility → Escapism	0.282	0.184	0.461	0.007	0.656
H2	Layout → Escapism	0.139	0.496	0.389	0.000	1.060
H3	Layout → Utility	0.777	0.000	0.496	0.000	−2.918
H4	Ambiance → Escapism	0.217	0.166	−0.071	0.575	−1.427
H5	Utility → Ambiance	0.473	0.000	0.756	0.000	1.521
H6	Layout →Ambiance	0.573	0.000	0.367	0.000	−1.308
H7	Escapism → RPI	0.537	0.000	0.552	0.000	0.144

Table 6. Purpose moderation

Hypotheses No.	Hypothesized Path	Shopping		Other than Shopping		z–score
		Estimate	P	Estimate	P	
H1	Utility → Escapism	0.087	0.651	0.683	0.001	2.092
H2	Layout → Escapism	0.404	0.027	0.184	0.225	−0.932
H3	Layout → Utility	0.654	0.000	0.714	0.000	0.599
H4	Ambiance → Escapism	0.116	0.426	−0.072	0.650	−0.873
H5	Utility → Ambiance	0.541	0.000	0.723	0.000	0.999
H6	Layout →Ambiance	0.657	0.000	0.281	0.012	−2.385
H7	Escapism → RPI	0.435	0.000	0.651	0.000	2.146
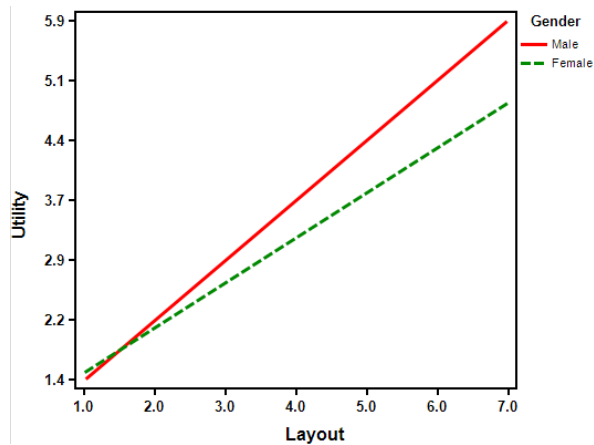
Figure 4. Layout-utility interaction
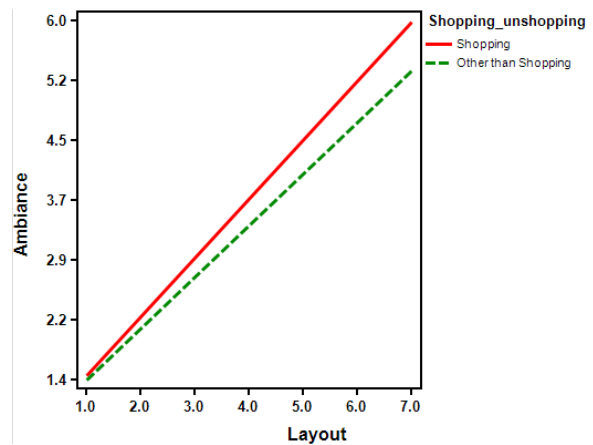
Figure 5. Layout-ambiance interaction
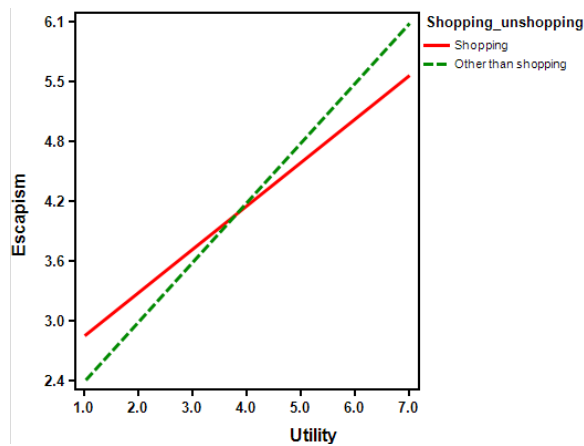
Figure 6. Utility-escapism interaction

Figure 7. Escapism-RPI Interaction

Table 7. Interaction effects

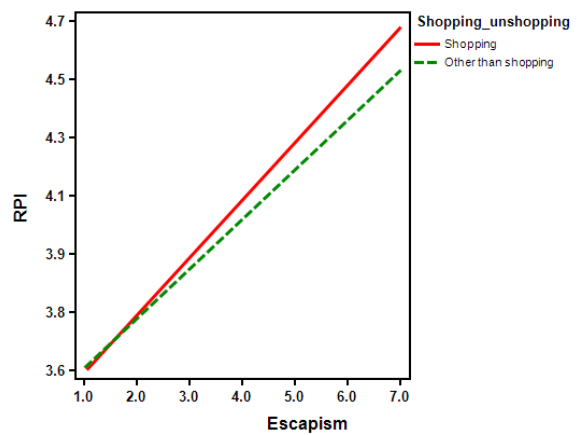| Hypotheses No.	Mod	CFI	RMSEA	Path	R²	Interaction	f²	Group differences	Sum of Squares	F
H1	Purpose	0.920	0.063	Utility → Escapism	0.211	0.0051	0.2676	2.092	176.25	27.82
H3	Gender	0.935	0.057	Layout → Utility	0.507	0.0088	1.0295	-2.918	300.1	107.07
H6	Purpose	0.920	0.063	Layout → Ambiance	0.496	0.0022	0.9833	-2.385	314.75	102.264
H7	Purpose	0.920	0.063	Escapism → RPI	0.073	0.0039	0.0786	2.146	23.54	8.172

Moderation effects were tested due to gender (male versus female) and purpose of visit (shoppers versus pleasure seekers). The results show that the layout-utility relationship is moderated by gender with a significant difference in their paths (Tables 5 and 6).

Moreover, the path coefficients suggest different levels of importance for layout, ambiance, and utility, thereby confirming the consumption value theory. The strength of the relationships changes if the purpose of a visit to the mall changes, suggesting the importance of escaping for those who visit the mall for reasons other than shopping. Gender moderates the layout and utility relationship, suggesting that it is perceived differently, and men construe the utility after visualizing the layout more than women.

4. DISCUSSION

The study successfully reaffirmed the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model for Delhi malls, where layout and utility lead to the escape, which results in a repurchase response. The results validate the positive relationship between utility and escapism (H1), as established by Heatherton and Baumeister (1991). It implies that a focus on buying tasks can help consumers escape anxiety. Malls can enhance functional value by providing a diverse tenant mix. Retailers assume that mall shoppers focus on aspirational products; therefore, consumers still need to visit shopping markets to buy essentials and utility-driven items. Products required for carrying out religious ceremonies and community-specific events are examples of product lines that are required by mall shoppers but are hardly available in malls.

Similarly, services like key making, shoe repair, or watch repair cannot be accessed in malls. These services may not take much space but can add to the utilitarian aspect of a mall. For example, flea

markets are regularly organized in mall premises by Select Citywalk, DLF Promenade, and Great India Place Mall adding to the utility value and providing a market-like feel to mall shoppers.

This study also validates that men are generally focused shoppers and would like to reach their destination faster rather than exploring different stores. Therefore, retailers offering merchandise targeted at men or preferred by men should be located so shoppers can complete their transactions faster and quickly move out of a mall. In addition to facilities, there can be the provision of feeding booths and childcare facilities to help females enjoy their shopping experience and stay longer in a mall.

The relationship between layout and escapism (H2) is supported, backed by Ainsworth and Foster (2017). A convenient layout will be preferred when choosing a mall. Another point to note is that parking facilities and safety are often compromised to reduce costs. Shoppers who visit malls to de-stress themselves can be distressed by the hassles of parking their vehicles. Time taken in parking a vehicle can wipe away the time saved by efficient layout. Besides, shoppers wish to reach their desired retail store with less walking and minimum effort. Therefore, mall developers should delve deeper into layout planning. Mall managers must carefully allocate space amongst retailers and entertainment as the purpose of the visit has a different influence on customers. This will provide much-needed relaxation and excitement to shoppers without too much investment of their time and efforts. Retail education should also emphasize a deeper understanding of mall layout, functional aspects, and escapism, as education is vital in building a country (Hudzyns'kyi et al., 2020).

Layout to utility (H3) linkage is established, which is also witnessed by a study conducted on Gen Y consumers (19-25) in the US (Martin & Turley, 2004). Utilitarian shoppers choose such

malls where the layout makes shopping easy and saves time. The same type of stores can be grouped similarly to traditional markets. For example, Bhagirath Palace is a shopping market for electrical goods, and Nai Sarak market is famous for textbooks and stationery items. This clustering should also extend to food courts with outlets serving fast food or a specific cuisine that can be clubbed together, as visible in the food court of Mall of India.

Layout to ambiance (H6) relationship is supported and is experienced by adolescent girls in another study in US malls (Haytko & Baker, 2004). A well-designed layout creates a spacious atmosphere, giving consumers the freedom to move according to their will. The utility and ambiance (H5) relationship is also supported, which confirms the outcome of Ng (2003). It signifies that the physical environment facilitates the fulfillment of shoppers' needs. Mall architects can consider this aspect while deciding on locations of mall atriums.

According to the study, escapism results in re-patronage or revisit to the mall (H7), backed by Arnold and Reynolds (2012). Shoppers look for relaxation to escape from their hectic modern lifestyles by browsing the stores or trying out the merchandise. Promotional events should add to the entertainment quotient of malls providing pleasure, a desired break from routine, and relief from stress. Moreover, double-income, single-kids, and double-income no-kids families are on the rise in metro cities. Money-rich and time-starved, they frequently visit the malls to shop, indulge their kid, get entertainment, and temporarily escape their hectic lifestyles.

However, ambiance and escapism linkage (H5) is not supported, although the same was supported by Rosenbaum and Wong (2015). This finding can be because top-performing malls in Delhi National Capital Region are similar in ambiance. Mall management should note that more than an attractive ambiance is needed to promote feelings of escape. Instead, they should ensure enough variety of retailers so that customers can fulfill their functional needs of buying desirable products. The retail stores, food kiosks, entertainment areas, and facilities like parking and restrooms should be designed so shoppers can walk less, complete their purchases efficiently, and enjoy their shopping trip.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to understand the relationship between ambiance, mall layout, and utilitarian aspects of a mall and their impact on escapism. The study also focused on the linkage between escapism and re-patronage intention. The outcome postulates that mall layout and utilitarian values support the consumer objective of seeking escape from routines or stress, but ambiance does not aid escapism. A positive linkage between escapism and re-patronage intention is confirmed. Mall management should pay attention to the availability of a variety of retailers to meet the functional needs of consumers. The layout should be designed so that these retailers can be quickly accessed in such a manner that makes the shopping experience more convenient and fun-filled. The effect is more pronounced for male shoppers and consumers who visit malls for reasons other than shopping, like pleasure seeking.

This study was carried out in the Delhi National Capital Region of India. Future studies can be undertaken in more metro and non-metro cities and developed economies. Research can be carried out to ascertain the significance of mall layouts for obese consumers and senior citizens, highlighting their specific needs. Social factors can be added to future studies to determine the impact of the presence or absence of shopping companions on escapism. As consumers seek to escape for various reasons, separate studies can be undertaken to study shopper behavior for each reason.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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