

# MARKETING STRATEGIES TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE SERVICE: A NORTH - SOUTH COMPARISON OF INDIAN SHOPPING MALLS

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## ABSTRACT

Shopping malls play a very crucial role in the retail industry of India. Over the last few years, a number of shopping malls have developed across the country. Not only shopping malls, but also e-commerce platforms have quickly expanded. This has led to massive competition amongst the stakeholders; the less strong parties are wiped out of the market. In this light, the literatures have been referred to and it is found that majority of the studies have focussed on a specific location to identify the factors impacting the service quality of the malls, but there is hardly any research which has conducted a region wise comparative analysis among the shopping malls. The present study is conducted to develop an in-depth understanding of the shopping malls of northern and southern India. Primary data relevant to the study is obtained from the shopping malls based out of the two regions mentioned above. The dataset is pre-processed and subjected to statistical analysis. It is found that the service quality dimensions

impacting the mindset of the consumers from northern parts of India are efficiency of employees, promptness of employees and security of the transactions. In case of southern India, mall navigation and purchase experience, integrity of services and personalized care offered by the malls to the visitors play a significant role. By going further into the depths of the study, it is learnt that, in case of northern India, efficiency of employees show low performance. However, for southern India, there is no major area of concern. Net Promoter Score for north is satisfactory, however, majority of the south visitors seem to discourage their acquaintances from visiting malls. This findings from this study may act as guiding light for the mall managers. A happy customer keeps returning to the shopping mall; thus helping the mall to achieve its bottom line.

**Keywords:** Efficiency of employees, Service quality dimension, service quality perception, shopping malls

## INTRODUCTION

India is one of the rapidly growing countries in terms of retail. Retail industry in India has undergone massive evolution over time. Several retail formats have developed, one such format being the shopping mall. A shopping mall is a collection of well-organized retail establishments contained within a single architectural building. Malls have developed into multipurpose leisure areas that combine retail with entertainment, amusement, and social interactions in addition to offering a variety of goods under one roof. Movie theatres, gaming areas, food courts, cafés, salons, banks, and other convenience-based businesses are now found in the majority of malls. In other words, consumers see malls as appealing central locations where they may shop, eat, socialize, and spend time with loved ones rather than just as locations to buy goods.

Malls have become an integral part of urban consumers' daily routines in the setting of modern lifestyle. Weekend mall excursions have become a common cultural practice for many homes, particularly in Tier-1 and metropolitan areas. A certain aspirational value is also projected by malls. They show how Indian customers' expectations for comfort, convenience, ambience, hygiene, safety, and choice are evolving. High-street shopping frequently lacks the "feel good" atmosphere that is created by the regulated environment, air conditioning, cleanliness, and visual merchandising. Sometimes, people visit shopping malls, just to overcome the boredom of the daily routine; they visit malls just for window shopping and

enjoying the ambience and return home with a full heart. Over the past few years shopping malls have developed in every nook and corner of the country. Initially a massive change in the overall shopping behaviour was observed, but slowly, it led massive level of competition amongst the malls, making it extremely difficult for them to sustain in the fierce scenario. Along with shopping malls, India also witnessed massive growth in e-commerce platforms. The e-commerce platforms offered goods and services to the consumers at the comfort of their homes. They also provided attractive promotional strategies like massive discounts, quick delivery, easier return and refund processes, etc. Therefore the shopping malls, not only faced competition amongst themselves but also from the e-commerce platforms. This led to declining sales, thus reducing the top line and bottom line and ultimately difficulty in survival.

These situations have made things really difficult for the shopping malls; it is observed that many shopping malls fail to achieve optimum tenant mix and proper visitor oriented designs. However, the malls which are outperforming others have presented themselves as experience centres rather than simply a collection of shops at one place. They have concentrated their efforts on long term sustainability, rather than simply concentrating on short term sales. This study aims to understand the service gaps and identify the loopholes existing in the shopping malls of northern and southern India. A happy customer will keep coming back to mall and also motivate his acquaintances to visit. This helps to improve the top line and bottom line of the malls.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Shopping mall culture has come into prominence in the last few years and India has witnessed a massive growth in the number of malls. It is found that shopping malls have become an integral part of human lives. The success of a business depends on understanding the needs of the customers and in depth understanding of their buying pattern. When the concept of shopping malls was very novel, Bloch P. et. al. (1994) performed a study for learning about consumer activity in the malls. They considered the shopping malls which were categorised as “super-regionals”. It was revealed that tenant mix played a pivotal role in attracting consumers. In due course of time, Mohan M. et. al. (2015) explored a different facet of shopping malls and figured out that malls attract middle and upper classes and the catchment area attracts highly educated and young crowd. A significant difference existed in the shopping behaviour of high, medium and low spenders across all product categories and a high degree of positive correlation was found to exist between incomes of the respondent and money spent at the mall and low positive correlation between time and money spent at the mall. Mittal A. et. al. (2015) said that differences in the purchasing behaviour of shoppers existed among geographical markets (due to difference in cultures, income, demographics etc.) but at a shopping centre level, consumers cared for more tangible benefits such as merchandise, brands, variety, social infrastructure (milieu) and convenience. Moreover, Kumar A. (2017) said that location of the mall, comfort in shopping, status portrayed in shopping, knowledge about

the goods/ service, parity of price and convenience of operational hours were the main attitude factors impacting the shopping behaviour of mall visitors. The visitors considered overall attractiveness of the mall, amenities and atmospherics, personnel, ease of shopping and convenience factors while selecting the shopping centres. Diany A. A. et. al. (2025) said that shopping mall service quality led to impulse buying of the consumers in the shopping malls. They also identified the emotions related to shopping as a key player in terms of moderating the buying decision. In the recent times, in order to understand the shift in the mall visitors’ buying behaviour and the shopping motivations, Belwal R. et. al. (2025) figured out that apart from personal motivations, utilitarian values played a very important role. They found that the main categories of customers in the shopping malls were Practical Value Seekers, Discerning Shoppers, Selective Online Shoppers, Social Brand Seekers and Instant Gratifiers. Practical value seekers, discerning shoppers and social brand seekers preferred to purchase from the modern retail formats. Instant gratifiers showed high level of impulsive shopping behaviour as compared to others. Zalke A. (2025) said that mainly the factors related to marketing mix and promotions impacted the satisfaction levels. Salsabila A. et. al. (2025) conducted a service quality study on shopping malls and found that service quality as well as brand image impacted the satisfaction level of the customer. Better satisfaction level led to better perception of the visitors about the malls. The success of a shopping mall not only depends on understanding the needs of the consumers and their buying

behaviour; it is necessary to understand the post purchase behaviour and their evaluation of service quality of the malls. It is learnt that one of the popular analytical methods used in measuring service quality is Importance – Performance Analysis (OZTURK S. et. al., 2023). Baquero A. (2022) suggested that another very contemporary yardstick used in the service organizations is the Net Promoter Score. The researcher found that reaching high Net Promoter Score is synonymous with achieving high numbers.

These researches focused on understanding the mindset of the consumers, but hardly any study was conducted to compare the service quality of shopping malls based in northern and southern India.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To identify the main factors impacting service quality perception of shopping malls in Northern vis-à-vis Southern India and determine their impact
- To determine the service gaps of the malls located in the two regions under consideration
- To determine the Net Promoter Scores of the malls of northern vs. southern India
- To provide suggestions for improvement, wherever necessary.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The goal of the current study is to investigate how the patrons in shopping centres in India's northern and southern areas view the quality of the services

provided. The goal is to determine whether perceptions of these two wide geographic zones differ noticeably and to comprehend the underlying factors that influence consumers' assessments of mall service quality. A systematic questionnaire based on the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) has been used to gather primary data for this aim. Although the RSQS is a widely recognized tool for assessing retail service quality, the constructs used in this study have been carefully modified to fit the operational environment, context, and features of Indian shopping malls, which have a very unique mix of retail, leisure, and entertainment.

Primary data was gathered from the popular shopping malls of both north as well as south India. A total of 216 replies that were deemed legitimate and useful, were collected and incorporated into the study. Both SPSS and R statistical tools were used to analyse the data, enabling cross-validation and more reliable statistical procedure management.

To accomplish the goals of the study, a variety of statistical techniques have been used. To find the underlying factor structure and ascertain if the modified RSQS items group meaningfully within the Indian mall setting, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) has been carried out. In order to determine which service quality factors, have the greatest influence on perception, regression analysis has been used. Prioritizing managerial interventions has also been done through Importance-Performance Analysis. Furthermore, the Net Promoter Score (NPS) is assessed to offer a clear indication of consumer propensity to suggest, which functions as a useful

performance benchmark for mall owners.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The reliabilities of datasets for north and south India respectively, were found to be acceptable, with the values of 0.892 and 0.806. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test values are .616 and .707 for east and west, with Bartlett's Test of Sphericity values lesser than 0.05, both values are satisfactory.

The primary objective was to determine the underlying dimensions of service quality perception of malls in northern and southern India and then to determine the factors which significantly impact the service quality perception. For the said purpose, Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted followed by Regression Analysis.

For north, the main underlying dimensions were efficiency of employees, promptness of response, secured transactions and alterations which explained 82.549% pf the variance. For

southern India, the dimensions identified were mall accessibility and support, mall navigation and purchase experience, service integrity, support interaction quality and personalized care which explained 75.142% of the total variance.

Further, Regression Analysis was conducted to determine the significant factors predicting service quality perception. The R square values were 0.885 and 0.755 for north and south respectively, which are acceptable in studies that aim to predict human behaviour (Frost, 2019).

The results are shown in Table 1. It is observed that in northern India, the significant predictors were efficiency of employees, promptness of employees and secured transactions while for southern India, the significant factors were mall navigation and purchase experience, service integrity and personalized care. The results are depicted in Table 2.

**Table 1** Model summary of regression analysis

| Location of shopping malls | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Northern India             | .885 <sup>a</sup> | .783     | .725              | .16755                     |
| Southern India             | .755 <sup>a</sup> | .570     | .544              | .16797                     |

**Table 2** Results of regression analysis for the four regions

|                                               |                                         |                             |            |                           |        |      |                         |       |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|-------------------------|-------|
| Northern India                                | Coefficients                            |                             |            |                           |        |      |                         |       |
|                                               | Model                                   | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | T      | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics |       |
|                                               |                                         | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      | Tolerance               | VIF   |
|                                               | Constant                                | -2.139                      | .982       |                           | -2.179 | .046 |                         |       |
|                                               | Efficiency of employees                 | .566                        | .142       | .662                      | 3.989  | .001 | .526                    | 1.902 |
|                                               | Promptness of response                  | .476                        | .089       | .754                      | 5.374  | .000 | .736                    | 1.358 |
|                                               | Secured transaction                     | .767                        | .155       | .759                      | 4.947  | .000 | .615                    | 1.627 |
|                                               | Alterations                             | -.238                       | .163       | -.256                     | -1.467 | .163 | .476                    | 2.102 |
| Dependent Variable: Perceived Service Quality |                                         |                             |            |                           |        |      |                         |       |
| Southern India                                | Coefficients                            |                             |            |                           |        |      |                         |       |
|                                               | Model                                   | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics |       |
|                                               |                                         | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      | Tolerance               | VIF   |
|                                               | Constant                                | 2.087                       | .567       |                           | 3.680  | .000 |                         |       |
|                                               | Mall accessibility and support          | -.181                       | .095       | -.163                     | -1.903 | .060 | .585                    | 1.711 |
|                                               | Mall navigation and purchase experience | .233                        | .067       | .314                      | 3.475  | .001 | .527                    | 1.899 |
|                                               | Service integrity                       | .727                        | .084       | .726                      | 8.635  | .000 | .607                    | 1.647 |
|                                               | Support interaction quality             | -.099                       | .133       | -.070                     | -.741  | .460 | .489                    | 2.047 |

|                                               |       |      |       |        |      |      |       |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|------|-------|--------|------|------|-------|
| Personalized Care                             | .168  | .062 | -.241 | -2.703 | .008 | .541 | 1.847 |
| Aesthetic Quality                             | -.023 | .037 | -.044 | -.615  | .540 | .857 | 1.167 |
| Dependent Variable: Perceived Service Quality |       |      |       |        |      |      |       |

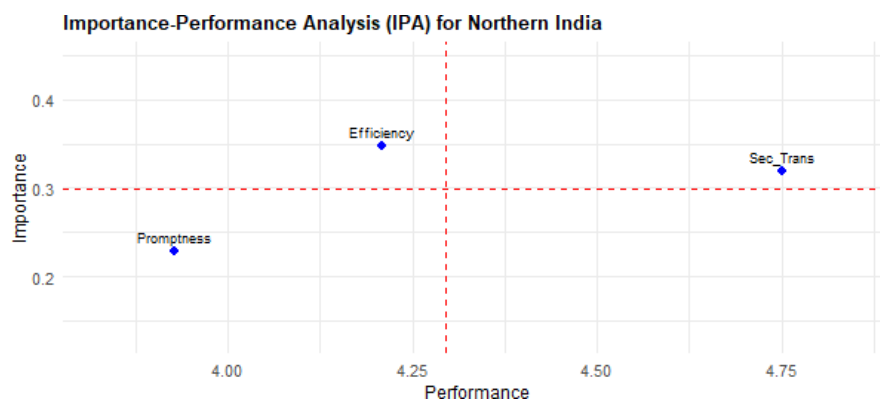
The regression equations for the same are given below.

*Service Quality Perception about malls in Northern India* = -2.139 +  
.566 (*Efficiency of Employees*) +  
.476 (*Promptness of Employees*) +  
.767 (*Secured Transactions*)  
..... (1)

*Service Quality Perception about malls in Southern India* = 2.087 +

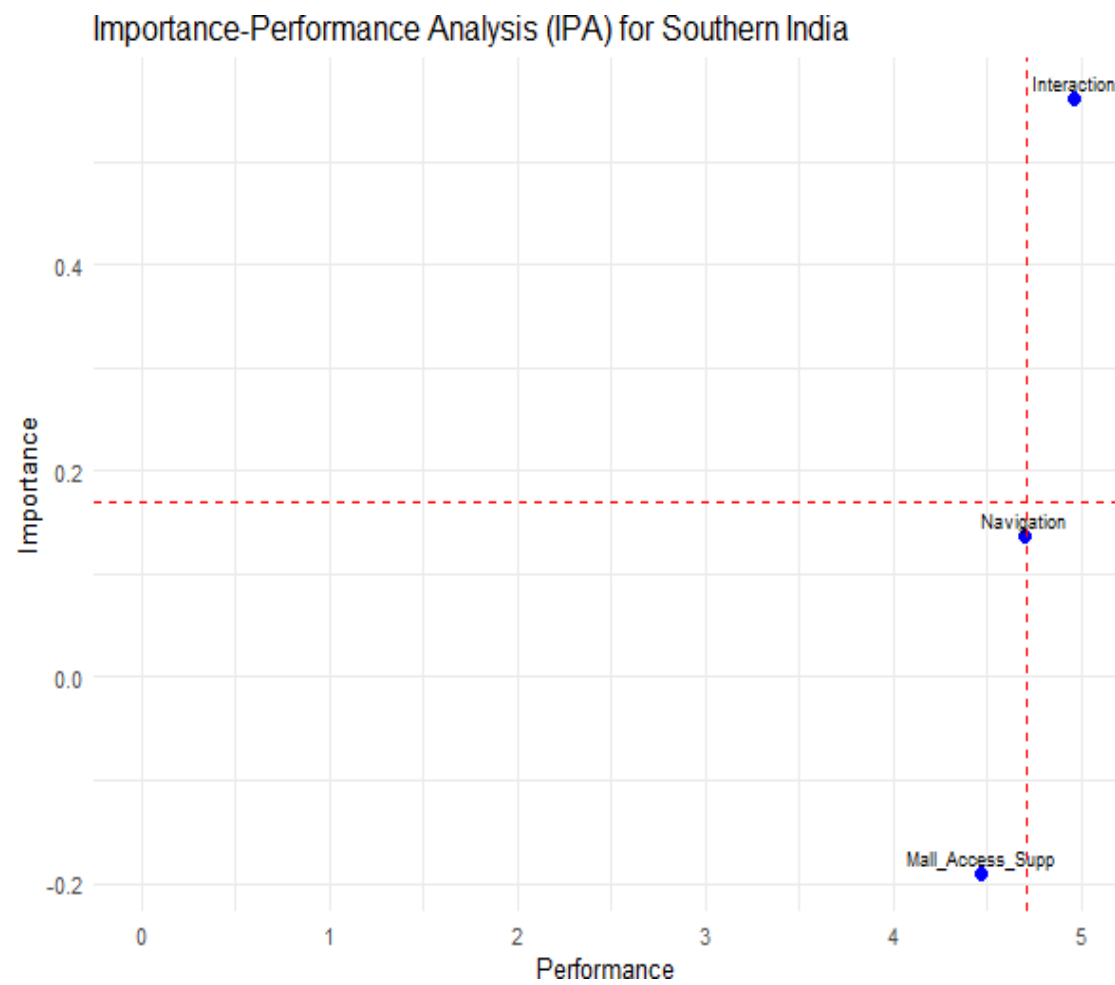
.233 (*Mall navigation and purchase experience*) + .727 (*Service integrity*) –  
.168 (*Personalized Care*)  
..... (2)

The Importance – Performance matrix conducted for northern India suggested that the main area that needs to be focussed upon was the efficiency of employees, remaining factors performing decently.



**Fig 1:** Importance Performance Matrix of Northern India

On the other hand, for southern India, there was no major area of concern.



**Fig 2:** Importance Performance Matrix of Southern India

The Net Promoter Score in case of northern India was found to be 16.34 and in case of southern India found to be - 3.737. The malls in Northern India performed well, since a large number of visitors recommend their acquaintances to visit malls, while in Southern India many visitors were found to be detractors who did not recommend or rather discouraged others from visiting shopping malls.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Shopping malls play a very important role in today's world. This study aims to understand the service quality perception of shopping mall visitors of northern and southern India. The northern and southern parts of India have been considered in the study because, both are believed to be advancing in the field of commerce, technology and overall infrastructure developments. Hence, the locations are comparable. It is also often found that, the two parts of northern and southern India are very much varied in terms of taste and preferences of the consumers. Several studies have been conducted to understand the cultural and mindset differences among the residents. In this regard, primary data for the study is obtained by interviewing the mall visitors. The dataset obtained is analysed using the contemporary methods of statistics. It is found that the service quality dimensions impacting the mindset of the consumers from northern parts of India are efficiency of employees, promptness of employees and security of the transactions. However, for southern India a completely different picture is obtained. It is found that, the most significant factors are mall navigation and purchase experience,

integrity of services and personalized care offered by the malls to the visitors. By going further into the depths of the study, it is learnt that, in case of northern India, efficiency of employees show low performance. However, for southern India, there is no major area of concern. For northern India, the mall managers may take the shortcomings into consideration. It is necessary to have a specialized recruitment team, who would be able to select the candidates having sufficient knowledge in this field and who have high emotional intelligence. These employees may be provided with refresher trainings and sufficient amount of product knowledge may be imparted, so that they are equipped to answer the customer queries and also solve the customers' issues. Also, modern digitalisation may be done so as to ensure that, the whole transaction is smooth and much faster. It is a known fact that service sector is one of the areas, where the employees get demotivated really fast. Thus to keep them motivated and focussed on the work, necessary bonuses should be given from time to time. Not only financial benefits, but also their work and achievements may be recognized. These are some of the ways to keep the employees keep going and ensure that they offer the services with highest of efficiency. The findings reveal that security of transactions also play a very important role, in terms of impacting the service quality perception of the shoppers. Hence, necessary security measures and digital methods may be adopted so that the customers feel that their transactions are safe. Also, the data shared is also safe in the hands of the malls. In southern India, though no major problem area is revealed, but the net

promoter score is found to be highly concerning. It is found that, the visitors discourage others from going to the shopping malls, purchase goods and enjoy the services. This may be attributed to the customs and traditions of the visitors located in southern India, which was revealed during the interviews conducted during primary data collection. Thus, the malls need to take necessary steps to attract customers to the malls, use promotional methods so that they are motivated to visit the malls. It is necessary to develop the feel good factor in the shopping malls of southern India. Experts' help may be taken in this matter. While conducting the interviews, the respondents in southern India notified about the excessively high car parking charges, which hinders them from visiting the shopping malls regularly. Thus necessary measure of parking management may be taken to ensure that the rates are affordable. This study may act as a guiding light for the shopping mall managers in north and south India. A happy customer will indulge in repeat purchases and

also suggest his acquaintances to avail the services of the shopping malls. Owing to constraint of time, this study is limited to the north and south India. Inclusion of the shopping malls of eastern and western India, will give a better perspective. This study may also be conducted in other countries to give a better understanding of the international shopping mall operations.

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