CUSTOMER AWARENESS ON THE NEED FOR SAFE SHOPPING IN RELATION WITH THE STRUCTURE OF THE RETAIL OUTLET

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Abstract

This study is done to know about the extent of awareness,the customers have about the safety conditions present in the building, when they decide to visit a much demanded retail store. It was conducted in the retail outlets functioning in three central districts of Kerala which are known to be prone to a lot of hazards. The geography of Kerala present it as a narrow, long strip of land in the southern tip of India. 2011 census shows that, the state has the highest population density in the country i.e., 860people/km². It also claim to have a high literacy rate as well as high standard of living when compared with the rest of India. There has been a transformation in its population profile of the state which happened over the last century. Kerala changed from an agrarian society to a highly urbanized group over the last hundred years. There has been an increase in the total number of shops during the 12 years ranging from 2004 to 2015. The number of outlets increased from 2, 31,046 to 2, 87,598. This highly literate and urbanized society makes the retail business stand at par with the international retail society. The Kerala shops and establishment commercial fund has published data showing that about 50 malls have come up during the period between 2016 and 2019. Also the state disaster management authority shows that of the total land area of 38,863 Km^2 ,14.5% is prone to floods and 14.4% to landslides, one of the reasons why Kerala is a multi-hazard prone state. And making this data even worse, the floods that affected the state in 2018 and 2019 have proved more disastrous as the whole state with all its fourteen districts was affected. The data used for this study was collected six months before the 2018 floods and focused on learning about the awareness of the customers about the need for safe shopping in such risky situations as the structure of the building plays a lot in ensuring safety. The analysis revealed that the element of building

condition as a requirement for safe shopping is often over looked by the public when they decide the place and outlet.

Keywords---Building Condition, Precautions, Disasters, Emergency, New Generation Retail Outlets.

Introduction

The narrow long stripped land of Kerala in the southern tip of India has been placed by the National Disaster Management Authority and the State Disaster Management Authority as a multi-hazard prone state. It has faced a lot of situations which have been unforeseen and unpleasant and has resulted in causalities. Such happenings are termed as situations of 'high caution' or a situation of 'emergency' – a disaster. There is no place in this planet which is immune to this.

Kerala forms a long strip of coastal line (580 km) with the Arabian Sea on its western side. There is another long strip of mountains - the Western Ghats on the east and in between there is just 35 – 120 km of width. The state shows a high socio-economic vulnerability, in relation with the effect of disasters.

Kerala has the highest population density in the country i.e., 860people/km² according to the 2011 census. The state also has a high Human Development index (HDI) and high standard of living compared with the rest of the country. These features make it more vulnerable to population disasters than anywhere else. Over the last hundred years Kerala has been witnessing a socio-economic transformation which has resulted in a rapid change in its population's profile. A changeof its society from agrarian to anurbanized one. This transformation has resulted in the creation of a highly developed consumerist society.

In 2015 the Government of Kerala haspublished information about an increase in the total number of shops from 231046 (2004) to 287598. Out of these, 120729 have employees apart from the owner. Kerala's per capita consumption expenditure is said to be one of the largest in the country.

Until recently consumers of Kerala focused on only one object – gold. It used to be phrased that there are as many jewelry outlets in Kerala as there are coconut trees. But this scenario has changed since the advent of new generation retail outlets with enclosed air conditioned atmosphere and self-service phenomenon. Now Kerala shopping list ranges from luxury cars

toelectronic goods, textiles, entertainment etc. This trend had alerted high end retail chains. Starting with super markets it went on to IT super shops and white goods retail outlets. Then came the malls. It is reported that about 50 malls, of all ranges - small, medium, large– have come to function in the state within the period between 2016 and 2019.

The New Indian Express on May 16, 2017 reported about the break out of fire in Kochi Oberon Mall, one of the busiest shopping centers in Kerala. It was a five storey building. The fire started during the night when there were no shoppers in the mall. The New Indian Express on October 2018, reported about the death of an old man, as a furniture outlet caught fire in Kattakada in the outskirts of Trivandrum.

The News Minute, reported about retailers lamenting 'it would take a lifetime to recover from the losses' after the floods of 2018. The waters had brought with it an immeasurable quantity of slush and mud, accumulating in the shops and go-downs causing immense losses while creating the risk of reptiles as well.

I. Background of the study

- Reports of retail accidents had been coming in and the hazard profile of Kerala brought out by the State Emergency Management Authority says that it is a multi-hazard prone state.
- A minimum of two incidents of fire accidents are reported in commercial buildings every year.
- Retail in Kerala is on a boom and the trend is going to stay as more and more people are choosing to shop for pleasure and entertainment.
- Minor accidents are happening inside retail outlets. But the measures required to ensure the safety of shoppers in an enclosed air-conditioned building is often not complied with.

II. Objective

The retail industry in Kerala has a promising future. But being a multi hazard prone state it is necessary to analyze whether the places where the people are crowding for shopping are safe enough and how much do they know about the safety conditions present.

III. Methodology.

4.1. Scope.

The research paper is based on the study conducted inthreedistricts of Kerala namely Kottayam, Kochi and Thrissur. The descriptive analysis covered different aspectsof the retail outlets like types, physical location, features of the location near the outlet, tenure of the building, whether the outlet is in an independent building, in which floor the outlet is functioning and the spread of the outlet. Data is also collected about the gender, age, education, location and income of the people who responded for the study. The study should be helpful as it tries to bring out the relevance of customer awareness about 'the condition of the building as related to their safe shopping. The data included published information and also primary data collected from the field using survey method. Published secondary data included the newspaper reports, internet sites, articles in journals and publications by Kerala State Emergency Management Authority.Primary data was collected from both the retail outlets and consumers using interview schedule. Sample study was conducted in ten retail outlets. Theshops which are functioning in an enclosed, air-conditioned environment, offering the self-service facility and which can be termed as a new generation outlet were chosen for the study. The hypothesis wasbased on the assumption thatthe there is no relationship between the structure of the building and the awareness of the customers regarding the need for safe shopping.

4.2 Data Description

Data was collected about the profile of the respondents, which included the area where they preferred to do their shopping, gender, age education, occupation, location and annual income. The descriptive analysis of the same is presented in Table No. 4.1. Data was also collected about the socio-demographic profile of the retailers which is presented in Table No. 4.2

4.2.2 Descriptive Analysis of the sample retail outlets.

Table No. 4.1 shows that the study was conducted in the municipal corporation area of three central districts of Kerala i.e. Kottayam, Kochi and Thrissur. A total of 530 respondents were approached. 60.75% of the respondents (322) were male whereas 39.25% of the respondents (208) were female.

The data further shows that about 58.68% of the respondents (311) are of the age group 10 to 30. So most of the people visiting the new generation retail outlets are either teenagers or young adults. This is followed by people between the age group of 30 and 40 which forms 21.51% (114) of the sample.

Majority of the respondents are degree holders, 36.98% (196 no.s), followed by 12th qualified people 21.51% (114 no.s). This supplements the information that majority of the respondents are teenagers or young adults.

44.53% of the respondents (236) are working in the private sector while 28.87% (153) are self-employed. Majority of the respondents (44.91% or 238 no.s) are from urban areas while 28.49% (151no.s) are from semi urban areas followed by 26.6% (141 no.s) from rural areas.

Data about the annual income of the respondents showed that 52.64% of the people (279 no.s) are having income between Rs 60,000/- and Rs 400,000/- per annum. 26.04% (138)are having less than Rs 60,000/- which supplements the information that most of them are either teenagers or young adults who are starting on their career, and 17.17% (91 no.s) are having more than Rs 400,000/- annual income.

Table No. 4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Respondents

Profile of the respondents	Particulars	Kottayam	Kochi	Thrissur	Total	
		Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Area	Municipal Corporation	150	210	170	530	100.00%
	Total	**150**	**210**	**170**	**530**	**100.00%**
Gender	Male	119	79	124	322	***60.75%***
	Female	31	131	46	208	39.25%
	No response	0	0	0	0	0.00%
	Total	**150**	**210**	**170**	**530**	**100.00%**
Age	< 10	0	0	2	2	0.38%
	10-20	67	2	88	157	***29.62%***
	20-30	47	79	28	154	***29.06%***

	30-40	24	67	23	114	21.51%
	40-50	5	26	21	52	9.81%
	50-60	3	21	6	30	5.66%
	60-70	0	12	0	12	2.26%
	No response	4	3	2	9	1.70%
	Total	**150**	**210**	**170**	**530**	**100.00%**
Education	< SSLC	4	19	16	39	7.36%
	SSLC	8	13	39	60	11.32%
	12TH	57	26	31	114	21.51%
	DEGREE	52	64	80	196	***36.98%***
	Post-Graduation	21	57	2	80	15.09%
	Professional	8	30	2	40	7.55%
	No response	0	1	0	1	0.19%
	Total	**150**	**210**	**170**	**530**	**100.00%**
Occupation	Govt. Employee	25	16	27	68	12.83%
	Private Employee	57	118	61	236	***44.53%***
	Self Employed	67	39	47	153	28.87%
	Retired	1	0	9	10	1.89%
	Student	0	10	10	20	3.77%
	House wife	0	24	4	28	5.28%
	No response	0	3	12	15	2.83%
	Total	**150**	**210**	**170**	**530**	**100.00%**
Location	Rural	61	41	39	141	26.60%
	Urban	66	113	59	238	***44.91%***
	Semi Urban	23	56	72	151	28.49%
	Total	**150**	**210**	**170**	**530**	**100.00%**
Annual Income	<60,000	69	18	51	138	26.04%
	60,001 - 100,000	38	43	17	98	18.49%
	100,001 - 200,000	8	46	21	75	***14.15%***

	200,001 - 400,000	25	37	44	106	20.00%
	> 400,001	8	59	24	91	17.17%
	No response	2	7	13	22	4.15%
	Total	**150**	**210**	**170**	**530**	**100.00%**

Data was also collected on the profile of the retail outlets. All the outlets were functioning in the municipal corporation limits. 45.28% (24 no.s) of the outlets were specialty stores followed by 15 super markets (28.30%), 4 hyper markets (7.55%) and 18.87% other kind of outlets (10 no.s) which may include outlets inside malls also.

45.28% (24no.s) of the outlets are situated in market or shopping centers followed by 15.09% (8 no.s) of outlets located in industrial areas. Regarding the nature of the surrounding environment, 22.645 (12no.s) of the outlets are situated in low-lying areas, whereas 5.66% (3 no.s) are in marshy lands.

Regarding the presence of natural/man-made features in the immediate neighbourhood, 52.84% of the outlets (28 no.s) are either near a river or a lake or in the immediate vicinity of the same. 24.52% (13no.s) are near a factory or any other manufacturing complex while 6 outlets (11.32%) are near an ocean.

75.47% (40 outlets) of the outlets are functioning in an independent building while 24.53% (13 no.s) are running as part of a building. 30.19% (16 no.s) of the outlets are functioning in buildings which are 6 to 10 years old. 26.42% of the outlets are in building which are 1 to 5 years old, 16.98% (9 no.s) are in buildings which are more than 20 years old and 15.09% of the outlets are in buildings which are 16 – 20 years old. 11.32% (6 no.s) of the outlets exists in buildings which are between 11 and 15 years old. Of the 24.53% of the outlets which are functioning as part of another building 16.98% (9 no.s) of the outlets are in the ground floor and 7.55% (4 no.s) of the outlets are in between 1 to 3 floors.

37.74% (20 no.s) of the outlets are spread over in just 1 floor. 33.96% (18 no.s) and spread over in 2 floors, 13.21% (7 no.s) are in 3 floors, 11.32% (6 no.s) are spread over 4 floors and 3.77% (2 no.s) are spread over more than 4 floors.

Table No. 4.2 Profile of the Retail Outlets

Profile of the retail outlets	Particulars	Kottayam	Kochi	Thrissur	Total	
		Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Sample	Municipal Corporation	15	21	17	53	100.00%
	Total	**15**	**21**	**17**	**53**	100.00%
Type of retail outlet	Department Store	**0**	**0**	**0**	0	0.00%
	Super market	2	3	10	15	28.30%
	Hyper market	2	0	2	4	7.55%
	Specialty Store	6	13	5	24	***45.28%***
	Discount Store	0	0	0	0	0.00%
	Co-operative Store	0	0	0	0	0.00%
	Any Other	5	5	0	10	18.87%
	Total	**15**	**21**	**17**	**53**	100.00%
The nature of the neighborhood	Residential	1	0	0	1	1.89%
	Industrial	5	3	0	8	15.09%
	Commercial/Business	2	0	1	3	5.66%
	Markets/Shopping Centers	2	9	13	24	***45.28%***
	Not applicable (other)	5	9	3	17	32.08%
	Total	**15**	**21**	**17**	**53**	100.00%
The nature of the surrounding environment	Low Lying	3	4	5	12	***22.64%***
	Hilly/Mountainous	0	0	0	0	0.00%
	Marshy	0	3	0	3	5.66%
	Subject to vandalism/Riots	0	0	0	0	0.00%
	Not applicable	1	3	0	4	7.55%
	Any Other	11	11	12	34	64.15%
	Total	**15**	**21**	**17**	**53**	100.00%

Natural/man made features in the immediate neighborhood	River	1	7	6	14	***26.42%***
	Ocean	0	4	2	6	11.32%
	Lake	0	5	9	14	***26.42%***
	Factory	13	0	0	13	24.52%
	Airport	0	3	0	3	5.66%
	None	1	2	0	3	5.66%
	Total	**15**	**21**	**17**	**53**	100.00%
Building Condition	Independent Building	14	13	13	40	***75.47%***
	Part of another building	1	8	4	13	24.53%
	Total	**15**	**21**	**17**	**53**	100.00%
Tenure of the building	1-5 years	7	6	1	14	26.42%
	6-10 years	7	6	3	16	***30.19%***
	11-15 years	1	0	5	6	11.32%
	16-20 years	0	6	2	8	15.09%
	>20 years	0	3	6	9	16.98%
	Total	**15**	**21**	**17**	**53**	100.00%
Part of another building- Which floor	Ground Floor	0	6	3	9	***16.98%***
	1-3 floors	1	3	0	4	7.55%
	4 floor or above	0	0	0	0	0.00%
	Not applicable (Independent Building)	14	12	14	40	75.47%
	Total	**15**	**21**	**17**	**53**	100.00%
The spread over of the outlet	1 floor	1	5	14	20	***37.74%***
	2 floors	7	11	0	18	33.96%
	3 floors	2	2	3	7	13.21%
	4 floors	3	3	0	6	11.32%
	> 4 floors	2	0	0	2	3.77%
	Total	**15**	**21**	**17**	**53**	100.00%

IV. Hypothesis

H°: The time spend by a customer for shopping does not depend on the safety measures as related to the structure of the outlet.

V. Analysis

Kruskall- Wallis H Test (Reason for choosing an outlet and time spend for shopping)

Kruskal- Wallis H Test, or One Way ANOVA on ranks is a rank based (non-parametric) test used to checkfor any statistically significant difference between two or more groups of an independent variable on an actual dependent or continuous variable. In this research it is used to testfor any statistically significant differences between the times spend for shopping and the reason for choosing an outlet. It should help to know to whether the structure of the building and its physical settings has any influence on a customer's selection of retail outlet.

Table No. 6.1 (Kruskal-Wallis H test (Reason for choosing an outlet and time spend for shopping)

K W H test	Kottayam		Kochi		Thrissur	
	Chi-Square	P value	Chi-Square	P value	Chi-Square	P value
Spacious parking area	12.276	0.006	4.813	0.09	1.98	0.372
Spacious aisles	10.558	0.014	18.449	0	1.469	0.48
Spacious corridors	7.156	0.067	6.414	0.093	0.44	0.803
Friendly and helpful customer service assistants	14.99	0.002	6.586	0.086	0.799	0.671
Clearly marked departments	6.172	0.104	7.893	0.019	0.86	0.65
Child care assistance	24.734	0	1.928	0.587	5.061	0.08
Presence of disaster care equipment.	22.849	0	11.901	0.008	1.681	0.431
Presence of trained disaster care staff.	3.656	0.301	1.928	0.587	2.107	0.349
Presence of a mechanical air system.	9.51	0.023	1.95	0.377	5.318	0.07
Good lighting on the shop floor, back area and shopping area.	3.462	0.326	6.691	0.035	1.72	0.423
Continuous mopping.	0.8	0.849	6.097	0.107	3.199	0.202
Security check before entry.	0.318	0.957	5.869	0.053	1.745	0.418
Multiple entry points.	1.843	0.606	14.173	0.001	4.018	0.134
Multiple exit points.	1.847	0.605	6.294	0.043	2.084	0.353
Mapping of all emergency exits.	5.264	0.153	6.201	0.102	1.925	0.382

Warning of emergency situations.	7.896	0.048	4.345	0.227	1.81	0.405
Presence of alarm systems that could be used by the customers.	7.365	0.061	3.865	0.276	1.808	0.405
Notification of precautions to be taken in case of emergency.	1.961	0.581	4.645	0.2	3.338	0.188

Table No. 6.1 show the consolidated results of the test with the Chi-Square values and the p-values. The different reasons with respect to the structure of the building, based on which the customer was studied on his shopping preference included the following,

- Parking area
- Aisles
- Corridors
- Presence of good service assistants
- Clearly demarcated departments
- Presence of good, professional child care.
- Disaster care equipment
- Disaster care staff
- Mechanical air system
- Lighting
- Presence of continuous mopping facility
- Security check
- Multiple entry and exit points
- Mapping of emergency exits points
- Warning in case of an emergency
- Alarms to be used by the customers
- Written and Oral Notification of precautions that are to be taken in case of any emergency.

According to Table No. 6.1, the customers of Kottayam are attracted by spacious parking area (p value 0.006), the existence of Friendly and helpful customer care staff (p value 0.002), child care assistance (p value 0.000), presence of disaster care equipment (p value 0.000) does influence the customer's time spent inside the retail outlet. Since the p-value is less that the significance level the null hypothesis is rejected for the above attributes But the rest of the attributes like spacious aisles (p value 0.14), spacious corridors (p value 0.067), clearly marked departments(p value 0.430), trained disaster care staff (p value 0.301),mechanical air (p value 0.023), good lighting in the shop floor and other areas (p value 0.326), continuous mopping (p value 0.849), security

check before entry (p value 0.957), multiple entry points (p value 0.606), , multiple exit points (p value 0.605), mapping of all emergency exits (p value 0.153), warning of emergency situations (p value 0.148), presence of alarm systems that could be used by the customers (p value 0.001) and notification of precautions to be taken in case of emergency (p value 0.581) do not have any influence on the customer for his time spent inside the retail outlet as the p-values are more than the significant level and the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table No. 6.1 also show the response of customers in Kochi. The respondents are not influenced by spacious parking area (p value 0.090),spacious corridors (p value 0.093), friendly and helpful staff (p value 0.086), clearly marked departments(p value 0.019), child care (p value 0.587), trained disaster care staff (p value 0.587), presence of mechanical air system (p value 0.377), good lighting (p value 0.035), mopping (p value 0.107), security check (p value 0.053), presence of multiple exit points (p value 0.043), mapping emergency exits (p value 0.102), warning of emergency situations (p value 0.227), alarm systems for the use of customers (p value 0.276) and notification of precautions to be taken in an emergency situation (p value 0.200) because the p-values are more than the significant level and so the null hypothesis is accepted. However the outlets with spacious aisles (p value 0.000), presence of disaster care equipment (p value 0.008)and existence of multiple entry points (p value 0.001) does affect the respondents choice in Kochi since the p-value is less than the level of significance and so, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The results of the respondents shopping preferences in Thrissur can also be seen in Table No. 6.1. The customers preference of shopping is not influenced by any of the attributes mentioned spacious parking area (p value 0.372), spacious aisles (p value 0.480) and corridors (p value 0.803), helpful customer care staff (p value 0.671), marked departments(p value 0.650), child care (p value 0.080), disaster care equipment (p value 0.431), trained disaster care staff (p value 0.5349, mechanical air system (p value 0.070), good lighting (p value 0.423), mopping (p value 0.202), security check on entry (p value 0.418), multiple entry points (p value 0.134), multiple exit points (p value 0.353), mapping of exits (p value 0.382), warning emergency situations (p value 0.405), alarm systems (p value 0.405) and notification of precautions to be taken (p value 0.188). As the p-values are more than the significant level and the null hypothesis is accepted.

VI. Interpretation

1. Presence of a Spacious parking area does influence the shopping preference of customers in Kottayam but it fail to have any effect on the people of Kochi and Thrissur.
2. The existence of spacious aisles in the retail shop floor are of attraction to the respondents of Kochi but not for those of Kottayam and Thrissur.
3. Spacious corridors does not have any effect in the shopping preference of the respondents
4. The existence of friendly and helpful customer service assistants are of attraction to the customers of Kottayam, but fail to influence the respondents of Kochi and Thrissur.
5. A retail outlet with clearly marked departments is not of any attraction to any of the respondents
6. Good child care assistance in the retail outlet is preferred by the customers of Kottayam only
7. Disaster care equipment that can be used by both employees and customers are preferred by the respondents of Kottayam and Kochi but not Thrissur.
8. None of the respondents have thought of the presence of trained disaster care staff as a need for safe shopping
9. A mechanical air system to keep the atmosphere inside the outlet clean and germ free is not thought of as a preference for safe shopping by any of the respondents.
10. The customers consider good lighting on the shop floor, back area and shopping area as a service that does not affect their time spend inside an outlet.
11. There is not influence for continuous mopping or the existence of a clean hazard free floor in customers shopping preference.

12. Respondents do not prefer security check before entry to an outlet
13. Multiple entry points are preferred by the people of Kochi but not the other two districts.
14. The presence of multiple exits are not considered as an attraction by any of the respondents
15. The customers have not thought of the presence of any signs of mapping of all emergency exits as they have not considered the possibility of an emergency situation.
16. The precaution of warning of an emergency situation that may arise is not of any influence for majority of the customers
17. Presence of alarm systems to be used by the customers does not influence customers time spend for shopping
18. Majority of the respondents do not prefer to be notified of the precautions to be taken in case of an emergency.
19. The customers have no idea about the dangers that can be caused by a cluttered floor or poor lighting.
20. They overlook the need for trained disaster care staff or the need for emergency exits, notifications, alarms, or directions that could be of use in case any emergency situation arise.

VII. Conclusion

Customer awareness on the importance of the condition of the building where the retail outlet is functioning and the emergency management precautions present in it are insufficient to mitigate and manage an emergency. The retail accidents reported from various corners of the state had alerted the need for a conscious and deliberate precautionary approach from the part of the customers and the governing authorities in educating themselves on the attributes to be considered while choosing the outlet they want to shop from. Preparedness help to mitigate the effect of disasters.The public must be made aware of the importance of disaster care equipment, the infrastructure of the outlet and other support services that is a must in

crowded retail environment. The industry have great prospects in the state of Kerala. But it has to go a long way in creating need for safety in the shopping environment a priority for customers.

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