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## Towards a better understanding of customer satisfaction with shopping mall food courts

### Abstract

**Purpose:** In this study, we examined the attributes that determine shoppers' satisfaction with food courts in shopping malls and the effects of this satisfaction on behavioural intentions towards shopping malls.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The data for this study were collected from 380 shoppers who visited food courts in shopping malls located in Hyderabad, India. The data were analysed using structural equation modelling.

**Findings:** The results indicate that fair prices, authenticity and the quality of the food, service and environment predict shoppers' dining satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The findings also indicate that satisfaction with food court experiences has a strong positive influence on shoppers' intention to revisit shopping malls.

**Originality:** This study has implications for mall operators and food court managers seeking to enhance customer satisfaction with food courts and sustain the success of shopping malls. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the factors that influence shoppers' dining satisfaction and behavioural intentions in this context.

**Practical implications:** Food service providers in Indian shopping malls should recognise that offering suitably priced and high-quality experiences is vital for sustaining their businesses in the long term as well as offer prompt service and warm hospitality to visitors to enhance customer satisfaction.

**Keywords:** food courts, shopping malls, dining satisfaction, behavioural intention, India

### 1. Introduction

In recent decades, shopping malls have emerged as the preferred 'one-stop shops' for purchases and entertainment, offering a convergence of retail options under one air-conditioned roof (Zhu and Chung, 2023). Given the paramount importance of the customer experience, shopping malls are constantly working to engage visitors and fulfil their social, functional and emotional needs (Leung *et al.*, 2023). Malls offer numerous attractions to meet these needs, including food courts, movie theatres, beauty salons, bowling alleys and video arcades (Kowalczyk *et al.*, 2020). These entertainment facilities increase footfall and generate increased revenue for tenants (Lee *et al.*, 2023).

Food courts were first introduced to shopping malls in the United Kingdom in the 1980s, and they have since been adopted by other countries (Kowalczyk *et al.*, 2020). They are now an inseparable part of the shopping mall experience (Mitra *et al.*, 2022). In India, there is an increasing interest in shopping due to changing attitudes and higher disposable incomes. To respond to the growing needs of Indian consumers, malls are proliferating in various regions (Misra and Verma, 2023). After work-related travel, shopping trips accounted for the second-highest proportion of trips in India in 2022 (Palani and Malarvizhi, 2023).

A food court in a shopping mall is a special form of common area that accommodates a variety of service outlets offering food and beverages, including cafés, fine-dining restaurants and casual eateries with quick service, where shoppers can dine, relax and socialise (Kowalczyk *et al.*, 2020). As consumers spend an average of two to three hours (known as dwelling time) in shopping malls, the availability of food-and-beverage outlets has become an essential feature of these businesses (Bawa *et al.*, 2019). Food courts in shopping malls offer

multiple benefits to stakeholders. They offer shoppers unique opportunities for dining and socialising, and they have emerged as a major and consistent source of revenue for mall operators (Agarwal and Shilpashree, 2022). In India, a great food experience is considered an integral part of visiting a shopping mall. The ubiquitous presence of food courts in shopping malls is a testament to this cultural expectation. Food courts provide a variety of dining options in modern India and have become an essential part of the mall ecosystem (Lamba, 2020).

Although the growing presence of food courts in shopping malls is generally beneficial, operators face many challenges that may significantly impact their success and sustainability. First, there is a need for food court operators to offer excellent service quality to distinguish themselves from other businesses, as they compete for a fixed number of consumers. This calls for managerial intervention to create clear distinctions in food service delivery due to the sector's fixed aggregate demand (Winfree and Allen, 2022). Second, the culture of online shopping and the pandemic-induced trend of ordering food online are eroding food courts' business (Voas and Kshetri, 2021). This requires the development of strategies to attract customers and provide unique consumption experiences. Third, shopping malls face rising competition, not only from their counterparts but also from other forms of traditional retailing and e-retailing (Nalluri and Rao, 2023). These challenges require that operators understand the factors that contribute to customer satisfaction and revisit intention (Lee and Kim, 2023).

Despite the growing importance of food courts in shopping malls in India, there is a noticeable research gap concerning the key factors that influence Indian shoppers' satisfaction with these locations. While the antecedents of customer satisfaction in traditional dining settings have been extensively studied, there is a lack of evidence regarding which of these factors are operative in shopping mall food courts. Food courts offer a wide range of cuisines and dining options in a single location; thus, they may influence customer satisfaction differently than traditional dining. Moreover, food courts typically provide a communal dining space along with diverse food options from various vendors offering distinct dining experiences, which makes these settings unique compared to standalone restaurants. The service environment of a food court – the shared seating, the ambience of the court and its location close to a busy shopping area – may affect customers' perceptions of service quality, comfort and the dining experience. In this context, the structure of the antecedents of shoppers' satisfaction with food courts and how these factors contribute to revisit intention remain under-investigated.

While consumer satisfaction has been studied in the broader context of shopping malls (Amin *et al.*, 2021), there is limited research on the key factors that influence shoppers' satisfaction with dining at food courts in shopping malls, especially in India. Furthermore, research on consumer satisfaction with food service establishments has typically focused on fast food outlets (Ababneh *et al.*, 2022) and standalone restaurants (El-Said, 2021), which makes it necessary to investigate food courts (Winfree and Allen, 2022). It is also unclear whether the determinants of consumer satisfaction with other commercial food service establishments are relevant and valid in the context of shopping mall food courts. The dearth of recent studies on the determinants of customer satisfaction and behavioural intention regarding traditional food service settings underlines the need to examine the factors that influence customer satisfaction in other commercial food service establishments (Björk *et al.*, 2023).

The novelty of the present study is that it provides valuable insights that can help both food court tenants and mall operators ensure memorable experiences, which can ultimately enhance their success and sustainability in a highly competitive market (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018; Hosany *et al.*, 2022). To do so, this study examined various factors that determine shoppers' satisfaction with dining at, and behavioural intentions towards, food courts. We also investigated the effect of consumer satisfaction with food courts, which are important touchpoints for malls, on the intention to revisit shopping malls. In doing so, we respond to the

call to explore the determinants of customer satisfaction and behavioural intention beyond restaurants and other commercial food-and-beverage service establishments (Björk *et al.*, 2023).

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Theoretical foundation and research hypotheses**

This study used cognitive appraisal theory (CAT), which was proposed by Lazarus (1991) and Bagozzi (1992), to evaluate the relationship between the antecedents and outcomes of consumer satisfaction with shopping mall food courts. CAT was introduced to explain the link between cognition and emotion, postulating that emotions arise from cognitive appraisals of particular events, situations or environments (Kursan *et al.*, 2023). Bagozzi (1992) extended this theory to explain the relationship between attitudes and behaviours. According to CAT, a consumer's cognitive appraisal of an experience leads to an emotional response that further influences their behavioural intentions (Chen *et al.*, 2023). In a food court, when a consumer favourably evaluates the quality of the food, dining environment and service, as well as the authenticity of the food and the price level, they may feel satisfied; hence, they may be more inclined to offer their patronage to the service providers (Sthapit *et al.*, 2022).

Researchers have empirically verified the significant influence of food quality (Verma, 2022; Singh *et al.*, 2021), dining environment quality (Singh *et al.*, 2021), service quality (Singh *et al.*, 2021), food authenticity (Kala, 2019) and price fairness (Singh *et al.*, 2021) on customer satisfaction and positive behavioural intention in the Indian food service context. In addition, CAT has frequently been adopted by scholars to evaluate consumer experiences and their implications for consumer behaviour. A recent study by Song *et al.* (2023) used CAT to examine the relationship between service authenticity, service quality and diners' revisit intentions in restaurants in China. Beyond the dining context, CAT has also been employed by Ta *et al.* (2023) to investigate the emotional response to consumer behavioural intentions regarding e-logistics service quality. Both studies demonstrate the relevance and usefulness of CAT in rigorously exploring consumer emotions and their influence on behavioural intentions in different research contexts.

### **2.2 Determinants of dining satisfaction**

As there is no research on the determinants of customer satisfaction with food courts located in malls, this study identified five attributes – food quality, service quality, authenticity, dining environment quality and price – based on studies of the predictors of customer satisfaction in restaurant contexts (Choi *et al.*, 2022). These attributes have been frequently identified as significant predictors of customer satisfaction with restaurants in different cultural contexts. Additionally, Zhao and Liu (2023) confirmed the significance of these variables using a large amount of data from customer-generated online reviews.

#### **2.2.1 Food quality**

Scholars suggest that perceived characteristics such as size, taste, presentation and nutritional value constitute food quality (Line *et al.*, 2016). Some studies have indicated that food quality is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the food-and-beverage consumption context. This should not be surprising because, in the context of commercial food service operations, it is logical that poor food quality will lead to dissatisfaction among customers and adversely impact repeat business and revisit intentions (Badu-Baiden *et al.*, 2022). The enduring importance of this attribute is such that, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, customers rated it as more significant than other attributes (Ababneh *et al.*, 2022). Despite the importance of food quality, many studies of food service operations have examined the role of the dining environment and the delivery of service while overlooking food quality and its crucial influence on customers' behaviours and emotions (Slack *et al.*, 2021). However,

other scholars have suggested a close link between food quality and customer satisfaction (Lefrid, 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H1: The quality of the food and beverages in food courts positively influences customer satisfaction.

### **2.2.2 Service quality**

Spreng and Mackoy (1996) suggested that service quality and customer satisfaction lie at the heart of marketing. Service quality is determined by an attitude that develops over time into an overall evaluation of the product or service (Bitner *et al.*, 1990; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Wu and Lin, 2023; Zeithaml, 1988). In the food service industry, maintaining high-quality service is critical for long-term success (Muskat *et al.*, 2019). In today's marketplace, where competition is fierce and businesses vie for customers' patronage, offering high-quality services is crucial because it promotes customer satisfaction and loyalty (Wu and Lin, 2023). In turn, this leads to profitability and the realisation of company objectives; for example, it can result in an increased market share and a greater return on investment (Al-Maamari and Abdulrab, 2017). The influence of service quality on customer satisfaction is well established across different industries, including the restaurant (Song *et al.*, 2023), retail (Amin *et al.*, 2021) and logistics (Ta *et al.*, 2023) sectors. These studies show that both tangible and intangible dimensions of service quality play a crucial role in influencing customer satisfaction. Accordingly, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H2: Service quality in food courts positively influences customer satisfaction.

### **2.2.3 Authenticity**

Authenticity is an important parameter of the dining experience. Increased homogeneity and commercialisation among food service providers have made diners more concerned about authenticity (Al-Kilani and El Hedhli, 2021). Authenticity is premised on the customer's belief that the food and services offered by a business are genuine and represent a specific culture, cuisine and ethnicity (El-Said *et al.*, 2021). As culture represents an integral part of all societies, the demand for 'authentic' food experiences is growing (Putra *et al.*, 2023). Food service providers generally use menus, music, decorations, staff uniforms, the physical environment and other factors to convey authenticity (El-Said *et al.*, 2021). Some studies have examined how operators and marketers in the hospitality industry and the food service sector use this concept as a unique selling point to reinforce their competitive advantage (Zhou *et al.*, 2023). By doing so, they build a positive brand image to better communicate the intangibility of their services – with authenticity comprising a core part of this image. As many food courts offer a range of ethnic cuisines and have become new gastronomic 'hotspots' (Kowalczyk *et al.*, 2020), authenticity plays a significant role in promoting customer satisfaction with these settings (El-Said *et al.*, 2021). Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Authenticity in food courts positively influences customer satisfaction.

### **2.2.4 Quality of the dining environment**

Kotler (1973) argued that a consumer's behaviour is influenced by their physical environment. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) found that customer behavioural responses are the products of emotional reactions, which, in turn, are provoked by physical stimuli. They classified such responses into three types: pleasure, arousal and dominance. Physical stimuli are features of the surrounding environment that can be sensed, such as the interior design, ambience and layout. Booms and Bitner (1982, p.36) defined the physical retail environment as 'the environment in which the service is assembled and in which seller and customer interact,

combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service'. Bitner (1992) later identified three aspects of the retail atmosphere – ambience, functionality and design – which can be both tangible and intangible. According to Line and Hanks (2020), the social and physical aspects of an environment are inseparable, and both are significant characteristics of service settings. Academics and industry practitioners are keenly aware of the importance of the quality of the dining environment in attracting, satisfying and retaining customers. Hence, they work to enhance their understanding of the interplay between the various facets of this concept (Björk *et al.*, 2023). To represent and help enhance this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The quality of the dining environments in food courts positively influences customer satisfaction.

### **2.2.5 Price fairness**

According to Campbell (2007, p.261), price fairness is 'a consumer's subjective perception of a price as being correct, just, or legitimate versus being incorrect, unjust, or illegitimate'. Some recent studies have suggested that pricing is an external cue that customers use to assess the overall quality of an offer or product, and, on this basis, they decide whether to purchase it (Zhao and Liu, 2023). While examining this concept in the context of food service businesses, some scholars have discovered a positive relationship between price fairness, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Choi *et al.*, 2022). For example, Choi *et al.* (2022) found that prices play a significant role in the food-and-beverage service industry. Researchers who have investigated the influence of pricing on buying behaviour have determined that sensitivity to price is a significant predictor of 'buy-or-bye' outcomes (Kim *et al.*, 2022). Prices have also been interpreted as cues for customers' expectations of levels of service quality (Choi *et al.*, 2022). This means that consumers use price as a reference point to evaluate the value of the food and services received from providers. When customers deem prices to be fair and justifiable, they are more likely to be satisfied (Choi *et al.*, 2022). Considering the significance of price fairness and its impact on customer satisfaction, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Price fairness in food courts positively influences customer satisfaction.

## **2.2 Customer satisfaction and behavioural intention**

Behavioural intention can be defined as the degree to which an individual has formulated a plan to perform or not perform a specific behaviour in the future. It is a fundamental concept for those seeking to understand human behaviour, as it represents the core of purposive action and agency in the social world. Behavioural intention is considered a dynamic strategy through which individuals make informed decisions about which behaviours to act on. It is theorised to be the proximal determinant of an individual's favourable post-purchase behaviours, which might include saying positive things about the purchase, recommending the seller to others and wanting to revisit the seller (Chandel *et al.*, 2023).

Customer satisfaction is an indication of the sense of enjoyment and pleasure that a consumer experiences when a product or service meets their expectations (McNeil and Young, 2019). In other words, it is a comparison between pre-purchase expectations and perceived performance following consumption (McNeil and Young, 2019). When a service or product exceeds the expectations of the consumer, the latter will be highly satisfied (Zhao and Liu, 2023). Satisfied customers are more likely to make repeat purchases and be loyal to the service provider (Chandel *et al.*, 2023). Customer satisfaction is a key determinant of consumers' positive behavioural intentions in food service settings (To and Leung, 2023). Some studies have suggested that customer satisfaction predicts customers' intention to spread positive recommendations via word of mouth, purchase products, revisit establishments and pay

premium prices to food-and-beverage service providers (El-Said *et al.*, 2021). This link between customer satisfaction and behavioural intention has been demonstrated not only in conventional food service establishments, such as fine-dining restaurants, casual eateries and restaurants operated by hotels, but also in nonconventional venues, such as gas stations (Lefrid, 2021) and tea houses (Lai, 2005). Given this significance of customer satisfaction, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Customer satisfaction positively influences their behavioural intention towards food courts.

It has been shown that customer satisfaction plays a vital role in establishing long-term relationships between consumers and shopping malls (Amin *et al.*, 2021). However, few studies have empirically examined the positive spill-over effect of customer satisfaction from one service to another within the same service ecosystem (Prentice *et al.*, 2021). A shopping mall is an amalgam of customer touchpoints. Although the term ‘shopping’ indicates the main business of a shopping mall, the latter is also a social and recreational space. This combination of goods, services and entertainment attracts consumers to the mall, as it fulfils their achievement orientations. As shopping malls have become one-stop shops for purchases and entertainment thanks to the confluence of retail options available within them (Zhu and Chung, 2023), ensuring a positive experience for shoppers at each touchpoint is essential to ensuring favourable outcomes in terms of customer behaviour (Stocchi *et al.*, 2016). Stocchi *et al.* (2016) found that permanent entertainment options, including food courts, eateries, cinemas and other entertainment venues, have a significant positive influence on shopper satisfaction and behavioural intention. Other scholars have examined the impact of mall atmospheres, special events and artefacts as well as consumers’ utilitarian, hedonic and symbolic values on shoppers’ behavioural intentions (Kushwaha *et al.*, 2017). However, the role of customer satisfaction with food courts and its spill-over effect on behavioural intentions have yet to be studied. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Customer satisfaction has a positive impact on behavioural intentions towards shopping malls.

Based on these seven hypotheses, we developed the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.

**\*\* Insert Figure 1 about here \*\***

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Sample**

The data for this study were collected from consumers at shopping malls located in Hyderabad, India using an online questionnaire. The target population was individuals who frequently visited food courts between 1 June and 15 July 2022. All malls located within the municipal limits of Hyderabad were approached to obtain their approval for the data collection. Hyderabad was chosen because 52% of the shopping malls located in this municipality are classified as Grade 1, which means that they each have a gross leasable area of more than 46,451 m<sup>2</sup>, a vacancy rate of less than 9% and parking for at least 300 vehicles (Agarwal and Shilpashree, 2022). This figure is the highest among all eight metropolitan regions in India. The figure for Grade 2 (a gross leasable area of 9,290–46,451 m<sup>2</sup>, a vacancy rate of 10%–40% and limited or no parking facilities) is 21%, and that for Grade 3 (a gross leasable area of less than 9,290 m<sup>2</sup>, more than 40% vacancy and limited or no parking facilities) is 27%.

### 3.2 Measures

The first part of the questionnaire included a brief introduction to the study and its aims. The second part stated that participation was voluntary and anonymous to control for evaluation apprehension (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003); it also clarified that the participant could withdraw and end the survey at any time. The third part contained the measurement items for all constructs included in the hypothesised model, which were determined based on the relevant literature (Liu and Jang, 2009; Namkung and Jang, 2008; Ryu *et al.*, 2012; Slack *et al.*, 2021; Wu, 2013). We collected responses on the following items: food quality (freshness, variety, taste, serving temperature, presentation and availability of healthy options), service quality (friendly employees, prompt service, waiting time for food, helpful employees, receiving food as ordered and employees exhibiting sufficient knowledge of the menu), authenticity (atmosphere of the food court, food authenticity and menu presentation), quality of the dining environment (ambient temperature, level of noise, interior design and cleanliness) and price fairness (price of food, price of beverages and value for money). Each dimension was measured on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from very poor (1) to excellent (5). Behavioural intention towards food courts and shopping mall revisit intention were measured separately on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

To test satisfaction, the following three items were used: 'I am satisfied with my dining experience at this food court', 'I am pleased to have visited this food court' and 'I truly enjoyed myself at this food court' (Jang and Namkung, 2009; Liu and Jang, 2009). Behavioural intentions were tested using these statements: 'I would like to come back to this food court', 'I would recommend this food court to friends' and 'I would say positive things about this food court'. Finally, revisit intention was measured with the following statements: 'I would like to come back to this mall', 'I would recommend this mall to friends' and 'I would say positive things about this mall' (Namin, 2017; Namkung and Jang, 2007). Before starting the survey, the participants were asked to recollect their dining experiences in shopping mall food courts within the past seven days and then respond to the questionnaire.

### 3.3 Data collection

We approached a total of 605 shoppers in person to ask them to participate in the study after receiving formal approval from the managers of 13 shopping malls. Prior to the final data collection, a pilot study ( $n = 30$ ) was conducted to test the questionnaire and verify its suitability. The pilot study was used to evaluate how easily the questionnaire could be understood and establish its content and face validity. If they agreed to participate, we forwarded a link to the survey to each shopper. A total of 402 responses were collected. After we deleted 11 incomplete responses, 391 questionnaires were retained. Further scrutiny of the responses revealed 11 extreme multivariate outliers. After excluding these, 380 cases were ultimately used as data for analysis.

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table I. Of the 380 participants, 228 were male, and 152 were female. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 61 years; the mean age was 34. Of the respondents, 18.8% visited shopping malls frequently, and 40.7% did so occasionally; 63.2% reported that they visited the food court every time they went to a shopping mall. Only 2.9% of the respondents stated that they did not visit food courts when they visited shopping malls.

\*\* Insert Table I about here \*\*

## 4. Results

Four different methods were employed to analyse the data. First, the descriptive statistics of each item in the scale were measured using the mean value of the item in each construct. In addition, the normality of the data was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis. Second, the



psychometric properties of all seven constructs were assessed in terms of reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. To assess the psychometric properties of the constructs, the Cronbach's alpha value ( $\alpha$ ), composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), maximum shared variance and correlations between the constructs were calculated. Third, covariance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to measure the goodness of fit of the measurement model, which is a prerequisite for testing a hypothesised structural model. Structural equation model was preferred over path model as it can analyse both latent and observed variables. Fourth, the hypothetical relationship proposed in the conceptual framework was evaluated using IBM AMOS 26 software.

#### ***4.1 Descriptive statistics and testing of the normal distribution of the data***

The descriptive statistics for each item in the proposed constructs, along with the items' factor loadings, skewness and kurtosis, are presented in Table II. The mean values of the items varied between 3.44 and 4.73. The skewness and kurtosis values of each item in the scale varied between 2 and -2 (George and Mallery, 2016), indicating a normal distribution of the data.

\*\* Insert Table II about here \*\*

#### ***4.2 Reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity***

Reliability was analysed using  $\alpha$ , while convergent validity was measured with CR. AVE was assessed to measure the discriminant validity of the constructs. The results are presented in Table III. The CR indicates that all items in each construct had good reliability, as the values ranged from 0.825 to 0.948. The  $\alpha$  values for all constructs were greater than the cut-off value of 0.7, indicating good reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2018).

As the standardised (regression) coefficients of all items in the scale were found to be above 0.7, except for two statements concerning the quality of the dining environment and the quality of the food, the scale indicates good convergent validity. Although the standardised regression scores of the two abovementioned statements were lower than the cut-off value, both were retained in the final analysis because their elimination did not significantly improve the model's goodness of fit. The AVE was greater than 0.5, which confirmed that all constructs had good convergent validity. The square root of AVE, presented diagonally in the correlation matrix (Table III), also indicates that there was acceptable discriminant validity among the constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

\*\* Insert Table III about here \*\*

#### ***4.3 Assessment of the fitness of the proposed model***

A structural model proposed for the sake of research is an approximation of reality, and it may not hold true for all hypotheses. Several fit indices were used to measure the goodness of fit of our proposed model. Although the chi-square value is one of the most commonly used fit indices, it is oversensitive to sample size, model complexity and data normality. Given these weaknesses, other indices are often used to validate the fitness of structural models (Hu and Bentler, 1999). In this study, various goodness-of-fit indices (GFIs) were used, and they are presented in Table IV. The chi-square value (1.511, CMIN/DF) indicates that the proposed model had adequate fit. Moreover, the values of the comparative fit index, GFIs and adjusted GFIs (AGFI), which are close to 1, also indicate a good fit. The threshold value of AGFI is 0.8 (Segars & Grover, 1993). The proposed structural model demonstrated a good fit, as evidenced by the root mean square error of approximation value being below 0.4 (Hair *et al.*, 2018).

#### 4.4 Hypothesis testing

The hypotheses in our model were analysed using the SEM package of AMOS 26. The results of the causal relationships between the different constructs are shown in Fig. 1. The recommendations of Jöreskog and Sörbom (1982) were followed to perform a path analysis using the maximum-likelihood estimation method. The results are presented in Table V.

\*\* Insert Table V about here \*\*

Table V shows that although food quality ( $\beta = 0.495$ ,  $t$  value = 9.224,  $p < 0.01$ ) was the strongest predictor of customer dining satisfaction in shopping malls, price fairness ( $\beta = 0.326$ ,  $t$  value = 5.392,  $p < 0.01$ ), service quality ( $\beta = 0.275$ ,  $t$  value = 4.510,  $p < 0.01$ ), food authenticity ( $\beta = 0.253$ ,  $t$  value = 3.799,  $p < 0.05$ ) and dining environment quality ( $\beta = 0.129$ ,  $t$  value = 2.057,  $p < 0.05$ ) also contributed to customer satisfaction. Thus, Hypotheses 1–5 were supported. The  $R^2$  value (0.71) of the model indicates that the independent variables predicted approximately 71% of the variation in the diners' satisfaction with the food court. A positive impact of diner satisfaction on the intention to revisit the food courts was discovered ( $\beta = 0.883$ ,  $t$  value = 22.148,  $p < 0.01$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 6 was also supported. Finally, a positive association was discovered between customer satisfaction with the food courts and shopping mall revisit intention ( $\beta = 0.636$ ,  $t$  value = 18.337,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

### 5.1 Conclusions

This study examined the factors that influence diner satisfaction and behavioural intention in relation to food courts located in shopping malls based on CAT (Bagozzi, 1992; Lazarus, 1991). We also investigated the spill-over effect of shopper satisfaction on shopper behavioural intention. The results indicate that all antecedents (food quality, service quality, quality of the dining environment, authenticity and price fairness) were statistically significant determinants of shopper satisfaction. Food quality, which includes taste, freshness, presentation and availability of healthy options, emerged as the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction. This indicates that consumers have high expectations concerning the quality of the food served in shopping malls. These findings support previous researchers' indications that food quality is the main predictor of customer satisfaction in these contexts (Lefrid, 2021).

The second most important predictor of consumer satisfaction was price fairness. This indicates that justifiable prices for food and beverages are important external cues that influence customer satisfaction. Fair pricing and a guarantee of value for money are important in food courts. Moreover, the mean score of less than 3.01 for statements related to perceived price fairness shows that the respondents believed prices were generally unfair, and appropriate value was not being offered for their money in food courts. This suggests a need to develop strategies to improve perceived price fairness. These findings echo prior research indications that price fairness is an important predictor of customer satisfaction in dining contexts (Severt *et al.*, 2022).

Service quality, dining environment quality and authenticity were further significant antecedents of shopper satisfaction with food courts. This finding corroborates studies that have documented the significance of service quality (Björk *et al.*, 2023) and authenticity (El-Said *et al.*, 2021). However, it contradicts suggestions that the quality of the dining environment does not significantly influence customer satisfaction (Choi *et al.*, 2022).

We found that consumer satisfaction was a significant predictor of shoppers' behavioural intentions towards food courts. This is consistent with research indicating that consumer satisfaction is a strong predictor of behavioural intention (To and Leung, 2023). The analysis of the spill-over effect of customer satisfaction with food courts on behavioural intention

towards malls discovered a positive relationship between these two constructs. This highlights the importance of consistent customer experiences across different touchpoints and their impact on shoppers' behaviours.

### ***5.2 Theoretical implications***

The results of this study are theoretically important because they provide empirical evidence of the link between food, environment and service quality, price fairness, food authenticity and customer satisfaction with food courts located in shopping malls, which has rarely been studied. The study's theoretical contribution is threefold. First, by exploring the antecedents of customer satisfaction with food courts, this research extends our understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of consumers' dining behaviours beyond conventional food-and-beverage service establishments. The constructs that reflect the dining behaviours of consumers (i.e., food quality, service quality, dining environment quality, price fairness and authenticity) have mostly been applied in the restaurant industry. Here, they have been tested in the context of food courts located in shopping malls, an unconventional food service sector. Therefore, this study paves a path for further research to adopt different dining behaviour constructs in atypical food service contexts.

Second, by examining the relationship between dining satisfaction and behavioural intention towards shopping malls, we provide empirical evidence of the impact of customer experiences at different touchpoints within the service premises in question. Furthermore, the study integrates the five key determinants frequently found to be strong predictors of consumer satisfaction with restaurants – food quality, service quality, quality of the dining environment, price fairness and authenticity – into a single model. This approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape customer satisfaction with food courts. Moreover, by focusing on food courts in shopping malls as a unique setting, this study contributes to the literature by acknowledging the significance of consumers' dining satisfaction and its impact on their behavioural intentions towards shopping malls.

Third, by applying CAT, this research advances the field by providing evidence of the applicability of this theory to food service establishments located in retail settings.

### ***5.3 Practical implications***

The findings of this study have important implications for Indian food court operators and shopping mall managers. First, food service providers in Indian shopping malls should recognise that offering suitably priced and high-quality experiences is vital for sustaining their businesses in the long term. Second, food court staff and shopping mall managers should offer prompt service and warm hospitality to visitors to enhance customer satisfaction. In addition, staff should be trained regularly to increase customer satisfaction. Third, concentrating on food quality, which is a strong predictor of satisfaction, implies that service providers must focus on the quality of the food and beverages sold to consumers. The focus should be on serving food that is healthy, well preserved, tasty and stored at the right temperature. In addition, investment in quality-related initiatives by food court operators is crucial. Fourth, focusing on the quality and authenticity of the dining environment is crucial for satisfying shoppers and improving their positive behavioural intentions towards food courts. Thus, Indian food court operators and shopping mall managers should offer clean and pleasant environments to customers. Dining environments should be spacious enough to serve both small and large groups. In addition, comfortable and attractive furnishings (i.e. ambience) can help ensure customer satisfaction. As Indian consumers' expectations for shopping malls grow, it becomes increasingly vital for food service providers and mall operators to provide high-quality experiences by offering multiple gastronomic options. Fifth, food court operators must justify their prices. They can do so by adjusting portions, achieving cleanliness and using quality ingredients, which will be very convenient from a cost–benefit point of view. Sixth, as the spill-over effect of customer

satisfaction with food courts on behavioural intentions towards shopping malls was found to be strong, mall managers need to highlight the importance of quality experiences among tenants. As the success of a shopping mall relies heavily on how effectively it is managed across different touchpoints, ensuring a satisfactory experience at each of these points is fundamental, given the ever-increasing competition and changing consumer needs.

#### **5.4 Limitations and future research**

This study has several limitations. First, the findings pertain only to shopping malls in Hyderabad, India. Scholars should examine other cultural and geographical settings. Second, although we analysed the relationship between food court attributes and customer satisfaction and behavioural intention, the influence of shoppers' ages, genders, income and other demographics was not explored. Therefore, future studies should investigate consumers' personal characteristics and their influence on perceptions of food courts. Third, although this study documented the spill-over effect of customer satisfaction with food courts on behavioural intentions towards shopping malls, there is a need to examine this effect in different cultural contexts and populations. Finally, since malls combine shopping and other leisure activities, understanding the contribution of each element to customer satisfaction is vital for ensuring the successful operation of these establishments.

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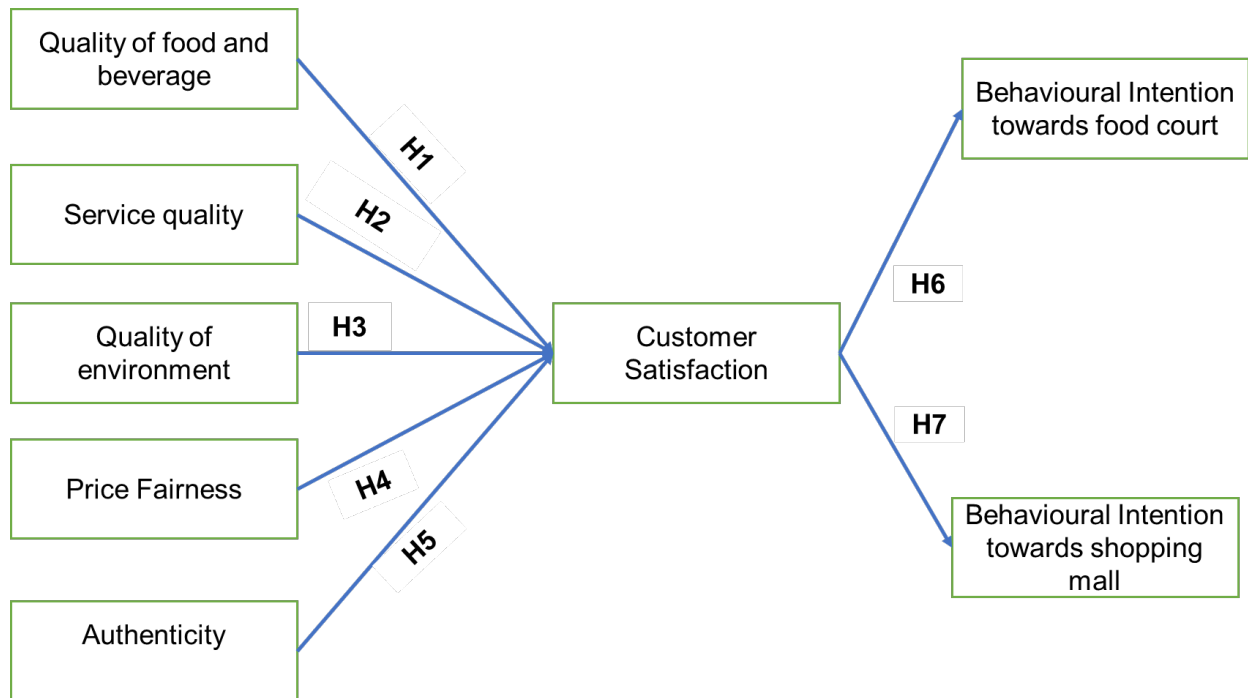
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**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework

**Table I.** Demographic profile of respondents

<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency (n = 380)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	228	60.0
Female	152	40.0
<b>Age</b>		
Mean	34	
Minimum	18	
Maximum	61	
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	123	32.4
Employed	201	52.9
Homemaker	47	12.4
Professional	4	1.0
Other	5	1.3
<b>Frequency of visits to a shopping mall per month</b>		
Frequently	71	18.8
Occasionally	155	40.7
Sometimes	91	23.7
Rarely	64	16.8
<b>Visit food court during each visit to mall</b>		
Yes	240	63.2
Maybe	129	33.9
No	11	2.9

**Table II.** Descriptive statistics, skewness and kurtosis

S. No	Construct	Items	Mean	$\lambda$	S	K
<b>1</b>	<b>Quality of food &amp; beverage (QFB)</b>					
	Freshness of food served	FQ1	4.04	0.783	-0.464	-0.229
	Food served is healthy	FQ2	4.11	0.674	-0.744	0.683
	Food served is well presented	FQ3	4.07	0.855	-0.624	0.492
	Food served is tasty	FQ4	4.04	0.745	-0.623	0.249
	Food is served at right temperature	FQ5	3.63	0.710	-0.247	-0.434
<b>2</b>	<b>Service quality (SQL)</b>					
	Waiting time for food service	SQ1	3.96	0.777	-0.594	0.571
	Employee knowledge of menu	SQ2	4.08	0.793	-0.775	0.667
	Prompt service	SQ3	4.16	0.840	-0.818	0.478
	Friendliness of employees	SQ4	4.14	0.723	-1.042	1.120
	Food served as ordered	SQ5	3.99	0.701	-0.649	0.139
<b>3</b>	<b>Quality of environment at food court (QEN)</b>					
	Cleanliness in food court	EQ1	4.10	0.826	-0.748	0.255
	Noise level in food court	EQ2	3.57	0.620	-0.398	-0.334
	Temperature in food court	EQ3	4.16	0.810	-0.898	0.545
	Pleasantness of food court	EQ4	4.08	0.776	-0.785	0.509
<b>4</b>	<b>Price fairness (PRF)</b>					
	Price of the food	PF1	2.57	0.919	-0.576	-0.286
	Price is fair	PF2	2.88	0.892	-0.391	-0.609
	Value for money	PF3	3.01	0.814	-0.399	-0.56
<b>5</b>	<b>Authenticity (AUT)</b>					
	Use of authentic ingredients	AUT1	4.07	0.717	-0.485	-0.159
	Authentic taste of food	AUT2	3.95	0.849	-0.517	0.240
	Authentic presentation	AUT3	4.05	0.775	-0.552	-0.080
<b>6</b>	<b>Satisfaction (SAT)</b>					

	I truly enjoyed myself at this food court	SAT1	4.73	0.930	-1.09	1.950
	My choice to visit this food court was a good one	SAT2	4.60	0.923	-0.834	0.878
	I am satisfied with my overall dining experience at the food court	SAT3	4.70	0.934	-0.982	1.320
<b>7</b>	<b>Behavioural Intention (BIN)</b>					
	I would say positive things about the food court	BIFC1	4.64	0.872	-0.76	0.544
	I would like to come back to this food court	BIFC2	4.57	0.903	-1.09	1.850
	I would recommend this food court to friends	BIFC3	4.59	0.839	-0.965	1.020
<b>8</b>	<b>Mall revisit intention (MRI)</b>					
	I would like to come back to the mall	MRI1	4.08	0.904	-1.122	1.624
	I would say positive things about the shopping mall	MRI2	3.98	0.821	-1.101	1.921
	I would recommend this mall to friends	MRI3	4.11	0.879	-0.820	0.384

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Note:  $\lambda$  =Factor loadings, S = skewness, K = kurtosis

**Table III.** Convergent and discriminant validity

<b>Constructs</b>	<b><math>\alpha</math></b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>SAT</b>	<b>BINT</b>	<b>BIM</b>	<b>QENV</b>	<b>AUT</b>	<b>SQ</b>	<b>QFB</b>	<b>PRF</b>
<b>SAT</b>	0.908	0.948	0.859	<b>0.927</b>							
<b>BINT</b>	0.903	0.905	0.760	0.596	<b>0.872</b>						
<b>MRI</b>	0.838	0.903	0.756	0.778	0.612	<b>0.869</b>					
<b>QENV</b>	0.846	0.846	0.547	0.527	0.596	0.378	<b>0.739</b>				
<b>AUT</b>	0.830	0.825	0.612	0.679	0.614	0.381	0.618	<b>0.782</b>			
<b>SQ</b>	0.876	0.878	0.591	0.520	0.501	0.501	0.621	0.573	<b>0.768</b>		
<b>QFB</b>	0.869	0.869	0.572	0.582	0.487	0.508	0.559	0.572	0.642	<b>0.756</b>	
<b>PRF</b>	0.905	0.908	0.768	0.705	0.482	0.578	0.500	0.505	0.430	0.418	<b>0.876</b>

Note: Square root of AVE represented diagonally; CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted, SAT = Satisfaction, BINT = Behavioural Intention, MRI = Mall Revisit Intention, QENV = Quality of environment at food court, AUT = Authenticity, SQ = Service Quality, QFB = Quality of Food and Beverage, PRF = Price Fairness

**Table IV.** Assessing the fitness of the measurement model

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Threshold value</b>	<b>Model value</b>
CMIN/DF (383.88/225)	< 3.00 Good	1.511
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> 0.95 – Great > 0.90 – Good	0.981
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	> 0.95 – Excellent > 0.90 – Traditional > 0.80 – Permissible	0.930
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI)	> 0.80 – Acceptable	0.907
SRMR	< 0.08 – Acceptable	0.032
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	< 0.05 – Good 0.05 to 0.10 – Moderate	0.037
Probability of Close Fit (P Close)	> 0.05	0.999

Note: CMIN/DF = Minimum discrepancy divided by its degrees of freedom, CFI = Comparative Fit Index, GFI = Goodness-of-Fit Index, AGFI = Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index, SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, P Close = Probability of Close Fit

**Table V.** Hypothesis testing

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Independent variable</b>		<b>Dependent variable</b>	<b>Standardised beta</b>	<b>t value</b>	<b>Result</b>
H1	Quality of food & beverage	←	Satisfaction	0.495**	9.224	Supported
H2	Service quality	←	Satisfaction	0.275**	4.510	Supported
H3	Environment quality	←	Satisfaction	0.129*	2.057	Supported
H4	Price fairness	←	Satisfaction	0.326**	5.392	Supported
H5	Authenticity	←	Satisfaction	0.253*	3.799	Supported
H6	Satisfaction	←	Behavioural intention	0.883**	22.148	Supported
H7	Satisfaction	←	Mall revisit intention	0.636**	18.337	Supported

\* Significant at 5 percent. \*\* Significant at 1 percent.