

THE EFFECTS OF MALL ENTERTAINMENT VALUE ON MALL PROFITABILITY

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Overview

Entertainment has emerged as a guiding paradigm for malls. Entertainment is considered to be a powerful motivational variable for consumer choice. As such, one would expect a relationship between entertainment and mall productivity to have been clearly established. A review of the available research literature indicated that entertainment has been related to mall productivity only conceptually and anecdotally and very circumspectly. This research was designed to test the relationship between the entertainment value of malls and their sales per square foot, annual customer count, average lease rate, and percentage of space leased. Findings clearly showed that a relationship does exist but the relationship is different for mall managers' views of the entertainment value of their mall and consumers' views of the same mall. The results suggest that there are dimensions to mall entertainment that may facilitate or impair mall productivity.



■ Introduction

The proliferation of shopping malls over the past 30 years has had an indelible impact on the structure of retailing. According to statistics compiled by the International Council of Shopping Centers in 1999 there were 43,600 malls with 5.33 billion square feet of retail space (over 20 square feet for each American), accounting for nearly 100 trillion dollars of sales—about 40% of all retail sales, 8% of the labor force, and 13% of the GNP (ICSC, 1999; Turchiana, 1990).

Malls, though, are more than just the accumulation of space and retail dollars. Malls are centers of community activities, the centerpiece of revitalization of declining urban centers (e.g., Harborplace in Baltimore) and so large that they are among the most popular attractions in their states. The Mall of America is one of the top three attractions in the United States. More people visit the Mall of America in one year than visit the Statue of Liberty, the Grand Canyon and the Washington Monument combined. The top two tourist attractions in Illinois are both shopping malls—Woodfield Mall and Gurnee Mills Mall.

■ Malls as Arenas of Entertainment

What defines the nature and scope of consumers' attraction to the mall? Certainly consumers are attracted to the mall because of its economic utility. There is a greater probability that consumers will find what they want at a mall than at an individual store. Yet current writing about malls appears to identify a more subtle magnetism defined by "malls as entertainment." This thinking has led to a paradigm shift not only in mall development and management but also in retailing. There is even a new word for this movement—"retailtainment" (Hoban, 1997). In its simplest form, the thinking is that in a "commoditized" world where one store is the same as another and one piece of merchandise is the same as the next, it is the ability to entertain that will capture consumers hearts, minds, and wallets. Yet for all the professional and scholarly talk about entertainment no one has tried to ascertain how entertainment is related to mall profitability. If entertainment is not related to bottom line profitability of a mall, there is a lot of misplaced effort.

Entertainment Malls

The National Research Bureau's database of over 37,000 malls identifies only 137 shopping centers as strategically positioned for entertainment

(1999). In their operational definition, a shopping center positioned for entertainment consists primarily of food and specialty retailers and entertainment facilities (many with a heavy concentration of tourist traffic). In their seminal definitional article of entertainment in malls the International Council of Shopping Centers (*ICSC Research Quarterly*, 1995) identified 20 malls as defining the category (see Table 1). While the "mall as entertainment" is certainly defined by prototypical examples such as the Mall of America or Caesar's Forum Shops, it is clear that most consumers local shopping centers have elements of those things that define entertainment in the malls of grander scale. If entertainment is going to be a central focus of mall development and management at the local or regional level, we must begin to understand the entertainment value that any mall has in the eyes of consumers and how this entertainment value is related to profitability and other productivity measures.

TABLE 1. INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF SHOPPING CENTERS' LIST OF ENTERTAINMENT MALLS

Alabama Shepard, Houston, TX
The Avenue at Tower City Center, Cleveland, OH
Centro Comercial Perinorte, Cuautitlan, Izcalli, Mexico
Dadeland Mall, Miami, FL
Downtown Plaza, Sacramento, CA
Forum Shops at Caesars Las Vegas, NV
Harborplace, Baltimore, MD
Horizon Outlet Center, Oshkosh, WI
Horton Plaza, San Diego, CA
Lenox Square, Atlanta, GA
Mall of America, Bloomington, MN
Outlets of Birch Run, Birch Run, MI
River Oaks, Houston, TX
Riverwalk, New Orleans, LA
Universal City Walk, Universal City, CA
Village Arcade, Houston, TX
West Edmonton Mall, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
Woodbine Centre, Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada

Entertainment as a Patronage Variable

The current retail environment is one of too many stores competing for the shopper's attention and patronage, and shoppers who are increasingly dissatisfied with the sameness of the merchandise offerings and want to spend less time shopping. This decreased time in the retail setting has had a negative effect on retailers' revenues per shopper trip and retailers have

been searching to find something that will keep shoppers in their stores longer. Stores are now trying to excite all the senses and build entertainment into their merchandise strategy (e.g., Warner Bros., NikeTown, Sony). An entire segment of the restaurant industry has developed through the use of entertainment as the differentiating factor in otherwise similar menus (e.g., Planet Hollywood, Rainforest Cafe). The use of entertainment as a competitive tool has not been limited to individual retailers. Malls are being built with large entertainment centers including rides, skating rinks, amusement parks, tens of movie theaters, museums, and virtual reality centers. As competition increases, entertainment seems to be becoming an even more important part of the retail scene.

■ Research Objective

The goal of this study is to present a measure of mall entertainment value and then determine what the overall impact of the entertainment value of a mall has on mall profitability and productivity (e.g., annual sales per square foot, percentage of occupied space, and average lease rate.) The simple prediction is that malls that are more entertaining will be more productive.

Previous Research

Research has found consistently that consumers go shopping for experiential, emotional, and entertainment reasons (Belk, 1975; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Feinberg et al, 1989; Langrehr, 1991), as well as for the merchandise they take home. Popular writers have compared the mall to theater in which shopping is just part of the experience (Kowinski, 1985). "In truth, I don't go to the malls to shop. Sure I might buy something, but it's not opportunity or need that brings me to a mall, it is the glitter and glitz, the chance to mingle. A good mall is like a good man: it offers entertainment, excitement, and enlightenment" (Gershman, 1988). Although not specifically speaking of shopping malls, Mehrabian and Russell (1974) believe that retail environments that create heightened experiences and pleasure lead to higher levels of buying. It does not take much of a logical leap to conclude that the same should hold true of malls. Mall environments that create heightened experiences and pleasure should lead to higher levels of buying.

Stores and malls are being architecturally redesigned and updated to increase the drama, the experience of going shopping (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). Mall managers have enthusiastically embraced the notion that increasing the social and entertaining nature of malls is important.

They plan events, institute clubs (e.g., walking exercise clubs), and expand food and entertainment offerings (e.g., theaters, virtual reality centers) all in an effort to increase revenues generated through the mall retailers (Christman, 1988; Henry, 1986; Kowinski, 1986; Stoffell, 1988). This trend has found its peak in malls designed with as much entertainment value as shopping value (e.g., West Edmonton, Mall of America). In these malls the recreation is surrounded by hundreds of stores. The entertainment and the stores become destinations and the distinction between mall, shopping, and entertainment is blurred.

Entertainment may be related to purchase behavior by way of mood. Sherman and Smith (1986) found that positive moods were related to self-reported purchase and spending. High levels of experience (arousal) have been associated with excessive and compulsive spending. In an extensive literature review, Langrehr (1991) presented a number of studies that showed impacts of environmental stimuli on perceptions and behaviors in non-shopping environments. He speculated that these stimuli acting in a natural retail/mall arena would have the positive impact of facilitating shopping and spending behavior.

In one of the few studies that looked at malls as entertainment, Bloch, Ridgeway and Nelson (1991) factor analyzed mall behaviors. Five of the six factors that emerged underlying the structure of consumer behavior of shopping centers were entertainment related: eating, browsing/socializing, movies, exercise, socializing. Only 45% of the activities were shopping related activities. More than 50% of all activity in the mall could be considered entertainment.

Others have found clear relationships between recreational and social motives in mall shopping (Eastlick, Lotz and Shim, 1998; Shim and Eastlick, 1998). Bloch, Ridgeway and Dawson (1994) showed that mall choice and use reflected the psychological and social benefits afforded by the mall. These benefits included means of escape, place to explore, place to spend time, and a place to visit others. Indeed, Feinberg et al (1989) showed the mall to be an arena of social activity and more like the farmers market than the sterile supermarket. These results were clearly supported by the demonstration of a strong relationship between the values of excitement and a marginal relationship between the value of fun and enjoyment of life and frequency of mall visits (Swinyard, 1998).

Haynes and Talpade (1996) completed what at first glance might be the only study finding a direct link between entertainment and mall productivity. Their research question asked directly, "Does entertainment draw shoppers?" However, their operational definition of entertainment was the existence in the mall of a "family entertainment center" (amusement park). Their findings indicated that anywhere from 2 to 14% of shoppers might be attracted to an entertainment center. There was no

reflection that a family entertainment center is only one, and very limited, form of entertainment value for a shopper.

The real question is: does the entertainment value of a mall relate to measures of productivity? No studies done yet have examined this issue directly. Haynes and Talpade (1996) indirectly shed light on this issue by showing that mall shoppers drawn to a mall primarily for a department store spend more money per visit and more time shopping than those drawn to the mall for a family entertainment center. Their results actually suggest that entertainment detracts from mall productivity by stealing and redirecting consumer time, effort and money away from mall shopping. This finding was replicated and enhanced by Eastlick, Lotz and Shim (1998).

■ The Subjective and Objective Measurement of Mall Entertainment Value

The first step in trying to determine the impact of how the entertainment value of a mall may affect such areas as sales and profitability is to develop a measure of what constitutes mall entertainment to a consumer. A review of the retail literature found little agreed-upon definition of mall entertainment. The scales developed in the literature cited above were idiosyncratic measures developed from the researcher point of view, measuring preconceived notions of what consumers might find entertaining. John Konarski (1995) of the International Council of Shopping Centers has been cited as suggesting that there are three major sources of mall entertainment: permanent and temporary entertainment arranged by the mall management; retailers whose core products are heavily entertainment-based (e.g., movie theaters, some restaurants); and individual retail operations which may provide entertainment value (e.g., a Disney store, Warner Bros.) (See also ICSC, 1995.)

The current research conducted consumer focus groups to learn how consumers think of entertainment and what aspects of a mall visit may provide entertainment value and found consumers' definitions to be a bit more complex. Consumers largely identified entertainment as some activity or behavior that provided a diversion or relief from normal day-to-day activities such as movies, theater, sporting events, travel, consumer hobbies and crafts, as well as shopping. Consumers also mentioned that the architecture and interior design of the mall itself might provide

entertainment value. A second area dealt with interpersonal aspects of the mall. Consumers enjoy "people watching" as a type of entertainment value provided by malls. Entertainment is the pleasure of observing and commenting on other shoppers. Consumers also felt that the store mix of a mall could provide entertainment value. Individual retailers provide entertainment value. Certain stores that are entertaining because of the uniqueness of their products (e.g., Sharper Image), and/or have greater inherent entertainment value (e.g., Warner Bros. store) should create greater entertainment value for the mall. A final attribute derived from the consumer focus groups dealt with mall location. Consumers felt that some malls were located in areas that seemed to generate greater entertainment value. Mall locations where there were multiple opportunities for the consumer to engage in diversionary activities were felt to provide greater entertainment value. Those "outside" features most commonly mentioned were restaurants and bars near the mall or even on the mall property perimeter.

A set of 38 questions was developed to measure all these aspects of mall entertainment. These questions were 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert questions (see Table 2). The summed scores across the 38 questions were a measure of entertainment value—the higher the score, the greater the entertainment value in that mall.

■ The Current Study

The goal of the current study was to establish the links between entertainment value (as measured by the mall entertainment value scale described above) and mall productivity (sales per square foot, percentage of space leased, annual customer count, and average lease rate). Two subject populations were used. In the first, mall managers were asked to assess the entertainment value of their mall as well as provide mall productivity data. The second group consisted of consumers who shop in the malls. These consumers were asked about the entertainment value of the malls. Thus we had two separate but comparable databases, one of the mall managers' perceptions of their mall and the second of the consumers' perceptions of the same mall, plus objective data on mall productivity. In this way mall entertainment value could be established from the points of view of the two principal groups—managers who run them and consumers who use them. The divergence and/or convergence of the relationships uncovered can go a long way to understanding the comprehensiveness of the relationship between entertainment and mall productivity.

TABLE 2. THE ENTERTAINMENT QUESTIONS

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1. There is an air of excitement in the mall.
 2. There is always something new and interesting going on at the mall.
 3. The sights and sounds at the mall are fun.
 4. There is always something fun to do at the mall.
 5. Has a good amusement area for adults.
 6. The mixture of sights and sounds at the mall add pleasure to my shopping experience.
 7. Has good places to get "mall food."
 8. Has good special exhibits.
 9. Is a good place to go with friends.
 10. One of the best things about shopping at the mall is the people who shop there.
 11. I look forward to visiting with people at the mall.
 12. One of the best things about shopping at the mall is the people who work there.
 13. Is a fun place to go.
 14. Has a good video and/or game arcade.
 15. Has good restaurants/bars in or near the mall.
 16. The mall plays music that I like.
 17. Mall music is played at an appropriate volume.
 18. The mall's architecture gives it an attractive character.
 19. The mall is decorated in an attractive fashion.
 20. The interior wall and floor color schemes are attractive.
 21. The overall design of the mall is interesting.
 22. The layout of the mall makes it easy to get to the stores you want.
 23. The layout of the mall makes it easy to get to the food areas.
 24. The layout of the mall makes it easy to get to the restrooms.
 25. Overall, the layout makes it easy to get around.
 26. Is a good place for "people-watching."
 27. Has stores with friendly employees.
 28. Is a friendly place to shop.
 29. Has unique stores.
 30. I am never bored at the mall.
 31. Has a good movie theater.
 32. Has a good amusement area for children.
 33. There is more to do at the mall than just shopping.
 34. Has good special events or shows.
 35. Is a good place to go with the family.
 36. Is a good place to go to just "get away."
 37. I enjoy socializing with people at the mall.
 38. Is a good place for "window shopping."
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The specific hypotheses of the study were:

- H1. There are positive relationships between the entertainment value of the mall and mall productivity. These relationships should exist in the same form for both managers and customers.
- H2. For consumers, mall entertainment will be positively related to mall patronage.

■ Results

Sample 1

Fifty mall managers were mailed the Entertainment Value Survey that included measures of mall productivity—sales per square foot, customer count, percentage of space occupied, average lease rate. Twenty-seven mall managers responded.

Sample 2

Six malls were randomly selected from the 27 malls for which we had complete data. Consumers were contacted in a telephone interview using numbers randomly selected from a commercially available list of consumer names, addresses, and phone numbers. Telephone calls were made randomly across the seven malls until 100 telephone interviews were completed. Ninety-eight consumers with complete data were used in the analysis.

Two types of entertainment scores were used in the analysis. The first was an Overall Entertainment Index that consisted of the summed score across all 38 entertainment questions. The second score was the entertainment value ascribed to the mall by a self-reported Likert question. For consumers the question was: "How entertaining is it for you to shop in this mall?"

For mall managers the question was: "How would you rate your mall at providing entertainment value for your customers?"

Relationship of Entertainment Measures (Table 3)

There were four measures of entertainment: an index resulting from the sum of the 38 questions measuring various aspects of entertainment in the mall and a self-report measure of how entertaining the mall is. For consumers and for mall managers there was a significant positive correlation between their self-report of mall entertainment and their index score. As mall managers and consumers reported their mall to be entertaining the corresponding entertainment index score was higher ($r=.61$ for consumers, $r=.83$ for mall managers). Thus the index score appears to be measuring entertainment. However, there were no significant relationships between the mall managers' index scores or self-report and the entertainment index or self-report of consumers. Thus, consumers and mall man-

agers are seeing the same malls differently. What the mall manager sees as entertaining is clearly not what the consumer sees as entertaining. This gap has important managerial implications.

TABLE 3 ENTERTAINMENT MEASURES

	CEI	CSR	MEI	MSR
Entertainment Consumer Index (CEI)	—	.61*	.12	.04
Consumer Self-Report of Entertainment Value of the Mall (CSR)	.61*	—	.03	-.09
Mall Manager Entertainment Index (MEI)	.12	.03	—	.83*
Mall Manager Self-Report of Entertainment Value of the Mall (MSR)	.04	-.09	.83*	—

* $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

*** $p < .10$

Relationship Between Entertainment and Mall Productivity Measured by Entertainment Index (Table 4)

The overall Entertainment Index (EI) for consumers and for managers was related to mall productivity but differently for mall managers and consumers.

TABLE 4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED ENTERTAINMENT AND MALL PRODUCTIVITY

Entertainment Index	Sales per Square Foot	Annual Customer Count	Percent Occupied Space	Average Lease Rate
Mall Managers	.35**	.64*	.51*	.25
Consumers	.10	.30*	.06	.05

* $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

*** $p < .10$

Mall Managers. The EI was correlated with sales per square foot, customer count, and percentage of occupied space. As predicted, as malls increase in entertainment value (as perceived by managers) the sales per square foot are higher, there are more customers annually, and there are

higher percentages of leased spaces. As predicted, the entertainment value of the mall is related to measures of productivity.

Consumers. The relationship between EI and mall productivity was not as strong or consistent as found in the mall manager data. Entertainment was only related to customer count.

Relationship between Entertainment and Mall Productivity Measured by the Self-Report Entertainment in the Mall (Table 5)

Mall managers and consumers were asked to rate their particular malls on how entertaining they were.

TABLE 5. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED ENTERTAINMENT VALUE AND MALL PRODUCTIVITY

Self-Report of Entertainment	Sales per Square Foot	Annual Customer Count	Percent Occupied Space	Average Lease Rate
Consumers	.15***	.30**	.002	.03
Mall Managers	.10	.63*	-.32*	.84*

* $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

*** $p < .10$

Mall Managers. Mall manager perceptions of the entertainment value of their mall for consumers were significantly correlated with annual customer count ($r=.63$) and average lease rate ($r=.84$). Surprisingly, the self-report of entertainment was negatively related to percentage of occupied space and not related to sales per square foot.

Consumers. Self-reported entertainment value of their mall was marginally related to sales per square foot ($r=.15$) and significantly related to annual customer count ($r=.30$). Self-reported entertainment was not related to percentage of occupied space or average lease rate.

Relationship between Consumer-Perceived Entertainment Value of Mall and Mall Shopping Behavior (Table 6)

The relationship between the consumers' perceptions of the entertainment value of the mall and their consumer behavior was consistent and clear.

TABLE 6. ENTERTAINMENT AND SHOPPING BEHAVIOR

Consumers	Percent of Shopping Done			Frequency of Visits to the Mall	Number of Items Purchased Last Visit	Percent of Time Spent	
	In Mall	Other Malls	Non-Malls			Browsing	Shopping
Entertainment Index Self-Report	.33*	.08	-.35*	.24*	.06	.33*	-.43*
Entertainment Value	.29*	.01	-.28*	.35*	.03	.52*	-.57*

* $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .10$

The EI score and the self-report score of how entertaining the mall is were related positively to percentage of all shopping done in that mall, negatively related to shopping in other malls, positively related to frequency of visits to the mall, and positively related to percentage of time in the mall in browsing behavior. In both cases entertainment value was not related to number of items purchased and percentage of time spent engaging in shopping behavior. This may explain why entertainment is not related to sales per square foot. Entertainment behavior might be distracting rather than facilitating.

■ Discussion and Conclusion

Mall managers and consumers at their malls were surveyed about how entertaining their malls were. These values were then related to objective measures of mall productivity and consumer behaviors.

While there is some evidence that mall entertainment value is related to mall productivity, the relationships are inconsistent. Mall manager perceptions and consumer perceptions hold differing values in predicting mall productivity. Mall manager estimates of entertainment value of their malls were clearly related to mall productivity. From the mall managers' point of view, the greater the entertainment value of their malls, the greater the sales per square foot. Unfortunately it is the consumer perception that is paramount. And in this case there is a wide divergence between how mall managers see their mall and how consumers see the mall.

Despite these differences there is enough evidence in this data to demonstrate the relationship between entertainment and mall productivity. While entertainment value is not related to all measures of productivity it is related to enough measures to establish a relationship that until now has only been hinted at.

Suggesting that entertainment value is related to mall profitability does not take into account the significant finding in these data that entertainment value is negatively related to percentage of time spent in shopping behavior and number of items purchased. At some level, then, entertainment value is a distracter and not a facilitator to shopping behavior.

There are some limitations that need to be raised before suggesting the contribution of this study. First, the study was conducted on a very limited sample of malls and consumers. It is clear that a replication and extension must be done on a wider sample. Despite these limi-

tations the potential contribution of this research can be summarized as follows:

- For the first time a substantial link (not simply conceptual) between entertainment and mall productivity has been established.
- Building upon prior research that has defined entertainment as a function of having entertaining activities and areas, this study shows that malls vary along a continuum of entertaining value. Thus, it is not necessary to have an amusement area or be the Mall of America (or one of those 137 malls the National Research Bureau has identified as entertainment malls) to have entertainment value. If entertainment value is related to productivity then all malls, large and small, can become more entertaining. The next step in this research program is to break out dimensions of entertainment and view how they affect mall productivity.
- The gap between mall manager perceptions and consumer perceptions is striking. It is sometimes said that the most destructive thing that executives do is talk to each other. In this case it is clear that managers do not have a clear and accurate idea of how their consumers are viewing the entertainment aspects of their malls.

The results of this study create concern for the “retailtainment” movement in the mall and retail industries. Not all entertainment is going to be related to productivity. It is the responsibility for research to tease out the “good” and the “bad” entertainment so that the rush for survival and profit is not laced with the very seeds of mall destruction.

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