



Enhancing customer shopping experience in malls of emerging countries – the “Mauritius” experience

Thanika Devi Juwaheer, Sharmila Pudaruth and Priyasha Ramdin
Faculty of Law and Management, University of Mauritius, Reduit, Mauritius

Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to explore the contributing factors impacting on shopping experiences of customers in Mauritius. It also seeks to investigate the relative significance of these factors in predicting the willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper applies the data reduction technique using exploratory factor analysis on a sample of 600 respondents drawn from 23 shopping malls and shopping centres across Mauritius and condenses a set of 33 mall attributes into a list of six comprehensible dimensions about shopping experience. The multiple regression analysis was also conducted to investigate the importance of the six shopping experience dimensions in influencing the behavioural intentions of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius in future.

Findings – The factor analysis identified that customers visualise shopping experience as a combination of six factors: “provision of childcare facilities”, “health and wellness events”, “entertaining events”, “sports and games facilities”, “value-added restaurant facilities” and “shopping events”. The results of the regression analysis have also suggested that the willingness of customers to visit the shopping malls is primarily derived from one significant factor related to “entertainment facilities and events”.

Practical implications – Shopping mall managers should cater for more entertainment facilities and events. Mall developers should also focus on improving restaurant facilities by maximizing regular renovation of food courts, integrating international coffee shops and fast food outlets in various shopping malls of Mauritius.

Originality/value – The study is still a pioneer work on the factors impacting on shopping experiences in the context of Mauritius which is still a developing nation. Yet, it would serve as a roadmap for mall managers and designers to enhance shopping experience in similar contexts.

Keywords Shopping malls, Factors, Shopping experiences, Mauritian context, Shopping, Shopping centers, Shopping centres management

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

It is important to note that there has been a paradigm shift from shopping malls being comprised of traditional shopping activities to treating them as retail-entertainment complexes and community centres for social and entertaining events. Shopping malls are not only centres for shopping but they are now integrated with highly structured social spaces for entertainment, interaction and other types of consumer excitement. Similarly, the shopping climate has been radically transformed with the mushrooming of various shopping malls and centres all over the world. Indeed, the mall industry has been evolving at an accelerating pace in Mauritius. Various shopping malls are



competing against each other and mall development is expected to have a sustainable growth in the forthcoming years. Shopping experiences are now regarded as an emerging paradigm for mall designers and developers all over the world.

In Mauritius, the mall industry has also been significantly transformed with the presence of highly competitive shopping malls. Mall designers and managers have become conscious that shopping experience is the key for sustainable success in the mall industry. Similarly, customers are now putting more emphasis on the experiential part when they are visiting various shopping malls. However, just a few empirical studies have analysed the factors that can enhance experiences of customers in shopping malls (Dennis *et al.*, 2001; Nicholls *et al.*, 2000, 2002; Singh and Sahay, 2012). To the authors' best knowledge, no academic study has focused on shopping experience in the context of developing countries such as Mauritius. Specific studies on shopping experiences are almost inexistent for the shopping mall industry of Mauritius. Hence, this paper provides a deep insight into the factors impacting on the shopping experiences of customers in Mauritius. This paper presents a new cross-road to sharpen one's understanding of the factors influencing the shopping experiences of customers in various malls of in Mauritius. Hence, this paper contributes to the empirical scarce literature on shopping experiences by providing meaningful insights on the different attributes likely to contribute to shopping experiences of customers for a developing country like Mauritius.

Objectives of study

The primary objectives of the research is to explore contributing factors impacting on shopping experiences of customers in the shopping malls of Mauritius. The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- (1) to investigate the most predictive factors for enhancing customer experience in shopping malls of Mauritius; and
- (2) to explore the significant dimensions of shopping experience which impacts upon the willingness of customers to visit Mauritian shopping malls.

Literature review

Shopping experience and malls as social spaces for entertainment in the twenty-first century

Nowadays, consumption has become a lifestyle and shopping malls are considered to be the temples of consumption. Various researchers have highlighted the strategic importance of shopping experience to increase customer patronage in various shopping malls (Berman and Evans, 2004; Parsons, 2003; Yavas, 2003; Chattopadhyay and Sengupta, 2006; Lindsey-Mullikin and Munger, 2011; Singh and Sahay, 2012). Similarly, with the accelerating growth of the malls industry, various new malls were built and millions of square feet of retail space were added to existing shopping malls (Berman and Evans, 2004). Various researchers have also found that shopping malls are now regarded as highly organised social spaces for entertainment, interaction and other types of consumer excitement (Bloch *et al.*, 1994; Firat and Venkatesh, 1993; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Many consumers view shopping malls as an entertainment source in the USA (Iksuk *et al.*, 2005).

Nicholls *et al.* (2000) also found that consumers visited their mall for more diverse reasons, largely revolving around entertainment in the USA. Additionally, recent studies on shopping centre preferences and choice have highlighted the importance of

food courts and entertainment facilities such as mega-theaters, amphitheaters, museums and other special attractions within the mall setting in attracting higher levels of patronage (Wong and Yu, 2003; Field, 2009; Reda, 2009). Moreover, shopping malls play a major role in consumers' lifestyle (Terblanche, 1999) and they have become not only a centre for shopping but also a community centre for social and recreational activities (Howard, 1993; Terblanche, 1999; Chan *et al.*, 2001; Ng, 2003; Martin and Mason, 1987; Jansen-Verbeke, 1987; Dholakia, 1999; Miller, 1998; Mintel, 2000; Myers and Lumbers, 2008). Terblanche (1999) have stated that recreation appeared to be one of the major dimensions impacting on shopping centre patronage.

Shopping landscape, restaurant facilities and extended trading hours

The real-success story in shopping centres has been the addition of catering of various forms (Howard, 2007). Restaurant and café operators have stated that locating close to retail generates substantial lunch time sales on a par with, if not greater than, their traditional trade and examples include The Oracle at Reading, Mailbox in Birmingham, Bluewater in Kent (Vines, 2001). Moreover, consumers who valued an open-air shopping environment with unique architectural design and appealing restaurants tended to shop more often at the central business district (Barson, 2005; Yan and Eckman, 2009). Furthermore, daily schedules influence shopping behaviour by limiting the time available to shop (Reimers and Clulow, 2009). Hence, consumers are more likely to turn to traditional store-based strategies such as visiting the nearest facility or shopping at facilities offering extended trading hours (Alreck and Settle, 2002; Yavas, 2003; Anselmsson, 2006; Richbell and Kite, 2007). Likewise, further extended trading hours can prove to be a relatively simplistic method of generating sales growth without store extension or increasing selling space within existing store limits (Richbell and Kite, 2007). Newman and Cullen (2002, p. 47) observed that "extended opening hours make it possible for most consumers, who have the mobility, to shop at their convenience".

Shopping malls, play centre for kids and health and wellness initiatives

Stores, food courts, restaurants, cinemas, children's play areas, interactive entertainment, social use areas, relaxation spaces and promotional areas are now major components of any mall (Terblanche, 1999). In their study, Tabak *et al.* (2006) found that play ground for kids was a significant place because when high school girls go shopping with their families; they do not want to be annoyed with existence of their little brothers/sisters. Moreover, the fitness industry is growing quickly (Tawse and Keogh, 1998). Tauber (1972) hypothesised a number of personal motives for going shopping, and one of them includes physical activity, for example, a walk round the shops. Although health and fitness activities may be successful in themselves, they often seem to add little directly to the success of the retail offer (Howard, 2007).

Research methodology

In line with the present study's main objective of exploring the contributing factors for enhancing shopping experience in shopping malls of Mauritius, a structured questionnaire consisting of several sections was generated. The various sections of the questionnaire relates to a list of 33 attributes related to influence shopping experiences of customers and the last part of the questionnaire addressed the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Sampling plan

In the present research, the targeted population of the study consisted of customers of various shopping malls and centres. The target population sampled was the customers visiting various shopping malls and shopping centres of Mauritius to ensure adequate geographical coverage. The sample size of this study amounted to 750 customers through the judgemental sampling technique. The response rate for the present study was 80 per cent and respondents drawn from 23 shopping malls and centres across Mauritius were surveyed to explore the attributes for improving their shopping experience. Below is the graphical layout of the sampling process of respondents covered district wise in Mauritius.

Shopping malls and supermarkets covered district wise

Figure 1

Internal consistency of the questionnaire

The Cronbach's α -value for the entire questionnaire was 0.817 and such a high-figure designates that the questionnaire is a good indicator of what the researcher wants to investigate. According to Hair *et al.* (1995), a co-efficient of < 0.6 indicates marginal to low internal consistency and a value of 0.60 or more indicates satisfactory internal consistency reliability (Churchill, 1979).

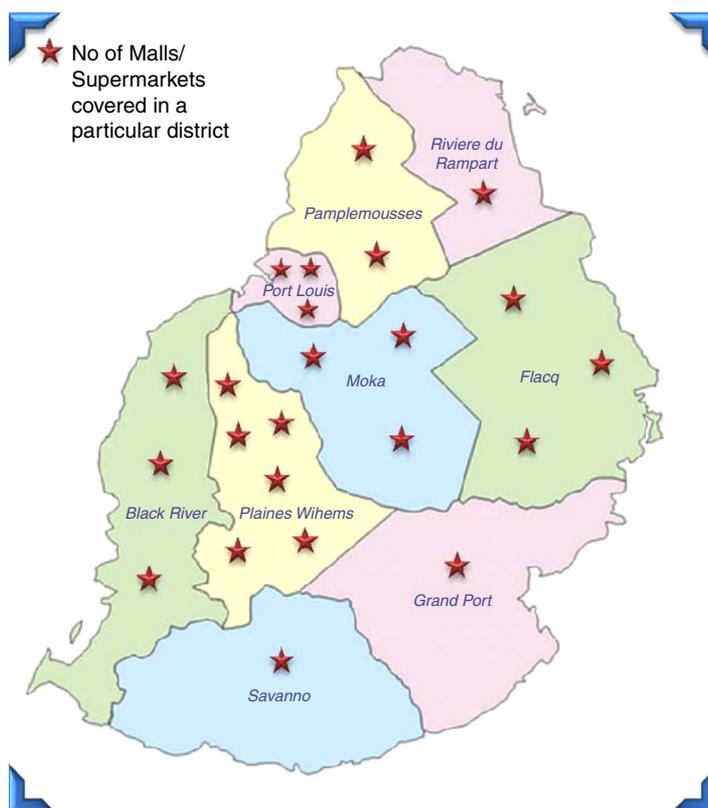


Figure 1.
Graphical layout of sampling process

Data analysis

Factor analysis was developed to assess the relative significance of the attributes for improving the shopping experiences of customers in various malls of Mauritius. The factor analysis was used to assess the relative significance of the attributes for improving the shopping experiences of customers in various malls of Mauritius. Only factors with eigenvalue equal to or > 1 were considered significant and chosen for interpretation. A variable with factor loadings of 0.40 was considered, that is, items < 0.40 were excluded. The multiple regression analysis was also applied to explore the six dimensions of shopping experience which could determine the overall willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius. The shopping experience dimensions were then used as independent variables in explaining customers' overall willingness to visit malls of Mauritius. The factors with various degrees of significance resulting from the regression analysis were then shown in order of importance based on their β -co-efficient. For example, a factor with a high β -co-efficient is more likely to suggest that the factor itself carries a heavier weight in explaining the overall willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius.

Empirical findings

Part A: demographic profile of respondents

Table I

Demographic variables	%
<i>Ethnic group</i>	
Sino-Mauritian	4
General population	31
Hindu	49
Muslim	16
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	45
Female	55
<i>Age</i>	
< 18 years	5
18-25 years	44
26-34 years	24
35-44 years	14
45-54 years	5
55/ + years	8
<i>Marital status</i>	
Single	56
Married	41
Divorcee	2
Widow	1
<i>Education</i>	
School certificate	29
Higher school certificates	35
Diploma holder	12
Degree holder	16
Master degree	7
< School certificates	1

Table I.
Demographic profile
of sample

Part B: empirical survey findings

1. *Factor analysis and results.* Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on 33 attributes and six factors representing 59.710 per cent of the explained variance were extracted from the 33 attributes as shown in Table II. The empirical estimates for enhancing shopping experiences in shopping malls of Mauritius and the results evidence the “provision of childcare facilities”, “health and wellness events”, “entertaining events”, “sports and games facilities”, “value-added restaurant facilities” and “shopping events” as the main determinants of shopping experience in shopping malls of Mauritius as shown in Table.

Factor title	Factor loading	Eigenvalues	% of variance explained	Cronbach α
<i>Factor 1 – provision of childcare facilities</i>		4.556	13.806	0.933
Ball ponds, air cannons and football pitches	0.839			
Toddler area for little guests	0.833			
Comfortable seating arrangements for parents	0.819			
Provision of food and beverages for kids	0.802			
Shop and drop facility for parents	0.792			
Play centres for kids	0.714			
<i>Factor 2 – fitness, health and wellness events</i>		3.753	11.373	0.850
Seminars on health and wellness topics	0.792			
Sales of health and wellness products	0.768			
Sauna, hamam and spa services	0.766			
Aerobic exercises sessions	0.752			
Group exercises for stress management	0.552			
Gym facilities with qualified coaches	0.490			
<i>Factor 3 – entertainment facilities and events</i>		3.286	9.957	0.793
Live concerts by international artists	0.775			
Live concerts by local artists	0.737			
Night life and exciting activities	0.663			
Organisation of receptions	0.636			
Live football matches	0.539			
Happy hours	0.524			
Open-air cinema and festivals	0.490			
<i>Factor 4 – recreation, sports and games facilities</i>		3.050	9.241	0.751
Group sports meeting	0.720			
Outdoor games	0.719			
Appealing game rooms	0.599			
Ropes course and wall climbing activities	0.598			
Indoor games	0.584			
<i>Factor 5 – value-added restaurant facilities</i>		3.007	9.111	0.721
Regular renovation of the food courts	0.681			
International coffee shops	0.666			
Outdoor sunset dinners	0.624			
International fast food outlets	0.623			
Diversified culinary offer	0.593			
Live animation in food courts	0.461			
<i>Factor 6 – shopping facilities and events</i>		2.053	6.221	0.732
Late night shopping	0.720			
More braderies	0.668			
International shops	0.661			

Note: Total percentage of explained variance is 59.710

Table II.
Outcomes of factor analysis

Factor 1 – provision of childcare facilities. As seen in Table II, Factor 1 has an eigenvalue of 4.556 and explains 13.806 per cent of the variance. This factor groups six attributes related to “provision of childcare facilities”. “Ball ponds, air cannons and football pitches” have the highest loading factor (loading = 0.839), followed by “toddler area for little guests” (loading = 0.833). Other attributes that can boost shopping experience in Mauritian shopping malls are “comfortable seating arrangements for parents” (loading = 0.819), “provision of food and beverages for kids” (loading = 0.802), “shop and drop facility for parents” (loading = 0.792) and “availability of play centres” in the shopping malls (loading = 0.714).

Factor 2 – fitness, health and wellness events. Factor 2 has an eigenvalue of 3.753 and explains 11.373 per cent of the variance. This factor groups six attributes related to “fitness, health and wellness events”. “Seminars on health and wellness topics” have the highest loading factor (loading = 0.792), followed by “sales of health and wellness products” (loading = 0.768) and “sauna, hamam and spa facilities” (loadings = 0.766). Other attributes relate to “aerobic exercise sessions” (loading = 0.752), “group exercises for stress management” (loading = 0.552) and “gym facilities with qualified coaches” (loading = 0.490).

Factor 3 – entertainment facilities and events. Factor 3 has an eigenvalue of 3.286 and explains 9.957 per cent of the variance. This factor groups seven attributes related to “entertainment facilities and events”. “Live concerts by international artists” has the highest loading factor (loading = 0.775), followed by “live concerts by local artists” (loading = 0.737) and “nightlife and exciting events” (loading = 0.663). Other attributes includes “organisation of receptions” (loading = 0.636), “live football matches” (loading = 0.539), “happy hours” (loading = 0.524) and “open-air cinema and festivals” (loading = 0.490).

Factor 4 – recreation, sports and games facilities. Factor 4 has an eigenvalue of 3.050 and explains 9.241 per cent of the variance. This factor groups five attributes related to “recreation, sports and games facilities”. “Group sports meeting” has the highest factor loading (loading = 0.720), followed by “outdoor games” (loading = 0.719) and “appealing game rooms” (loading = 0.599). Other attributes includes “ropes courses and wall climbing activities” (loading = 0.598) and “indoor games” (loading = 0.584).

Factor 5 – value-added restaurant facilities. Factor 5 has an eigenvalue of 3.007 and explains 9.111 per cent of the variance. This factor groups six attributes related to “restaurant facilities”. “Regular renovation of the food courts” has the highest factor loading (loading = 0.681), followed by “international coffee shops” (loading = 0.666) and “outdoor sunset dinners” (loading = 0.624). Other attributes includes “international fast food outlets” (loading = 0.623), “diversified culinary offer” (loading = 0.593) and “live animation in food courts” (loading = 0.461).

Factor 6 – shopping facilities and events. Factor 6 has an eigenvalue of 2.053 and explains 6.221 per cent of the variance. This factor groups three attributes related to “shopping facilities”. “Late night shopping” has the highest factor loading (loading = 0.720), followed by “more braderies” (loading = 0.668) and “presence of international shops” (loading = 0.661).

2. *Relative importance of shopping experience factors contributing to customers' overall willingness to visit the shopping malls of Mauritius.* The six shopping experience dimensions were then entered into regression analysis to determine their relative significance to influence customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius. Table II reports the results of the stepwise regression model using respondents' overall willingness to visit the shopping malls as the dependent variable being measured on a

five-point scale type and the six factors presented above as the independent variables. The higher the co-efficient the more the factor contributes to the overall willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius. There are five most predictive factors which explained 11.6 per cent of variance for the overall customers' willingness to visit shopping malls of Mauritius. Based on the findings of the shopping experience dimensions, which influence the willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius, a regression model was developed by using the standardised factor scores for each respondent. The R^2 was 0.116, which indicated that 11.6 per cent of the overall willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius is explained by the model. The model also indicates that 88.4 per cent of the variance can be explained by other factors and clearly indicates that further research is needed to identify the additional factors that can influence the willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius.

The factor which had the greatest impact on the overall willingness of customers to visit the shopping malls of Mauritius has been "entertainment facilities and events" with a co-efficient (β of 0.270). The factor relating to "value-added restaurant facilities" with a (β -co-efficient of 0.125) also appeared to play an important role in influencing the willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius.

It was also interesting to note that the factor pertaining to "shopping facilities and events" with a co-efficient (β of 0.123) have also been significant in explaining the overall willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius. There is also enough empirical evidence to demonstrate that customers' willingness to visit shopping malls of Mauritius is also influenced by another significant factor relating to "recreation, sports and games facilities" with a co-efficient of (β of 0.102). The findings of the multiple regression analysis have also shed light on the factor relating to "provision of childcare facilities" with a co-efficient of (β of 0.095) which can predict the willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius.

Hence, the results have revealed that the willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius is principally influenced by these predictive factors: (Table III)

- Factor 3 – entertainment facilities and events
- Factor 5 – value-added restaurant facilities

Sample ($n = 600$)	R^2 / Significance	Dimensions	B	β	t	Significant t	F -statistic**
	0.116/0.000	Factor 3 – entertainment facilities and events	0.317	0.270	0.000	6.863	47.096
		Factor 5 – value-added restaurant facilities	0.147	0.125	0.001	3.201	29.036
		Factor 6 – shopping facilities and events	0.144	0.123	0.002	3.177	23.016
		Factor 4 – recreation, sports and games facilities	0.120	0.102	0.008	2.654	19.198
		Factor 1 – provision of childcare facilities	0.112	0.095	0.013	2.482	16.724

Notes: Total explained variance (R^2) = 0.116 (11.6 per cent); dependent variable: willingness to visit shopping malls of Mauritius. Constant = 2.145; $t = 47.69$ (significance = 0.000). **The F -statistic for the regression model had a p -value < 0.000

Table III.
Dimensions of shopping experiences affecting the willingness of customers to visit shopping malls of Mauritius

Factor 6 – shopping facilities and events
Factor 4 – recreation, sports and games facilities
Factor 1 – provision of childcare facilities

Managerial implications and recommendations

In today's highly competitive shopping arena, it is essential that the mall developers and managers have a deep understanding of the contributing factors of shopping experiences. Our present research findings have revealed that customers have assigned different levels of importance to shopping experience dimensions which in turn, can contribute to their overall willingness to visit shopping malls of Mauritius.

The findings from the regression analysis have depicted interesting insights on entertainment facilities and events as the emerging best predictor for boosting shopping experiences. Hence, live concerts should be promoted both local and international artists to participate on the same platform during festive seasons. In turn, the promotion of live concerts would also promote affiliation among participating countries and diversifying the culture. Equally, various tactical strategies for promoting night life should be implemented. For instance, mall executives should also work in close collaboration with the gambling industry to cater for nightlife and exciting gambling activities. Likewise, it has been found that many consumers view shopping malls as an entertainment source in the USA (Iksuk *et al.*, 2005).

The research has depicted another determining attribute related to restaurant facilities can enhance shopping experiences. In this respect, mall managers and executives should maximise on appealing cuisine, live animation in food courts and at the same, they should emphasise on regular innovation in the food courts of shopping malls. Another major implication for mall managers and designers is the integration of international fast food outlets and coffee shops in the shopping malls of Mauritius. The present study also revealed that "Braderies" are likely to have a positive impact on shopping experience in malls of Mauritius. Hence, shopping mall managers with the collaboration of the tenant mix can provide good deals on a variety of local and international brands with more "Braderies" and late night shopping facilities during the year to improve sales volume.

Indeed, there is evidence of an increasing proportion of people saying that they spend more time looking around the shops as a leisure activity (Mintel, 2000) and the trend is most marked among younger adults. Likewise, the results of the research have depicted that customers would prefer to have several recreational activities such as group sports, outdoor games and indoor activities. Therefore, mall managers should integrate various indoor and outdoor games in the shopping malls. In addition, it is important to design and introduce game rooms for the younger generation since they will more likely to visit shopping malls if recreational and games facilities are available.

Empirical findings have shown that "provision of childcare facilities" can play a major role in improving the shopping experiences of customers. The results reflected on the study of Terblanche (1999) and Tabak *et al.* (2006) who stated that provision of childcare facilities can enhance experiences in the shopping malls. Indeed, mall managers should provide parents with a fantastic place to drop their kids and should also cater for food and beverages for the little kids.

The results obtained from the multiple regression analysis will serve as a new cross-road for shopping malls executives to reorient their strategies for enhancing the shopping experiences of customers in the mall industry of emerging countries such as Mauritius.

Conclusion, limitations and directions for future research

The present study has highlighted the need to have a serious re-look on how shopping malls are managing experiences of customers in Mauritius. Customers are putting greater emphasis on leisure and entertaining events and extra shopping facilities such as late night shopping and braderies. Hence, it is highly recommended that mall executives develop a deep understanding of the factors influencing shopping experiences. Indeed, the research results can be useful and form practical tools for the policy makers and shopping executives who are responsible for designing and marketing shopping offers and services of various shopping malls of Mauritius.

Limitations of the research

The present study has outlined the various factors contributing towards improving shopping experiences and customers' overall willingness to visit shopping malls of Mauritius. The study had some potential limitations as focus was only on investigating the factors for improving shopping experiences and the overall significance of these predictive factors on behavioural intentions from customers' perspective in Mauritius and the underlying perceptions of mall managers and executives have not yet been tapped. The paper has some serious conceptual limitations in the arena of shopping experiences for developing countries.

Future research directions

In this respect, research should extend to shopping executives and mall managers in order to allow a comparative analysis on the factors influencing shopping experiences in malls of Mauritius. Likewise, a conceptual model related to predictive dimensions of shopping experiences influencing the willingness of customers to visit shopping malls can be proposed and validated in order to overcome the conceptual limitations of the present study and the research can be extended to other emerging countries such as Seychelles and Rodrigues.

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About the authors

Thanika Devi Juwaheer, PhD, is an Associate Professor of the Department of Management, Faculty of Law and Management, University of Mauritius. Dr Juwaheer has several years of experience in marketing management and tourism and hospitality in Mauritius and the Indian Ocean Islands. Dr Juwaheer has extensive teaching, industrial and consulting experience in the marketing, hospitality and tourism field. She has published articles in academic journals, conference proceedings and trade journals in the field of marketing, tourism and hospitality management and on the impact of green marketing and the environmental management strategies of hotels of Mauritius. Dr Juwaheer serves on the editorial board of several refereed academic journals. Her additional research interests include green marketing, ecotourism, service quality, customer satisfaction, CRM, customer experience and health care management.

Sharmila Pudaruth is a Lecturer in Marketing of the Department of Management, Faculty of Law and Management, University of Mauritius. She has published articles in academic journals and conference proceedings in the field of green marketing, interactive advertising, internet banking, viral marketing, customer relationship management and e-government uptake in Mauritius. Ms Pudaruth is also involved in project management for some consultancy works in different fields of management pertaining to customer care and developing coaching skills. She has conducted surveys and research work on customer satisfaction for organisations in different sectors of Mauritius. Her additional research interests include customer relationship management, internet marketing, customer experience management, consumer behavior,

green marketing and services marketing. Sharmila Pudaruth is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: sh.pudaruth@uom.ac.mu

Priyasha Ramdin, degree holder in Management (Minor: Finance), has been collaborating on a consultancy project as research assistant at the University of Mauritius. She was responsible for coordinating the field work of the survey team and consolidating the final report on the consultancy project pertaining to assessing the shopping experiences of Mauritians. She has also been an active trainee in a prestigious banking institution where she was able to enhance her professional skills and applied her academic knowledge in the banking landscape. During her six-month internship, she had a keen interest for the various e-banking products and services that all the banks were offering in Mauritius. She always enjoys the challenges of creativity together with a touch of originality. She is highly motivated to work in the banking industry while she will be pursuing her postgraduate studies.