

Dressed to Impress, Destined to Return? Conspicuous Shopping, Shoppers' Well-being, and Re-Patronage Intention: The Moderating Role of Mall Sophistication

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Abstract

This study examines the direct relationship between conspicuous shopping and shoppers' well-being (SWB), and the direct relationship between SWB and re-patronage intention (RPI). It further tests the moderation effect of mall sophistication in the conspicuous shopping and SWB relationship. A mall intercept survey was used to collect data from shoppers at two leading shopping malls in Lahore. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 340 were returned and 309 were retained as valid for analysis. All proposed constructs were measured by adopting seven-point Likert scale, and the proposed relationships were examined using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Results show that conspicuous shopping has a significant and positive relationship with SWB, and that SWB is a significant predictor of RPI. Furthermore, mall sophistication significantly moderates the association between conspicuous shopping and SWB. This study provides both theoretical extension and practical guidance for mall management on cultivating a sophisticated retail environment.

Keywords: Conspicuous shopping, Mall sophistication, Shoppers' well-being, Re-patronage intention, Stimulus-Organism-Response theory, Pakistan

1. Introduction

Shopping malls remain central to modern retailing, drawing consumers with a mix of product variety, leisure, and social experience under one roof. However, this is a role that is being stressed, as online retail continues to erode the number of footfalls and the competition between retail formats has only increased (Elmashhara & Soares, 2022), and functional convenience alone is not enough to guarantee a shopper's loyalty, malls must now grasp the psychological rewards that attract them to return (Ali et al., 2021). El Hedhli et al. (2013, p. 857) define SWB as a “shopper's perceived impact of a shopping mall in contributing to satisfaction in important life domains (such as consumer life, social life, leisure life, and community life) resulting in a global judgement that the mall contributes significantly to one's overall quality of life.” Unlike transient states such as satisfaction, SWB reflects consumers' broader evaluations of how shopping experiences contribute to their quality of life over time (El Hedhli et al., 2016), and malls that generate it are consistently rewarded with loyalty and revisit behaviour (El Hedhli et al., 2013; Javed et al., 2023), which explains the growing interest in identifying its drivers.

Research on SWB antecedents, however, has concentrated almost entirely on mall-side attributes: “functional, symbolic, social, and environmental relevance” (Javed et al., 2023), mall personality (Ali et al., 2021), and culturally aligned offerings (Yaqub et al., 2025). Comparatively little is known about shopper-driven motives that originate from the consumer's own psychological needs and could shape well-being just as strongly, a gap, since symbolic, status-oriented consumption motives are well documented elsewhere but unexamined within the mall context.

Conspicuous shopping, consumption carried out visibly, and often deliberately, to signal prestige, social recognition, and status to others (Huang & Wang, 2017; Nwankwo et al., 2014), is one such motive. But this is a role being pushed, as online retail continues to decrease the number of footfalls, and competition between retail formats has only grown (Elmashhara & Soares, 2022), and functional convenience is not enough to ensure that a shopper will return to a mall, the psychological rewards must also be understood (Guillen-Royo, 2008; Yang & Mattila, 2017). Such benefits should hold with particular force inside the mall, an inherently social, visible, self-presentational setting, yet this possibility remains empirically untested, and integrating conspicuous shopping into the SWB framework offers a natural extension of both literatures.

The psychological payoff of conspicuous shopping is unlikely to be uniform across settings; it should depend on how credible the setting is as a stage for status display. Mall sophistication reflects shoppers' perception of a mall as upscale, stylish, and prestigious (Rahman et al., 2016), and a conspicuous purchase made there should carry more symbolic weight, and generate more well-being, than an identical purchase made elsewhere. Sophistication has so far been examined mainly as a direct predictor of shopping value (Rahman et al., 2016) not as a condition determining when conspicuous shopping translates into psychological benefit, a second gap this study addresses.

Re-patronage intention (RPI), a shopper's willingness to revisit a retail destination (Jones & Reynolds, 2006), is among the most consequential indicators of retail success,

and shoppers who perceive greater well-being are considerably more inclined to revisit the mall that generated it (El Hedhli et al., 2013; Javed et al., 2023). Drawing upon Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), this study conceptualises conspicuous shopping as a stimulus (S) that directly shapes SWB as an organism-level state (O), which in turn directly produces RPI as a response (R). Mall sophistication is positioned as an environmental cue moderating the stimulus-organism link, strengthening conspicuous shopping's influence on SWB when the mall's own image is sophisticated enough to lend credibility to the shopper's status display.

This study makes two key contributions. First, it extends the SWB literature by introducing conspicuous shopping as a novel, shopper-driven antecedent, moving beyond the mall-side attributes dominating prior work. Second, it repositions mall sophistication from a direct predictor of shopping value to a boundary condition determining when symbolic consumption becomes psychologically rewarding. The study also situates the well-established SWB and re-patronage link (El Hedhli et al., 2013; Javed et al., 2023) within this new structure, grounding the model in S-O-R theory for an integrated account of how status-oriented consumption translates into long-term shopper-mall relationships.

Accordingly, this study pursues three objectives: (1) to determine the direct relationship between conspicuous shopping and SWB; (2) to determine the direct relationship between SWB and RPI; and (3) to test the moderation effect of mall sophistication on the relationship between conspicuous shopping and SWB. Examining shoppers within an experiential retail setting shaped by a growing, status-conscious consumer base, this study extends current understanding of symbolic consumption and post-shopping behaviour, and offers practical insight into when shoppers derive genuine psychological value from their shopping experience.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Theoretical underpinning

This study is based on S-O-R theory, developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), within environmental psychology to explain how external stimuli shape an individual's internal state, which subsequently drives approach or avoidance behaviour. The theory has been widely applied in retailing research to explain how environmental and consumption-related cues translate into consumer emotions and, ultimately, behavioural outcomes. In the current research, conspicuous shopping is considered as the stimulus (S): a consumption-related cue rooted in the shopper's own status-seeking motivation rather than in the physical mall environment. SWB represents the organism (O), capturing the internal psychological state that forms as shoppers evaluate the symbolic and social value derived from their shopping experience. RPI constitutes the response (R), reflecting shoppers' behavioural inclination to revisit the mall as an outcome of this internal state. Mall sophistication is introduced as an environmental cue that moderates the stimulus-organism link, strengthening the effect of conspicuous shopping on well-being when the mall itself is perceived as an environment capable of validating the shopper's status display. S-O-R theory therefore provides a parsimonious and theoretically coherent structure for linking a shopper-driven motive, an internal psychological outcome, and a behavioural response within a single model.

2.2. Shoppers' well-being (SWB)

El Hedhli et al. (2013, p. 857) explained the SWB as a “shopper's perceived impact of a shopping mall in contributing to satisfaction in important life domains (such as consumer life, social life, leisure life, and community life) resulting in a global judgement that the mall contributes significantly to one's overall quality of life”. The construct is multidimensional: it reflects shoppers' perceptions of the mall's role in their consumer life (shopping for products and services), social life (dealing with their families and friends), leisure life (relaxing, enjoying), and community life (Ijaz et al., 2026). This distinguishes SWB from situations such as being in the middle of a shopping experience, or feeling satisfied. Those are one-sided and temporary ones, while SWB is developed from one year to the next, and is more based on an overall evaluation of the role of the mall in the quality of life of visitors (El Hedhli et al., 2016). SWB is a strategic issue for researchers and managers with interest in understanding the factors that contribute to long-term shopper loyalty, as shoppers who feel better about their shopping experience in the mall tend to be more loyal and more likely to return in the future (El Hedhli et al., 2013, 2016).

2.3. Hypotheses development

2.3.1. Conspicuous shopping and SWB

Conspicuous shopping or SWB (Nwankwo et al., 2014; Skulsuthavong & Wang, 2025), which is an act of consuming something conspicuously, with the intent of conveying prestige, social recognition and status to others. Conspicuous shopping is not only about function, but about symbolic meaning attached to the consumption that can give an advantage to the identity and social status of the consumer. Conspicuous shopping is about maintaining a desired self image as well as gaining the approval from relevant social groups by the brands they wear and the stores they shop at, which are related to the social environment (Huang & Wang, 2017). Previous studies on status consumption indicate that achieving symbolic goals results in psychological benefits such as higher self-esteem, social validation and self-perceptions of life satisfaction (Guillen-Royo, 2008; Yang & Mattila, 2017). In the context of the shopping mall, the rewards these shoppers receive will likely be directed to a larger sphere of well-being: if a consumer can clearly convey their status through shopping in the shopping mall, they should perceive that the shopping mall contributes meaningfully to their social and consumer life, both core dimensions of SWB (El Hedhli et al., 2020). Shopping malls offer an ideal setting for this symbolic shopping impulse to manifest as a psychological gain, as they offer the prestigious brands, premium shopping experience and the social visibility and conspicuousness that shopping demands. On this basis, it is hypothesised that:

H1. Conspicuous shopping has a significant and positive relationship with SWB.

2.3.2. SWB and RPI

RPI is seen as one of the most important behavioural measures of retail destination and is defined as a shopper's desire to return to a specific retail location (Jones & Reynolds, 2006). The consumers evaluate their overall experience against their expectations and if they feel that the mall has indeed brought about a positive change in their quality of life within various facets of their lives – consumer, social, leisure, community, then an overall positive assessment leads to a greater intent to return (El Hedhli et al., 2013).

SWB is the opposite of momentary satisfaction and it is this kind of overall, cumulative assessment that SWB captures, and it is a particularly strong predictor of the continued patronage of a firm (Liu et al., 2023). Those who truly find their “place of well-being” in the mall are less likely to move on to other types of retail outlets, such as online, because the “place of well-being” they get there cannot be duplicated elsewhere. Previous research has been consistent in finding positive relationships between SWB and a variety of loyalty-related outcomes such as mall loyalty and revisit intention (Ali et al., 2021; El Hedhli et al., 2013; Javed et al., 2023; Yaqub et al., 2025), thus reinforcing SWB as an important psychological mechanism driving repeat patronage. Building on this evidence, it is hypothesised that:

H2. SWB has a significant and positive relationship with RPI.

2.3.3. Moderating Role of Mall Sophistication

The psychological benefits which the shopper gets from conspicuous shopping are not likely to be the same in all retail environments; these psychological benefits should depend on the credibility of the retail environment as a stage for conspicuous shopping. Sophistication is a perception of the mall being upscale, stylish, and prestigious, which can be observed in the presence of premium tenants, aesthetically refined mall designs, and an exclusive image overall (Rahman et al., 2016). The symbolic value of a conspicuous purchase in a sophisticated mall is more strong and powerful than that of an identical purchase in any ordinary shop, as the prestige of the mall validates the shopper's status signal (Javed, 2020). The act of shopping, the brands displayed and the social audience in a very sophisticated mall all reinforce one another hence increasing the sense of prestige and social recognition sought by the conspicuous shoppers (Rahman et al., 2016). By contrast, in a mall lacking sophistication, the same conspicuous consumption behaviour is likely to generate a weaker psychological payoff, since the surrounding environment does not corroborate the shopper's intended identity signal. This reasoning is consistent with the broader S-O-R logic that environmental cues condition the relationship's strength between a stimulus and the internal state it produces, rather than acting as independent predictors in isolation. Mall sophistication is therefore expected to function as a moderating variable that strengthens the positive association between conspicuous shopping and SWB: the more sophisticated the mall is perceived to be, the more strongly conspicuous shopping translates into enhanced well-being. Where mall sophistication is low, this relationship should weaken correspondingly, as the environment fails to reinforce the shopper's status-seeking motive. Accordingly, it is hypothesised that:

H3. Mall sophistication moderates the relationship between conspicuous shopping and SWB.

3. Research Methodology

This study collected the data from mall shoppers using a mall intercept survey at two of the leading shopping malls in Lahore, Pakistan including Emporium Mall and Packages Mall, both of which host a wide range of premium domestic and international brands and attract a status-conscious shopper base, making them suitable settings for examining conspicuous shopping behaviour. Purposive sampling, a non-probability technique appropriate for theory-based generalisation where an accessible sampling

frame is unavailable (Calder et al., 1981), was used to approach shoppers directly within the mall premises. Data administrators randomly intercepted mall shoppers and asked them to give a response to a self-administered, structured questionnaire.

The questionnaire comprised two sections: respondent demographics and construct items. All proposed constructs were tested by adopting a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to enhance reliability, discriminating power, and score distribution (Foddy, 1994). Measurement items for conspicuous shopping (Huang & Wang, 2017), mall sophistication (Rahman et al., 2016), SWB (El Hedhli et al., 2013), and RPI (Atulkar & Kesari, 2017; Jones et al., 2006) were adapted from previous research with minor wording adjustments to fit the mall context. Content validity was confirmed through review by marketing academics prior to data collection. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 340 were returned, yielding a response rate of 85%. After screening for incomplete responses and inattentive answering patterns, 309 questionnaires were retained as valid for analysis, representing a usable response rate of 77.25% of the total distributed. Table 1 demonstrates the demographic responses of the mall shoppers.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Respondent

Variables	Categories	Number (n=309)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	136	44.01
	Female	173	55.99
Age	18-28 years	34	11.00
	29-38 years	133	43.04
	39-48 years	88	28.48
	48-58 years	41	13.27
	Above 58 years	13	4.21
	Intermediate or below	53	17.15
Education	Bachelors	119	38.51
	Masters	114	36.89
	Other	23	7.44
	Below 60,000 PKR	52	16.83
Monthly Income	60,001-130,000 PKR	121	39.16
	130,001-190,000 PKR	86	27.83
	190,001-270,000 PKR	35	11.33
	Over 270,000 PKR	15	4.85

4. Results of Data Analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the proposed model, given its suitability for handling reflective constructs, moderate sample sizes, and non-normally distributed data typical of survey-based consumer research (Hair et al., 2016). The analysis proceeded in two stages: “assessment of the measurement model, followed by evaluation of the structural model”.

4.1. Measurement Model

Construct reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), both of which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 for all four constructs (conspicuous shopping: $\alpha = 0.743$, CR = 0.833; mall sophistication: $\alpha = 0.864$, CR = 0.897; SWB: $\alpha = 0.770$, CR = 0.853; RPI: $\alpha = 0.761$, CR = 0.897). Convergent validity was determined through average variance extracted (AVE), with all constructs exceeding the 0.50 benchmark (conspicuous shopping = 0.557; mall sophistication = 0.594; SWB = 0.592; RPI = 0.594), and item loadings ranged between 0.649 and 0.832, within acceptable limits (Hair et al., 2016) (see table 2. Figure 1). Discriminant validity was tested using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with values falling below the conservative 0.90 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015) for all construct pairs, confirming adequate discriminant validity (see Table 3).

Table 2. Assessment of Measurement Model

Variables	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Conspicuous Shopping	ConS1	0.743	0.743	0.833	0.557
	ConS2	0.649			
	ConS3	0.828			
	ConS4	0.754			
Mall Sophistication	MS1	0.714	0.864	0.897	0.594
	MS2	0.828			
	MS3	0.679			
	MS4	0.811			
	MS5	0.832			
	MS6	0.749			
Shoppers' well-being	SWB1	0.795	0.770	0.853	0.592
	SWB2	0.700			
	SWB3	0.761			
	SWB4	0.817			
Re-Patronage Intentions	RPI1	0.770	0.761	0.897	0.594
	RPI2	0.832			
	RPI3	0.700			
	RPI4	0.749			

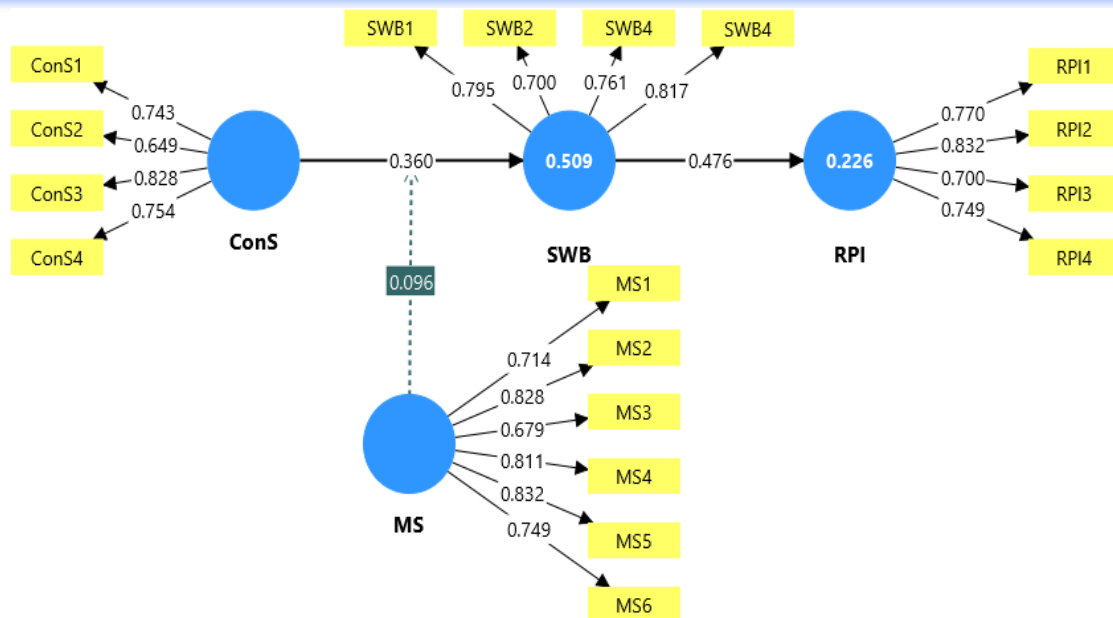


Figure 1. Measurement Model

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

Constructs	ConS	MS	RPI	SWB
ConS				
MS	0.865			
RPI	0.567	0.465		
SWB	0.793	0.766	0.618	

4.2. Structural Model

Hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples at a 5% significance level. The results support all three hypotheses. Conspicuous shopping significantly and positively predicts SWB (H1: $\beta = 0.360$, $t = 8.361$, $p < 0.05$), and SWB significantly and positively predicts RPI (H2: $\beta = 0.476$, $t = 13.622$, $p < 0.05$). The moderation analysis confirms that mall sophistication significantly strengthens the relationship between conspicuous shopping and SWB (H3: $\beta = 0.096$, $t = 4.005$, $p < 0.05$) (see Table 4 and Figure 2). The model explains 50.9% of the variance in SWB ($R^2 = 0.509$), with a Q^2 value of $0.495 > 0$ confirming the model's predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2016). RPI explained a variance in SWB alone ($R^2 = 0.226$) with Q^2 $0.190 > 0$. The conspicuous shopping by well-being relationship is small to medium ($f^2 = 0.133$) and the well-being by RPI interaction effect is medium to large ($f^2 = 0.292$), consistent with the guidelines of (Cohen, 1988) for interaction effects, which tend to be relatively small in magnitude even if they are theoretically meaningful.

Table 4. Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Relationship	Path Coefficient	Std. Error	t value	p-Value	Result (supported)	R^2	Q^2	F^2
H1	ConS $\rightarrow$ SWB	0.360	0.043	8.361	0.000	Yes	0.509	0.495	0.133

H2	SWB→RPI	0.476			Yes		0.292
			0.035	13.622	0.000		
H3	Moderation	0.096			Yes	0.226	0.029
	Effect of MS						
	ConS→SWB		0.024	4.005	0.000		

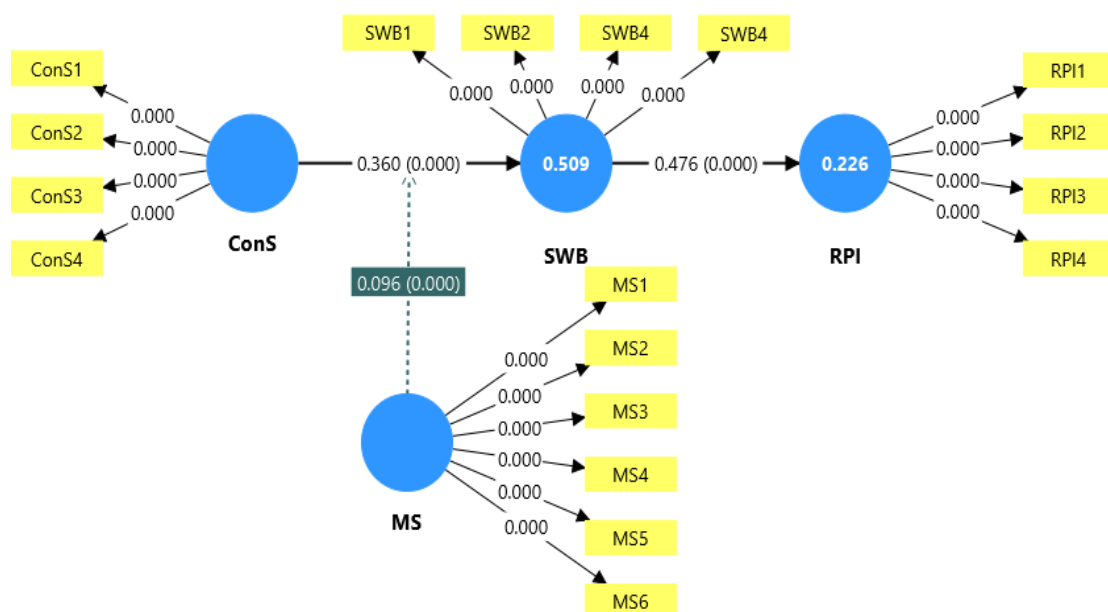


Figure 2. Structural Model

5. Discussion

The results support all three hypothesized links, and taken together provide a consistent picture of the relationship between a shopper-driven symbolic motive and psychological profit and, finally, behavioural loyalty in the shopping mall environment. The confirmation of H1 demonstrates that conspicuous shopping is an important determinant of SWB. This finding was added to the literature on status consumption (Guillen-Royo, 2008; Yang & Mattila, 2017) that has mainly explored the psychological benefits of status consumption in the absence of the shopping mall as a context. It also addresses directly the issue of increased integration between the conspicuous consumption literature and the SWB literature (Nwankwo et al., 2014; El Hedhli et al., 2013) that has largely developed independently of each other. The findings imply that the consumption of the mall is not only about status for status' sake; the shopping act, as displayed by the shoppers, has indeed an impact on the appraisal of the consumer and the social life they experience within the mall, in the sense that it strengthens the idea that symbolic consumption is something legitimate that enhances the well-being of the shoppers. Similarly, the support for H2 validates the ability of SWB as a predictor of RPI, as it was found in previous studies in this research direction (El Hedhli et al., 2013; Yaqub et al., 2025). The medium to large effect size for this

path ($f^2 = 0.292$) further substantiates the argument that SWB is not merely one of the many factors that helps the mall gain long-term customer loyalty, but a key psychological process that helps the mall achieve this goal. This means that for any mall manager that wants to boost revisit behavior should focus on the overall sense of well-being of visitors to the mall instead of satisfaction with just one visit. Furthermore, the important moderation effect supporting H3 indicates that the shopping value provided by the shopping mall is not simply an additive effect of the shopping mall itself but also a moderating effect. Additionally, the moderation effect supporting H3 shows that the shopping value generated by the shopping mall is not merely an additive effect of the shopping mall itself, but also a moderating effect. The interaction effect is small ($f^2 = 0.029$), but not trivial; that is, the psychological reward of status-oriented consumption is not universal but is increased when the context of the shopping mall is respected as being prestigious enough to give the shopper the license to engage in status display. This discovery supports the overall S-O-R principle that environmental stimulus events modulate, rather than simply reinforce, stimulus-organism relationships.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study makes three principal theoretical contributions. First, it extends the SWB literature by introducing conspicuous shopping as a novel, shopper-driven antecedent, complementing the predominantly mall-side antecedents including functional, symbolic, social, and environmental relevance, and mall personality that have dominated prior research (Ali et al., 2021; Javed et al., 2023). This shifts part of the explanatory burden for SWB away from what the mall provides and toward the psychological motives shoppers themselves bring into the retail environment. Second, the study repositions mall sophistication from a direct predictor of shopping value (Rahman et al., 2016) to a boundary condition that determines when a shopper-driven motive becomes psychologically rewarding, offering a more contingent and theoretically nuanced understanding of the mall environment's role. Third, by embedding conspicuous shopping, SWB, RPI, and mall sophistication within a single S-O-R framework, the study demonstrates the continued relevance of environmental psychology theory for explaining status-driven consumption behaviour, extending its application beyond the atmospheric and functional cues to which it has traditionally been applied in retailing research.

5.2. Practical implications

The findings carry several implications for mall management and retail marketing practice. First, given that conspicuous shopping meaningfully enhances SWB, mall managers should recognise status-conscious shoppers as a strategically valuable segment rather than treating conspicuous consumption as a peripheral or reputationally sensitive behaviour. Curating a strong portfolio of premium and internationally recognised brands, and creating visually prominent spaces where such purchases and their associated social interactions can take place, may help shoppers derive greater psychological value from their visit. Second, since SWB is a good predictor of RPI, mall managers should go beyond transactional measures of satisfaction and consider how the mall enriches shoppers' consumer, social, leisure and community life and use that broader view to guide mall services, event programming, and the planning of the

mall's communal spaces. Third, the moderating function of mall sophistication suggests that the costs of investment in the mall's premium image – in terms of architecture, tenant mix, visual merchandising and service quality – are not only an aesthetic positioning but also a mechanism by which more or less psychological value can be obtained from the visit of a mall's status-seeking shoppers. Therefore, the issue of sophistication building should be considered as a direct tool to enhance well-being rather than a mere branding strategy that is far removed from shopper psychology for those who want to attract and retain conspicuous shoppers to their malls.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

This study has several limitations which provide opportunities for further research. First, the data were collected by cross-sectional survey, thus limiting the capacity to draw causal inference and to understand that conspicuous shopping motives and their psychological payoff might change over time – longitudinal or experimental designs would facilitate such study. Second, the data were gathered in two malls in one city, so the results might not be generalizable to other retail environments, other cultures, or other mall formats; further research would be beneficial that could be conducted in other cities or countries to determine if the findings would be transferable to other settings. Third, self-reported data were used, which could be influenced by some social desirability bias, especially in relation to the social sensitivity of the construct of conspicuous shopping, and future research could include behavioural or observational measures. Fourth, the current study included only the boundary condition of mall sophistication for the conspicuous shopping–well-being relationship; other individual difference and/or environmental boundary conditions (e.g., materialism, self-esteem, or mall crowding) may be explored in future studies to construct a comprehensive contingency model. Lastly, future studies may expand on the scope of outcomes studied to include positive word of mouth or mall loyalty as additional behavioral outcomes to further elucidate the psychological implications of the value created through conspicuous shopping.

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