

## Entertainment events in shopping malls—profiling passive and active participation behaviors

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents an empirical framework for operationalizing passive versus active participation in the context of shopping mall entertainment events (e.g., school holiday events and fashion shows) and assesses the framework's utility for segmenting and profiling shopping mall entertainment audiences. Exploratory factor analysis of data collected at shopping mall events revealed two distinct dimensions, "relax and be entertained" and "socialize and explore," reflecting passive and active participation, respectively. From nine activities operationalizing passive versus active participation, two distinct audience segments reporting different levels of immediate and future shopping behaviors were identified. The "engage me" segment (active-dominant audience) was more likely to stay longer at the mall, purchase food and nonfood items, share the event experience with others, and attend similar entertainment events in the future than the "entertain me" segment (passive-dominant audience). The activities operationalizing passive versus active participation were tested with 280 participants at two family-oriented shopping mall entertainment events. This paper extends the knowledge in the retail event marketing literature whereby it confirms passive versus active participation levels at retailing events, and verifies that passive and active participation levels can be measured and differentiated operationally. The findings provide insights on the utility of shopper participation level as a meaningful segmentation variable, pertinent to both the marketing and management of shopper experiences within a retailing entertainment event. Managerial implications and limitations of this paper are discussed. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

### INTRODUCTION

Shopping malls face intense competition from multiple sources including other shopping malls operating in the same catchment area, high-street stores, alternative shopping destinations (e.g., factory outlets), and alternative retailing formats such as pure-play online retailers (e.g., Amazon, eBay, and ASOS) (Clifford, 2012). To mitigate competition and defend market share, shopping malls rely on various strategies to create and deliver value-added experiences for their customers (Barbieri, 2005; Morgan, 2006; Sands *et al.*, 2009; Clifford, 2012). One popular experiential marketing strategy involves staging entertainment events such as school holiday events, fashion shows, celebrity appearances, mini concerts, and market days (Sit *et al.*, 2003; Gentry, 2004; Tsai, 2010).

A shopping mall entertainment event frequently offers opportunities for both passive and active participation (Gentry, 2004; Barbieri, 2005). Passive participation refers to a situation whereby the customer primarily behaves as a spectator or observer and does not seek to physically influence the experience delivery. Conversely, active participation relates to a situation where the customer opts to be a partaker or doer and is motivated to physically influence the experience delivery (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). For example, when attending a children's entertainment event, parents can opt to actively participate and join in with the activities, or they can adopt a more passive spectator role whereby they simply take a break and observe their children having fun in close proximity. Some participants may commence by actively participating in an entertainment event and then retreat to a more passive spectator role, or vice

versa, thus exhibiting both passive and active participation levels across the duration of the event.

Whereas the conceptual meanings of passive versus active participation have been well documented in the customer experience literature (Holt, 1995; Holbrook, 1996; Pine and Gilmore, 1998), their operational meanings are less apparent. In the retail literature, only a few studies have attempted to operationalize passive versus active participation. However, none of the studies have focused specifically on shopping mall entertainment events; rather, they examined other contexts such as online and catalog shopping (Mathwick *et al.*, 2001) and sporting events (Holt, 1995). Therefore, the purpose of the study reported in this paper was threefold: (i) to construct a set of activities that are potentially meaningful for operationalizing passive versus active participation from secondary data; (ii) to assess this set of participation activities through empirical research; and (iii) to examine the utility of these participation activities for segmenting and profiling entertainment event consumers.

Knowledge of what "passive" versus "active" participation represents operationally is valuable for the effective marketing and management of customer experiences with shopping mall entertainment events as well as other in-store themed events (Sands *et al.*, 2008). For instance, at a children's workshop, desired active participation may involve children learning a new skill while having fun (e.g., building a sand castle) while their parents socialize with others. Endowed with this knowledge, the shopping mall manager can identify and strategically allocate resources (e.g., props, activities, and settings) required to create and deliver these desired active experiences. This knowledge can also be useful for diagnosing the effectiveness of an entertainment event in driving mall shoppers' loyalty behaviors, as well as for personalizing marketing messages to appeal to various audience segments of an entertainment event.

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For example, if the passive and active participants at an entertainment event can be discerned and profiled operationally, this knowledge may enable the shopping mall manager to orchestrate and manage the coexistence and co-consumption of these two distinct segments by, for example, customizing the delivery and communication activities of the identical entertainment event. These strategies reflect the ideology of collective consumption (Ng *et al.*, 2007) and experiential customization (Addis and Holbrook, 2001).

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, studies that conceptually address passive versus active participation are discussed, and the few studies that have attempted to operationalize these two levels of participation are reviewed. Second, the methodology employed to identify and empirically test the proposed set of items operationalizing passive and active participation is explained. Third, the quantitative results are discussed in relation to existing studies. Finally, theoretical and managerial implications are addressed, and limitations and directions for future research are identified.

### PASSIVE VERSUS ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Studies on shopping mall entertainment events have hitherto focused on three key areas beyond passive versus active participation. These areas relate to the extent to which entertainment events do the following: (i) explain shopping mall image (Nevin and Houston, 1980; Yavas, 2001); (ii) facilitate the segmentation of shopping mall consumers (Boedeker, 1995; Sit *et al.*, 2003; El-Adly, 2007); and (iii) foster shoppers' behavioral loyalty (Parsons, 2003; Kim *et al.*, 2005).

Within the context of theatrical performances (e.g., theme parks and concerts), Pine and Gilmore (1999) discuss passive versus active participation in their four-experience-realm framework. Holbrook (1996) emphasizes passive versus active participation in his customer value framework; however, he does not specify the context on which this framework is based. Within this framework, participation is referred to as customer interaction or engagement with an object or an activity (Holbrook, 1996). In both frameworks, passive participation (interaction) is described as distanced appreciation of an activity, whereas active participation is direct participation in an activity (Holbrook, 1996; Pine and Gilmore, 1998). In addition to the consistency of definitions, both frameworks emphasize the complex and multifaceted nature of passive versus active participation. For instance, Pine and Gilmore (1998) propose that passive participation captures entertaining and aesthetic experiences, whereas active participation involves educational and escapist experiences. Holbrook (1996) explains that active participation is characterized by efficiency, play, status, and ethics, whereas passive participation comprises product excellence, aesthetics, esteem, and spirituality (Holbrook, 1996).

In agreement with Holbrook (1996), Pine and Gilmore (1999) explain that passive versus active participation levels are not mutually exclusive but rather coexist on a continuum in an experiential context. For instance, despite a person choosing to be a mere spectator at an entertainment event, that person is not completely docile or inactive in the

consumption process. Indeed, by simply attending the event, the person's presence serves to facilitate the construction and delivery of the dynamic ambience that others are experiencing through "collective consumption" (Ng *et al.*, 2007). The work of Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Holbrook (1996) has unquestionably and insightfully contributed to the conceptualization of passive versus active participation. However, they have not specified activities for operationalizing passive versus active participation, and these operational activities are beneficial for the effective marketing and management of customer experience with a retail event (Lotz *et al.*, 2010). This gap in the retail marketing literature is partially addressed by Holt (1995) within the context of baseball games and Mathwick *et al.* (2001) within the context of catalog and Internet shopping.

Holt (1995) explains four consumption practices or activities in a professional baseball game: (i) consuming as play; (ii) consuming as experience; (iii) consuming as integration; and (iv) consuming as classification. Although Holt (1995) does not use the exact term "participation" within this experiential context (i.e., professional baseball games), consuming as experience and consuming as play are analogous to passive and active participation, respectively. In particular, consuming as play represents autotelic, interpersonal actions such as communing and socializing, which are more active in nature. Conversely, consuming as experience involves autotelic, object-focused actions such as accounting, evaluating, and appreciating. These activities accentuate central facets of reflective thinking, namely, distanced observation and passive response to an object, and do not necessitate active play with an object or physical interactions with other individuals at the event.

Mathwick *et al.* (2001) measure passive versus active participation in their experiential value (EV) framework with a focus on catalog and Internet shopping. The EV framework is a parsimonious adaption of Holbrook's (1996) customer value framework and useful for operationalizing passive versus active participation. The EV framework empirically verifies the existence and multidimensionality of passive versus active participation and identifies activities measuring different participation levels (cf. Mathwick *et al.*, 2001, for details). In the EV framework, active participation comprises "playfulness" and "consumer return on investment," whereas passive participation consists of "aesthetics" and "service excellence."

Although the Holt consumption typology (1995) and Mathwick *et al.* (2001) EV framework have provided valuable insights for operationalizing passive versus active participation, neither have been tested with the experiential or themed events consumed in a retail setting, such as shopping mall entertainment events. Holt (1995) focuses on professional baseball games characterized by high involvement (even fanaticism) evidenced by ardent fan support and regular attendance (cf. Wakefield and Barnes, 1996; Wakefield and Bush, 1998; Hightower *et al.*, 2002; Bernthal and Graham, 2003). In contrast, a shopping mall entertainment event rarely attracts such dedicated participation or fervor (Hill and Robinson, 1991). Rather, with respect to a shopping mall entertainment event, any level of customer loyalty

could, at best, be described as momentary and *ad hoc* (Parsons, 2003). Indeed, shoppers do not participate in all entertainment events on offer; rather, they selectively partake in those entertainment events that offer desired experiences and are deemed worthy of their time and effort (Lotz *et al.*, 2010). Hence, given the more experientially intense context of professional baseball games as compared with shopping mall events, the extent to which Holt's (1995) activities proposed for operationalizing passive versus active participation are applicable to the shopping mall entertainment event context requires further investigation.

Mathwick *et al.* (2001) focus on levels of participation in the context of catalog and Internet shopping. Again, the consumption process of this type of shopping activity is quite different from the consumption process associated with shopping mall entertainment events. Catalog and Internet shopping are typically consumed alone and in private, whereas a shopping mall entertainment event is consumed publicly and collectively with other participants or spectators (Ng *et al.*, 2007). Catalog and Internet shopping do not require consumers to be physically present in the "experience factory," as opposed to the need to be physically present at a shopping mall entertainment event. Therefore, because the nature and degree of passive versus active participation are contingent upon the consumption context, we cannot assume the operational activities proposed by Holt (1995) and Mathwick *et al.* (2001) are universally relevant in other contexts. Therefore, further testing is necessary to verify their relevance for other consumption contexts such as shopping mall entertainment events.

Knowledge concerning the activities operationalizing passive versus active participation within the context of shopping mall entertainment events may prove insightful for segmenting and profiling entertainment event seekers. Discerning meaningful segments of entertainment event seekers will render several benefits: (i) a better understanding of how or why shoppers consume a shopping mall entertainment event and (ii) a participation-oriented evaluation of the effectiveness of a shopping mall entertainment event in fostering shopper loyalty. Moreover, segmentation facilitates the examination of which type of entertainment event will appeal to different participant cohorts and why.

In brief, the review of the relevant literature has identified a knowledge gap concerning the operationalization and segmentation utility of passive versus active participation with shopping mall entertainment events. Addressing this knowledge gap can facilitate the strategic design, execution, evaluation, and communication efforts of shopping mall entertainment events.

## METHOD

### Measures

Drawn from the work of Holt (1995) and Mathwick *et al.* (2001), combined with the findings of preliminary investigations (in-depth interviews with eight shopping mall managers and focus group discussions with four distinct groups of entertainment event participants), a set of 10 activities,

potentially relevant for operationalizing passive versus active participation in the context of mall entertainment events, was compiled. The activities measured in this study were based on "consuming as play" and "consuming as experience" by Holt's (1995) and "playfulness" and "aesthetics" by Mathwick *et al.* (2001).

"Consuming as experience" and "aesthetics" represent passive participation, whereas "consuming as play" and "playfulness" typify active participation. "Consuming as experience" entails the passive aspects of accounting, evaluating, and appreciating. "Accounting" concerns spectators or participants making sense and discussing what they observe at the game, "evaluating" focuses on spectators or participants assessing the action or the performance by making comparisons with a variety of norms and baseline expectations, and "appreciating" reflects responding emotionally to the situation or the performance at the game (Holt, 1995). "Aesthetics" involves the passive appreciation of visual appeal and entertainment (pleasure) in an experiential context (Mathwick *et al.*, 2001). On the other hand, "consuming as play" involves communing and socializing, which collectively reflect active participation in an event. Communing and socializing entail physical interactions and mutual communications between individuals at an event (Holt, 1995). Playfulness involves the active aspects of "escapism" and "enjoyment," which collectively relate to diversion, recuperation, and pleasure seeking in an experiential context.

The set of participation activities was tested for its segmentation utility via cluster analysis. Participant segments were also profiled by demographic and behavioral attributes. The demographic attributes included gender, age, and household status. The behavioral attributes involved immediate and future shopping behaviors, wherein immediate behaviors were those undertaken immediately after an entertainment event and future behaviors were intended behaviors associated with future entertainment events (Wakefield and Baker, 1998; Parsons, 2003). Because shopping behaviors can either be approach (positive) or avoidance (negative) in nature, their attributes were worded neutrally and measured with a 5-point Likert agreement scale (cf. Mathwick *et al.*, 2001).

### Survey

Face validity testing of the participation activities and behavioral attributes was conducted with 34 randomly selected participants at a family-oriented entertainment event (i.e., a school holiday event). This face validity testing involved embedding the participation activities and behavioral attributes into a questionnaire measured with a 5-point Likert agreement scale, personally administering the questionnaire to randomly selected participants to gauge their perceived relevance of those measurement items, and then seeking clarification when an item (either a participation activity or a behavioral attribute) was identified to be irrelevant or ambiguous (Frazer and Lawley, 2000). The face validity testing did not identify any major semantic or phrasing issues with the participation activities and behavioral attributes. The validated participation activities and behavioral attributes were then transferred to a self-completion questionnaire whereby the questions on the participation activities began with the opening statement "The entertainment event today offers a

good opportunity to..." and the questions on the behavioral attributes started with "The entertainment event today has made me ...," as presented in Table 1. This self-completion questionnaire was also designed with a 5-point Likert agreement scale. The self-completion questionnaire was administered to 280 participants at two family-oriented entertainment events (Family Week Festival, October 2009, and Let's Dance, January 2010) at two different shopping malls located in South East Queensland (Australia). Both shopping malls are positioned primarily as a family-friendly shopping destination and thus frequently stage family-oriented entertainment events (e.g., children workshops and market days). Family-oriented mall entertainment events were chosen for this study because they frequently offer both passive and active participation opportunities (Gentry, 2004) and the family shopper is a major market segment for shopping malls (Roy, 1994; Evans *et al.*, 1996; Talpade and Haynes, 1997). Systematic random sampling strategy was used, wherein a field researcher attended the two events and invited every third participant encountered to partake in the survey.

## RESULTS

### Respondent profile

As may be expected, given the family-oriented mall entertainment events surveyed in this study, the majority of respondents were female (75%), aged between 26 and 50 years (64%), and family shoppers with school-aged children below 12 years old (49%). Almost two-thirds of the respondents (64%) reported that they did not visit the mall exclusively for the mall entertainment event but also for other reasons such as shopping for fashion (30%), window shopping (25%), shopping for food (21%), and meeting family or friends (13%). This finding further reinforces the notion that a shopping mall offers a broad range of utilitarian and hedonic experiential activities (Roy, 1994; Martin and Turley, 2004). On the whole, the respondents were interested

in the shopping mall entertainment events, with interest levels ranging from "some" (23%), "moderate" (30%), "quite a lot" (20%) to "a great deal" (9%).

### Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics of the participation activities and behavioral attributes are presented in Table 2. For the participation activities, the three most favorably rated items were "to enjoy free entertainment" ( $\bar{x} = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ), "to escape from my daily routine" ( $\bar{x} = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ), and "to have some fun" ( $\bar{x} = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ). This finding suggests that

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of participation activities and shopping behaviors

| Measurement items   | Mean (SD) <sup>a</sup> |
|---|------------------------|
| Participation activities (10 items)                                 |                        |
| To enjoy free entertainment   | 4.07 (0.66)            |
| To escape from my daily routine                                     | 3.95 (0.77)            |
| To have some fun  | 3.90 (0.70)            |
| To watch other people   | 3.88 (0.78)            |
| To see something new or different                                   | 3.88 (0.76)            |
| To support my children's interests                                  | 3.87 (0.97)            |
| To take a break from the shopping trip                              | 3.86 (0.76)            |
| To do something with family (or friends)                            | 3.79 (0.88)            |
| To see something (someone) I am interested in                       | 3.71 (0.86)            |
| To receive free prizes (or gifts)                                   | 3.32 (1.01)            |
| Shopping behaviors (6 items)  |                        |
| I would say good things about the event today to other people       | 4.03 (0.67)            |
| I would come back to a similar event in the future                  | 3.90 (1.07)            |
| I have stayed at the mall longer than planned                       | 3.87 (0.84)            |
| I would like to receive invitation to a similar event in the future | 3.45 (1.07)            |
| I have bought some food items that I did not plan to                | 3.31 (1.03)            |
| I have bought some nonfood items that I did not plan to             | 3.10 (1.03)            |

Note:

<sup>a</sup>These items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale whereby 1 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *neither*, and 5 = *strongly agree*.

Table 1. Key factors and operational items

| Key factors                                | Operational items  | Sources  |
|--|--|--|
| Passive versus active participation        | To watch other people<br>To take a break from the shopping trip<br>To enjoy free entertainment<br>To escape from my daily routine<br>To see something new or different<br>To support my children's interests<br>To have some fun<br>To see something (someone) I'm interested in<br>To do something with my family (or friends)<br>To receive free prizes (or samples) | Mathwick <i>et al.</i> (2001) and Holt (1995), along with the findings of preliminary qualitative investigations |
| Immediate versus future shopping behaviors | I have stayed longer at the mall than planned<br>I have bought some food items that I did not plan to<br>I have bought some nonfood items that I did not plan to<br>I would come back to a similar event in the future<br>I would like to receive invitation to a similar event in the future<br>I would say good things about the event today to other people         | Andreu <i>et al.</i> (2006), Mowen <i>et al.</i> (2003), and Wickham and Kerstetter (2001)                       |

shoppers perceive shopping mall entertainment events to be an economically desirable way to experience some level of escapism and amusement. In current gloomy economic times, families are reining in their spending on entertainment and leisure activities, and thus, mall entertainment events, which are usually gratis in nature, serve as an economically attractive entertainment option for family shoppers and their children (CBS News, 2012). "To receive free prizes (or gifts)" was the least favorably rated participation activity ( $\bar{x} = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ); however, a plausible explanation is that the two family-oriented entertainment events surveyed in this study did not offer any free prizes or gifts to the audience, and thus, this activity was less applicable to the respondents of this study.

With regard to the behavioral attributes, the three most favorably rated items were "I would say good things about the event today to other people" ( $\bar{x} = 4.03$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ), "I would come back to a similar event in the future" ( $\bar{x} = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ), and "I have stayed at the mall longer than planned" ( $\bar{x} = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ). Less favorably rated behavioral attributes (although still above the mean) included "I have bought nonfood items that I did not plan to" ( $\bar{x} = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ), "I have bought food items that I did not plan to" ( $\bar{x} = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), and "I would like to receive invitation to a similar event in the future" ( $\bar{x} = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ). These findings indicate that the shoppers have stayed longer at the shopping mall because of the mall entertainment event; however, this extended stay appeared to have only minimal impact on their extra spending on food and nonfood items. These findings are contrary to Parson's (2003) study, which reveals a positive association between participation in mall entertainment events and increased spending among mall visitors. The weak association between event attendance and spending tendency in this study may be attributed to the timing of the questionnaire whereby the shoppers were surveyed immediately after the conclusion of the mall entertainment event. Hence, the shoppers' responses to the items measuring immediate shopping behavior were possibly based on intentions rather than actual behaviors. Future research should involve a follow-up survey to more accurately assess post-event behavioral activities.

Although the respondents indicated that they were very likely to recommend the entertainment event experience to other people and were very interested in attending a similar

mall entertainment event in the future, they were less likely to agree that they would like to receive an invitation to a similar event in the future. However, because it is not common practice for shopping malls to send out personalized invitations to consumers when promoting an entertainment event, the lower rating on "I would like to receive invitation to a similar event in the future" may reflect perceived likelihood rather than agreement. Future research could address personalized communication strategies for mall entertainment events and the potential role of gathering participant satisfaction data as the basis of future direct marketing activities.

### Exploratory factor analysis

To establish the unidimensionality of the items operationalizing passive versus active participation, as well as immediate versus future shopping behaviors, a principal components factor analysis (PCA) with a varimax rotation was conducted (Table 3). This strategy was chosen to identify the minimum number of factors needed to account for the maximum portion of the total variance vis-à-vis the 10 participation activities (Hair *et al.*, 2006). PCA with a varimax rotation was used to determine whether passive and active participation factors could be partitioned and, if so, whether these two factors could maximally explain the set of participation activities identified from the literature. Hair *et al.* (2006) explain that PCA with a varimax rotation is particularly useful for checking the unique (explained) and error (unexplained) variance of a specific variable. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test was 0.89 (exceeding the threshold of 0.60), and Bartlett's test was significant, verifying that the data were appropriate for factor analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

To establish the convergent and discriminant validity of the participation activities, two criteria were applied to remove an item from the analysis: (i) any item that exhibited a loading score lower than 0.40; and (ii) any item that cross-loaded on more than two factors with a loading score of equal to or greater than 0.40 on each factor (Hair *et al.*, 2006). The participation activity "to receive free prizes (or gifts)" did not meet these criteria and thus was excluded from further analysis. The remaining nine participation activities loaded onto two factors (with an eigenvalue greater than 1), accounting for 63.18 per cent of the total variance explained, indicating a satisfactory factor solution (Hair *et al.*, 2006). The omission

Table 3. Factor analysis of participation activities

| Factor solution and items                     | Item loading | Eigenvalue | % of variance explained | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|--------------|------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Factor 1—relax and be entertained             |              |            |                         |                  |
| To watch other people                         | 0.84         | 4.60       | 51.12                   | 0.86             |
| To take a break from the shopping trip        | 0.83         |            |                         |                  |
| To enjoy free entertainment                   | 0.78         |            |                         |                  |
| To escape from my daily routine               | 0.65         |            |                         |                  |
| To see something new or different             | 0.54         |            |                         |                  |
| Factor 2—socialize and explore                |              |            |                         |                  |
| To support my children's interests            | 0.80         | 1.09       | 12.06                   | 0.76             |
| To have some fun                              | 0.74         |            |                         |                  |
| To see something (someone) I am interested in | 0.67         |            |                         |                  |
| To do something with my family (or friends)   | 0.59         |            |                         |                  |

Note: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = 0.89; Bartlett's test,  $p$ -value = 0.00 (chi-square = 1088.78, degree of freedom = 36); total variance explained = 63.18 per cent.

of “to receive free prizes” in this study should be interpreted with caution, as it does not necessarily negate the value of free prizes within the context of shopping mall entertainment events. The low factor loading and cross-loading with the two identified factors could indicate the existence of an unaccounted factor as supported by the total variance unexplained (37%). Hence, future research could further assess the relevance of “to receive free prizes” with other samples at other entertainment events.

The first factor labeled “relax and be entertained” explained 51.1 per cent of the variance and consisted of five activities. This factor related to watching other people, recuperating from the shopping routine, and enjoying gratis and novel entertainment. The second factor labeled “socialize and explore” consisted of four activities and accounted for 12.1 per cent of the variance explained. These activities were associated with supporting a child’s interest, pursuing personal interest, bonding with family or friends, and having fun. Both factors attained very robust reliability (Cronbach’s alpha greater than 0.70) (Kline, 1998).

A PCA with a varimax rotation was also conducted for the items measuring immediate and future shopping behaviors (Table 4). Two factors emerged (with eigenvalues greater than 1) with 71.4 per cent of total variance explained, suggesting a very well-explained factor solution (Hair *et al.*, 2006). The first factor labeled “future shopping behaviors” accounted for 54.54 per cent of the variance and included three operational items, which focused on positive behaviors that the respondents agreed they would undertake with regard to future mall entertainment events. The second factor labeled “immediate shopping behaviors” included items related to positive behaviors that the respondents claimed to have undertaken immediately after the mall entertainment event. This second factor explained 17.0 per cent of the variance. Both factors achieved very good reliability (Cronbach’s alpha over 0.70) (Kline, 1998).

### Cluster analysis

*K*-means clustering was conducted to explore the utility of the passive versus active participation activities for segmenting and profiling mall-entertainment-event consumers. *K*-means clustering enabled the examination of the meaningfulness of various cluster solutions separately and thoroughly, less possible with hierarchical clustering, which generates all possible

cluster solutions in a single analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Two-cluster, three-cluster and four-cluster solutions were performed on the nine remaining participation activities. The two-cluster solution prevailed because it produced the most meaningful segments with regard to distinctive activity structure and membership size (Table 5). These two participant clusters were labeled “entertain me” and “engage me.” The “entertain me” segment is primarily interested in being the spectator or observer at a mall entertainment event, whereby they enjoy watching people for amusement and consider mall entertainment events to be an economical and convenient means to escape from mundane or routine shopping activities. Conversely, the “engage me” segment enjoys both spectating and actively participating and is keen to experience a fuller range of participation activities. Besides seeking spectator-based amusement opportunities (e.g., people watching, escapism, and gratis and novel entertainment), the “engage me” segment desires opportunities to socialize and explore (e.g., doing things with family or friends, supporting their children’s interests, and pursuing personal interests). In this study, the “engage me” segment ( $n = 169$ ) was a larger than the “entertain me” ( $n = 111$ ) segment, and this may be attributed to the family-oriented entertainment events investigated in this study. Family-oriented entertainment events are typically interactive and social in nature as they aim to entice parents to visit the shopping mall

Table 5. Clusters of mall-entertainment-event participants

| Participation items                           | Mean score                   |                           |
|---|------------------------------|---------------------------|
|   | Cluster 1:<br>“entertain me” | Cluster 2:<br>“engage me” |
| Factor 1—relax and be entertained             |                              |                           |
| To watch other people                         | 4.00                         | 4.00                      |
| To take a break from the shopping trip        | 3.00                         | 4.00                      |
| To enjoy free entertainment                   | 4.00                         | 4.00                      |
| To escape from my daily routine               | 4.00                         | 4.00                      |
| To see something new or different             | 3.00                         | 4.00                      |
| Factor 2—socialize and explore                |                              |                           |
| To support my children’s interests            | 3.00                         | 4.00                      |
| To have some fun                              | 3.00                         | 4.00                      |
| To see something (someone) I am interested in | 3.00                         | 4.00                      |
| To do something with my family (or friends)   | 3.00                         | 4.00                      |
| Membership size (%)                           | 111 (40%)                    | 169 (60%)                 |

Table 4. Factor analysis for shopping behaviors

| Factor solution and items  | Item loading | Eigenvalue | % of variance explained | Cronbach’s alpha |
|--|--------------|------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Factor 1—future shopping behavior                                      |              |            |                         |                  |
| I would come back for a similar event in the future                    | 0.89         | 3.27       | 54.53                   | 0.84             |
| I would say good things about the event today to other people          | 0.87         |            |                         |                  |
| I would like to receive an invitation to a similar event in the future | 0.74         |            |                         |                  |
| Factor 2—immediate shopping behavior                                   |              |            |                         |                  |
| I have bought some food items that I did not plan to                   | 0.86         | 1.02       | 16.96                   | 0.74             |
| I have bought some nonfood items that I did not plan to                | 0.81         |            |                         |                  |
| I have stayed at the mall longer than planned                          | 0.67         |            |                         |                  |

Note: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = 0.78; Bartlett’s test,  $p$ -value = 0.00 (chi-square = 678.72, degree of freedom = 15); total variance explained = 71.49 per cent.

and have fun with their children. Moreover, a shopping mall entertainment event also serves as an ideal “time-out” for parents and children, as they typically undertake other shopping activities in conjunction with the event participation (Gentry, 2004; Barbieri, 2005).

### Demographic and behavioral profiles of participant clusters

Chi-square testing and independent-sample t-tests were performed to establish the demographic and behavioral profiles of the “entertain me” and “engage me” segments (cf. Tables 6 and 7). Chi-square testing revealed no significant demographic differences between these two segments in relation to gender, age, or household status. Hence, demographic traits may be less insightful in profiling entertainment event participants. However, testing did reveal significant behavioral differences between the “entertain me” and “engage me” segments with regard to both immediate and future shopping behaviors. In comparison with the “entertain me” segment, the “engage me” segment was more likely to strongly agree to having stayed at the mall longer than planned ( $t = -5.24, p < 0.01$ ) and spontaneously buying food items ( $t = -4.71, p < 0.01$ ) and nonfood items ( $t = -4.32, p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, the “engage me” segment was more likely to agree to saying good things about the event to other people ( $t = -7.62, p < 0.01$ ), coming back to a similar event in the future ( $t = -8.48, p < 0.01$ ), and receiving an invitation to a similar event in the future ( $t = -7.24, p < 0.01$ ). This

finding indicates that a positive relationship may exist between more active and fuller participation with an entertainment event and consumers’ shopping behaviors.

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

For many events (e.g., sporting events, music concerts, and theatres), the extent of passive versus active participation is strictly prescribed and managed. For instance, in a professional soccer game or a pop-music concert, consumers are generally “constrained” as pure spectators rather than being active participants (cf. Madrigal, 2003; Greenwell *et al.*, 2007). This is different from many shopping mall entertainment events, whereby consumers are frequently encouraged to “engage” in higher levels of participation and interaction through playing, performing, or exploring (Gentry, 2004; Barbieri, 2005). Alternatively, consumers have the option to be more passive and simply appreciate or observe the event if they so desire (Barbieri, 2005). “Engaging” and “observing” are not mutually exclusive activities; rather, they coexist in a continuum within the context of shopping mall entertainment events. For example, in a children workshop, parents may more actively engage or play with their children at the beginning of the event and then switch to more passively observing to take a break and then revert back again to higher levels of engagement once they have recuperated. Managing opportunities for switching between more passive

Table 6. Demographic profile of mall-entertainment-event clusters

| Demographics                               | Frequency percentage       |                         | $\chi^2$ test | Degree of freedom | Significance |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
|  | Entertain me ( $n = 111$ ) | Engage me ( $n = 169$ ) |               |                   |              |
| Gender                                     |                            |                         |               |                   |              |
| Female                                     | 75                         | 80                      | 1.12          | 1                 | 0.29         |
| Male                                       | 25                         | 20                      |               |                   |              |
| Age category (in years)                    |                            |                         |               |                   |              |
| 18–21                                      | 12                         | 14                      | 6.28          | 7                 | 0.51         |
| 22–25                                      | 13                         | 7                       |               |                   |              |
| 26–30                                      | 16                         | 14                      |               |                   |              |
| 31–40                                      | 23                         | 33                      |               |                   |              |
| 41–50                                      | 21                         | 20                      |               |                   |              |
| Over 50                                    | 15                         | 13                      |               |                   |              |
| Household status                           |                            |                         |               |                   |              |
| Have children under the age of 6           | 26                         | 29                      | 7.37          | 5                 | 0.19         |
| Have children between the ages of 6 and 12 | 16                         | 26                      |               |                   |              |
| Have grown-up children                     | 23                         | 17                      |               |                   |              |
| Do not have any children                   | 36                         | 27                      |               |                   |              |

Table 7. Behavioral profile of mall-entertainment-event clusters

| Behavioral items  | Mean (SD)                  |                         | t-test (significance) |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
|   | Entertain me ( $n = 111$ ) | Engage me ( $n = 169$ ) |                       |
| I have stayed at the mall longer than planned                       | 3.55 (0.86)                | 4.08 (0.76)             | -5.24 (<0.01)         |
| I have bought some food items that I did not plan to                | 2.96 (0.98)                | 3.53 (1.00)             | -4.71 (<0.01)         |
| I have bought some nonfood items that I did not plan to             | 2.78 (0.94)                | 3.30 (1.05)             | -4.32 (<0.01)         |
| I would come back for a similar event in the future                 | 3.41 (0.89)                | 4.22 (0.62)             | -8.48 (<0.01)         |
| I would like to receive invitation to a similar event in the future | 2.91 (1.08)                | 3.80 (0.91)             | -7.24 (<0.01)         |
| I would say good things about the event today to other people       | 3.68 (0.65)                | 4.25 (0.58)             | -7.62 (<0.01)         |

or more active levels of participation can be beneficial in creating and delivering a more enjoyable entertainment event experience.

On the basis of an extensive review of the extant literature, this paper identifies nine activities that potentially operationalize passive versus active participation in a shopping mall entertainment event. Exploratory factor analysis revealed two factors. The first factor, “relax and be entertained,” focuses on passive relaxation and amusement acquired by watching other people, recuperating from a routine shopping excursion, experiencing free entertainment, and viewing something new or novel. The second factor, “socialize and explore,” captures active hedonism via socializing with family and friends, supporting a child’s interest, and pursuing personal interests.

The empirical findings of this study build on the work of Holt (1995). First, in comparison with Holt’s (1995) consumption typology, the two factors that emerged in this study, “relax and be entertained” and “socialize and explore,” are akin to Holt’s (1995) “consuming as experience” and “consuming as play,” respectively. Holt’s (1995) “consuming as experience” comprises accounting, evaluating, and appreciating, which are comparable with the activities captured in the “relax and be entertained” factor such as viewing something new or novel, watching other people, and enjoying free entertainment. However, Holt’s (1995) “consuming as experience” does not include aspects such as recuperation and escapism, which have been revealed to be pertinent to the experiential consumption of family-oriented entertainment events in this study. The second factor that emerged in this study, “socialize and explore,” comprises activities related to supporting a child’s interest and doing things with family and friends and is akin to Holt’s (1995) “consuming as play”. However, Holt’s (1995) “consuming as play” does not include aspects such as having fun and pursuing personal interests, which are captured in the “socialize and explore” factor in this study. Hence, the two participation factors and associated activities emerging from this study extend the work of Holt (1995) by identifying additional aspects that more fully capture passive versus active participation in a shopping mall entertainment event.

The empirical findings of this paper also complement the work of Mathwick *et al.* (2001) on the EV framework. The factors of “relax and be entertained” and “socialize and explore” identified in this paper are analogous to the dimensions of “aesthetics” and “playfulness” underpinning the EV framework. “Aesthetics” relates to the appreciation of appealing and entertaining visual features, whereas “playfulness” focuses on the attainment of intrinsic enjoyment and immersive escapism (Mathwick *et al.*, 2001). Nevertheless, the EV framework is limited in its capacity to capture the full extent of consumer experiences with family-oriented mall entertainment events. First, the “relax and be entertained” dimension in this study captures additional visual or aesthetic elements including human crowd attributes whereby shoppers observe others for amusement (crowd aesthetics) and uniqueness elements whereby event participants seek novelty or variety in a family-oriented mall entertainment event. The need for uniqueness in a mall entertainment event can potentially influence people’s patronage to a shopping mall

(cf. Burns and Warren, 1995). Second, the element of escapism in this study is captured within the “relax and be entertained” factor as it reflects passive absorption of the entertainment event for relaxation (cf. Table 3). Conversely, within the EV framework, escapism is clustered with the “playfulness” factor reflecting more active immersion into the shopping experience (cf. Mathwick *et al.*, 2001, p. 53). This raises the question of whether escapism is a more active versus passive activity within an experiential context and, if so, whether escapism requires further investigation within the context of family-oriented and other mall entertainment events. Third, the “socialize and explore” factor in this study reflects the importance of social interaction in family-oriented mall entertainment events. Conversely, the EV framework does not include social dimensions as it is developed within the online and catalog shopping contexts wherein co-creation and co-consumption with other participants are deemed less relevant when compared with the collective nature of mall entertainment events (Ng *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, the EV framework was developed prior to the emergence of social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), which have now revolutionized the social collective experience of online and catalog shopping (Harris and Dennis, 2011).

In addition to presenting potential activities operationalizing passive versus active participation, this paper has demonstrated the potential for using varied participation levels to segment and profile mall-entertainment-event consumers. From the nine participation activities, two segments are identified and labeled as “entertain me” and “engage me” whereby the former is more interested in hands-off hedonic experiences (i.e., watching other people, enjoying free entertainment, and escaping from mundane shopping activities) and the latter emphasizes a fuller range of both passive and more hands-on or active participation opportunities. Understanding these segments and their different motives (or expectations) enables shopping mall managers to strategically create and deliver an entertainment event that simultaneously satisfies both participant segments.

Because of their varied preferences for passive and active participation, the “entertain me” and “engage me” segments exhibit heterogeneous shopping behaviors. In comparison with “entertain me,” “engage me” exhibits a higher propensity to undertake immediate and future shopping behaviors such as increased duration of stay at the mall, unplanned purchase of food and nonfood items, recommendation to others about the mall entertainment event, and returning to a similar entertainment event in the future. These findings enrich the extant literature by providing the theoretical grounding for future studies that seek to investigate the relationship between participation levels and shoppers’ subsequent behaviors in a mall entertainment event.

The preliminary findings of this paper offer several managerial implications. First, the activities operationalizing passive versus active participation can facilitate the construction and execution of a fuller range of consumer experience within the context of shopping mall entertainment events. For instance, the participation activities can be incorporated into a survey instrument to identify people’s expectations of, or preferences for, passive versus active participation in an entertainment event, allowing the shopping mall manager

to be more effective in design, execution, and promotion of the event. Second, the operational knowledge about measuring passive versus active participation can be used to assess the potential return on investment of a shopping mall entertainment event (i.e., the degree to which the event increases shopping mall patronage, length of stay, and spending) and estimate “experiential success” (i.e., the degree to which the event is effective in creating and delivering passive versus active experience). Third, the proposed framework can be converted into a diagnostic tool for understanding how consumer participation changes across the consumption process of a shopping mall entertainment event and can enable mall managers to proactively maneuver or manage participants’ behaviors at the entertainment event. Finally, the activities measuring passive versus active participation can be used in conjunction with other psychographic and behavioral variables (e.g., novelty-seeking tendency and patronage frequency to the mall) to insightfully cluster and profile participant groups in an entertainment event and understand which types of entertainment events are more appealing to which participant groups and why.

#### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings presented in this paper are exploratory in nature and therefore offer several opportunities for further development. First, the proposed activities operationalizing passive versus active participation require further validation, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Second, these participation activities have been tested at two family-oriented entertainment events, with this entertainment event category chosen because it is known to offer both passive and active experiences (Gentry, 2004; Barbieri, 2005). Empirical testing of the participation activities with more family-oriented and other types of entertainment events (e.g., fashion shows and automobile exhibits) is necessary to establish measurement validity and reliability. Future research could explore other unaccounted activities of passive versus active participation, in particular, activities associated with more immersive and collective activities, for example those involving co-production and co-creation (Carù and Cova, 2006; Raghunathan and Corfman, 2006; Peters *et al.*, 2012). For this study, the data on immediate and future shopping behaviors were gathered via a self-reporting method immediately following the event, and thus, intentions rather than actual post-event behaviors were measured. Future research could allow triangulation through a mixed-methods approach (e.g., self-reporting, observation, and a longitudinal study) to more accurately gauge the impact of passive versus active participation on participants’ immediate versus future shopping behaviors (cf. Davies and Fitchett, 2004).

Demographic variables appear to offer little insight into why or how passive versus active participant segments exist within the context of shopping mall entertainment events. Hence, future research should more fully consider psychological variables for segmenting and profiling entertainment event participants, such as shopping orientation (Bloch *et al.*, 1994; Teller *et al.*, 2008), novelty seeking (Hirschman, 1980), normative influences (Shukla and Babin, 2013), and mood states (Lotz *et al.*, 2010).

#### CONCLUSION

This paper reveals the need to adopt a customized, multifaceted approach when examining and profiling participants in a retail experiential event. The empirical findings indicate that participants in a retail experiential event are not homogenous but rather seek or desire varied levels of participation experience. Some participants favor a more passive, absorptive role (“entertain me”), whereas others prefer a more active, immersive role (“engage me”). The empirical findings also indicate that consumers with varied participation preferences (passive versus active) behave differently after a retail experiential event and thus support a customized approach to the marketing and management of the event in order to deliver desired experiences, facilitate co-creation and co-consumption, and mitigate any potential conflict of interest among heterogeneous participant segments.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Christoph Teller (Surrey University, UK) and Jonathan Elms (Stirling University, Scotland) for their helpful comments in developing this manuscript

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