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Article

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MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Consumers choice of small independent specialty stores in shopping centers during weekday extended trading hours: A qualitative study

Vikram Khangembam^{1*}

Abstract: This study explored the behavioral dynamics that is responsible for the success of the small independent specialty retailers in a shopping center during weekday extended trading hours. Drawing on literature from different areas, consumers' shopping experiences, browsing patterns and factors influencing browsing activities in small independent specialty stores in a shopping center during weekday extended trading hours was investigated. The study was carried out in Brisbane, Australia. Two focus groups with consumers and a personal interview with an expert was performed. This research found consumers were usually goal oriented during weekday late evening trading hours and they would usually engage in browsing in-stores only when they require customer assistance. This research was also able to understand and establish the behavioural dynamics that can determine the performance of the small independent specialty stores during extended trading hours. Overall, this research suggests that the small independent specialty stores are unlikely to experience an increase in sales or attract more customers by extending the trading hours. This study makes an important step in understanding consumers demand for small independent specialty stores in categorized shopping centers during the extended trading hours. The conceptualization and findings of this research contribute to two areas of research: consumer spatial behavior and consumer information search in small independent specialty stores in a shopping center during weekday extended trading hours.

Subjects: Urban Policy; Consumer Psychology; Planning; Property; Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management; Marketing

Keywords: Retail Trading Hours; Shopping Centers; Consumer Browsing Behavior; Specialty Stores

1. Introduction

Decision to restrict or liberalize retail trading hours are contentious but crucial for physical stores to remain competitive against online shopping and enhance consumers' shopping convenience. Therefore, policy-makers have been interested in the implications of restriction and liberalization of retail trading hours on consumers' shopping convenience and stores performance. One of the main questions many of these studies have tried to answer is: Does extending the trading hours favor larger-sized shopping centers? So far, scholars provided the evidence of larger-sized shopping centers to benefit more from extended trading hours than smaller-sized shopping centers and stand-alone stores (Baker, 2002; Baker & Wood, 2010). The Spatial Interaction Models and Retail Aggregate Space Time-Trip (RASTT) Model are some of the prominent models of spatial theoretical framework applied to explain the above outcome.

However, there is a limitation in these models. Shopper's patronage of a particular center is calculated based on the overall floor size of the center. Thus, the results do not precisely explain the advantages of larger-sized shopping centers during extended trading hours to be pertinent or equally favorable to the Small Independent Specialty (SIS) stores located within. For example, within the shopping center, there exist well-known brand outlets and department stores with large product assortment acting as main anchor tenant, all competing against the small independent retailers. Therefore, Baker (Baker & Wood, 2010) expressed the need to disaggregate the performance of the shopping center as the overall analysis generate wider range of forecast which may not be relevant to some sections of the shopping center. One of the key strengths of the Spatial Interaction Models is that it is flexible and can disaggregate the performance of the shopping center (Dawson, 2012; Thomas, 1976). For example, the Huff Model can integrate the behavioral dynamics of shopping center environment.

The aim of the current study is to gain insights into the dynamics that are driving the behavior of the consumers to shop during weekday extended trading (WET) hours and therefore are responsible for the success of the small independent specialty retailers in a shopping center. To understand the behavioral dynamics, it was proposed to investigate the in-store consumer browsing behavior. Based on these insights it is possible to test and improve the accuracy of the spatial models in determining the performance of retail precinct including main anchor tenants and non-anchor tenants. Thus, objectives of this study are: 1) to explore the unique experiences of consumers who visits a shopping center during the weekday extended trading hours and 2) to identify consumers browsing patterns and activities that supports the small independent specialty stores to become successful. Specifically, the research question underpinning this study is: *How would consumers describe their browsing experiences at small independent specialty stores in a shopping center when shopping during weekday extended trading hours?*

2. Literature review

2.1. Spatial Interaction Theory and RASTT Model

Various researchers have contributed to the development of Spatial Interaction Models (SIM) and have sought to create a more realistic model of consumer spatial behavior (McGoldrick & Thompson, 1992). The most significant contribution in SIM was made by the Huff Spatial Interaction Model in predicting shoppers' patronage decisions (Wee & Pearce, 2015).

The three assumed determinants of the Huff Model: the size of the shopping center, distance and the impact of alternative centers in the retail environment, are still relevant and significant in determining shopping behavior (Wee & Pearce, 2015). The Huff model is considered the closest specification for modern theory-based approaches in explaining shopping behavior and the role of the shopping center (Wee & Pearce, 2015). The Huff model assumes that consumers differentiate between competing shopping centers based on their attractiveness and distance (McGoldrick & Thompson, 1992). Further, the gravity model can integrate the behavioral dynamics of shopping interactions (Dawson, 2012; Thomas, 1976).

One disadvantage of the Huff model was that it does not consider the temporal factor in determining shopping center patronage. In the intra-urban retail environment, Warnes & Daniels (1979) observed that consumers' shopping behavior was significantly influenced by the temporal factor and the distance of the shopping trip. Therefore, Thill & Thomas (1987) suggested that combining both spatial and temporal aspects would increase accuracy in analyzing consumers' spatial behavior.

Integration of both spatial and temporal aspects was initiated by Baker (2002) who has applied the two factors in determining shopping center patronage and consumer movement. Baker (2002) employed the Retail Aggregate Space-Time Trip (RASTT) model and successfully demonstrated that the length of trading period has significant influence on the size of and distance to, the

shopping center. He found consumers were more likely to travel further distance and choose larger-sized shopping center as the length of trading period was increased. The RASTT model uses trip distance, shopping frequency, retail floor space and length of trading period per week as variables to examine consumer shopping behavior (Baker, 2002).

However, there are limitations of the RASTT model and Huff's gravity model that influences the accuracy in predicting consumer shopping behavior. For example, the scope of the Retail Aggregate Space-Time Trip (RASTT) model was limited to only "when", "where" and "how often" shopping is undertaken Baker (2002). As for the Huff model, it has provided reasonably accurate explanations of shoppers' patronage decisions regarding a particular shopping center or a shopping "precinct", it is not as accurate when explaining patrons' decisions to visit individual stores (McGoldrick & Thompson, 1992). Consequently, these models at present lack the ability to establish the knowledge that consumers' preference for larger-sized shopping center during extended trading hours will positively contribute to small retailers' success. Therefore, the current study explores behavioral dynamics to enable integration with the spatial models.

2.2. Specialty Stores, Retail Trading Hours and Consumer Browsing Behavior

Shy & Stenbacka (2008) found non-uniform trading hours of the stores within the shopping center affect consumers' shopping activities especially one-stop shopping and in-store browsing activities. Therefore, shopping center managers need to maintain a uniform trading schedule, which might compel small retailers to stay open during extended trading hours despite their lower productivity/sales. This is often mandated in retail leasing contracts, which signatories of leased space within shopping centers are legally obliged to adhere to. Thus, a disadvantage for small retailers renting a physical space within the shopping center is they are bound by the shopping center management requirements around operational hours and do not have flexibility or full authority to operate their businesses during hours they dictate.

It was perceived that the liberalization of trading hours affected the survival of the small specialty retailers the most (SafeWork, 2013). Wenzel (2011) found that extending trading hours were very demanding for the majority of small specialty retailers, as they required additional investment that influenced time, physical and mental resources, and ultimately financial capacity. Collectively, these issues can negatively affect the longevity of small specialty retailers, as they often cannot draw on the same level of resources and capacity as their larger competitors such as departmental stores. Consequently, this increases the workload and the overhead costs of smaller businesses.

Further, Price (2005) found that the employment rate was the same despite the extension of retail trading hours. This suggests that small specialty retailers are likely to work by themselves during extended trading hours in order to reduce the operating cost of their business. Hence, it could be said that small specialty retailers and/or retail employees tend to make decisions that negatively affect their wellbeing. In this context, social and religious groups have asserted that extended trading hours, especially on weekends, present an unhealthy competitive environment (Huddleston & Huddleston, 2010). These findings raise a strong counter argument to the benefits of extended trading hours.

Yet there are empirical results that have demonstrated that those small specialty retailers who managed to survive the competition during extended trading hours could expand the size of their businesses due to an increase in consumer spending and shopping activities (Business South Australia, 2018; Wenzel, 2011). In other words, restricted trading hours may help in maintaining the viability of the majority of small retailers to some extent, but equally they place social and economic burdens on small independent specialty retailers. Therefore, it is timely to understand how consumers spend their time when visiting shopping centers during WET hours.

Drawing from research on consumer shopping, I propose that consumer in-store browsing behavior will be key in understanding the influence of retail trading hours on SIS stores success. Goodman & Remaud (2015) found that consumers were more likely to choose specialty stores over department stores if they perceived the specialty retailer delivered high quality products and services (related to product knowledge). Romaniuk & Sharp (2004) suggested that, although a retailer's convenient location is important, their presence in a consumer's mind is what makes the difference as it influences consumers in their choice of where to shop. Hence, consumers may need to spend some time browsing in-stores to experience the quality of the products and services offered by the SIS stores.

On most occasions, the information acquired during browsing activity in a store is an end in itself. The shopper may tend to make an impulse purchase or may be simply satisfied by acquiring the knowledge about a particular product. The information gained can also be used in future purchases (Bloch et al., 1989). *Impulse purchase* is a sudden decision made by the consumer based on their affection towards a product (Rook, 1987). Therefore, those shopping centers that are able to induce consumers to browse within the center are likely to help the small independent specialty retailers in promoting their products and services. The review of literature shows no previous research has specifically investigated the consumer browsing process and experiences in a shopping center during weekday extended trading hours. In the scope of this research consumer browsing behavior will be used as a lens to identify factors influencing browsing patterns and activities in specialty stores in a shopping center during WET hours.

2.3. Extended trading hours in Australia

The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies' commissioned by SafeWork (2013) which noted that respondents needed greater flexibility in shopping hours despite acknowledging that the current retail trading hours were sufficient to cater for their shopping activities. These findings concur with Reimers & Clulow (2009) research which suggested that Australian shoppers were regularly pressed for time and sought time convenience when shopping. Therefore, suburban residents in Adelaide support the liberalisation of trading hours, but indicated such changes to pertain on shopping centres that are located in close proximity to their residence than just the CBD (Central Business District) area (SafeWork, 2013).

Thus far the existing policies are perceived to be effective in sustaining the competitiveness of smaller centres as the return of investment from various retail centres indicated a marginal difference irrespective of their size and locations (McGreal & Kupke, 2014). The smaller shopping centres are equally competitive with the large-sized regional shopping centres in terms of annual turnover. According to URBIS (2015, p. 1) "for the year ending June 2014, total aggregated centre turnover was estimated at AUD\$130.7 billion with inclusive of GST". As for the three categories (i.e., regional, sub-regional and neighbourhood centre) of shopping centres, the combined total aggregated turnover for the year ending June 2014 was estimated at AUD\$109 billion (URBIS, 2015). One of the main reasons that smaller shopping centres sustain their competitiveness is because of restricted trading hours, as well as the volume of smaller shopping centres in comparison with regional. Baker (2002) empirically demonstrated that longer trading hours were more beneficial to larger sized shopping centres, therefore, restricted trading hours were considered necessary to disperse the frequency of visits to smaller shopping centres. A report published by the Shopping Centre Council of Australia (2011) also claimed that the performance of Australian shopping centres in terms of sales per metre² was high, but these shopping centres only comprised 35% of the total retail stores in Australia. Furthermore, shopping centres were observed to have a very low average vacancy rate (i.e., within 1%) despite facing economic turbulence (for example, the global financial crisis). Therefore, in light of the success of shopping centres, it is essential to investigate the impact of extended trading hours on shopping centres especially in suburban area.

According to the SafeWork (2013) report, those consumers who usually preferred to shop during public holidays had the highest preference for shopping during extended trading hours. This result

may indicate that consumers who spend their leisure activity shopping are the ones who prefer shopping on days with extended trading hours. Interestingly, it is not true according to the findings of Geiger (2007) who identified late evening shoppers to be usually task oriented. Further, Geiger (2007) found the frequency of shopping visits during the late evening trading hours was greater for younger cohorts in comparison to older shoppers who were mostly male. Geiger also identified the majority of the shoppers were regular visitors to the shopping centre and many of them worked night shift. Although, Geiger (2007) study was based in Ireland and focussed on supermarket stores it definitely helps in the current research because it's the main anchor tenants that are the primary drivers of consumers' footfall to the shopping centre. However, the contrasting results between SafeWork (2013) report and Geiger (2007) raises the question about the efficiency of consumers' in-store browsing activity during extended trading hours considering it is an important factor influencing specialty stores success. In other words, there is a need to further explore what consumers think about shopping during weekday late evening trading hours and how does this relate to convenience in the Australian context. The implication of this study will help shopping centres and specialty stores to understand what drives consumers to shop during weekday late evening hours considering 70% (approx.) of Australian shopping centre customers are female (Bailey, 2013). From a strategic and operational perspective, an in-depth understanding of this knowledge would be an incredibly powerful tool for shopping centre management. An understanding of this impact can provide evidence to retail tenants of the best strategies to attract consumers and entice them to browse, once they are within the shopping centre. Specialty stores retailer pays the highest rent in all categories of shopping centres in comparison to other retailers such as department stores and supermarkets (Savills Research Australia, 2018). Therefore, another implication of the current study will be for the shopping centre management to be able to retain and assure the specialty retailers of excellent performance even with the liberalisation of trading hours. Based on previous study by (Geiger, 2007; McGreal & Kupke, 2014; SafeWork, 2013) it was observed that the quantitative survey method and total sales data analysis revealed limited knowledge about consumers shopping behaviour during extended trading hours. Therefore, the current research adopted the qualitative method to connect with the consumers and shopping centre management on a more personal level to gain in-depth insights about shopping during weekday late evening trading hours.

3. Methodology

3.1. Employment of Focus Groups Discussions

Focus group interview is more relevant for investigating a wide-ranging exploratory research (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Therefore, the current study organized two focus groups discussions (face to face) in order to understand consumers unique shopping experiences during WET hours. Questions were centered around consumers' browsing behavior in a shopping center, with an emphasis on the effect on in-store browsing and/or purchasing in SIS stores. These perspectives are combined under themes to address the research objectives. The determinants of the spatial models as discussed in the literature review helped frame the questions and the themes.

The questions for the focus group discussions were designed based on Stewart et al. (2007) typology of focus group questions (see, Table 1).

The structure of the questions adopted the funnel approach. According to Stewart et al. (2007) the funnel approach enhances the rapport amongst the participants by discussing a broad general topic in the initial stage of the discussion process, followed by specific questions related to the objective of the focus group.

As focus group discussions cannot be generalized to a larger population, Stewart & Shamdasani (2014) found convenience sampling to be the most common form of recruitment. The recruitment process for the focus groups discussion was limited to the trading area of the shopping center that provided approval to recruit participants in the current study in order to achieve geographical

Table 1. Typology of focus group questions

Type of questions	Purpose	Examples of questions used in the focus groups discussion
Main research question	Specifies the main focus of the discussion	How does the opening hours of the shopping center affect your daily shopping and browsing activities within a shopping center?
Leading question	Getting deeper ideas and perceptions of the participants	What are the reasons why you visit a shopping center?
Testing question	Test the ideas and perceptions of the participants	How would you describe your in-store browsing behavior at regional, sub-regional and neighborhood shopping centers?
Steering question	Steering the group back to the main agenda of the discussion after testing the perceptions and ideas of the group	Which category of shopping center do you consider most favorable for browsing specialty stores? (example of closed-ended questions)
Obtuse question	This question is introduced to generate differences in the opinions of the participants	Why do you feel this particular shopping center is more favorable for browsing specialty stores? (example of open-ended questions)
Factual question	This is employed to ease tension when participants argue inconclusively	How important is the weekday extended trading hours of the shopping center?
“Feel” question	Individual participants are given the opportunity to express their own experiences	Consider the following situation: you need to purchase a specialty product and you have already determined the brand and the type of specialty product to purchase. Will you still visit a shopping center with numerous options to choose from, or will you visit the nearest shopping center where the product is available, regardless of limited or few options to compare the products with other brands? Why?

Source: (Stewart et al., 2007)

homogeneity. The current research calculated the trade area of the shopping center at three kilometer radius. According to Yang (2002), residents tend to have high spatial dependence within a three kilometer range irrespective of their mode of transportation (i.e., “walking, cycling, private cars, public transportation”).

In 2017 the Queensland Government made amendments to the *Trading (Allowable Hours) Act 1990* by partially deregulating the trading hours, especially within Brisbane City in order to facilitate shopping convenience for consumers’ (Queensland Parliament Finance and Administrative Committee, 2017). Thus, conducting the study in Brisbane provides an opportunity to investigate the significance of the recent changes in the trading hours concerning the performance of the small independent specialty retailers within the shopping centre. This researcher managed to obtain approval from just one shopping center located in Brisbane suburban area. As a result, all the responses in the focus groups were derived from consumers visiting a sub-regional shopping center and residing within the trading area. Additionally, located within the three kilometer radius of the sub-regional shopping center trade area, are the three major categories of shopping centers: regional, sub-regional and neighborhood shopping centers. In this research, the definitions of the shopping centers are adopted from the Shopping Centre Council of Australia (SCCA) guidelines which use “Gross Lettable Area” (GLA) to define and classify a shopping center (URBIS, 2015).

Table 2. Socio-demographic profile of focus group participants

	Participants unique ID/code	Gender	Age	Occupation status
Focus group 1	R1	Male	30 yrs	Student
	R2	Male	30 yrs	Employed full-time
	R3	Female	25 yrs	Student
	R4	Female	43 yrs	Student
	R5	Female	48ys	Employed part-time
	R6	Female	23 yrs	Student
	R7	Female	28 yrs	Employed part-time
	R8	Female	25 yrs	Employed full-time
Focus group 2	R9	Male	29 yrs	Employed-fulltime
	R10	Male	34 yrs	Employed fulltime
	R11	Female	25 yrs	Student
	R12	Female	29 yrs	Employed part-time

Source: Prepared by the author based on the focus group participants

Regional shopping centers are usually the biggest shopping centers in terms of size and product offerings, exceeding GLA of 50,000 m² (URBIS, 2015). Sub-regionals are mid-size shopping centers with a maximum GLA of 50,000 m² and neighborhood shopping centers are the smallest, with a maximum GLA of 10,000 m² (URBIS, 2015).

This research employed two focus groups with a minimum of four individuals in each group. Galvin (2015) recommended a minimum of four individuals in a focus group in order to illicit enough discussion and a wide range of views. Further, the current study followed Guest et al. (2017) suggestion and carried out two focus groups discussion on different occasions (8 December 2016 and 11 January 2017) for 90 minutes starting from 6pm. A semi-structured open-ended question guide framed the discussion. The key terms, “independent specialty store”, “the three categories of shopping centers” and “in-store browsing” were clarified before the commencement of the focus groups discussions. The author was present as the moderator in both focus groups discussions.

The participation in the focus groups was voluntary. More young adults, in comparison to the middle age groups, participated in the focus groups (75% young adults) (See, Table 2).

An individual within the age range of 18–34 is classified as young adult (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Meanwhile, Individuals within the age range of 35–54 are classified as middle-aged (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The presence of more young than middle aged adults and mostly female participants reflected the general Australian population who frequently visit shopping centers (Bailey, 2013). Further, Xia (2010) stated that young female adults were the main age group that frequently browsed in shopping centers.

3.2. Personal Interview

After the focus groups, the author arranged a personal interview (face to face) with the shopping center manager (16 February 2017 at 10.00 am). The purpose of this interview was to: a) expand on the thematic analysis of the focus groups; and b) identify any possible gaps between shopping center strategy and consumers’ expectations in relation to in-store browsing activities. Previous studies by Sobaih et al. (2012) have also suggested that an in-depth personal interview with an expert should be organized after analyzing the responses of the focus group discussions.

Fetterman (2009) suggested that in-person interviews could be organized with one or two key actors in case of difficulties in recruitment and time constraints. Hence, due to time constraints and the limited number of shopping center experts within the sub-regional shopping center trade area, the in-person interview was held with one key actor. Furthermore, this shopping center manager and his/her organization also manages a number of shopping centers in this trade area and therefore his expertise was significant. Since there was only one manager, the unique identification code for this expert was allotted with the symbol (x). The results of the personal interview and two focus groups were recorded and analyzed using the Thematic analysis. Prior to commencing the focus group discussions and personal interview the participants were asked to fill out and sign a consent form in order to comply with the ethical guidelines as specified by Griffith University. The aim of conducting the individual interview and the focus groups was to achieve data triangulation. Lambert & Loiselle (2008) found that the integration of focus groups and individual interview data to be reliable only if the aim of the study was to achieve data triangulation and not method triangulation.

4. RESULTS

Findings were organized in two parts based on the objectives of this study. First, section 4.1 explored the unique shopping experiences influenced by the retail trading hours. Second, section 4.2 identified consumers browsing patterns and activities that supports the SIS stores in a shopping center to become successful during WET hours. The thematic analysis was focused on the various agendas and shopping dimensions as listed in Table 3.

4.1. Contentions over retail trading hours

Retail trading hours in the state of Queensland are strictly regulated under the *Trading (Allowable Hours) Act 1990* (Queensland Parliament Finance and Administrative Committee, 2017). Retailers and shopping centers need to comply with existing regulations, despite shoppers' demand for extended trading hours. However, the regulation also poses challenges for some retailers. For example, a boutique store may benefit more from afternoon to late evening trading hours rather than opening early at 9am. Yet there are limitations on retailers from the shopping centers in terms of breaches to lease agreements. The non-uniformity of trading hours within shopping centers has the potential to adversely affect consumers' shopping behavior and ultimately, the shopping center environment. The shopping center manager articulated the complexity of extended trading hours.

Yeah 'cos while the labor cost is so high, it is difficult to just give an extension of trading hours with some flexibility. I am not sure what the answer is to that, because as owners we are little bit powerless as it is legislation that we rely on and then it's trying to get retailers to comply to the same trading hours, whereas different usages, different retailers want to have different trading hours, so it's very complex (x).

Despite the challenges in the provision of extended trading hours, the center manager suggested an alternative approach: "I think possibly we need to be looking at other spheres a little bit more than the trading hours rather than just extending the evening, maybe we should be looking at opening later on" (x). This statement parallels the findings in the study by Shy & Stenbacka (2006) who suggested that retail trading hours could be adjusted according to peak and off peak shopping hours.

4.1.1. Consumers' welfare versus competitiveness of small retail centers

Limited flexibility in the trading hours of shopping centers on weekdays may be one of the possible reasons for the focus groups participants', especially the female participants, preference for shopping during the weekend. As one of the female participants noted, "I feel the weekend is better because the other days people are working" (R8). In addition, many of the female participants identified their shopping activity as a form of socialization most of the time. Therefore, the employment status of friends and family members have some influence on shoppers' recreational

Table 3. Thematic analysis focused on the various agendas and shopping dimensions

Section	Agenda	Shopping dimensions: Outcomes/ recommendation from previous studies	Source	Observation in the current study not identified in previous studies.
4.1	Strategy to address the efficiency of liberalisation of trading hours by retail centres.	Peak and off-peak strategy	(Shy & Stenbacka, 2006)	Not yet adopted in the state of Queensland but there is potential for this strategy. Section 4.1.1 to 4.1.3 provides key information of how 'peak and off-peak strategy' implementation could be focused and also challenges.
4.1.1	Shopping activity during late evening trading hours.	Task-oriented shopping	(Geiger, 2007)	Family and friends influences consumers to be task-oriented.
4.1.2	Implication of restricted retail trading hours.	Shopping dispersion	(Baker & Wood, 2010)	Shopping dispersion affects customer loyalty and it cannot be strengthening through online presence.
4.1.3	Shopping centre leasing policy.	Facilitating provision for short term leasing	(Roberts et al., 2010)	Can help in enticing browsing activity but this strategy will benefit only certain shopping centres.
4.2	Success of small Independent specialty store.	Customer assistance	(Goodman & Remaud, 2015)	Non-repetitive purchase and limited stock driving the need for customer assistance and choice of specialty retailer.
4.2.1	Demand for flexibility in shopping hours despite acknowledging that the current retail trading hours were sufficient.	Extended trading hours	(SafeWork, 2013)	Despite the advancement in technology consumer still perceive there is never enough time for shopping. In other words the perception of time poor for shopping activities will likely be pertinent despite extending the trading hours.

shopping activity. One female participant explained, “Shopping is mostly done in conjunction with catching up with friends so it will be during weekend mornings as my friends work full time during the whole week” (R12).

The focus groups indicated that extended trading hours on weekdays facilitated flexibility and convenience in organized shopping activity. For example, one of the female participants explained: “I prefer extended hours during weekdays. Usually when you want to go shopping most people are working on other days and so we have to depend on weekends, but sometimes we miss that as we have to go somewhere” (R3). The main concern with weekend shopping activity, as indicated by the focus groups, was mostly related to its impact on family time. One participant (R4) commented, “I usually go shopping on weekdays because most of the weekend I go out for family time, so we don’t go to shopping centers, so I really need those extended hours”. These findings augment previous research by Kennedy (2010) who also found that weekend shopping activity may negatively affect family time. Therefore, weekday extended trading hours are essential, especially for those shoppers who are employed full-time, as this allows them to balance the need for shopping activity and family time. For example, one participant noted:

... sometimes the extended time matters, as for me sometimes I need to rush from work to do shopping. Therefore, I would not really have to run away from work just to do the shopping (R10).

However, the shopping center manager noted that the issue of extended trading hours remains highly debatable. Extended trading hours do not support the sustainability of smaller shopping centers in the presence of larger shopping centers, as most shoppers are attracted to larger assortments of goods for their browsing activity.

It’s very challenging because then there is that issue with the smaller shopping center versus the larger, when you have something like a regional shopping center in your trade area. Thursday nights have become quite difficult for sub-regional shopping centers even though the retailers are encouraged to open unto 9 o’clock, a lot of them shut early because their perception is that customers will be going to the regional shopping center on that night trade. So, it’s difficult to convince them and it’s a vicious cycle because the less shops that stay open until 9, the less customers come. So, it’s tricky to work out what to do with that. Hence, it almost does take away the market share from small shopping centers to some degree (x).

Therefore, an increase in the frequency of extended trading hours may negatively affect the performance of the smaller shopping centers and their ability to attract/retain retailers.

Regional shopping centers may have a distinct advantage over sub-regional and neighborhood shopping centers during Thursday night shopping (extended trading hours). Consumers’ main reasons for shopping during Thursday late evening hours were related to time efficiency and their interest in ensuring time for family or social activities on the weekends. These findings infer that the WET hours facilitates shoppers who are willing to engage in both cognitive (goal-oriented) and sensory shopping experiences (recreational-oriented). The reduced attractiveness of sensory shopping experiences within sub-regional and neighborhood shopping centers may hinder these centers’ ability to generate increased customer footfall for the SIS stores during the late evening hours, especially given they are located within a regional shopping center trade area. Therefore, there is limited economic benefit or imperative for SIS store retailers in the sub-regional and neighborhood shopping centers to stay open during late evening hours. This in turn affects consumers’ browsing behavior and the performance of the sub-regional and neighborhood shopping centers, as shoppers presume that the majority of the specialty stores are closed in these locations. As one participant observed, “Yeah the closure of the specialty stores affects the browsing and shopping activity” (R2). Thus, consumers’ choice of sub-regional and neighborhood shopping centers in general during extended trading hours is affected.

Despite the perceived lack of attractiveness of sub-regional shopping centers in comparison to regional shopping centers, the shopping center manager stressed the importance of daily shopping needs such as grocery shopping. This manager highlighted that the everyday needs of the shopper influences the frequency of visits to shopping centers, which in turn influences the performance of the independent specialty stores.

So, I think a lot of small shopping centers are to be marketed and so they have been relying on the weekly or two or three times a week supermarket spend from a customer, and customers would come more regularly to a small sized shopping center in comparison to a regional shopping center (x).

Hence, smaller shopping centers and the SIS stores can sustain the competitiveness against regional shopping centers, but they remain dependent on the performance of the main anchor tenant (i.e., Kmart, Coles).

4.1.2. Consequences of restricted trading hours

The consequences of not complying with shoppers' needs (i.e., "flexibility in trading hours") may affect the image and patronage of the shopping center. As one participant explained: "I would not buy because I would be annoyed as I have to come back another time to get the product" (R5). This situation may influence the shopper to try other shopping destinations. As one participant indicated: "Yeah I do prefer to visit the closest shopping center if the store I visited is already closed"(R9). However, the option of reaching the SIS stores through online shopping is considered a nuisance once the shopper is in-store. Shoppers expect to gain instant gratification and convenience by shopping in-store because they do not have to wait for delivery, as is the case in online shopping. As one participant commented: "If I am rushing to the stores I want it there and it doesn't make sense to get it online" (R2). This view was supported by the shopping center manager who also noted that the impact of limited trading hours was detrimental to the economic growth of both the shopping center and specialty stores. The manager commented: "So there will be some pressures economically for small retailers around that I know"(x).

Shoppers who perceived that they experienced greater shopping inconvenience due to restricted trading hours were likely to shop on days with extended trading hours. As one participant noted: "That's why I choose Thursday, so sometimes if I go in the morning for shopping. I am always in a rush and also since I come from a country where shops are open till late" (R4). Thus, the demographic profile of the trading zone may be a consideration in determining extended trading hours. For example, in the current study it was evident certain centers would benefit from late evening trading hours, as they cater to predominantly Asian communities which prefer to shop during the late evening hours.

4.1.3. Impact of liberalization of trading hours on short-term leasing

There are opportunities for Australian decision makers to realign shopping center trading hours with consumers' expectations and needs. The shopping center manager believed that consumers' needs and wants do facilitate changes to trading hours over time, although these changes may have a negative impact on SIS store retailers as the competition opens up. One negative consequence would be the longer time period in achieving the break-even point for retailers making a financial investment in extended trading hours. This in turn will affect the retailers, especially the newly established SIS store retailers, who intend to rent a physical store on a short-term or "pop up" basis. As the shopping center manager noted:

I think Queensland's trading hours are quite contentious, and we even recently have had changes which are exciting from our perspective. But at the same time, we can't help but think of the little independent traders who then have to pay for staffing for longer hours, and will their return be there, and there will be a period of adjustment for buyer behavior. So they may not see return immediately and that might take some time. But there is a little bit of

ambiguity around trading hours, I think all over Australia. So, there is some opportunity there, I think (x).

Provision for short-term leasing benefits both shopping centers and small independent specialty retailers. For example, some focus groups participants identified that regional shopping centers are static, monocultures with the same atmosphere, which makes them non-distinctive or monotonous for some shoppers. As participant (R5) explains:

... the stuff in a regional center isn't very interesting to me so I am more likely to go to kind of a funky neighborhood center that's got stuff that would interest me and look at that, whereas in a regional shopping center shops are quite similar (R5).

Perhaps introducing an online store could support those small independent specialty retailers who aim to lease a physical store for a short term. After acquiring the trust and confidence of the consumers by renting a physical store for a short period, an online store would enable a small independent specialty retailer to remain connected to their existing/current customers. This approach may to some extent help small independent specialty retailers to survive for a longer period.

4.2. Consumers browsing at small independent specialty stores

4.2.1. Non-repetitive purchase

As highlighted by a number of focus group participants, a challenge for SIS store retailers is consumers' preferences for non-repetitive purchases. SIS store retailers must compete through quality service and provision of unique products at higher price points in order to sustain their competitiveness,

What I would buy from specialty stores are things that won't repeat. Like I got this cardigan but this is not something that I buy every day, which I buy every couple of years, something like this, so am not going to buy the same item in different colors (R8).

4.2.2. Uncertainty-based risk

Interestingly, many focus group participants rejected the notion of decreasing their frequency of in-store browsing activity despite the increase in online usage (i.e., "for purchasing and browsing"), unless they have made pre-determined purchase decisions prior to visiting the shopping center. However, differentiation between online shopping and in-store browsing appeared to be influenced by the product category, product carrying uncertainty-based risk. For example, participant (R1) indicated that online shopping was suitable for certain products, but not for fashion products that carry uncertainty-based risk such as the size.

Not for certain products. I only shop online or browse online for watches, shoes, hats, wallets and as far as clothes, it might not fit so I tend to not take that risk. I'd rather just go and shop after trying it (R1).

4.2.3. Limited Stock

The risk of lower frequency of shopping center visits for browsing activity will still be pertinent with increasing confidence in online shopping and increased familiarity of specialty products due to frequency of online purchases. However, the amount of stock a SIS store can carry is very small in comparison to that held by larger size chain stores (e.g., "Kmart"), and particularly online e-commerce platforms. This provides an opportunity for SIS stores to change/update their product offerings from time to time. Frequent editing of product offerings disrupts shopper familiarity with the products and can lead shoppers to return to in-store browsing. As one respondent noted:

If I can get the product online, then I would purchase it online rather than visiting a store. But some specialty shops, like the homewares stores not the chain stores but the individual ones,

the stock changes all the time, whereas the chain stores carries the same stock all the time (R12).

SIS stores also have the flexibility to negotiate the price on the spot and build a better relationship with customers, which may not be achieved in online shopping.

4.3. Consumers interpretation of their browsing activity

Most focus groups participants acknowledged that the visual attractiveness or demand for smaller centers diminishes with the presence of a larger regional shopping center within the trade area. Hence, in order to browse, they would choose to go to the regional shopping center more often than the sub-regional or neighborhood shopping center. In this context, sub-regional and neighborhood shopping centers are more likely to attract grocery shoppers than those customers looking for specialty products. One participant reflected on this behavior:

... don't browse in a sub-regional shopping center. If I go to a sub-regional shopping center, it is for groceries or something, I actually tend to have something to buy in mind and I go there, but for browsing I only go to a regional shopping center (R4).

From an experiential perspective, the above statement indicates two forms of shopping experience: cognitive (goal oriented) and sensory (recreational). The data reveals that the two forms of shopping experiences influence the way consumers use shopping centers. For example, shoppers visiting a regional shopping center were more likely to browse with an abstract mind-set as they intend to satisfy their sensory shopping experience. Shoppers visiting sub-regional and neighborhood shopping centers were predominantly cognitive oriented, and they mostly browse with a concrete idea in order to minimize the time spent while shopping. The cause for shoppers to browse with a concrete or abstract mind-set in this case was influenced by the orientation of the shopping center. The sub-regional shopping center in the current study is more functional oriented, and therefore respondents were influenced to shop and browse more often with a pre-determined purchase objective.

However, the focus group participants discussed the difficulty in accessing the stores of their interest in large-sized shopping center and considered them highly inconvenient for shoppers that have limited time to browse in-store. In such situations, shoppers with no pre-determined purchase objective tend to only visit the stores with which they are familiar. As one participant explained, time constraints can determine where people shop and in which stores:

Large-sized shopping centers are quite big and if you do not have that much time, you would probably end up going to the bigger stores that you know and like, that you are already familiar with and sometimes you might not even get the time to look at the smaller stores, because you are not familiar with them (R7).

Consequently, the SIS stores may not be the first choice when shoppers' priority is value for money.

Many female focus group participants disregarded the option of visiting smaller shopping destinations when purchasing specialty products in general, despite experiencing time constraints at the large-sized shopping center. Instead, they would consider going the following day or choose an alternative day to fulfil their shopping and browsing needs. As one participant noted: *"If am too tired and miss going shopping, I will make sure that the next day in the early morning when I am available I will go"* (R8). Some of these female participants also indicated that time constraints do affect their frequency of shopping visits. However, a decrease in frequency does not influence them to skip their recreational shopping experiences. They discussed their willingness to combine both goal oriented and recreational shopping by engaging in one-stop shopping. As one of the female participants reflected:

Browsing is like a leisure activity, so I think if we are tired we don't want to do that and we won't go browsing at the shopping center, but if we have time and we have the energy then we will go. Therefore, I think it will be an enjoyable experience (R3).

A key finding from the focus group discussions was the range of brands or store preferences and their influence on browsing behavior. Smaller shopping centers face challenges in inducing effective browsing activity due to the lack in variety of stores and products. Many focus group participants associated "shopping convenience" with the size of the shopping center, depending on the type of product category. Some product categories, namely fashion products, were more likely to induce shoppers to visit the large-sized shopping center than the smaller centers. For example, one participant expressed his opinion on shopping convenience regarding fashion products:

Say for example, I was thinking of making a spontaneous purchase, I would be like trying to buy a blazer for tomorrow's church activities. So, for me I'd been to H&M, Roger David, Myer when I am shopping at a large-sized shopping center. If I go to the smaller shopping center, all you have is Kmart (R10).

This statement also indicates the importance of the main anchor tenants (that is Kmart, Myer) in attracting consumers to the shopping center. Consumers are challenged to recall the presence of SIS stores within large-sized shopping center as readily as the main anchor tenants. Therefore, when a consumer is intent on making an immediate purchase in the fashion product category, the presence of numerous main anchor tenants or reputed brands may influence choice of shopping destination.

Nevertheless, participants concluded the focus group discussions by making it explicit that the challenges for in-store browsing have not changed in recent years. As one participant noted: "Back in the old days you didn't really browse because you didn't really have time. Like if you had to go buy something on the weekend you have only three hours and you are more focused in what you are buying" (R5).

5. Conclusion

This study contributes to our understanding the reason "why" consumers may prefer shopping on days offering extended retail trading hours. Understanding 'why' will assist retailers, shopping centers and policy makers to improve the retail businesses marketing strategy and facilitate shopping convenience for consumers'. Although the facilitation of shopping convenience for consumers in a shopping center is a heavily researched area, there exist knowledge gaps, as few researchers have considered the convenience of retail trading hours in marketing the small independent specialty retailers in shopping centers.

There are a number of important contributions made by this study. Firstly, policy-makers will be provided with information relating to the need to increase the frequency of extended retail trading hours. A key finding of this research was identifying that the opportunity costs for consumers were shopping displacement. Rather than shopping on weekends, they would shop during WET hours.

This study identified that restricted retail trading hours of the shopping centers were less likely to be advantageous for small independent specialty retailers irrespective of the type/category of shopping center in which they are located. Restricted trading hours constrain shoppers' in-store browsing activity. This negative effect on consumers' in-store browsing activity usually favors the anchor tenants, such as the discount department stores. For example, Goodman & Malkoc (2012) found that shoppers who wish to purchase a product immediately emphasized the larger-sized stores, while a smaller store was preferred when consumers were less time pressured. Once shoppers are at the shopping center, the proximity factor becomes irrelevant but the effect of the size of the store is pertinent.

Table 4. Behavioural Dynamics influencing consumer in-store browsing behaviour on weekday extended trading hours

Latent variables	Measurable variables	Variable Type	References	Results in the current study supporting the latent variables and measurable variables
Choice overload	Perceived level of visibility of specialty stores at regional shopping centre Perceived level of visibility of specialty stores at neighbourhood shopping centre Frequency of impulse purchase	Independent	(Townsend & Kahn, 2014)	Stores in large-sized shopping centres will be eventually visible in the long-term as consumers at some point of time will be engaged in browsing activity. Therefore, its advantageous to locate in large-sized shopping centres if the retailer intends to stay for long-term period. Yet, the phenomenon of choice overload may still occur during restricted trading hours. Consequence of choice overload could lead to lower frequency of impulse purchase. It was evident in the current study that consumers may mostly choose to visit bigger stores only when they felt time-pressure as they can readily recall the main anchor tenants' product offerings.
The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	Perceived level of trust in online shopping for specialty products Frequency of online product comparison for specialty products prior to purchasing in-store Frequency of shopping centre visits with pre-determined purchase objective	Independent	(Grabner-Kräuter & Kaluscha, 2003; Klein & Ford, 2003; Davis, 1989)	One-time purchase and novelty of specialty products will likely be an important factor determining the benefits of online shopping in terms of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. For example, consumers may not be able to determine the purchase decision online due to the high uncertainty risk of specialty products and newness of the product. Consequently, consumers may not be able to utilised online shopping to shop efficiently in-store during restricted trading hours. Hence, consumers with higher level of trust on online shopping may use online shopping to frequently compare products and visit shopping centres with pre-determined shopping visits more often to achieve time efficiency. In contrast, Consumers with lower level of trust on online shopping might less frequently compare products online and less likely to visit shopping centres with pre-determined purchase objectives.

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued)

Latent variables	Measurable variables	Variable Type	References	Results in the current study supporting the latent variables and measurable variables
Customer assistance during restricted trading hours	<p>Perceived level of shopping inconvenience due to shorter trading hours of the specialty stores</p> <p>Frequency of customer assistance required when shopping for specialty products in-store</p> <p>Frequency of online purchases due to limited trading hours of the specialty stores</p>	Independent	(Goodman & Remaud, 2015; SafeWork, 2013)	<p>Customer assistant is one of the key strength for the specialty stores but based on the results in the current research it is proposed that consumers who engages in customer assistance less frequently are more likely to feel inconvenience of restricted trading hours. In the current paper we identified the importance of 'feel and touch' which is an important attribute of the shopping centre environment getting people to shop in-store. However, when customers visit stores to gain expert advice through customer assistance they may restrain their browsing activity to fewer stores. It is a well-known fact that customer assistance service usually aims to convince consumers of why they should buy their product. Hence, consumers that are engage in customer assistance less frequently in making a purchase decision are likely to browse multiple stores and more freely engage in 'feel and touch' of the product. Furthermore, the results in the current study indicates that consumers may not increase the frequency of online shopping due to the inconvenient of restricted trading hours especially for specialty products. Although Consumers with high frequency of online shopping may have less negative perception of restricted trading hours. They may also seek customer assistance more frequently when shopping in-stores due to lack of sensory experiences and face to face interaction with the expert.</p>

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued)

Latent variables	Measurable variables	Variable Type	References	Results in the current study supporting the latent variables and measurable variables
Huff's Gravity Model	<p>Perceived level of preference for shopping on days offering extended trading hours</p> <p>Perceived level of importance of distance to shopping centre when shopping for specialty products</p> <p>Frequency of shopping visit to regional/subregional/ neighbourhood shopping centre during extended trading hours</p>	Independent	(Baker, 2002; Goodman & Remaud, 2015; SafeWork, 2013; Wee & Pearce, 2015)	Consumers that are willing to travel to a physical store for specialty products are likely to prefer extended trading hours and choose large-sized shopping centres for the convenience of one-stop shopping. It was identified that the decision to purchase in-store is usually associated with the need for instant gratification.
Elements enhancing in-store browsing	<p>Availability of variety of products</p> <p>Presence of preferred store/ brand</p>	Mediating	(Bloch et al., 1989; Goodman & Remaud, 2015)	Availability of variety of product entices consumers as they are likely to find something suitable to their needs. Hence bigger stores tend to be their preferred stores in most occasion as indicated in the current study. It signifies the importance of main anchor tenants in increasing the footfall of consumers to the shopping centre.
Consumer in-store browsing behaviour	<p>In-store browsing time spent during goal-oriented shopping visits</p> <p>In-store browsing time spent during recreational shopping visits</p>	Dependent	(Bloch et al., 1989; Xia, 2010)	The current study has identified consumers that enjoys spending time browsing stores during goal oriented shopping visits are likely to expend more time browsing in shopping centres when they visit for recreational purposes.

Secondly, the benefit for shopping center management was having independent research that can be used to attract and retain prospective tenants to their centers. In order, for shopping centers to accommodate changes short term leasing, shopping center management need to be flexible. However, flexibility of the shopping center management might be hindered by the size of the shopping center. For example, Roberts et al. (2010) found that the presence of a large number of stores in a regional shopping center creates difficulty for the shopping center management in making quick responses or adjustments to retailers' needs. Additionally, shopping center management is constrained legislatively as they need to follow the law that governs retail leasing and other legislation governing shopping. In this context, the sub-regional shopping center, which is neither too small nor too big in terms of size, holds the advantage in facilitating the established purely online retailers' and small independent specialty retailer the ability to rent a physical space for short periods. Additionally, rent costs in sub-regional shopping centers are lower than in the regional shopping centers. A short-term lease may assist the sub-regional shopping centers in offsetting the lack of competitiveness in terms of "attractiveness for leisure and one-stop shopping" and "proximity" factors. Shoppers are likely to choose regional center for "one-stop shopping" and neighborhood center for "proximity".

Lastly, there is evidence to support the theory that the consumer browsing behavior can be employed to identify the potential of SIS stores in a shopping center to be successful during the WET hours. Thus, making a significant contribution to an understanding of consumers' browsing behavior during WET hours and the possibility of integration with the spatial models (see, Table 4).

This study identified non-repetitive purchases related to specialty products, usually for one-time use, influenced consumers to browse with the aim of seeking customer assistance in-store. As a result, consumers' choice of shopping center size and how far they would travel during WET hours will be influenced by consumers need for customer assistance. The SIS stores in shopping centers will benefit from this "non-repetitive purchase decision" and the "unfamiliarity of new products".

5.1. Study limitations and future research

Findings of this study are limited to the consumer shopping behavior during WET hours. This researcher also acknowledges that cultural factors and differences in the policies relating to extended trading hours in different states of Australia may show some variation in the responses of the participants. The qualitative findings are exploratory. Since there was limited knowledge regarding the relationship of consumer browsing behavior and the specialty stores within a shopping center during late evening trading hours; the survey questions cannot be precisely identified. Hence, a focus group interview serves as an important tool prior to a survey as it enables the researcher to frame the survey questions more specific and targeted. Therefore, further explanatory research is required in order to generalized the findings and its implications on small independent specialty stores in a shopping center. This will also enable to establish the successful integration of the spatial models with behavioral dynamics (i.e., "consumer browsing behavior").

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