EVALUATING TWO MALLS: APPLICATION OF A COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS TOOL

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At a time when the U.S. retailing scene goes through profound changes, this article introduces a competitive analysis tool, Extended Quadrant Analysis (EQA), and illustrates its application in the context of two competing malls. Extended quadrant analysis identifies strengths and weaknesses of a marketing object (e.g., a mall) in terms of four dimensions that are critical to consumers when they evaluate that object vis-a-vis competitor(s). These are attribute salience, attribute determinance and own and relative performances of the object. A good heuristic device for conceptualizing competitive standing, EQA helps managers to identify the strategic options and translates the results into action.

Today increased complexity of the business environment makes developing differential advantage over competition a must for sound marketing strategy. Not surprisingly many companies are constantly in search of ways to identify and capitalize on their unique differential advantage(s). Consumer evaluations of performance are critical to companies in their quests for differential advantage. As Duke and Mount (1996) cogently argue more than ever there is a need for practical tools based on sound behavioral principles to help managers understand and use consumer evaluations in a competitive setting.

The purpose of this article is to introduce such a tool, Extended Quadrant Analysis (EQA), and illustrate its application in the context of two competing malls. A good heuristic device for conceptualizing competitive standing, EQA helps managers to incorporate consumer evaluations into their marketing strategy. EQA is very pragmatic, easy to apply and interpret. More importantly it readily identifies the strategic options and translates the results into action. The remainder of the paper briefly discusses the study context, describes the EQA, presents the method and findings of an empirical study and proffers the retail strategies derived from the study findings.

BACKGROUND

The U.S. retailing scene is going through profound changes. Traditional retail formats are being increasingly replaced by non-traditional formats. Surges in catalogs, computer-based shopping, direct mail and broadcast shopping networks are constantly eating into the sales of traditional modes of shopping. Among the most affected traditional forms of retailing will be the enclosed malls. In fact, pointing out that consumers are finding on line shopping faster, cheaper and better (Krantz 1998), the cover page of the July 20, 1998 issue of the *Time* magazine proclaimed: "Kiss Your Mall Goodbye."

The signs of trouble to the malls that shaped our retailing culture and consumption behaviors in the 1970s and 1980s are already in place. One apparent trend is that consumers are making fewer trips to the mall (Moukheiber 1996). For instance, a 1994 Roper Starch Worldwide survey indicated that only 10 percent of Americans characterize themselves as shopping at malls very often. This is down from 16 percent in 1987 (Cavanaugh 1996). And twice as many people in 1994 expressed that they did not go to malls at all. According to another survey, one-third of Americans shop at enclosed malls less frequently than they used to (Cavanaugh 1996). Not only are Americans making fewer trips to the mall, but they are spending less time there these days (Miller 1997). Indeed, according to a National Benchmarks of Shopping Patterns study, the amount of time shoppers spent on an average trip to a mall declined nearly 25 percent, from 90 minutes to 68 minuets in a span of little over a decade (Cavanaugh 1996).

The challenges to the long-term prospects of the malls, however, are not limited to the surge in non-traditional retailing. Malls suffer from overbuilding caused by speculative developments of the 1980s (Shim and Eastlick 1998; Singer and Rosecky 1995). As a result of the proliferation, mall vacancy rates and delinquency rates on mall mortgages are on the rise and mall sales per square foot are on the decline (Burns and Warren 1995). These trends are especially alarming for regional suburban malls located in the same metropolitan area. Being in close proximity and having similar store mixes and product offerings, these malls often compete for the patronage of the same pool of shoppers. In today's competitive milieu only those malls with a clear understanding of their competitive standing will be able to thrive, and those which do not will join the scores of others that are now closed.

EXTENDED QUADRANT ANALYSIS

Extended quadrant analysis is a technique which identifies strengths and weaknesses of a marketing object (e.g., a mall) in terms of four dimensions that are critical to consumers when they evaluate that object vis-a-vis competitor(s). First is the relative salience (importance) of attributes that the consumer uses to evaluate the marketing object. Second is the consumer's evaluation of the *own performance* of the focal marketing object in terms of these attributes. Third is an assessment of the focal object's *relative performance* vis-a-vis its competitor(s). Fourth is whether or not the assessment of relative performance is *determinant*. That is whether the attribute significantly differentiates among the competing objects. As shown in Table 1, simultaneous consideration of these four dimensions—*salience* (high vs. low), *determinance* (determinant vs. nondeterminant), *own performance* (good vs. poor) and *relative performance* vis-a-vis competition (better vs. worse)-results in sixteen outcomes.

Outcomes in the upper half of the figure (i.e., cells 1 through 8) all pertain to salient attributes. In other words, consumers consider these attributes important when evaluating an object. Four of these cells also contain determinant attributes. Among the four cells, the best position to be in is cell 1 (Solid Competitive Advantage), and the worst, cell 4 (Red Alert). In the former case, consumers perceive the focal object's performance as appreciably better than the competitor. This strong showing suggests a definite competitive edge over the competition and calls for continued high performance on the part of the focal object. In the red alert case, however, the competitor's performance is envisioned as significantly better than the focal object on an important attribute where the focal object's own performance is already poor. Unless mitigated, competitors will continue to exploit their advantage.

Table 1
Extended Quadrant Analysis Grid

Attribute Salience	Attribute Determinance	Own Performance	Relative Performance	Outcome
Salient	Determinant	Good	Better	1. Solid Competitive Advantage
			Worse	2. Head-to-Head Competition
		Poor	Better	3. Opportunity Alert
			Worse	4. Red Alert
	Nondeterminant	Good	Better	5. Lost Opportunity
			Worse	6. Competitive Warning
		Poor	Better	7. Overlooked Opportunity
			Worse	8. Competitive Disadvantage
Nonsalient	Determinant	Good	Better	9. Latent Competitive Advantage
			Worse	10. Competitive Watch
		Poor	Better	11. False Security
			Worse	12. Stand by Alert
	Nondeterminant	Good	Better	13. Competitive Illusion
			Worse	14. Pseudo Competitive Disadvantage
		Poor	Better	15. Null Opportunity
			Worse	16. False Alarm

In cell 2 (Head-to-Head Competition), while the focal object's own performance is good, it is not as strong as the competitor's. Hence, the focal object is vulnerable and cannot afford to relax simply because its own performance is good. Cell 3 (Opportunity Alert) signals those important and determinant attributes where the focal object's own performance is poor yet better than the competition. These are neglected opportunities, which can be exploited. By implementing changes that would transform current poor own performance into good performance, the focal object can move up to cell 1 and, thus, gain a significant edge over the competitor.

The remaining four cells in this section contain nondeterminant attributes. In other words, consumers do not perceive significant performance differences between the focal object and the competition on these attributes. Yet given that these attributes are important, concerted efforts to improve own performance can translate into real opportunities. For instance, by significantly improving poor own and relative performances for those attributes in cell 8 (Competitive Disadvantage), the focal object can move up to cell 1 and turn a disadvantage into a solid competitive advantage. Likewise, management should be alert to any moves mounted by the competitors to improve their relative performances. By fending off their attacks, the focal object can prevent conversion of nondeterminant attributes to determinant ones and avoid serious threats.

Unlike the attributes in the upper half, attributes in the lower half (i.e., cells 9 through 16) are nonsalient. At the present, consumers do not place much importance on these attributes when they evaluate different market offerings. The information yielded by the attribute placements in cells 13 through 16 is very valuable in cautioning against false optimism or pessimism. For instance, in cell 13 (Competitive Illusion), the focal object's performance on a particular attribute is good and better than the competitors. However, the attribute is neither important nor do the consumers perceive a significant performance difference between the focal object and the competition. Hence, good performance does not represent a major payoff. Likewise in cell 16 (False Alarm), the focal object's own performance is poor and worse than the competition. This, however, is a false signal since consumers do not rely on this attribute in making their decisions. Furthermore, they do not perceive a significant difference between the focal object's performance and that of the competition. In these cases, management needs to keep a close eye on attribute salience levels. If any of the currently unimportant attributes become important, then the outcomes may represent real threats or opportunities.

The EQA proposed in this article is based on the importance-performance analysis which, since its introduction into the marketing field more than two decades ago (Martilla and James 1977), has been widely applied in its original or variant forms (Chakravarty, Widdows, and Feinberg; Cheron, McTavish and Perrien 1989; Crompton and Duray 1985; Keyt and Yavas 1988; Sethna 1982) in a number of product and service settings. Similar to the EQA, the importance-performance analysis is a tool based on the conceptual foundations of multi-attribute choice models. The traditional importance-performance analysis identifies strengths and weaknesses of an object (e.g., a product, brand, company) in terms of consumers' assessment of the performance of the focal object and the relative importance of the attributes to consumers. The traditional importance-performance analysis is also easy to use and does not require sophisticated statistical or computer skills. And it yields results that can be relayed to decision-makers quickly and visually.

However, the traditional importance-performance analysis suffers from two inherent weaknesses. First, while it considers a focal object's own performance in terms of a particular attribute, it ignores its performance vis-à-vis competitors. Yet consumers do not evaluate an object in a competitive vacuum. On the contrary, the ultimate differential advantage of an object is determined by its performance relative to competitors. Second, while the importance-performance analysis takes into account attribute salience (i.e., importance), it does not recognize the determinance of an attribute. Determinant attributes are those that discriminate well among competitors and directly influence consumer choice. An attribute, say location of a mall may be very important (i.e., salient) to consumers, but if the consumers feel that two malls have equally convenient locations then location is not a determinant attribute. Thus, solely focusing on salience at the expense of determinance may misguide strategy. The first weakness of the traditional importance-performance analysis is addressed either by plotting the competing objects on the same grid (Duke and Mount 1996) or by extending the framework to include competition (Dolinsky 1991). The Extended

Quadrant Analysis discussed here not only incorporates consumers' evaluations of both objects (i.e., focal and competitor), but also rectifies the second weakness by explicitly incorporating determinance dimension.

METHOD

Setting

The two malls investigated in this study were 20 miles apart and were located in a Metropolitan Statistical Area (population 460,000) in the southeast. The mall executives interviewed during the course of the study expressed that the trading areas of both malls had considerable overlap and an earlier study (Yavas, Alavi and Riecken 1992) suggested substantial cross-shopping activity between the communities where the malls are located.

Construction at the focal mall (A) began in 1971 and the mall experienced significant expansions in 1980 and extensive renovations in 1991. The used leasable area of the mall at the time of the study was 550,000 square feet. Mall B built in 1976 has undergone a renovation in 1989 and at the time of the study had 530,000 square feet used leasable area. Mall A had four anchor department stores, a food court but no inside movie theaters. Mall B had three anchor department stores, five inside theaters but no food court.

Sample

Data for the study were collected through self-administered questionnaires from area residents. Four hundred questionnaires were hand-delivered to respondents satisfying the following condition; the respondent had to be familiar with both malls as a result of previous shopping. If a respondent did not meet this condition during the initial screening, then members of the field force sought an alternate respondent in the same neighborhood. After a three-week period, of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 319 usable ones were retrieved.

Over half of the respondents (71%) were female. A little over two-thirds (68%) were homeowners and about 80% had resided in the community a decade or longer. About 60% of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 54, 23% between the ages of 18-24 and the rest were older than 54. Respondents were fairly well-educated; 74% had some college or higher levels of education. Sixty-three percent of the respondents were married. Thirty-five percent of the respondents had annual household incomes less than $30,000 and about 23% came from households with annual incomes of $60,000 or more.

A comparison of the sample profile to the known characteristics of the study area revealed that the respondents represented an upscale segment of the area population in terms of income and education. Furthermore, females were disproportionately represented in the sample. Therefore, sweeping generalizations are unwarranted. However, it is important to note that shopping including physical visits to a mall is still a predominantly female activity (Dholakia 1999) and malls primarily appeal to upscale consumers (McDonald 1999).

Measurement

Variables pertinent to the study were collected in two parts. First, on seven-point scales (7=very important, 6=important, 5=slightly important, 4=not sure, 3=slightly unimportant, 2=unimportant and 1=not important at all), respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance they attached to a set of 24 patronage motives in their decision to choose a place for shopping. The list was harvested from related writings (Bellenger, Robertson and Greenberg 1977; Bloch, Ridgway and Dawson 1994; Finn and Louviere 1990; Gips 1996; Haynes and Talpade 1996; Kasrel 1998; Klara 1997; Labich 1995; Lord 1986; Nevin and Houston 1980; Roy 1994; Samli Riecken and Yavas 1983; Shim and Eastlick 1998) and a focus group conducted among consumers who did not participate in the study reported here. Second, again by using 7-point scales ranging from 1=very poor to 7=excellent, respondents were asked to evaluate each mall in terms of these attributes.

RESULTS

Motive Importance and Own Performance

Table 2 presents the respondents' ratings of the importance of the 24 patronage motives and their evaluations of the performances of the two malls in terms of these motives. To determine which of the 24 motives are salient/nonsalient and in which areas the focal mall performs good/poor, mean importance and own performance scores were calculated by summing across motives and then dividing the sums by 24. The mean of each motive was then compared to this grand mean. Use of grand mean as the benchmark is not only consistent with the current practice (Nitse and Rushing 1996), but also an earlier study in the context of traditional importance-performance analysis confirms that results based on alternative central tendency measures (i.e., mean and median) produce robust results (Crompton and Duray 1985). The motives whose importance averages exceeded the grand mean were designated as "salient" and those motives whose performance averages were above the grand mean were labeled as "good".

From this analysis, 14 attributes emerged as being salient and the remaining 10 as nonsalient. The 14 salient attributes in order of importance were quality, price, cleanliness, courtesy, product and store selection, security, store hours, availability of fashions, accessibility, atmosphere, parking, traffic flow and crowding in the walkways. An examination of the nonsalient motives revealed that they were predominantly related to auxiliary services and amenities such as availability of seating/resting areas, smoking-designated areas, entertainment and restaurant facilities and being a place to spend time or being an "in" place. Of all the 24 motives, with a mean of 3.88, kiosks were the least important patronage motive.

The focal mall's own performance was good in 12 areas (quality, cleanliness, courtesy, product and store selection, security, store hours, availability of fashions, accessibility, atmosphere, parking and restaurant facilities). However, the focal mall's own performance was below the grand performance mean in relation to the remaining 12 motives. Price, availability of amenities such as smoking and resting areas, traffic flow, crowding in the walkways were among these "poor" performance areas.

Table 2
Importance and Performance Ratings

Motive	Importance	Focal Mall Performance	Competitor Performance
Price competitiveness[a,d]	6.51	4.31	4.22
Variety of stores[a,b,c,d]	6.26	4.91	4.09
Parking facilities[a,b,c,d]	5.65	4.80	4.58
Atmosphere[a,b,c,d]	5.69	4.89	4.48
Security[a,c,d]	5.96	4.64	4.57
Cleanliness[a,b,c,d]	6.42	5.16	4.93
Courtesy of personnel[a,c,d]	6.41	4.73	4.58
Merchandise quality in stores[a,b,c,d]	6.58	5.04	4.75
Entertainment facilities (theaters/video games, etc.)[b]	4.16	4.04	4.42
Eating places (restaurants, food court, etc.)[b,c,d]	5.13	5.14	4.10
Presence of new fashions[a,b,c,d]	5.83	4.79	4.58
Special events/exhibits and promotions[b,d]	4.20	4.55	4.33
Store hours[a,c,d]	5.86	4.96	4.94
Ease of access in and out of mall[a,c]	5.78	4.74	4.78
Product selection in stores[a,b,c,d]	6.29	4.80	4.53
Ease of taking children[d]	4.60	4.27	4.24
Place to spend time[b,d]	3.99	4.18	4.04
Availability of seats, rest areas in the mall[b,d]	4.71	4.34	4.17
Congestion in walkways/Crowding[a]	5.39	4.27	4.28
Advertising[b,d]	4.54	4.43	4.22
Traffic flow in and out of mall[a,b]	5.40	4.19	4.38
"In-place" to shop[b,d]	4.32	4.46	4.14
Smoking policy/Availability of smoking designated areas[d]	4.33	4.54	4.38
Kiosks[b,d]	3.88	4.28	4.10

[a] Salient
[b] Determinant
[c] Good Own Performance
[d] Better Relative Performance

Relative Performance and Determinance

Comparisons of the mean performances of the two malls revealed that the focal mall's performance trailed that of the competitor in four areas. These included entertainment facilities, traffic flow, crowding and accessibility. Otherwise, the focal mall was rated better than its competitor with respect to the remaining 20 motives. To determine which of the performance spreads are determinant (i.e., significantly differentiate between the two malls) and which ones are nondeterminant, performances of both malls across motives were tested via t-tests. The performance spreads between the two malls were not significant (i.e., nondeterminant) with respect to price, crowding, being an easy place to take children to, courtesy, accessibility, security, store hours and smoking designated areas. Respondents were able to significantly differentiate between the two malls with regard to the remaining 16 motives. As such they were labeled as determinant motives.

Final Outcomes

By simultaneously considering each motive's importance and determinance, and the focal mall's own and relative performance in terms of these motives, outcomes for each of the 24 motives were determined. As can be seen from the results depicted in Table 3, the 24 motives fell into ten of the sixteen possible outcome categories. With seven and six motives respectively, solid competitive advantage and false security quadrants contained the most motives. On the other hand, stand by alert, red alert, overlooked opportunity, competitive warning and competitive disadvantage cells each had one motive only. A discussion of these results is presented next.

DISCUSSION

The results are enlightening in several ways. First, they show which motives are important and which are unimportant to consumers when they choose a place to shop. Second, they highlight focal mall's perceived own and relative performance in terms of these attributes. Third, attribute placements point out areas of strength, deficit, foregone opportunities and false optimism and pessimism for the focal mall.

Results in Table 3 indicate several bright spots in the focal mall's relative standing and signal areas of solid competitive advantage. These are variety of stores, parking facilities, atmosphere, cleanliness, merchandise quality in stores, presence of new fashions and product selection in stores. Each one of these attributes is important to consumers when they choose a shopping place. Furthermore, the focal mall's own performance in these areas is good and significantly better than the competitor. Therefore, individual actions by the stores as well as collective actions guided by the mall management are needed to maintain focal mall's competitive edge in these areas. Such actions can proceed on several fronts. For instance, the mall management should continue to make the mall aesthetically appealing to the public. Upkeep should be a top priority; floors should be polished regularly and extra staff should be hired to keep the place clean during special events and busy holiday seasons. Other maintenance and/or improvement actions can include resurfacing the parking lot, redesigning details in entranceways, perimeter landscaping and even a new facade.

Table 3
Quadrant Positioning

Motive	Outcome
Entertainment facilities (theaters/video games, etc.)	Stand by alert
Merchandise quality in stores	Solid competitive advantage
Cleanliness	Solid competitive advantage
Presence of new fashions	Solid competitive advantage
Product selection in stores	Solid competitive advantage
Atmosphere	Solid competitive advantage
Parking facilities	Solid competitive advantage
Variety of stores	Solid competitive advantage
Traffic flow in and out of mall	Red alert
Price competitiveness	Overlooked opportunity
Smoking policy/Availability of smoking designated areas	Null opportunity
Ease of taking children	Null opportunity
Courtesy of personnel	Lost opportunity
Security	Lost opportunity
Store hours	Lost opportunity
Eating places (restaurants, food court, etc.)	Latent competitive advantage
Advertising	False security
Kiosks	False security
"In-place" to shop	False security
Place to spend time	False security
Special events/exhibits and promotions	False security
Availability of seats, rest areas in the mall	False security
Ease of access in and out of mall	Competitive Warning
Congestion in walkways/Crowding	Competitive Disadvantage

Currently shoppers are satisfied with the variety of stores in the mall and their product assortments. However, this should not lead to complacency. Mall management should remember that consumer tastes change and shoppers will become dissatisfied if they are unable to find goods and services they need and can also become frustrated when an item is sold out. These detract from the basic benefits customers expect from mall shopping—convenience of shopping for a variety of goods/services under one roof. Therefore, mall management must continuously monitor customer preferences and make adaptations to its tenant mix. In this context, the mall management can take note of the successful strategies employed by the Taubman Mall. The Taubman Mall uses a team of scouts to identify new retailing concepts and stores to lure shoppers to the mall. Furthermore, realizing that retail trends have brief life cycles the Mall keeps shorter leases to their tenants allowing them greater flexibility in dealing with changes in consumer trends (Moukheiber 1996).

Likewise, individual stores should keep a close eye on consumer preferences and make the necessary adjustments to their product assortments. For instance, stores with broad assortments could build depth in their product lines most important to their customers and add items that complement particular brands within their core lines.

Similar to the above attributes, price competitiveness is an important attribute and shoppers rate the focal mall better than its competitor. However, the focal mall's own performance in this area is poor. Any effort by the focal mall to improve its own performance and differentiate itself significantly from the competitor would turn this attribute into a solid competitive advantage. In this context, attracting a department store and some individual stores with price appeals might pay dividends.

Likewise, the focal mall might be able to turn its latent competitive advantage in eating places into a solid competitive advantage by communicating that it is the only mall with a food court in the area. In addition, actions to spruce up the existing food court and to attract a theme-oriented restaurant or a microbrewery to the mall could further entrench the already favorable competitive standing of the focal mall. As a result of such actions more people could be enticed to visit the mall *more frequently* and for *longer durations*, both of which would translate to more shopping dollars.

Security, courtesy of personnel and store hours currently represent lost opportunities. The focal mall should emphasize these attributes in its communication campaigns. The tone of these communication efforts should be pioneering in nature and should stress the superior performance of the mall. Themes should center around the convenience of store hours, courteousness of employees and the safety of the mall as a place to shop. Also actions to increase the presence and visibility of security officials in the parking lots, better lighting in the parking lots and placing emergency phones could serve as reinforcement for the shoppers. To further entrench the favorable perceptions concerning employees' courteousness, the mall management must ensure that the customer service center/information desk is staffed by highly knowledgeable and trained individuals at all times. After all, this is where most shoppers go for information about store locations, special events, hours of operation and to seek assistance with other services (e.g., gift wrapping, baby stroller rental).

An area of concern for the focal mall is the stand by alert attribute of entertainment facilities. In this area, the focal mall's significantly lower relative performance and its own poor performance are attenuated only by the fact that presently consumers do not consider the attribute to be salient. If the competitor mall which already has the advantage of having an inside movie theater was able to increase consumer awareness of the importance of this attribute, then the focal mall would be confronted with a red alert. Therefore, management needs to be aware of the potential danger and be vigilant about changes in consumer attitudes relative to the importance of this attribute. While the focal mall cannot meet the inside movie theater challenge head-on, improving the currently dull tilt center, rejuvenating the mini-golf and attracting other entertainment facilities might at least in the short run neutralize the potential threat. It should also be remembered that there is a tremendous synergy between entertainment facilities and eating-places. Such facilities are useful in attracting consumers, particularly families, from farther distances. At a time when the retail market continues to heat up, consumers make fewer trips to malls and spend less time there when they do make trips, improvements in such auxiliary services might be helpful in reversing the adverse trends in shopping habits. If shoppers can be enticed to visit malls as a result of extra offerings (fun, games, eating, etc.) then they would be likely to stay longer in the mall and spend more.

The most critical concern for the focal mall is "traffic flow in and out of mall" attribute. Shoppers view this attribute important when they decide where to shop and perceive significant differences between the two malls. The focal mall is not only a poor performer in this area, but it is also rated significantly inferior than the competitor. If measures are not taken to rectify the situation, it may lead to less frequent visits by the current shoppers to the mall or worse yet it may result in the loss of current shoppers to the competitor permanently. Therefore, traffic flow demands immediate attention. The first of order of action for the administrators of the focal mall is to make the necessary investment to improve the traffic flow. Once this is accomplished then an integrated communications campaign including ads in the local media, publicity featuring testimonials from shoppers and news stories in the local newspapers and TV channels should be initiated to countervail the negative perceptions.

Ease of access is an important attribute and shoppers tend to rate the competitor mall better than the focal mall. However, the attribute is not determinant. Hence, at the present, access represents a Competitive Warning for the focal mall. Yet if the competitor engages in campaigns to further emphasize its ease of access, the current nonsignificant performance spread between the two malls may widen and turn it into a determinant attribute. This would pose a serious threat to the focal mall and lead to loss of customers to the competitor.

Similarly, the focal mall should take note of its competitive disadvantage in the congestion/crowding attribute. This is an important consideration to the shoppers when they decide where to shop. While the focal mall's performance on this attribute is not significantly worse than the competition, any improvement attempt by the competition would result in a red alert.

The extended quadrant analysis currently designates six attributes (special events/exhibits and promotions, place to spend time, availability of seats/rest areas in the mall, advertising, "in-place" to shop and kiosks) as "false security". In these areas, the focal mall performed better than the competitor but still performed poorly. The mall should not be complacent about these attributes and should try to improve its performance. If, in the future, these issues become important to the shoppers and the competitor engages in strategies to improve its performance, they would present "red alert" for the focal mall.

Focal mall's own performance in two attributes are poor but better than its competitor. Yet none of these attributes is salient. Moreover the perceived performance spreads between the two malls are not significant, so the attributes are nondeterminant. Hence, ease of taking children (place to take children), smoking policy/availability of smoking designated areas are null opportunities.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to present a competitive analysis tool (EQA) and illustrate its application within the context of two competing malls. The tool's application is not limited to retail institutions alone. It can be easily adapted to determine the standing of any marketing object (product, brand, company, etc.) in relation to competitors' positions of strength and weakness. Furthermore, it can be extended to comparisons among multiple objects (e.g., more than two malls) or alternatively, the focal object can be compared to the "average competitor". In this study, for instance, consumers could be asked to evaluate the focal mall along with other malls which may be in their consideration or evoked set and the benchmark could be derived from these other malls' evaluations.

While the study results here are useful to the focal mall management in designing pointed strategies to gain competitive edge, they should not be viewed as panacea. As noted before, in the years to come, non-traditional forms of retailing will pose serious challenges to the long-term prospects of malls. Finding appealing ways to stand out from intra-competition (i.e., other malls) will not be sufficient for survival and success. Instead, mall administrators will have to respond proactively to changing shopping patterns. The EQA described here can also be helpful to mall managers in this regard. By identifying relevant shopping criteria, mall administrators can apply EQA to compare a mall as a traditional form shopping to non-traditional modalities of shopping (e.g., on-line shopping). If mall administrators are able to understand consumers, what drives them and how they perceive competitive *modes* of shopping on dimensions that differentiate them, administrators can effectively execute well-crafted strategies. Although it may be too early to write an obituary for malls because of competition from non-traditional shopping, the threat is real. Survivors in the 21st century will definitely be the ones who take proactive approaches and use systematic competitive analysis tools such as the EQA.

As described here, EQA is very flexible, simple and easy to apply. It requires minimum amount of data and that data can be collected readily at low cost via common data gathering methods. The requisite calculations do not necessitate knowledge of any sophisticated, cumbersome statistical procedures. The information from the analysis is outputted in a way that helps diagnose the areas that need special attention and readily identifies the recommended strategic actions. The results of a study can be easily updated with collection of additional data over time. Any changes occurring in attribute importance, own and relative performance levels can be identified. When conducted over time, EQA can provide early warning of loss of market position. Traditional approaches to monitoring competitive performance primarily focus on changes in financial performance measures. Negative changes in these measures, however, represent symptoms rather than problems. As Smith, Andrews and Blevins (1992) aptly discuss, changes in financial outcomes are preceded by changes in *consumer* perceptions. Thus, the consumer-driven EQA, when applied on a periodic basis, can detect changes in consumer perceptions before they are reflected in financial performance.

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