




## Article

# Effectiveness of Customer Relationship Management in Shopping Malls: Mall–Retailer Collaboration Empirics

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**Abstract:** This study examines the collaborative impact of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) between shopping mall management and retailers on customer traffic. Through a multiple case study involving 30 interviews with managers from various traditional shopping malls and factory outlets, the research highlights how tailored CRM strategies, such as tenant mix, accessibility, and customer engagement, foster customer satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately affect performance. Mall management focuses on attracting visitors by building a strong mall image and creating partnerships, whereas retailers emphasize customer retention through loyalty programs and personalized services. The study finds that proactive, collaborative CRM efforts, such as setting shared objectives and aligning strategies, significantly enhance customer experience and mall performance. However, existing CRM measurement systems often overlook the integrated nature of mall and retailer relationships, limiting the assessment of CRM outcomes. This research proposes an integrated model to assess CRM effectiveness across multiple organizational levels, providing insights into optimizing CRM policies to drive customer satisfaction, retention, and mall success. Limitations include the study's focus on physical malls, with future research suggested to explore CRM adaptations bridging physical retail and e-commerce environments.

**Keywords:** customer relationship management; shopping mall; customer satisfaction; customer retention



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## 1. Introduction

Shopping centers have been gaining importance in the Spanish economy since their introduction. Retailers have evolved over the years, reinventing themselves and introducing innovative concepts among consumers. Although it is conceived to be a mature sector, which has been impacted by the introduction of e-commerce and alternative retail options, it faces fast-paced growth and continues to show positive results. In fact, in 2023, shopping centers have generated a revenue of 14,741 million euro, which represents a 9% of the services industry in Spain (AECC, 2024).

The shopping mall industry is shaped by complex interorganizational dynamics, with administrations, mall managers, and retail tenants working under a system of shared management. Administrations set guidelines that limit tenants' control over pricing and product strategies, imposing constraints on retailers. As competition intensifies, adapting to changing consumer trends is essential for success (Escudero-Gómez, 2024). To remain competitive, firms need not only to understand and formulate strategies that retain consumer traffic to their stores, but also consider the constraints imposed by the shared management system of shopping malls, which poses a major challenge to retailers.

In Spain, the total number of shopping centers and complexes amounted to 585 in 2023 (AECC, 2023). The shopping mall sector is distinguished by a consistent demand for certain fundamental traits that shopping centers must contain in order to meet client expectations. These qualities often include a well-curated tenant mix, an accessible location, and specialized services for the type of retail complex (Li, 2021). The tenant mix is important in attracting diverse client groups as it ensures that the shopping center provides a variety of retail selections to meet different interests and demands (Boix-Cots et al., 2024). The shopping center's location is fundamental as well, since it has an influence on what customers demand from them. Furthermore, the concentration of specialized stores can increase the attractiveness of a shopping area. When specialized retailers that sell unique or niche products work together, they generate a synergy that benefits both the retailers and the shopping center as a whole (Padilla & Blanco, 2020). This clustering effect results in a more diverse and appealing shopping experience since buyers are drawn to the range of specialized offers accessible in one place.

Recent research on shopping mall management highlights three key factors essential for driving consumer traffic and ensuring a mall's success: mall image, perceived customer satisfaction, and pricing and promotion strategies (Chebat et al., 2014). The mall's image reflects how it is perceived within the community and by its shoppers (Wei et al., 2021). Perceived customer satisfaction relates to how well the mall aligns with visitors' preferences, lifestyles, and experiences (Vilnai-Yavetz et al., 2021). Finally, pricing and promotion strategies involve how consumers perceive pricing fairness and the availability of discounts and deals, which significantly impact foot traffic (Khare et al., 2019).

These factors cannot be managed solely by the mall management. Effective control of these elements requires coordinated efforts between the administration and the retail stores within the mall (Wei et al., 2021). However, most retailers often perceive the mall merely as a physical space for their operations, offering a secure environment for staff and providing access to their target customers. This limited view typically confines their responsibilities to paying rent and complying with the mall's holiday opening schedule, overlooking the broader collaborative role needed for successful mall management.

Considering this dual perspective, mall management cannot design and implement management tools to achieve the center's objectives or shape its strategy without the close involvement of the retail stores. One such tool is Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which integrates a customer-oriented strategy with information technology-based applications. CRM has been extensively developed in recent literature (Dalla Pozza et al., 2018; Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021; Lamrhari et al., 2022), providing updated information that allows for the creation of appropriate policies to meet customer needs.

However, CRM systems do not always yield the expected returns. Authors identify three major challenges that currently hinder a clear understanding of what constitutes a successful and profitable CRM project: (i) the lack of a clear and consistent definition of CRM policy (Perez-Vega et al., 2022); (ii) the need to clearly identify the 'benefit drivers' associated with CRM policies and link these to specific measures (Suoniemi et al., 2021); and (iii) the need for an effective method to measure the success of CRM policies in a format that supports management decision-making (Ledro et al., 2022).

Additionally, CRM frameworks traditionally rely on a narrow set of financial indicators, such as sales volume and profit margins, which has been criticized for providing an incomplete view of performance (Zang et al., 2020). While non-financial indicators related to relationship performance, such as satisfaction, loyalty, and trust, have been proposed as alternatives, these partial indicators fail to comprehensively assess CRM policy outcomes, highlighting the need for integrated measurement systems (Denzici Guillet & Shi, 2019). Integrated systems like the Balanced Scorecard can effectively measure both

tangible and intangible assets, yet they often adopt a fragmented approach when applied to business relationships. Models such as the CRM-SEM and B2B-RELPERF Balanced Scorecard tend to evaluate the performance of each entity—mall management and retail stores—independently, neglecting the interconnected nature of their CRM relationships and the overall effectiveness of their efforts, as successful CRM require specific measurement (Ledro et al., 2022).

To address this limitation, this article aims to develop an integrated model for measuring the outcomes of CRM policies in shopping malls, emphasizing the relationships between the mall administration, retail stores and end customers, at a multi-level approach. The model employs empirical data to validate its theoretical framework and to evaluate key performance indicators (KPIs) that attract and retain consumers. By focusing on these KPIs, the proposed model seeks to enhance understanding of the interactions among all levels and identify areas for improvement in CRM strategies.

This article seeks to address the following research question: how can KPIs for measuring the effectiveness of collaborative CRM initiatives between mall management and retailers, including customer traffic, satisfaction metrics, and engagement indicators be optimized to enhance customer satisfaction, retention, and overall performance?

The following sections unfold as follows: Section 2 provides a literature review, as a base to support the proposed model; Section 3 develops the methodology followed; Section 4 presents findings for each of the dimensions included in the model; Section 5 provides a discussion of such findings, and provides directions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the tools and control systems employed in shopping malls to assess performance and implement strategies, as well as the applications of CRM based on existing research.

### 2.1. CRM in Shopping Malls

The concept of shopping centers has undergone significant evolution over the years, leading to various classifications and definitions. Pantano et al. (2021) defines a shopping centre as a centrally managed, planned retail complex that houses multiple independently operated stores. What sets shopping centers apart from other retail spaces, such as hypermarkets, is the presence of dedicated mall management, which oversees the overall functioning of the complex and indirectly influences customer traffic through the implementation of retail policies. Shopping centers are primarily categorized by size, with gross leasable area (GLA) serving as a key criterion. Table 1 shows how shopping centers are categorized by GLA:

**Table 1.** Shopping mall classifications according to GLA m<sup>2</sup>. Source: (AECC, 2023).

Size Category	Description
Very Large	Shopping centre with over 79,999 m <sup>2</sup> of GLA
Large/Regional	Shopping centre between 40,000 m <sup>2</sup> and 79,999 m <sup>2</sup> of GLA
Medium	Shopping centre between 20,000 m <sup>2</sup> and 39,999 m <sup>2</sup> of GLA
Small	Shopping centre between 5000 m <sup>2</sup> and 19,999 m <sup>2</sup> of GLA
Hypermarket-based	Shopping centre anchored by a hypermarket

A second prevalent classification of shopping centers is based on their customer orientation. Traditional shopping centers are typically designed with a lifestyle shopping approach, which incorporates leisure and hospitality services within the retail environment.

In contrast, other types of shopping centers cater to specific customer segments (Krey et al., 2022). For example, factory outlets primarily focus on providing discounts and bargains from recognized brands, prioritizing the presence of a diverse range of retail brands over the integration of leisure services. Conversely, specialized shopping centers, such as leisure centers, are exclusively oriented towards consumers seeking hospitality and recreational opportunities. Additionally, shopping parks are characterized by their open spaces that accommodate multiple retailers operating independently (AECC, 2023).

Customers are central to shopping centers, with satisfaction hinging on how well post-purchase experiences align with initial expectations. Retailers prioritize meeting or exceeding these expectations, as satisfaction drives loyalty, while unmet expectations can result in dissatisfaction and impact future shopping behavior (Krey et al., 2022). In this sense, obtaining useful information to assess the factors that are driving customer satisfaction becomes a key success factor. The need for detailed control mechanisms and a customer focus has led mall managers to engage in CRM systems. These are customer-oriented, technology driven systems that focus on developing strong relations with clients.

CRM systems are fundamentally designed to enhance customer satisfaction by systematically collecting and analyzing data across multiple customer interaction points, including websites, telephonic communications, live chat, direct mail, and social media platforms (Tazkarji & Stafford, 2020). By equipping customer-facing personnel with comprehensive insights into customers' personal information, purchasing history, and preferences, CRM systems facilitate more effective and personalized service delivery. This increased personalization subsequently diminishes the necessity for customers to seek assistance, thus elevating overall satisfaction levels. Moreover, CRM is aimed at fostering relationships, value, and brand equity, which are integral to enhancing customer equity. This is achieved through value-driven initiatives that include integrated multi-channel support, improved sales force efficiency, tailored marketing strategies, and heightened customer service effectiveness (Demartini & Otley, 2020; Ivens et al., 2024).

CRM systems are focused on two main dimensions: customer attraction and customer retention.

Customer attraction in CRM involves those processes, technological applications and roles that foster interest and engagement specifically aiming to acquire new customers. In this sense, it is related to process and product innovation (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021), customer attraction strategies are used not only to re-engage new customers but systematically interact with lost customers. Effective customer attraction relies on well-structured marketing action plans that align messaging, generate interest, and encourage engagement in ways that resonate with potential customers. Furthermore, digital channels, especially interactive media, are increasingly vital in creating meaningful connections with customers, facilitating varying degrees of engagement from passive observation to active interaction (Harrigan et al., 2020). This enhanced engagement not only increases brand visibility but also helps shape customer perceptions and loyalty, supporting the organization's goals of customer acquisition and retention through a technology-driven, customer-centric methodology (Lamrhari et al., 2022).

Customer retention, on the other hand, encompasses a range of strategies and practices designed to minimize customer defection and foster loyalty within an organization's client base. The overarching objective of customer retention initiatives is to ensure that organizations retain a sizeable proportion of their customers, thereby enhancing long-term profitability and stability. Effective customer retention strategies begin at the initial point of contact and persist throughout the entire lifecycle of the customer relationship. Key approaches include implementing fidelity programs that incentivize repeat purchases, personalized marketing efforts that cater to individual customer preferences, and regular

engagement through targeted communication channels (Malki et al., 2024). Additionally, providing exceptional customer service and support is crucial, as positive interactions can significantly influence a customer's likelihood of remaining with a brand. The integration of digital platforms in the shopping mall experience is an effective customer retention mechanism. For instance, utilizing social media enables organizations to engage with customers in real time, foster a sense of community, and keep customers informed about new products and promotions (Dewnarain et al., 2021). Businesses may also employ feedback mechanisms to gather insights into customer satisfaction, allowing them to address concerns proactively and enhance the overall customer experience.

The effectiveness of CRM strategies relies on four key success factors that need to be specifically formulated: organizational alignment, customer management, CRM technology, and CRM strategy implementation, as outlined in Table 2:

**Table 2.** CRM key dimensions according to literature. Source: author.

CRM Dimension	Description	Key Success Factors	References
Organizational Alignment	Emphasizes redesigning processes to reflect customer-centric principles, including incentive systems, employee training, and process reengineering to maximize customer value.	Commitment across the organization to CRM initiatives; fostering a strategic approach.	(Dalla Pozza et al., 2018; Ivens et al., 2024)
Customer Management	Focuses on treating different customers distinctly, requiring tailored strategies for various customer segments throughout their lifecycle to meet specific needs and enhance value.	Personalization of products and services to boost customer value and satisfaction.	(Demartini & Otley, 2020; Dewnarain et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2023)
CRM Technology	Involves implementing analytical, operational, and collaborative applications to facilitate the collection and integration of customer data across multiple touchpoints.	Leveraging information technologies for deeper insights into customer preferences.	(Demartini & Otley, 2020; Lamrhari et al., 2022; Malki et al., 2024)
Strategy Implementation	Requires a clearly defined customer-oriented strategy supported by top management, performance metrics aligned with customer outcomes, and a unified view of the customer.	Systematic analysis of data from customer interactions to refine strategies and improve relations.	(Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021; Krey et al., 2022)

When it comes to CRM technology, electronic CRM (e-CRM) needs to be addressed. These are technology-driven systems that integrate customer relationship management with digital tools to collect, analyze, and utilize customer data. The success of e-CRM practices do not only depend on technological capabilities (Liu & Chen, 2023). Factors that influence the effectiveness of e-CRM comprise organizational and collaborative aspects such as clear structures and processes for managing e-CRM activities, as well as coordination between internal departments (Gaudenzi et al., 2021). Effective e-CRM solutions need to be built around end customer preferences and consider factors such as trust and privacy concerns (Khanh et al., 2022). Furthermore, the alignment of e-CRM strategies across different business units is essential for ensuring consistency and efficiency in customer engagement efforts. Collaboration both within the organization and with external partners, such as digital platforms or resellers, is also crucial to foster long-term relationships with customers, balancing technological advancements with a focus on customer needs and preferences (Khanh et al., 2022; Liu & Chen, 2023).

But overall, organizational alignment is essential for the effective implementation of CRM strategies, ensuring that all organizational components work cohesively toward

customer-centric objectives. Research underscores the significance of integrating and timing various CRM dimensions, suggesting that these elements should be regarded as interconnected aspects that can mutually enhance one another when applied in a synchronized manner (Dalla Pozza et al., 2018). Key drivers of CRM success are engaged employees, who play a critical role in fostering robust customer relationships. Continuous engagement with customers throughout their lifecycle is imperative, as each interaction provides opportunities to gather valuable insights (Roy et al., 2023). Therefore, the efficient collection and integration of customer data from various interactions, particularly through digital platforms, is crucial for customizing CRM initiatives and improving overall customer satisfaction (Ivens et al., 2024).

## 2.2. Mall–Retailer Collaboration

A key figure present in all shopping centre types is the mall manager. Mall managers are those responsible for the correct development of the overall commercial activity of the centre, serving as a link between the owners of the facility and the tenants. Their duty is twofold (Hänninen & Paavola, 2021): on the one hand, they are required to select the appropriate guidelines that are followed in the centre based on the image and ambience they are pursuing, aiming to maximize customer attraction and retention, as well as ensuring that the tenant's performance is as best as possible, as profits depend largely on the performance of them.

The recent context has made the shopping centre industry have a volatile, complex environment.

Shopping mall managers must consider three primary stakeholders in the management of a shopping centre: investors or shareholders, tenants or retailers, and end-customers. Each of these stakeholders has distinct objectives and varying perspectives, all of which need to be thoughtfully balanced and integrated into the strategic planning process to ensure the mall's overall success (Cerdan-Chiscano & Darcy, 2024).

When it comes to shareholders, they play a fundamental role in the management of shopping centers, albeit often indirectly, as their primary focus lies in the financial returns generated from their investment rather than the day-to-day operations. Typically, these shareholders are large entities such as investment funds, real estate groups, or financial institutions. Their involvement is focused on recovering their capital through rental income from the operators' leasing spaces within the centre. The management of the shopping centre itself is usually delegated to external professional firms, who function as intermediaries between the shareholders, tenants, and consumers (Tannor et al., 2022).

This decentralized structure allows shareholders to benefit from long-term rental agreements without being directly involved in operational decisions, as these responsibilities fall under the purview of the managers. These managers not only collect rents but also execute the strategic vision, ensuring the center's alignment with the shareholders' goals, such as fostering a particular image or ambience (Vilnai-Yavetz et al., 2021). Therefore, while shareholders are primarily concerned with financial performance, their influence is reflected in the broader strategic directions imposed on the shopping centre through the management team.

Most importantly, shopping centre managers hold significant responsibility for curating the mix of shops and services within the centre, as this 'tenant mix' is a critical factor in attracting and retaining customers (Junaid et al., 2024). The selection of tenants is not just about filling vacant spaces; it involves a strategic decision-making process to ensure that the centre offers a diverse and appealing variety of stores that meet consumer demands and contribute to the center's unique identity. A well-curated mix can differentiate a shopping

centre from competitors and enhance its overall appeal, making it a key driver of foot traffic and customer loyalty (Xu et al., 2022).

However, maintaining this ideal mix requires more than just initial selection—it also involves ongoing oversight to ensure that individual stores align with the center’s desired atmosphere and standards of cleanliness, safety, and presentation. As noted by (Wei et al., 2021) the appearance and maintenance of tenant spaces directly influence customer perception, making it essential for mall managers to regulate both communal areas and the interior condition of individual stores. Therefore, mall managers must carefully choose tenants that complement the shopping center’s overall image and contribute to cohesive customer experience (Chen, 2024).

Prior research underscores that internal and external factors significantly affect customer satisfaction, which, in turn, impacts behavioral intentions. For instance, (Junaid et al., 2024) highlighted that service design, through providing facilities like restrooms, mall cleanliness, promotional events, and security services are critical to overall customer satisfaction. (Chebat et al., 2014) also found that mall design shapes customer perceptions, with hedonic values contributing more to satisfaction than utilitarian ones. (Makgopa, 2018) further confirmed that a range of factors—including location, store variety, parking availability, employee behavior, product pricing, quality, customer service, promotional activities, ambiance, food options, safety—shapes customers’ attitudes and satisfaction with shopping centers. Together, these studies emphasize the multifaceted aspects of customer satisfaction in mall environments.

Moreover, the adaptability of a shopping centre to evolving customer trends and lifestyle preferences, integrating experiences rather than focusing solely on sales, has been shown to significantly increase foot traffic (Wang et al., 2022). Centers that regularly refresh their offerings to match seasonal demands or emerging consumer interests can maintain a dynamic, attractive environment that keeps pace with shifting consumer tastes. This adaptability requires a continuous feedback loop, where managers and employees actively gather and analyze data on customer behavior, preferences, and experiences to identify areas for improvement and innovation (Jhamb et al., 2022).

At a strategic level, to meet shareholder expectations, shopping mall management must assess two key customer segments: (1) retail stores, which provide the main revenue source for the mall; and (2) end customers, who drive sales for retailers and, in turn, impact the mall’s overall viability. Table 3 outlines each group’s interests based on existing literature:

**Table 3.** Stakeholders’ interests in the shopping mall context based on existing literature. Source: Author.

Stakeholder	Interests	Source
Shareholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximize rental revenue and asset value.</li> <li>• Strategic brand alignment</li> <li>• Stable occupancy rates</li> <li>• Market competitiveness</li> </ul>	(Hänninen & Paavola, 2021; Tannor et al., 2022; Vilnai-Yavetz et al., 2021)
Tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High foot traffic for sales growth</li> <li>• Prime store location and accessibility</li> <li>• Quality maintenance and security</li> <li>• Flexible lease terms</li> </ul>	(Wei et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022)
Clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenient access and parking</li> <li>• Diverse shopping and service options</li> <li>• Clean, appealing atmosphere</li> <li>• Promotions and excellent value</li> </ul>	(Cerdan-Chiscano & Darcy, 2024; Chebat et al., 2014; Chen, 2024; Junaid et al., 2024; Makgopa, 2018; Wang et al., 2022)

In this context, Management control systems (MCS) are essential for effectively managing shopping centers, as they help align the diverse interests of stakeholders and facilitate strategic objectives. According to (Janka et al., 2020), MCS promote the internalization of organizational values, increasing the likelihood that individual behaviors will align with organizational goals. (Arrive & Feng, 2018) suggest that control mechanisms serve as vital tools for managers to monitor performance and adapt to strategic changes, while (Su et al., 2017) note that their usage evolves with shifts in strategy. Effective MCS fosters collaboration between mall management and retail tenants, who often perceive the shopping centre merely as a space for operations. This limited view can restrict tenant engagement to basic responsibilities, such as rent payment and compliance with schedules. By utilizing control mechanisms, shopping centre managers can encourage a more dynamic partnership with tenants, enhancing overall performance and customer satisfaction.

### 2.3. Conceptual Framework

Customer Relationship Management systems are technology-driven tools employed by mall managers to collect, analyze, and utilize customer data across various touchpoints, such as in-store interactions, websites, and social media platforms. These systems enable the personalization of services and marketing strategies, fostering robust, long-term relationships with customers (Demartini & Otley, 2020; Ivens et al., 2024). However, the application of CRM strategies varies between retailers and mall managers, reflecting their distinct operational focuses. Retailers prioritize building individual customer relationships to enhance loyalty and drive sales. Their strategies are personalized, leveraging customer data to design promotions, loyalty programs, and targeted marketing efforts that encourage repeat visits and purchases (Demartini & Otley, 2020; Ivens et al., 2024). Conversely, mall managers adopt a broader perspective, emphasizing the overall shopping experience across the entire mall. Their CRM strategies aim to increase foot traffic, enhance customer satisfaction, and cultivate mall-wide loyalty through customer feedback mechanisms, events, and promotional activities (Krey et al., 2022; Guerola-Navarro et al., 2021). These divergent approaches underline the necessity for coordinated CRM efforts between retailers and mall management to maximize customer satisfaction and loyalty. In this context, the first research question is formulated:

RQ1: How do retailers and mall managers formulate CRM strategies in practice?

Theoretical perspectives highlight the reliance of shopping centers on centralized management to optimize tenant relations, attract customers, and sustain competitiveness (Pantano et al., 2021). A mall manager's role mainly consists in curating tenant mixes and enforcing standards that contribute to a positive shopping environment. Their responsibilities extend to coordinating mall-wide promotions, maintaining cleanliness, and ensuring safety, all of which significantly impact customer foot traffic and satisfaction (Chebat et al., 2014). As intermediaries between mall owners and tenants, mall managers must balance diverse stakeholder interests while aligning the mall's offerings with its strategic vision (Hänninen & Paavola, 2021). This complex environment requires managers to address a range of internal and external factors influencing customer satisfaction and overall mall performance (Xu et al., 2022).

While the existing literature has extensively examined customer satisfaction within shopping centers, there remains a gap in understanding how collaborative efforts between mall management and retailers can drive customer loyalty and increase foot traffic (Wei et al., 2021). This interplay between the macro-level strategies of mall management and the micro-level actions of retailers presents an opportunity to explore how collaborative initiatives shape customer experiences and behaviors.

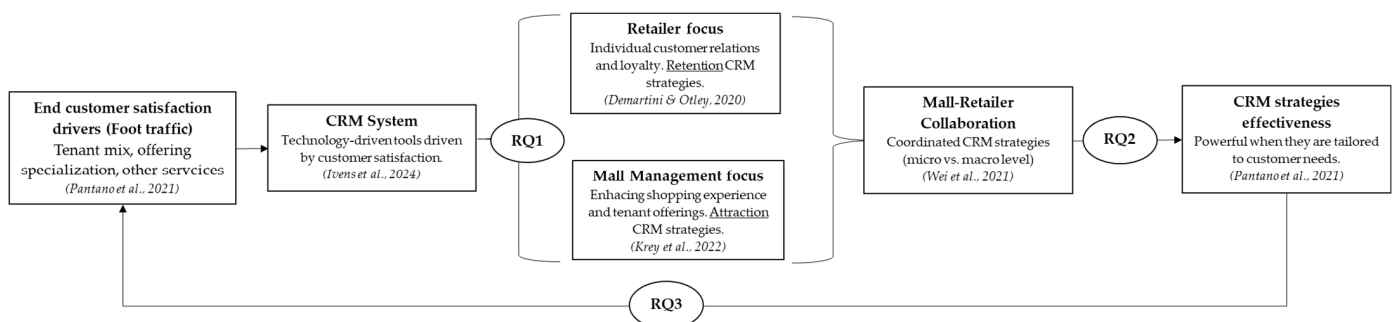


RQ2: How can collaboration among shopping center management and its retailers influence customer traffic within the shopping center?

Customer satisfaction in the mall context encompasses a holistic experience shaped by interactions with both the physical environment and individual retailers. Key dimensions include the variety and quality of products and services, the convenience and accessibility of the mall, its ambiance and cleanliness, and the quality of customer service provided by both mall management and tenants (Vilnai-Yavetz et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2021). While technical functionalities of CRM systems are well-documented, less attention has been given to benefit-centered CRM approaches that focus on drivers of customer satisfaction within a mall setting. A deeper understanding of these drivers could enhance the effectiveness of CRM initiatives in fostering customer loyalty and increasing foot traffic in competitive mall environments (Wei et al., 2021).

RQ3: How does identifying consumer benefit drivers affect the effectiveness of customer relationship management strategies designed to increase customer traffic?

By synthesizing these perspectives, the research aims to develop a nuanced understanding of how CRM strategies tailored to specific consumer benefit drivers can influence customer engagement, loyalty, and foot traffic within shopping centers. The proposed framework in Figure 1 considers the dynamic interactions between strategic levels within the shopping center ecosystem. It examines how alignment between macro-level strategies of mall management and micro-level actions of retailers can create synergistic effects that enhance customer experiences and behaviors. The integration of these theories not only provides a comprehensive roadmap for addressing research questions but also highlights potential interventions for optimizing CRM practices in shopping centers.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework proposed. Source: author (Pantano et al., 2021; Ivens et al., 2024; Demartini & Otley, 2020; Krey et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2021).

### 3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate how mall managers and retailers interact, as well as how these interactions are established and maintained, in order to better understand the mechanics underlying customer relationship management techniques in shopping centers. This goal is best served by a qualitative approach since it enables a thorough examination of participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights, which are difficult to capture using quantitative techniques. In this context, a multiple case study is conducted. According to (Yin, 2018), case studies are particularly valuable for analyzing interorganizational relationships in complex environments such as the one in the shopping mall industry. By comparing and contrasting these cases, the study aims to identify common patterns in collaborative dynamics that affect CRM effectiveness.

This paper investigates two primary types of shopping centers, as defined in the literature review: traditional shopping centers and factory outlet centers. The rationale for this distinction is that the factors influencing CRM strategies vary significantly between

these types, including consumer behavior, strategic objectives, and the constraints imposed by mall management.

The selection of malls aimed to capture the distinct approaches employed by both types of shopping centers, allowing for the identification of differences in the collaborative CRM strategies utilized. Given the study's focus on a deep analysis of the relationships between mall managers and retailers, a smaller, more focused sample was deemed appropriate. Consequently, six shopping malls were chosen, encompassing both factory outlet centers and traditional shopping centers. In total, thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with mall managers and retail store managers to explore their strategic orientations, perceptions of the mall–retailer relationship, and communication mechanisms. This approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play in CRM strategies within these distinct retail environments.

A qualitative method was employed through a multiple case study of six malls, including both traditional shopping centers and factory outlet centers. Data were collected through a total of 30 semi-structured interviews with mall managers and store managers (see Table 4), covering topics such as customer satisfaction, KPIs utilized to assess customer satisfaction and store performance, and the effectiveness of CRM policies.

**Table 4.** Sample of interviews performed. Source: author.

Interview #	Position	Type of Mall	Size
1	Retail manager	Traditional shopping mall	Medium
2	Retail manager	Traditional shopping mall	Medium
3	Retail manager	Hypermarket	Medium
4	Retail manager	Hypermarket	Medium
5	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Medium
6	Retail manager	Factory outlet	Regional
7	Retail manager	Factory outlet	Regional
8	Retail manager	Factory outlet	Regional
9	Retail manager	Factory outlet	Regional
10	Retail manager	Traditional shopping mall	Medium
11	Retail manager	Traditional shopping mall	Medium
12	Mall manager	Factory outlet	Regional
13	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Medium
14	Mall manager	Factory outlet	Regional
15	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Small
16	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Regional
17	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Regional
18	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Medium
19	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Regional
20	Retail manager	Traditional shopping mall	Very large
21	Retail manager	Traditional shopping mall	Very large
22	Retail manager	Traditional shopping mall	Very large
23	Retail manager	Traditional shopping mall	Very large
24	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Very large

**Table 4.** *Cont.*

Interview #	Position	Type of Mall	Size
25	Mall manager	Factory outlet	Regional
26	Mall manager	Factory outlet	Regional
27	Mall manager	Factory outlet	Regional
28	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Regional
29	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Regional
30	Mall manager	Traditional shopping mall	Very large

Interviews contained 30 to 40 questions, tailored to the interviewee's role and mall type. Interview data were categorized into 'factsheets' containing key points, trends, and supporting quotes for each of the dimensions analyzed, allowing for a systematic, aggregate understanding of CRM-related relationships and strategic performance in malls. Data analysis and interpretation followed an abductive approach, generating theoretical constructs based on unexpected observations and cross-level theorizing.

The use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method required the development of a tailored questionnaire, informed by the literature reviewed in Section 2. Each interview included between 30 and 40 questions, which varied based on the interviewee's position and the type of shopping centre examined. The questions primarily focused on several key areas: factors perceived to drive customer traffic, sources of feedback utilized to assess strategic performance, control mechanisms and KPIs established to evaluate the effectiveness of CRM, and the nature of the relationship between mall management and retailers. A sample of the questions posed during the interviews is presented in Table 5:

**Table 5.** Sample questions asked in interviews. Source: author.

Category	Sample Questions
Personal Information	What is your professional background? What are your key responsibilities?
Store/Mall Information	How does your store/mall differentiate itself? What are its competitive advantages?
Customer Insights	How do you measure customer satisfaction? What communication channels do you use to attract new customers?
Future Planning	How do you foresee the evolution of the shopping centre industry? What strategies are necessary to adapt to changing consumer trends?
Strategy related (Mall managers)	How do you define and prioritize the strategic goals for the mall to ensure long-term growth and customer retention? How do you measure the success of the mall's strategy in terms of tenant performance, customer traffic, and overall profitability?
Operations-related (Retailers)	How do you ensure consistent customer service quality across different shifts and staff members? What challenges do you face in optimizing store operations, and how do you address them to maintain profitability?
Collaboration and communication	What steps do you take to resolve conflicts or misunderstandings between tenants and management effectively? How do you encourage feedback from both retailers and customers to improve the overall shopping experience?

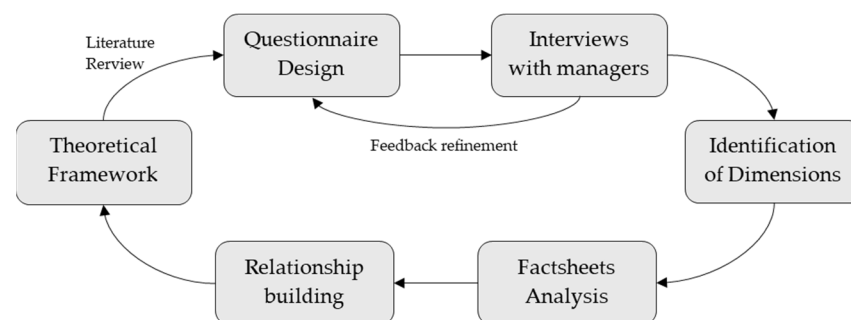
To minimize potential biases in the semi-structured questionnaire, questions were designed to be neutral and open-ended, avoiding any wording that could lead participants toward specific answers. The questionnaire was piloted with a representative sample to refine its structure and reduce ambiguities. Steps were taken to avoid leading questions by using balanced phrasing, and the order of questions was developed on-the-go, starting with

the “Personal information” set of questions, to reduce priming effects. Bias was mitigated by ensuring participant anonymity and emphasizing the importance of honest responses.

To enhance the accuracy and credibility of the research, all interviews were audio-recorded with the informed consent of participants and transcribed verbatim. Following transcription, participants were given summaries of the key findings related to their responses to ensure their perspectives were accurately represented. This process, commonly referred to as member checking, provided participants with the opportunity to confirm, clarify, or expand on their input. Incorporating their feedback into the analysis can reduce the risk of misrepresentation and strengthen the overall validity of the study.

Data obtained from the interviews were systematically categorized using factsheets. Each factsheet was developed for the specific variables under study, facilitating the processing of information derived from the interviews (Merly et al., 2012). Each factsheet was organized into two main sections: Key Points and Main Trends. The Key Points section offered a succinct summary of the unique characteristics observed in each company with respect to the relevant variables. In contrast, the Main Trends section expanded on these key points by providing a detailed account of the common trends and singularities identified throughout the analysis. Each observation was substantiated by 10 to 30 quotations from the interviews, effectively illustrating the diverse perspectives of the respondents. This data analysis method proved to be particularly effective, as the same researcher conducted the interviews, engaged in informal discussions with the participants, analyzed the interview content, and compiled the results into the factsheets. This continuity ensured a consistent and nuanced understanding of the respondents’ experiences, contributing to a more robust analysis of the data collected.

For the data analysis, an abductive approach was utilized. Abductive research facilitates the creative generation of hypotheses based on the complex and unexpected relationships observed (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022). The analysis followed an iterative process to develop a theory explaining the relationships between the three dimensions. After conducting the initial interviews, the questions were refined for more precise data collection. Empirical observations were categorized into fact sheets, which helped organize the data and identify patterns. These fact sheets were then used to build and analyze the relationships between the dimensions, allowing for continuous refinement of both the interview process and the emerging theory. Figure 2 summarizes the research process followed:



**Figure 2.** Research process followed. Source: author.

The analysis identified key findings across three primary dimensions: factors that contribute to increased consumer traffic in shopping centers, the observed benefit drivers that serve as effective indicators for evaluating the success of Customer Relationship Management strategies, and the influence of the mall–retailer relationship on the implementation and effectiveness of CRM strategies. These are developed in Section 4.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. CRM Strategies in Practice

CRM implementation strategies differ in the shopping malls, depending on whether it is the mall management or the store who implements them. Mall management's focus on CRM can shift depending on the mall's immediate needs; if repairs or maintenance are necessary, these take priority over marketing efforts. However, customer focus remains consistent. Mall managers concentrate their CRM strategies on three key areas: crafting a positive mall image that resonates with visitors, creating a tenant mix that attracts diverse customers, and, most importantly, enhancing the overall shopping experience.

When it comes to the tenant mix, certain stores are more marketing-intensive, normally defined as those retailers or services that, due to the brand image, are a major attractor of traffic in both the public and major retailers. Identifying anchor stores is essential for attracting customers to the mall: 'We know the stores that have pull, they are known as anchors of the shopping center. So, when you are going to open a center, you look for the anchors, which are basically the fashion firms, a medium-sized food company, which is in our case, some movie theaters... you look for three or four stores that make the others come'.

Additional to the tenant mix, the accessibility of the mall makes an impact on customer affluences. Mall management puts efforts in improving accessibility infrastructure (through collaboration with public transport, design of the internal mall flow...) and promoting easy access as a main characteristic in their promotions: 'If the center is very well located, but when you get there you don't find the firms or the conversation of services that the general public demands that is not going to be very successful. [...] it's also important that the traffic inside the bad one is accessible, that you have also good pedestrian traffic, also public, of course we are lucky to have all the public transportation that we have around, because we have the subway something that you don't have.'

Complementary to the accessibility, shopping centers aim to differentiate themselves by obtaining certifications in sustainable management of the center resources. These are achieved by introducing better illumination, a less electricity consuming infrastructure, reducing carbon footprint or upgrading current technical installations. This not only attracts tenants that aim to increase their reputation, but also becomes a cost saver for the owner corporation, as efforts put into maintenance are reduced and mall managers can concentrate on implementing CRM strategies.

Regarding the mall image, CRM efforts are mostly put into providing a unified image to customers. In this sense, marketing actions are aimed at a specific customer segment. The tenant mix is adjusted to the general expectation of what customers may demand, rather than reaching the general public. This factor is even more prevalent in driving customer attention than the location of the shopping center: 'as much (important) as location, it has an offering that fits well with what the customer demands'.

In terms of customer experience, mall managers are dedicated to creating a lively atmosphere that captivates customers and encourages prolonged shopping experiences. To achieve this, they employ a combination of temporary exhibitions and interactive activities, which are designed to engage shoppers on multiple levels. These dynamic initiatives complement traditional leisure facilities, such as cinemas and dining options, to increase consumer traffic in specific periods of time. Initiatives are complementing common peak periods of customer traffic, aiming to stabilize affluence throughout the whole year: 'There's a marketing plan drawn up for everything that's going to happen at the marketing level, what's going to happen at the event level in the what is going to happen in terms of marketing, what is going to happen in terms of events in the city... so we can still get

exceptionalities, and we'll have to be able to say 'look, this one might not fit, we're going to say 'well, maybe this one doesn't fit, we're going to try to do this one'.

In terms of coordination, several mall managers include all stakeholders present in the center to provide coherence in the CRM policies applied. The vision is broader and less detail-oriented regarding daily operations, prioritizing the creation of authentic experiences and the pursuit of excellence. There is an emphasis on fostering employee commitment and motivation through training and special events. All initiatives originate from management and require approval from property ownership, with management playing a key role in driving the implementation of the established plans.

From the retailer's perspective, CRM strategies are implemented in a different manner. Rather than attracting customers, strategies made by stores are aimed at retention. This main difference is fueled by the idea that it is the duty of the mall management to attract customers, hence the duty of the stores is to maximize customer satisfaction, so that customers come again to shop: 'Fundamentally what we try to do is to build customer loyalty, that is to say, beyond looking for a new market, what we work hard at is to make sure that whoever enters through the door comes back'.

For store chains, there is limited flexibility in implementing specific policies, as the parent company sets clear guidelines for CRM objectives and actions. Although efforts are underway to give individual stores more autonomy, much progress remains to be made, as the independence granted to each location is still quite restricted. Stores do not participate in setting their own goals; instead, these targets are determined by their supervisors and communicated afterward.

In setting customer relationship management objectives, stores emphasize customer engagement through product offerings and pricing. External firms are occasionally contracted to evaluate customer satisfaction and employee performance, using this feedback for improvement: 'We have a mystery shopper who comes and analyzes us...(...) He also leaves us a proposal for improvement, and we develop it.' To this end, three primary strategies are employed: loyalty programs, and custom social media marketing.

Loyalty programs play a key role in retaining first-time customers by offering incentives such as discounts through membership cards. These programs encourage repeat purchases while fostering closer customer relationships: 'We have a membership card, where purchases are accumulated, and a 10% discount is directly applied to each purchase. Additionally, depending on their total spending, customers receive personalized discounts. We aim to foster relationships with customers by organizing raffles among members and inviting them to events during various campaigns.' New customers are enticed with membership cards that offer future discounts and benefits, along with immediate incentives like a discount on their next purchase, tailored to current campaign offerings.

Social media marketing constitutes the second strategy followed by retailers. Analyzed stores maintain multiple social media accounts to promote their offerings and share information about upcoming events and relevant news tailored to their target customer segment. This engagement is crucial for enhancing the overall customer experience. Once customers enter the shopping center and interact with the stores, retention methods such as loyalty cards or newsletters are commonly used to keep customers up to date and exposed to relevant product offerings: 'We offer our customers the possibility to provide us with their mail and send them our promotions, private sales, new collections... so that they feel special and cared, and their satisfaction with our store becomes greater'.

Offering personalized products and services further enhances this experience, as one store representative explained: 'We try to give you benefits when registering as a new member, such as fitting services on the first clothes for free, some gift promotions on the second unit, and depending on the purchase that the customer makes, it is also common to

send them via email a discount for the next purchase' (E5). A personalized approach makes customers feel special and valued, increasing their satisfaction with the store. To achieve this, stores emphasize employee training to enhance customer service. A well-trained, customer-oriented staff makes a positive impression on visitors, improving retention and boosting customer traffic.

Table 6 summarizes the orientation and CRM strategies followed by retailers and mall managers:

**Table 6.** CRM strategies by agent in the shopping center. Source: author.

Aspect	Mall Management	Retail Stores
Customer Orientation	Attracts broad customer base, focusing on mall appeal and experience.	Focuses on customer retention and loyalty, leveraging mall traffic driven by management.
Key Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive mall image</li> <li>- Strategic tenant mix and anchor stores</li> <li>- Accessibility and sustainability initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Customer satisfaction and loyalty</li> <li>- Parent company standards</li> <li>- Personalized customer engagement</li> </ul>
CRM Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tenant selection for high traffic</li> <li>- Accessibility and sustainable practices</li> <li>- Coordinated events and training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loyalty programs and discounts</li> <li>- Targeted social media engagement</li> <li>- Personalized offers and customer service training</li> </ul>

#### 4.2. Mall–Retailer Collaboration in CRM

We can classify retailer-mall relationships analyzed in this study into two types: transactional and proactive.

In transactional relationships between mall managers and stores, the interaction is primarily transactional, with mall managers focused mainly on collecting rent and maintaining an appropriate tenant mix. Communication is limited to circulars that inform stores about mall events and regulations, with little room for collaboration or feedback. Mall managers enforce operational guidelines, such as delivery schedules and waste disposal, but their primary interest lies in ensuring that tenants fulfill their obligations while contributing to the overall profitability of the mall. This lack of deeper engagement means that both parties prioritize their own interests—managers revenue generation and tenant mix, and stores compliance—resulting in missed opportunities for co-operative initiatives that could enhance customer experiences and drive sales. This approach is prominent in Factory Outlets, due to the importance of the tenant mix over the atmosphere in the shopping experience.

Proactive relationships in malls involve superior collaboration among management, subcontractors, and store employees, all aimed at enhancing customer experience and providing a unified image of the mall and its stores. By emphasizing teamwork, staff members and retail stores work towards a unified goal of delivering high-quality service, which boosts customer satisfaction and increases foot traffic. Mall managers actively engage store employees in customer satisfaction strategies, understanding that motivated staff create a welcoming environment that can result in repeated visits and positive word-of-mouth, benefiting both the mall and its retailers.

Collaboration among retailers and mall management depend to a great extent on the orientation of the mall regarding its image, as those that aim to provide a cohesive view of the center will increase efforts in sustaining a continuous feedback channel with stores. Additionally, some stores pay variable rent based on sales, which motivates mall managers to support store sales performance. This shared financial incentive aligns managers and stores in their efforts to attract more customers to the mall, increasing the likelihood of a proactive relationship. Malls and stores that present a proactive relationship collaborate at

all levels of CRM strategic implementation, most prominently in setting objectives plans and controlling performance.

In proactive relationships, common objectives are established through collaboration between mall managers and stores, with a shared focus on enhancing customer experience. In these scenarios, the customer perspective from both agents merge. Mall management not only aims to showcase the mall itself but also takes an active interest in the performance of the stores. Conversely, stores extend their focus beyond internal operations to consider the overall customer traffic of the mall, implementing strategies to attract clients both inside and outside their premises. This is achieved through periodical meetings to define joint objectives: 'I try to meet once a month with the manager to give me an update on how the center is doing, give me a little bit of an update on how the client traffic has been going.' Close relationships foster a sense of community and mutual support, consequently creating a cohesive environment that resonates positively with customers and encourages repeat visits: 'The center's employees not only have the identity of the business itself, but also the identity of the center where they work. In other words, if I work in center X and in footwear company Z, then I am Z footwear staff, but I am also proud to work in center X, because center X provides me with advantages, it provides me with services, and it provides me with information'.

Mall management and stores engage in close collaboration to assess the performance of their joint CRM strategies through several key mechanisms. Regular meetings between store managers and mall management facilitate discussions about mall performance and traffic data, allowing both parties to align on strategies for enhancing customer engagement and increasing foot traffic. Mall managers share valuable insights on store traffic, enabling stores to optimize their layouts and displays effectively. This data-driven approach allows for informed adjustments that can improve customer attraction and conversion rates. Additionally, both managers and store teams utilize CRM techniques such as customer surveys and promotional events to gather feedback and better understand customer preferences. By working together on these modern CRM initiatives, they create a more appealing shopping environment. Furthermore, by acknowledging the diverse business strategies of individual stores, mall managers can tailor their support to meet varying CRM needs, fostering a collaborative atmosphere that enhances overall traffic and improves customer experience throughout the mall.

#### *4.3. Customer Benefit Drivers in Shopping Centers*

Customer satisfaction is the ultimate benefit driver that determines a mall's performance. However, this is measured by a series of key factors at various levels of the mall–retailer relationship. This paper separate them into two main categories: customer engagement and mall attributes.

Customer engagement focus on the satisfaction of the customer by the relationship they exert with the shopping mall through their consumer habits. These drivers assess the effectiveness of CRM retention policies based on not only customer traffic but also on feedback provided by customers through diverse means. Table 7 summarizes each of the drivers and the way these are measured:



**Table 7.** Dimensions of customer engagement. Source: author.

Factor	Definition	Measurement
Customer Service Skills	The ability of store employees to effectively assist and engage customers, contributing to overall satisfaction and loyalty.	- Surveys - Repeating visits - Evaluations from mystery shoppers
Product Quality	The perceived value and performance of products offered influencing customer satisfaction and repeat purchases.	- Online reviews
Product Availability	The extent to which products are in stock and accessible to customers, impacting purchase decisions.	- Online reviews - Customer feedback (suggestions and complaints)
Social Media Performance	The effectiveness of a mall's social media engagement in attracting and retaining customers through interactions and content.	- Data analytics related to search rankings and traffic (SEO Positioning) - Surveys

Malls provide statistics to the stores, additional to the ones implemented individually, as a means of redeveloping joint strategies. Stores, on the other hand, provide feedback transmitted by customers, as they are directly dealing with them. This continuous feedback mechanism provides increased flexibility to the overall shopping center, as it detects which actions need to be made to improve performance, as highlighted by a mall manager: 'Instead of cleaning the aisle and putting a doorman at the door, here we have more functions (...) We enter the store, we have our own window dressers visiting us in Madrid, we use the knowledge we have of sales (...) in a normal shopping center there is usually a people counter at the entrance for marketing, to know if there is more or less affluence. Apart from that, we have one in each store, so if we know the sales and they pass us the sales tickets, we can already tell a store then the window attraction, what percentage of people who go to the center enters the window, we can know the conversion ratio of the people who enter your store, how many people bite.'

On the other hand, mall attributes are essential to customer success. In this sense, these attributes do not only limit to the tenant mix but to the supporting infrastructure (security), accessibility, parking and complementary services that the shopping centre offers to its customers. The main driver of satisfaction with respect to mall attributes is customer affluence, measured by the number of customers, the average time spent shopping. Furthermore, location plays a major role in defining the mall attributes that are optimum to maximize customer affluence: 'You can have the best accesses in the world and the best stores in the world, but if you are 25 km away from the nearest shopping center, customers will go to other shopping centers, which will also have a good offer and are much closer [...]'.

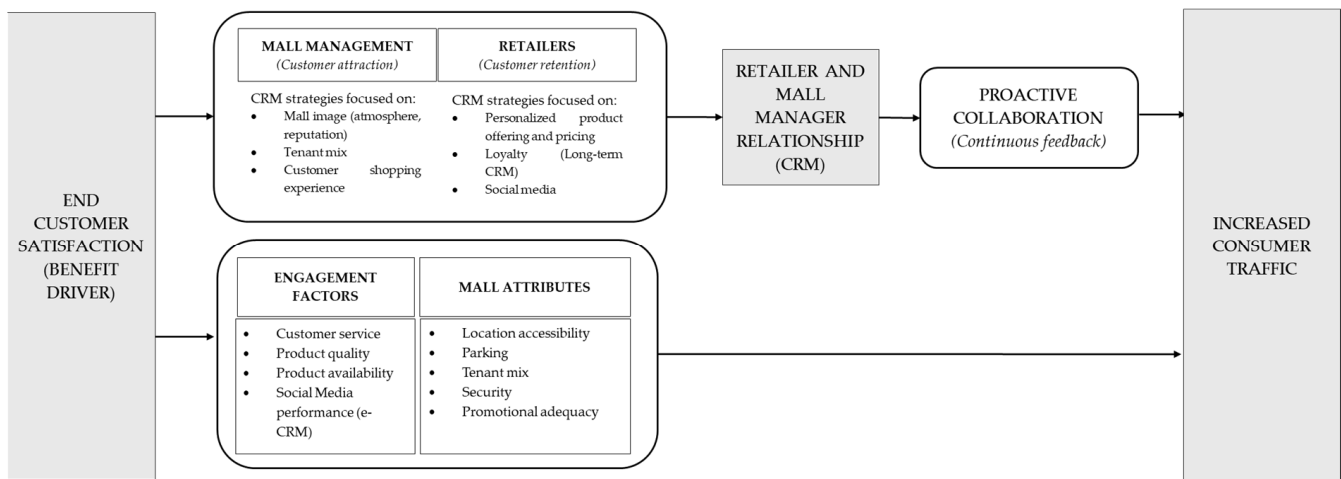
Table 8 summarizes the mall attributes that influence customer satisfaction and the measurement methods:

**Table 8.** Mall attributes dimensions in the sample. Source: author.

Mall Attribute	Description	Measurement Techniques
Location Accessibility	The ease with which customers can reach the mall, including proximity to major roads and transport.	- Customer surveys - Public transport evaluations - Road proximity
Parking Availability	The capacity and convenience of parking facilities at the mall.	- Customer feedback - Utilization analysis - Ease of access assessments
Tenant Mix	The variety and quality of stores available within the mall.	- Market studies - Loyalty card tracking - Preference Surveys
Security	The presence and perceived safety within the mall environment.	- Surveys - Tenants feedback
Promotions adequacy	The effectiveness of marketing promotions in driving customer engagement.	- Sales tracking - Customer feedback - Promotional surveys

To optimize these attributes, several mall managers perform socioeconomic studies of the surrounding populations, to complement feedback obtained from their own centre: ‘(...) for a medium, medium-high socioeconomic level. This does not mean that we go for elitist brands, no, because in some cases we have launched a brand that has not worked (...) So the importance of location, as I mentioned before, has its keys, but marketing must also be adapted to what you have, to your public’. To provide a unified image as a shopping centre, managers perceive that CRM strategies must focus on a specific customer type, adapting the mall attributes and engagement policies to fit the consumer preferences.

Figure 3 summarizes the findings section, integrating them into the proposed theoretical framework:



**Figure 3.** Proposed framework. Source: author.

In the proposed framework, mall managers and retailers identify multiple dimensions of customer satisfaction, which is the key driver of overall customer benefit. Satisfaction relies on two main aspects: engagement factors, tied to retention-focused CRM strategies and measured through e-CRM metrics, and mall attributes related to customer attraction. The findings indicate that while mall managers prioritize customer attraction to enhance satisfaction through an appealing mall image and a well curated tenant mix, store managers focus on customer retention through long-term CRM strategies such as loyalty programs

and personalized offerings and pricings. Both elements impact customer traffic, and proactive collaboration between mall managers and retailers can create synergies that improve overall mall performance.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The present study explored the dynamics of collaboration between mall managers and retailer stores in Spanish shopping centers from a CRM perspective, employing a qualitative, exploratory approach. By conducting a multiple case study with 30 interviews, the research aimed to uncover how CRM strategies are shaped by the contextual factors influencing collaboration between these two groups.

It was observed that the alignment of goals, the sharing of customer data, and the mall's physical infrastructure all play a role in shaping these strategies. Mall managers often focus on creating an appealing environment and drawing foot traffic, while retailers tend to concentrate on customer retention through personalized services. These approaches can complement each other, leading to a dynamic interaction that benefits both parties, though the level of collaboration can vary.

For instance, anchor stores, such as popular brands and essential services, are chosen to attract visitors, while management also prioritizes accessibility through partnerships with public transport and promotes sustainability to appeal to eco-conscious tenants and reduce costs. Together, these factors aim to foster a welcoming environment that encourages ongoing customer visits, consistent with previous literature (Hänninen & Paavola, 2021; Vilnai-Yavetz et al., 2021).

Retailers, in contrast, were observed to concentrate their efforts on retaining customers, leaving visitor attraction to mall management. They employ loyalty programs, targeted social media, and personalized services such as discounts and fitting services, aiming to build exclusive relationships with customers and motivate repeat visits. This approach enhances customer loyalty and keeps shoppers engaged with the brand (Chebat et al., 2014; Junaid et al., 2024). In this sense, the findings suggest that the distinct approaches of mall managers and retailers to customer engagement (retention and attraction) can complement each other. This differentiation allows customers to interact with the mall as a whole and its individual stores in unique ways, creating a complementary dynamic that enhances the overall customer experience and strengthens loyalty at both levels.

Secondly, the observed interactions between mall management and retailers range from transactional to proactive. In transactional relationships, common in factory outlets, engagement is minimal, with management primarily focused on rent collection and enforcing compliance. Proactive relationships, however, involve close collaboration to deliver a unified customer experience. This includes setting shared objectives, regular performance assessments, and aligning CRM strategies to increase satisfaction and foot traffic.

Most importantly, findings suggest that customer satisfaction, the main driver of mall performance, depends on a great extent on two factors: customer engagement (Wei et al., 2021) and mall attributes (Xu et al., 2022). Engagement is tracked through customer feedback, loyalty data, and social media activity, while attributes like accessibility, tenant mix, security, and parking are often assessed via surveys and feedback. To refine these factors, mall managers conduct socioeconomic studies of local demographics, tailoring CRM strategies to fit customer needs and preferences.

The present study adds to the existing literature on customer relationship management in shopping malls by empirically depicting the foundations of how CRM strategies differ between mall management and individual retailers, shedding light on their complementary roles in customer attraction and retention. While previous studies have focused on CRM within either mall management or retail environments without considering their

relationship, this research delves into the specific dynamics and collaborative potential between both parties, showing how their combined efforts and reciprocal effort can create a cohesive customer experience. Methodologically, the study design, including the detailed protocols for data collection and analysis, enhances its replicability. While the study focuses on shopping malls, the methodology through the use of semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis can be adapted to other retail environments, such as standalone stores or mixed-use retail spaces. Adjustments to the context-specific questions in the interview guide would enable replication in areas outside malls while maintaining the study's core focus on CRM dynamics and interorganizational collaboration.

For practitioners, this paper outlines key practices for building proactive relationships between mall management and retailers, along with guidelines on the factors that drive customer traffic. It highlights crucial elements such as the tenant mix, accessibility, and customer engagement, and provides specific CRM strategies designed to enhance these aspects, ultimately supporting efforts to maximize mall performance.

The primary limitations of this study are related to the use of case studies, with findings based on a limited set of interviews. Expanding the sample size could provide further relevant data and enhance the generalizability of results. Additionally, this research focuses specifically on the experience within physical shopping centers, leaving potential for further investigation into CRM strategies that bridge e-commerce and physical retail. From the perspective of information dissemination, the standardized CRM methods examined may not fully address the varying needs of distinct retailers within a shopping center, potentially limiting their effectiveness for smaller retailers. Concerns about customer data privacy and the reluctance of customers to share extensive personal information also pose challenges to CRM implementation.

Future studies could employ quantitative methods to more precisely assess the impact of individual customer engagement factors and mall attributes on customer satisfaction or explore how successful CRM strategies from e-commerce could be adapted to physical retail environments and information sharing constraints to improve overall performance. Furthermore, findings presented in this study highly depend on the mall context, hence considering how the findings might resonate in other retail environments, as commercial venues or other countries that present differences in customer expectations, could provide broader insights into the versatility and adaptability of collaborative CRM strategies.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The authors believe that formal ethical approval was not required for the following reasons: the interviews consisted solely of opinion-based questions that did not require participants to disclose personal or sensitive information; participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences; and the interview was conducted anonymously, ensuring that no identifiable personal data were collected. Given these points, the authors believe that ethical approval from an institutional review board or ethics committee was not necessary for this study.

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