

TENANT SATISFACTION AT A SERVICE-DOMINATED SHOPPING CENTRE: A CASE STUDY OF RAPULANA, GABORONE, BOTSWANA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores factors influencing tenant satisfaction in a service-dominated shopping centre in Botswana. Data were collected from 31 current tenants at Rapulana Shopping Mall using a semi-structured questionnaire, supplemented by secondary sources. Descriptive analysis using tables, bar, and pie charts was performed in Microsoft Excel. Findings indicate that high rents, ageing infrastructure, limited facilities management, and weak tenant-landlord relationships contribute to tenant dissatisfaction, prompting some tenants to vacate or delay payments. The study highlights the unique dynamics of service-dominated centres, where tenant mix and operational reliability are critical determinants of satisfaction and mall performance—insights from this case guide managing similar centres in emerging markets.

Keywords: Tenant, Satisfaction, Shopping Centre, Gaborone, Botswana

INTRODUCTION

Botswana has transitioned from a low-income to a middle-income economy since gaining independence in 1966 (Taylor, 2003), attracting investment in retail property, particularly in Gaborone (Bagopi & Daman, 2014). While modern shopping malls are a relatively recent development, retail trade in Botswana has deep historical roots (Shunda et al., 2015). Success in contemporary retail depends on established consumer patterns, political stability, and evolving business models (Selema & Makgosa, 2018; Ghebremusse, 2018; Morton, 2018).

Shopping centres typically combine retail, service, and entertainment offerings under unified management (Sujatha & Priya, 2015; Prinsloo et al., 2019). However, Rapulana Shopping Mall exhibits a service-dominated tenant mix, with 66% of tenants providing services such as travel agencies, security, and postal operations, rather than traditional retail. This composition influences tenant satisfaction differently from retail-focused malls, with operational and service reliability taking precedence over footfall-dependent trading outcomes.

Within the retail property sector, tenant satisfaction plays a central role in determining the performance and long-term viability of shopping centres. Tenant satisfaction is defined variously as cumulative evaluation of service experience (Jones & Suh, 2000), interaction-specific judgments (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), and psychological fulfilment of expectations (Kotler, 1982). High-quality facilities, effective management, and operational reliability are critical determinants of satisfaction (Alexander, 1996; Sanderson, 2016; Hui et al., 2013). Satisfaction reflects the degree to which a service or product meets or exceeds user expectations (Oliver, 1997; Olushola, 2018).

Tenants, as end-users of commercial space, require an experience that aligns with the rental value they pay and their operational needs (Sujatha & Priya, 2015; Oladapo & Adebayo, 2014). Factors such as infrastructure quality, availability of amenities, and effective mall management significantly shape tenants' perceptions of value (Pitt & Musa, 2009). High-quality facilities and responsive management practices not only enhance satisfaction but also contribute to the financial sustainability of the shopping centre.

Relationship management is also pivotal. Transparent communication, trust, and responsive service enhance satisfaction and retention (Matthysen et al., 2025; Adebisi, 2024; Chen & Junaid, 2024). Operational reliability, including maintenance of air-conditioning, elevators, security, and cleanliness, is consistently the strongest predictor of satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Sanita, 2019; Hui et al., 2013).

Tenant mix functions as a strategic tool in mall management (Abratt et al., 1985; Greenspan, 1987), influencing synergy, customer attraction, and rental performance. Anchor tenants, balanced representation of retail and service tenants, and complementary brand offerings are essential for sustaining overall centre performance. In service-dominated centres, tenant satisfaction drivers shift from footfall and sales to reliability of infrastructure, service provision, and landlord engagement.

In Gaborone, rapid commercial development has reshaped the urban landscape, resulting in increased competition among shopping malls (Sebego & Gwebu, 2013). Older malls, such as the case-study site Rapulana (pseudonym), now face challenges including rising tenant defaults, premature lease terminations, and stores vacating without notice. Such vacancies negatively affect the performance and appeal of a mall by lowering foot traffic, reducing tenant morale, and diminishing overall asset value (Masebe, Paradza, & Zulch, 2024).

Understanding tenant satisfaction in service-dominated centres is critical because dissatisfaction can lead to lease non-renewals, abrupt tenant departures, and reduced revenue stability. This study investigates tenant experiences at Rapulana, examining drivers of turnover, rent defaults, and satisfaction levels. It also situates findings within broader emerging-market retail trends, offering comparative insights relevant to the Pacific Rim and Global South contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing scholarship conceptualises tenant satisfaction from multiple perspectives. Jones and Suh (2000) describe it as a cumulative judgment based on overall service experience, while Cronin and Taylor (1992) frame it as an assessment tied to specific service encounters. Kotler (1982) further defines satisfaction as a psychological state that arises when expectations are met or exceeded. Across these perspectives, tenant satisfaction is recognised as a key determinant of shopping centre performance, since tenants effectively operate as customers of property owners and managers, and their engagement directly affects occupancy and revenue outcomes.

Facilities management plays a central role in shaping tenant satisfaction. High-quality management practices, including prompt maintenance, reliable services, and effective communication, contribute to positive tenant outcomes and long-term retention (Alexander, 1996; Sanderson, 2016). Dissatisfied tenants may withhold lease renewals, relocate, or scale back operations, which undermines occupancy rates and the asset value of the property (Robledo, 2001). Built-environment attributes, such as adequate parking, functioning safety systems, clean restrooms, escalators, elevators, and climate control systems, further enhance tenants' operational efficiency and appeal to customers. Yuan (1996) conceptualises tenant satisfaction research as comprising three layers (general, regional, and context-specific) highlighting the need for holistic evaluation of both facility quality and service delivery.

Empirical research confirms the critical role of operational reliability in tenant satisfaction. Hui, Zhang, and Zheng (2013), in a longitudinal study of Hong Kong shopping malls, found that consistent upkeep of communal facilities, particularly air-conditioning, vertical transport, and electricity supply, was the strongest predictor of tenant satisfaction. Cleanliness, efficient communication, and promotional activities that increase customer footfall were also significant contributors. Similarly, Adeola et al. (2023) emphasise that the mall environment) including physical conditions, layout, and service support (strongly influences tenant loyalty and engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa, suggesting that both tangible and intangible aspects of management shape satisfaction outcomes.

Service reliability is a recurring theme in the literature. Sanita (2019) argues that tenants prioritise dependable services over aesthetic improvements, and failures in service delivery, especially repeated or emergency-related, lead to rapid dissatisfaction. High-quality service delivery requires well-trained personnel, continuous monitoring, and employee incentives aligned with excellence (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The SERVQUAL model reinforces the primacy of reliability in service industries, with empathy consistently ranking lower, highlighting that consistency in service is critical in retail property management.

In addition to operational and service factors, relationship management between tenants and property managers is increasingly recognised as a determinant of satisfaction. Matthysen, Pelsler, and Prinsloo (2025) note that effective communication, trust, and engagement practices strengthen tenant retention and foster loyalty in South African shopping centres, underscoring the relational dimension of tenant satisfaction. Adebisi (2024) further demonstrates that transparency in service charge administration, clear communication, and responsive property management practices significantly improve tenant perceptions and satisfaction in Nigerian shopping complexes. Similarly, Chen and Junaid (2024) argue that coordinated mall–tenant collaboration enhances satisfaction by aligning expectations, improving service delivery, and fostering a positive business environment. These findings collectively suggest that both operational efficiency and active relationship management are essential to sustaining tenant satisfaction.

Overall, the literature shows that tenant satisfaction is shaped by a combination of property management performance, facility conditions, service reliability, and the quality of tenant–landlord relationships. These factors influence tenants’ decisions to remain in a shopping centre, impacting financial viability, occupancy, and the long-term competitiveness of retail property assets. However, empirical research in Botswana and broader Sub-Saharan Africa remains limited, particularly in older, mid-tier shopping centres, highlighting the need for context-specific studies such as the present investigation at Rapulana Shopping Centre.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative design using a semi-structured questionnaire captured tenant perceptions of satisfaction and service quality. The study site, Rapulana Shopping Centre, was purposively selected for its status as an older, service-dominated mall experiencing rising vacancies and lease non-renewals.

The target population included 80 tenants, of which 31 participated (78% response rate). Purposive and convenience sampling ensured inclusion of tenants operating for at least three months. Only current tenants were surveyed; former tenants’ experiences are reported indirectly through current tenant observations.

The questionnaire included closed- and open-ended items covering satisfaction, services received, and expectations. Data were analysed descriptively in Microsoft Excel. Ethical procedures included anonymity, pseudonymisation of the mall, informed consent, and secure data storage. Limitations include small sample size, single-case focus, and reliance on self-reported data.

Ethical procedures were carefully observed throughout the study. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising all respondents’ identities and using a pseudonym for the shopping mall. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, with respondents fully briefed on the study’s objectives, their right to withdraw, and the voluntary nature of participation. Data were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher to ensure participants’ privacy.

This study is exploratory in nature and focuses on a single case, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other shopping centres in Botswana or the region. The relatively small sample size and exclusion of former tenants constrain the range of perspectives captured. Additionally, the descriptive analysis does not formally test theoretical relationships. These limitations are acknowledged, and conclusions are presented in a context-specific manner, focusing on insights relevant to Rapulana Shopping Centre and similar older, mid-tier retail properties.

RESULTS

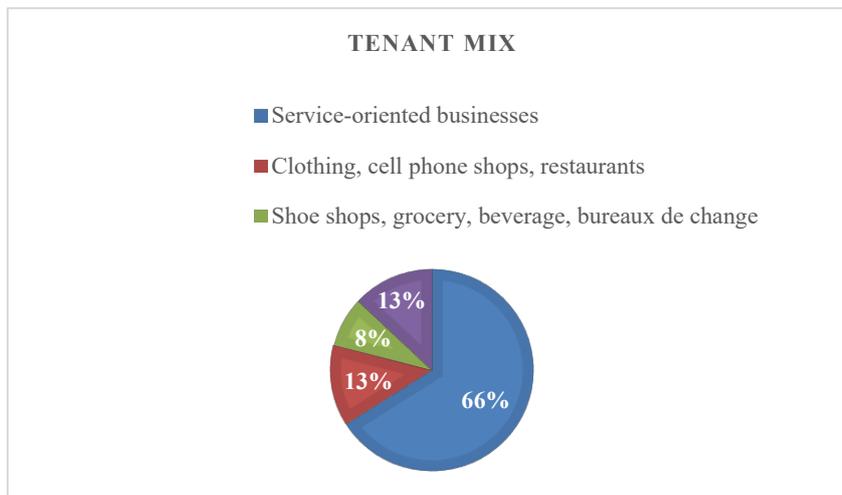
A total of forty (40) questionnaires were distributed to tenants at Rapulana Shopping Mall, of which thirty-one (31) were completed and returned, providing a 78% response rate. This strong participation enhances the validity of the findings and provides a reliable basis for analysing tenant experiences, satisfaction, and their implications for property performance.

Types of business at the mall

Service-oriented tenants dominate (66%), followed by retail (19%), food (10%), and financial/entertainment services (5%). This imbalance highlights the unique operational environment of Rapulana, where service reliability, rather than footfall-dependent trading, drives tenant satisfaction (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Distribution of tenants by type of business at Rapulana Shopping Mall (n=31).

Kotler’s (1982) definition of satisfaction as the degree to which expectations are met is helpful here: service tenants typically rely less on spontaneous customer traffic and more on appointment-based or necessity-driven interactions. This may partially explain the low footfall concerns later reported in the study. However, the



dominance of service tenants also reflects a potential tenant-mix imbalance. Abratt et al. (1985) emphasise that a balanced tenant mix is essential for creating synergies across stores and enhancing overall mall appeal. Prinsloo et al. (2019) further argue that tenant mix is a strategic asset-management tool affecting customer attraction and rental performance. The composition shown in Figure 1, therefore, suggests structural weaknesses that may be constraining the mall’s revenue-generating potential.

Leasing period for current tenants

The distribution of leasing periods, summarised in Figure 2, shows that 48% of tenants have been at the mall for 11-20 years, while 29% have stayed 3-10 years, and only 23% are relatively new (1-2 years). Long tenancy duration is often interpreted as a positive indicator of satisfaction and stability. However, interpreted through Cronin and Taylor’s (1992) interaction-specific framework, long tenure does not necessarily reflect positive satisfaction but may instead reflect switching costs, relocation constraints, or lack of better alternatives.

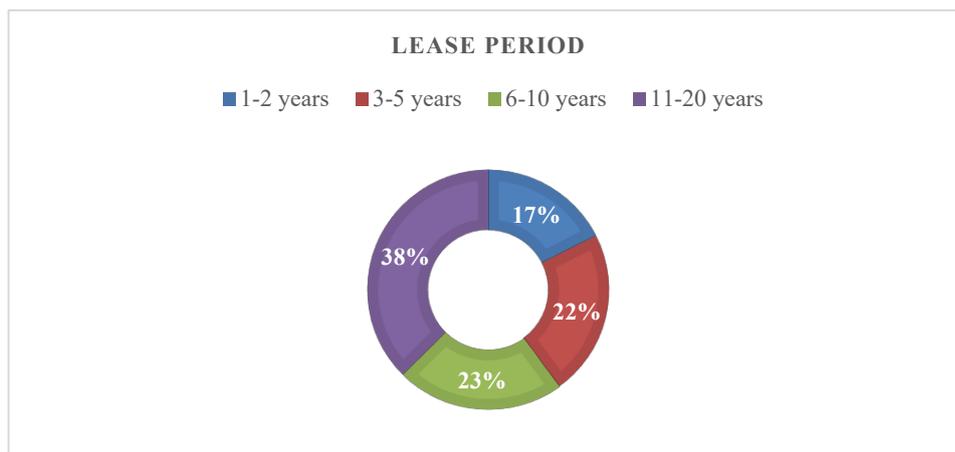


Figure 2: Lease period of existing tenants

The literature on shopping-centre asset management warns against overinterpreting long tenancies. Property performance research (Robledo, 2001; Eppli & Benjamin, 1994) shows that tenants may stay in deteriorating centres until dissatisfaction accumulates to a tipping point, after which sudden vacancies occur. The ageing condition of Rapulana, reported later in tenant expectations, suggests that long leasing periods may be masking simmering dissatisfaction rather than indicating stability.

Factors leading tenants to abscond/vacate without informing the Landlord

As shown in Figure 3, 65% of tenants cited high rental rates as the main reason for absconding, followed by low business activity (18%), poor tenant–landlord relations (10%), and competition from newer shopping centres (7%). These findings confirm the cumulative dissatisfaction process discussed by Jones and Suh (2000): when expectations are repeatedly unmet (whether due to high rents, low footfall, or poor communication), tenants eventually disengage behaviourally, sometimes through abrupt departures.

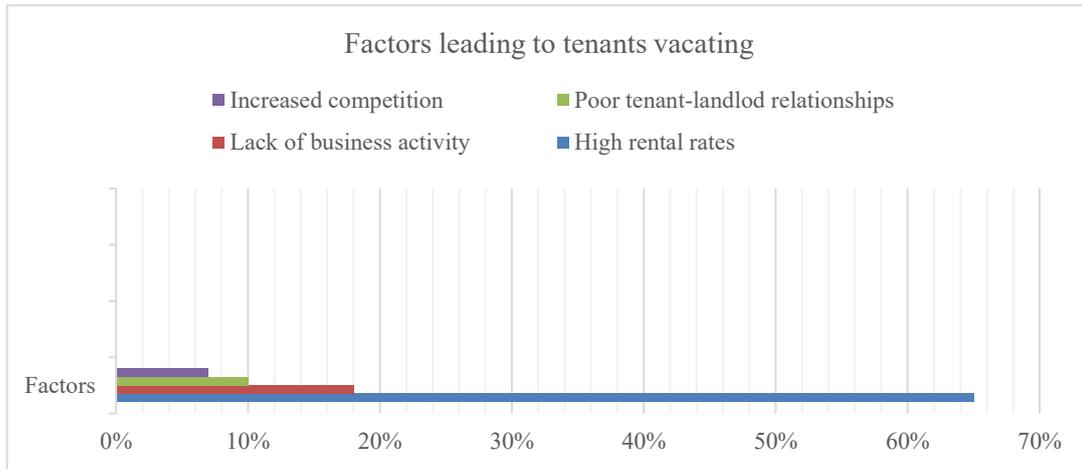


Figure 3: Factors contributing to tenants vacating without notice (n=31)

Hui, Zhang, and Zheng (2013) emphasise that consistent service quality and mall vibrancy are essential predictors of satisfaction. At Rapulana, high rents combined with poor trading conditions violate Kotler’s (1982) expectation-performance balance, resulting in perceived poor value for money. From a property investment and valuation perspective, such unplanned vacancies reduce income stability, increase re-letting costs, and elevate vacancy risk, all of which weaken net operating income (NOI) and ultimately reduce capital value (Prinsloo et al., 2019; Robledo, 2001).

Services received by tenants

The services tenants reported receiving from the landlord are summarised in Table 1, which shows that 42% of respondents received a clean lettable unit and 32% benefited from promotional activities. Still, only small proportions reported receipt of essential services such as maintenance (10%), cleaning (10%), and security (6%). These limited-service levels demonstrate significant gaps in facilities management.

Table 1: Services received by tenants

Services	Number of respondents	Percentage
Letting of a clean lettable unit	13	42%
Maintenance of exterior area of the building	3	10%
Promotion and Marketing of our businesses	10	32%
Cleaning of the Mall	3	10%
Providing security for our stores and customers.	2	6%
Total	31	100%

Source: Research Findings

Alexander (1996) and Sanderson (2016) highlight that high-quality management practices (including regular maintenance, reliable service delivery, and ongoing communication) are core components of tenant satisfaction and retention. Similarly, Parasuraman et al.’s (1988) SERVQUAL model identifies reliability as the most important determinant of service satisfaction. The low scores for security, cleaning, and maintenance in Table 1 suggest deficiencies in reliability, which Sanita (2019) argues is the factor tenants most prioritise over aesthetic considerations.

This composition influences tenant satisfaction differently from retail-focused malls, with operational and service reliability taking precedence over footfall-dependent trading outcomes.

Tenant satisfaction

As illustrated in Figure 4, most tenants reported being dissatisfied (52%) or very dissatisfied (32%), with only 16% indicating satisfaction. This overwhelmingly negative sentiment suggests that Rapulana is underperforming in nearly all dimensions of the satisfaction frameworks discussed in the literature review, including expectation fulfilment (Kotler, 1982), interaction quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), and cumulative evaluation (Jones & Suh, 2000).



Figure 4: Levels of tenant satisfaction at Rapulana Shopping Mall (n=31).

Adeola et al. (2023) and Hui et al. (2013) both stress that environmental quality, maintenance, and service support are fundamental determinants of tenant satisfaction and loyalty in African shopping centres. The dissatisfaction at Rapulana, therefore, reflects failures in both operational efficiency and relationship management. Respondents' suggested improvements (including attracting stronger anchor tenants, lowering rents, and renovating the mall) align with competitive repositioning strategies identified in retail asset-management literature (Kim, Lee & Kim, 2005).

For investors and valuers, the dissatisfaction levels reflected in Figure 4 represent a material red flag: persistent dissatisfaction weakens rental stability, stimulates tenant turnover, increases vacancy allowances, and ultimately depresses capital value.

Tenants' expectations

Tenant expectations, summarised in Table 2, reinforce earlier findings. A large majority (77%) expect the landlord to renovate the ageing mall, signalling recognition of functional and visual obsolescence—both of which diminish competitiveness as newer shopping centres emerge. This supports the literature asserting that reinvestment is essential to maintaining relevance and rental growth in ageing retail properties (Prinsloo et al., 2019).

Furthermore, 16% of tenants seek regular meetings with the landlord, emphasising the importance of relationship-based satisfaction. This is consistent with Matthyssen, Pelsers, and Prinsloo (2025) and Adebisi (2024), who highlight communication, transparency, and trust as key determinants of retail tenant–landlord relationships. The small proportion requesting rental waivers (7%) may reflect financial strain exacerbated by low footfall and poor service provision.

Table 2: Tenant expectations at Rapulana Shopping Mall

EXPECTATIONS	RESPONSE (%)
RENOVATION	77%
REGULAR MEETINGS	16%

RENTAL WAIVERS	7%
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Source: Research findings

Failure to address these expectations risks accelerating tenant turnover, weakening occupancy levels, and reducing long-term asset performance: outcomes repeatedly identified in the literature as detrimental to property value.

DISCUSSION

The results in Table 2 and Figures 1-3 reveal clear patterns of tenant dissatisfaction that align with, and in some areas extend, existing scholarship on shopping-centre tenant satisfaction. Consistent with Jones and Suh's (2000) conceptualisation of satisfaction as a cumulative judgement of service experience, tenants at Rapulana Shopping Centre assessed their satisfaction not on isolated encounters but on the ongoing reliability of operational systems. The low satisfaction ratings for air conditioning, cleanliness, security, and maintenance (Table 2) reinforce Cronin and Taylor's (1992) assertion that service-process performance critically shapes tenant perceptions, especially when failures occur repeatedly. The consistently low overall satisfaction levels illustrated in Figure 1 demonstrate that expectations outlined by Kotler (1982) (that satisfaction arises when performance meets or exceeds expectations) are not being met, indicating systemic rather than episodic failures.

A closer examination of the operational domains shows that service reliability is the most substantial source of dissatisfaction, supporting findings by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and Sanita (2019), who emphasise that reliability is the foundation of service satisfaction in managed facilities. The high frequency of maintenance-related complaints (Figure 2), particularly regarding electricity interruptions, malfunctioning cooling systems, and poor communication of repair schedules, mirrors the conclusions of Hui et al. (2013) that functional continuity of building systems is a primary predictor of tenant satisfaction in shopping centres. The prominence of service interruptions as a dissatisfaction driver in Figure 3 therefore demonstrates how operational unreliability erodes tenant confidence and affects their ability to trade efficiently, particularly for food outlets and services relying heavily on stable utilities.

The findings also reinforce the relevance of built-environment attributes highlighted by Yuan (1996). Tenants' concerns about parking limitations, cleanliness, and the condition of shared areas (Table 2) show that both tangible and intangible property management components interact to shape satisfaction. This multidimensionality supports Adeola et al.'s (2023) argument that mall environments in Sub-Saharan Africa require an integrated approach to facility management that addresses both physical infrastructure and service delivery standards.

Beyond operational aspects, relationship management emerges as a notable weakness. Tenants' comments about inadequate communication, unresponsiveness, and opaque service charge administration correspond with the relational determinants of satisfaction identified in Matthysen et al. (2025), Adebisi (2024), and Chen and Junaid (2024). The dissatisfaction patterns in Figure 3 (particularly the portion related to poor communication) indicate that weak tenant-manager relationships amplify the negative effects of operational failures. When tenants perceive management as disengaged or indifferent, even minor service problems escalate into broader dissatisfaction, consistent with Adebisi's (2024) findings in comparable African retail settings.

These findings have direct implications for property investment and valuation. Literature on retail property performance (Abratt et al., 1985; Prinsloo et al., 2019) emphasises that tenant satisfaction strongly influences rental income stability, vacancy rates, and ultimately capital value. The low satisfaction levels shown in Figure 1 and the high concentration of operational dissatisfaction in Figure 3 suggest a heightened risk of turnover, shorter lease renewal cycles, and potential rental arrears. This aligns with Robledo's (2001) proposition that dissatisfied tenants are more likely to relocate or renegotiate leases unfavourably, thereby weakening cash-flow predictability. In asset-management terms, the maintenance-related issues displayed in Figure 2 represent deferred expenditure risks that may diminish the net operating income (NOI), reduce valuation multipliers, and increase capitalisation rates. The building's ageing systems, combined with uneven service delivery, could also constrain the centre's competitive positioning relative to newer malls, further suppressing rental growth potential.

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Overall, the integration of survey results with the reviewed literature demonstrates that tenant dissatisfaction at Rapulana Shopping Centre stems from systemic service reliability failures, inadequate facilities management, and weak relationship management: factors that jointly depress both operational performance and long-term asset value. Addressing these issues is not merely an operational priority but a strategic requirement for safeguarding the investment performance and valuation trajectory of the asset.

IMPLICATIONS

Ensuring tenant satisfaction through targeted facility upgrades, strategic tenant mix, and proactive management is critical to safeguarding rental income, maintaining occupancy, and sustaining the long-term value of Rapulana Shopping Mall. High tenant dissatisfaction (84%) highlights operational and financial risks, including potential vacancies, despite the presence of long-term tenants. A mismatch between rental levels and perceived service quality, reported by 65% of respondents, increases lease-renewal risk and cash-flow volatility, underscoring the need for adjusted effective rents, vacancy allowances, and risk-adjusted yields in income-based valuations.

Immediate capital expenditure is essential, with tenants prioritising improvements to air-conditioning, lighting, sanitation, and common areas. Enhancing the tenant mix, including the introduction of recognised anchor stores, can strengthen footfall, trade performance, and rental growth, thereby supporting both operational stability and asset value.

Effective property management, particularly improved communication, regular tenant engagement, and clear service-level agreements, is vital to reducing misunderstandings and unexpected departures. The mall's ageing infrastructure further emphasises the need for ongoing reinvestment to maintain competitiveness, highlighting the importance of asset lifecycle management in urban retail contexts.

Overall, tenant satisfaction emerges as a key determinant of investment performance, occupancy stability, and property valuation. Addressing gaps in service, facilities, and management is therefore fundamental to preserving income, sustaining occupancy, and ensuring the long-term competitiveness of Rapulana Shopping Mall.

CONCLUSION

Tenant satisfaction at Rapulana is shaped by service reliability, facility quality, and tenant-landlord relationships. Service-dominated centres require proactive operational management, tenant engagement, and strategic tenant-mix interventions to maintain occupancy, income stability, and asset value. Addressing identified gaps can improve tenant retention and performance, offering practical guidance for similar centres in emerging-market contexts.

Tangible factors such as clean toilets, sufficient parking, adequate lighting, and overall accessibility were identified as key contributors to tenant satisfaction. However, these elements are only meaningful if the facilities are well-maintained. The study highlights that the quality of property management, together with the quality of building facilities, directly shapes tenants' perceptions and satisfaction, which in turn affects their behaviour in the landlord-tenant relationship.

At Rapulana Shopping Centre, tenants reported dissatisfaction primarily due to high rental rates, which hinder timely rent payments and lead some tenants to vacate before lease expiry in favour of shopping centres with more competitive rates. Additionally, the mall's age and dilapidated condition negatively affect tenant perceptions. Renovation and the introduction of popular retail brands could enhance the tenant mix, attract more customers, and improve overall tenant satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of proactive management strategies that address both operational and physical aspects of shopping centres to foster long-term tenant retention.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to a single service-dominated centre, a small sample, and current tenants only. Findings are context-specific and may not generalise to other retail or mixed-use malls.

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