

An Analysis of Visitors' Perceptions of Shopping Malls [†]

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Abstract: Shopping malls have been a significant part of our daily lives for decades. Their significance is derived from the use of these spaces based on great numbers of people, as well as the role malls play in culture. On the other hand, the design of malls has been constantly evolving according to the needs of users and the market. This study is based on survey data that we collected from ninety visitors of a shopping mall located in Izmir, Türkiye. Through the survey, we collected data on topics such as the participants' visit frequency and reasons for visiting the mall, architectural and spatial features they favor and/or dislike, their opinions on where they perceive malls in everyday life, and their opinions on alternative spaces to malls. The data collection was finalized right before the pandemic, which significantly changed the way we think about public spaces, as well as malls, in relation to architecture. Analyzing collected data provides further insight into surveyed customers' perception of spaces, the design of shopping malls, the use of the space, the preferred design features, as well as design features that drive customers away from the mall. The analysis was later compared and linked to studies in the literature. These research findings have the potential to be used in studies that evaluate mall design and space use, as well as in studies that compare the post-pandemic perception of spaces and the use of shopping malls.

Keywords: shopping malls; design; architecture; user perception

1. Introduction

Shopping malls have an undeniable place in modern city life and economy [1]. While the use of mall spaces changes in time, in order to design according to such changes, it is essential to understand the users' needs and the mall characteristics they find important. Shopping malls research cover a wide range of topics such as specific topics like wayfinding and orientation [2], attributes of brand image [3], and more general topics like mall design [4,5]. Singh and Shay determined that the shoppers visualize shopping experience as a combination of ambience, physical infrastructure, marketing focus, convenience, and safety and security [6]. The aim of the research was to collect data from users through a survey, and later analyze the collected data to bring insights on the perception of malls by the users, with a specific interest on spatial characteristics. Through the analysis of the survey data we provide insights on topics such as how often and why people visit malls, why they prefer some malls over others, and the mall design characteristics they like or dislike.

2. Methodology

We carried out a survey which was completed by ninety shopping mall customers. Table 1 below summarizes information on the demography of survey responders. The survey questions were prepared based on the following topics: frequency of mall visits, reasons for mall visits, reasons for favoring a mall, architectural features that are liked/disliked, mall characteristics that are liked or disliked, and the place of malls in social and daily life. The answers to each question were manually entered in an Excel file in a separate



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table. Later, the data on the Excel file were transferred to MAXQDA for coding. The research approach was inspired by grounded theory [7]. Since the answers analyzed in Tables 4 and 5 included not a single answer but a number of related answers from each responder, we used a different approach to make sense of this part of the data. For Tables 4 and 5 we listed all the related words provided as part of answers, and we analyzed the total number of words provided by all responders.

Table 1. Distribution of survey responders according to gender and age.

		%	#
Survey Group	Female	52%	47
	Male	48%	43
Age Group	18–24	46%	41
	25–32	33%	30
	33–40	9%	8
	40–50	3%	3
	50–60	9%	8

3. Results and Discussion

No time interval was mentioned when the participants were asked about the amount of time they spent in shopping malls. Analysis of the answers indicates that a two-hour period constituted a limit. Overall, 38% of the participants stated that they spent more than two hours in shopping malls, and 62% of them stated that they spent two hours or less in shopping malls (Table 2). Additionally, 44% of the participants mentioned that they visit the malls 1–3 times a month, 39% visit the malls 4–12 times a month, 15% of the participants mentioned that they visit the shopping malls rarely, and 3% of the participants stated that they visit shopping malls every day. According to Caalvo-Porrall and Levy-Mangin [8] the “better tenant variety, the more attractive internal environment and the more favourable leisure mix, the higher frequency of visits to the mall”.

Table 2. Information on frequency of visits, and time spent in malls.

		%	#
Frequency of visit to the mall	Rarely	15%	13.5
	1–2 times a month	21%	18.9
	2–3 times/month	23%	20.7
	3–4 times/month	14%	12.6
	4–8 times/month	17%	15.3
	8–12 times/month	12%	10.8
	Everyday	3%	2.7
Time spent in mall	2 h or less	62%	55.8
	More than 2 h	38%	34.2

Only 36.7% of the participants used the word shopping to explain their purpose of visiting the malls. Over fifty percent of the answers were a combination of shopping and either watching movies, socializing, or spending time with others. Table 3 below summarizes the responses on why the surveyed people visit malls.

Table 4 below summarizes the percentages of combined responses about why surveyed people favor a mall. While 30.2% of the words used to describe characteristics were related to stores in the mall, 28% were related to accessibility. The results of the analysis are similar to those in previous studies, such as [9], that focus on factors influencing the selection of shopping malls.

Table 3. Distribution of survey responders' reasons for visiting malls.

	%	#
Shopping	36.7	33
Shopping and movies	14.4	13
Shopping and socializing	13.3	12
Shopping and spending time	11.1	10
Shopping and eating	8.9	8
Meeting friends and socializing	5.6	5
Clothing and socializing (eating and movies)	5.6	5
Watching movies	4.4	4

Table 4. Distribution of the survey responders' reasons for favoring a mall over others.

	%	#
Stores (brands, diversity, products, quality, etc.)	30.2	42
Accessibility	28	39
Open and spacious feeling	10	14
# of people (crowd)	5.7	8
Has no specific criteria	4.3	6
Hygiene	3.6	5
Availability of social activities	2.9	4
User profile	1.4	2
Ventilation	1.4	2
Afordability	1.4	2
Others	6.5	9
N/A	4.3	6

Table 5 below summarizes the responses regarding the surveyed peoples' perception of architectural features they like or dislike in malls. The analysis indicates that a spacious feeling of the space is the most mentioned term when answering this question, with 27.6% of respondents mentioning this. Meanwhile, 20.8% of the used terms are related to the mall concept, and the data indicate that malls with semi-open spaces are favored by more people.

Table 5. Survey responders described a variety of characteristics when they talked about the architectural features of malls.

		%	#
Spacious feeling	Open space	27.6	16
	Spacious		14
	Headroom/ceiling height		9
	Wide/big		5
Mall concept	Semi-open	20.8	17
	Dislikes semi-open		2
	Favors closed malls		5
	Open mall		6
Ventilation	Street concept	7.6	3
	Ventilation		12
Lighting	Natural light	8.2	7
	Lighting		6
Circulation and navigation	Vertical circulation	11.3	11
	Plan simplicity		4
	Gallery spaces		3
Green	Green space	3.1	5
Accessibility	Accessibility	3.8	4
	Parking		2

Table 5. *Cont.*

		%	#
Others	Store brands		2
	Entrance		2
	Others	10.7	9
	Esthetic look		4
	Architecture not important	3.1	5
	N/A	3.8	6

Table 6 below summarizes the responses on mall characteristics that are liked or disliked. While the data indicate that 19% of the responders are, overall, satisfied with existing mall characteristics, 26.6% of the responses were related to lack of open spaces, and ventilation and lighting issues. Only 6.7% of the responses were related to stores and product diversity.

Table 6. Liked or disliked mall characteristics.

	%	#
Overall satisfied	18.9	17
Lack of open spaces	14.4	13
Ventilation and lighting issues	12.2	11
Lack of spaces (social, events, resting areas, green areas)	8.9	8
Store/product diversity	6.7	6
Cleanness and hygiene	6.7	6
Layout issues	5.6	5
Parking issues	5.6	5
Crowded	4.4	4
Wayfinding issues	3.3	3
Circulation issues	2.2	2
Combinations of the above	6.7	6
N/A	4.4	4

Table 7 below summarizes the responses about malls' place in survey responders' social and daily lives. Overall, 84.5% of the responses indicate that malls are part of either social, or daily, or both social and daily lives. The data also indicate that malls are accepted more as parts of social life.

Table 7. Responses on the place of malls in social and daily lives.

	%	#
Part of social life	31.1	25 (positive) + 3 (negative)
Part of daily and social lives	30	27
Part of daily life	23.4	13 (positive) + 8 (negative)
No/very limited place in our lives	11.1	10
Other	4.4	4

4. Conclusions

The analysis of this research can be used to better understand customers' perspectives of shopping malls. About eighty-five percent of the surveyed people stated that malls are part of their daily and social lives. The analyses also indicate that going to malls to socialize over movies, food, and drinks is as important as going to malls for shopping only. The analysis indicates that spatial organization and designs that support means of socializing should be a part of the contemporary mall designs. The notion of socializing and proposal of spaces to answer the needs for socializing have the potential to be parts of contemporary mall design problems. According to the survey data, accessibility is almost as important

as the qualities of the stores within the malls when it comes to choosing one mall over the others. A spacious feeling is the most important architectural feature that the users seek, followed by the concept of the mall, which is also defined by the amount of open and closed spaces.

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