

# SHOPPING MALL ATTRACTIVENESS ATTRIBUTES FROM URBAN SHOPPER PERSPECTIVE: CASE STUDY OF PARADIGM MALL, JOHOR

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## ABSTRACT

*The growing competition among shopping malls has demanded efficient strategies to attract shoppers. Urban shoppers with higher average disposable income levels and stronger purchasing ability directly influence the growth of urban shopping malls. The attractiveness attributes of the shopping mall will affect buyers' decision in choosing the shopping mall to visit. This research aims to investigate the attractiveness attributes of Paradigm Mall in Johor Bahru from the perspective of urban shoppers. A questionnaire survey was conducted, and 116 completed questionnaires were collected from the target respondents. The data were analysed using an important relative index (RII). Cinema, recreational facilities, furnishing, air-conditioning and a variety of stores and merchandise are the five most attractive selections for urban shoppers. The discovery of these critical attributes may guide the management of shopping malls to strategies future planning to attract more urban shoppers.*

Keywords: shopping mall, attractiveness attributes, urban shopper, attractiveness dimensions

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is one of the countries with a very competitive environment in the retail market. A shopping centre is a form of a commercial building in the retail market that can produce income and profits. Now, most shopping malls have extended their operations to include a wide range of facilities and entertainment, allowing customers to buy a wide selection of products (Calvo-Porrall & Lévy-Mangín, 2018). It is significant for a shopping mall to have attractive features that will allow more shoppers to come and visit the mall (Wongkerd, 2017). Today, there is a lot of competition between all the shopping malls in urban areas (Wong & Nair, 2018). Urban shoppers with higher average disposable income levels and stronger purchasing ability have led to the fast growth of urban shopping malls. The attractiveness attributes of the shopping mall can affect the buyers' decision whether or not to shop at the shopping mall.

Mall management and services that are not customer-oriented may fall out of competition and be unable to continue their business. According to Loganathan (2019), some shopping malls in Johor Bahru failed to attract customers or make enough profits. With Malaysia's increasing number of malls, urban shoppers tend to be more selective. Urban shoppers shop for entertainment and enjoy their spare time in shopping malls (Susilawati et al., 2002). They are more likely to select pleasant malls with a wide range of shops and merchandise that fit their specifications and tastes. Shopping malls play an important role here by offering a holistic shopping, dining and leisure experience in a convenient environment under one roof.

In certain views and circumstances, the attraction factors of shopping malls are dissimilar as it depends on the opinions and interests of people. Therefore, a shopping mall needs to have a specific attractiveness attribute. Nowadays, the rapid expansion of shopping malls makes the management identify and consider how the mall's attributes describe customer preferences and interests, which are essential for the mall's operation (Santoso, Joewono & Sunanto, 2018). The increasing amounts of malls influence consumers' ability to distinguish and choose malls, thus posing a big challenge for the retail industry (Barnes, 2005). Hence, the specific attractiveness attributes need to be identified from an urban shopper perspective, enabling the management of shopping malls to devise peculiar strategies to attract shoppers.

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This research focuses on the shopping malls in Johor Bahru, Johor, as there will be differences in shoppers' expectations regarding the urban population. Johor Bahru malls are located close to each other within a limited geographical area, with a similar mix of tenants. Most shopping mall attractiveness studies by researchers such as Aliagha, Qin, Ali, & Abdullah (2015), Astono (2014), El-Adly & Eid (2016) and Khong & Ong (2014) focused on customer loyalty and satisfaction. They concluded that the well-being of shoppers led to mall satisfaction and good word of mouth. Based on the study of Arnold and Reynolds (2003), it was discovered that the shopping experience significantly impacts shopping intentions. It considered the attributes that will result in the shopping experience and the excellent image of the mall that will eventually result in sustainability and patronage retention (Stoel et al., 2004).

This research identifies the dimensions of attractiveness attributes valued by urban shoppers in Johor Bahru and the relationship of demographic factors in their decision-making. As a result, this research can be used as a helpful starting point for recognising the aspects of attraction of shopping malls in the urban environment and understanding the expectations of urban shoppers. It also discovered the benefits the urban shoppers seek while visiting shopping malls, which will leverage the shopping mall management to devise appropriate strategies to satisfy the needs of shoppers better, leading to repeated visits.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEWS**

Urban is a series or set of changes and transformations mainly attributed to population expansion, concentration and industrialisation, as well as a way of life of modern communities that characterises contemporary society (Lefebvre, 1999). The zone that encompasses a city is an urban environment. Urban areas are well developed, meaning there is a density of human infrastructures such as homes, high-rise buildings, shopping malls, highways and railroads. Urban areas can refer to towns, cities and suburbs. Based on Asner (2018), urban shoppers could be defined as individuals or shoppers who shop within the boundaries of the urban areas. This includes residents living within the urban core and outside visitors entering urban areas. During the weekdays, shoppers inside the city's central business district behave equally, whether they are urban communities or visitors. The shopping behaviour of urban shoppers can be described as a subjective activity that is largely influenced by the individual and group behaviour of fellow customers.

Urban shoppers have comparatively higher spending power, but owing to their busy lifestyles, their leisure time is limited. In the short time available, they cannot fulfil the varied demands of the family members (Wong & Nair, 2018). This time-limiting aspect pushes urban dwellers to explore a suitable one-stop solution for diverse family needs, with shopping being one of them. As cited by Saat, Shaari & Fauzi (2018), urban societies see their environment as a serious factor in deciding their social lifestyle. Shopping malls and stores are known as the favourite locations for urban residents. Based on Rajagopal (2011), the behaviours of urban shoppers are guided by the logistics, accessibility and location of the shopping centre, demographics and agglomeration of shops in the commercial sector. Shoppers in urban communities usually patronise multi-channel shopping outlets and spend time and cost in a good quest for goods and products. Urban shoppers are influenced to seek the advantages of a shopping mall and market-specific discounts and price improvements to their shopping carts (Rajagopal, 2011).

Extensive studies undertaken on customer demographic attributes are internal variables related to decision-making (Mateja & Irena, 2009). Demographic input is the most effective method for targeting groups of people with similar characteristics (Sessoms, 2010). Hence, demographic factors are important characteristics that need to be considered by mall management when developing strategic plans. Many researchers have analysed shopping behaviour as gendered activities as it has been proven that men and women have different preferences South and Spitze (1994). Based on Durakbasa & Cindoglu (2005), women go shopping to look about and see shopping as an enjoyable experience, whereas men go shopping to satisfy their basic needs. Age is one of the demographic factors that influence the desire of customers to buy (Findsen, 2005). The human lifecycle influences the buying behaviour of the consumer. Age is a common factor affecting shopping motivations. Based on Lautianen (2015), customers switch their purchases of goods or product depending on their age and stage of life. Factors associated with age include diet, clothes and leisure. Income is viewed as a crucial determinant of shopping decisions (Irfan & Badar, 2018). As supported by Zeithaml (1985), customers' income strongly affects customer purchasing power. It can be seen how often the customers visit the shopping centres (Tirmizi, 2009). The income level enables the consumers to determine the extent of shopping and purchase intention for specific products. The profession of the customer plays a significant role in shaping their decision to purchase. According to Solomonm, Bossy, Askegaard and Hogg (2016), a good occupation makes a good income, which eventually influences buying intention. In addition, as studied by

Iqbal, Ghafoor and Shahbaz (2013), different kinds of occupations may choose a different selection of stores to shop.

The terms of shopping mall attractiveness, the mall management should provide comfort to customers (Nadine, 1982). In certain expectations and contexts, the attractiveness dimensions of the shopping mall are different since it depends on consumers' perceptions and preferences. El-Adly (2007) found that mall attractiveness factors can be the element to improve the successful management of the organisation in a market and can deliver the attractiveness of the particular mall. There are a variety of entertainment alternatives for creating a more pleasant shopping experience. Entertainment can become a means of mall image differentiation, especially for a specific segment of consumers. Next, Haynes & Talpade (1996) stated that entertainment could attract loyalty and fixed customers in a shopping centre. Reynolds et al. (2002) proposed entertainment as a dimension of shopping mall attractiveness. This research is supported by El-Adly (2017) and Rajagopal (2003), mentioning that entertainment is one factor that influences customers to shopping malls. Based on El-Adly (2007), shopping mall entertainment attributes include restaurants, food, and cinemas. Based on Sit et al. (2003), a group of amenities such as unique entertainment and general can be defined as entertainment dimensions at a shopping mall. The general amenities include the restaurant, food courts and cafes, movie theatres and play areas for children. Meanwhile, the special entertainment includes cultural performances, fashions and other special events. Entertainments were further categorised by Banerjee (2012) under five different subcategories, namely children's amusement corner, rest place availability, presence of movie theatre, presence of restaurant and presence of anchor restaurant.

Various mixtures of the tenants in a shopping centre are referred to as the tenant-mix. According to El-Adly and Eid (2015), the large trade area of shopping malls that incorporates many types of stores within one single location can attract all shoppers who can find a wide assortment of merchandise available within the stores. Kwiatek et al. (2020) conducted their research to encourage mall managers to provide plenty of tenant mix to increase the perceived size of the mall. Tenant-mix in a shopping centre was accentuated by the variety of the tenant types in providing the diversity of merchandise and the quality of the tenant in the shopping centre (Reynolds et al., 2002). According to Borgers et al. (2010), tenant-mix in a shopping centre is the key factor for the shopping centre's success.

According to Odeh & As'ad (2014), design factors include the furnishing, style of décor, equipment and layout. Shopping malls' physical appearance relates to its architectural and interior aspects, which is designed to act as an attractive factor of a shopping mall that helps to engage consumers who appreciate the mall's interior design, interior colour, interior texture, lighting and decoration (Andruskha et al., 2018). Based on Cortazar (2018), shopping mall physical design represents the appearance of the mall and pleasant design from an overall perception including the modern design, attractive images and organisation in the mall.

A shopping mall provides various facilities to mall visitors for their convenience during shopping time. A good mall environment has been considered a competitive tool for mall management, as it might positively impact mall facilities and visuals to increase customer satisfaction (Pullman & Gross, 2004; Kwortnik & Ross, 2007). This convenient environment for the customers will add to their spending time in the shopping mall and ultimately increase sales. According to Mohd Sapie et al. (2014), the convenience of a shopping mall includes a high level of security, good staff services, free parking, quality of products, ATM facilities, and shopping malls that are entertaining, cheerful and colourful atmosphere. As supported by Banerjee (2012), a convenience shopping mall location consisting of good transportation facilities, parking facilities available, not crowded and convenient operating hours will increase the attractiveness of the mall.

Promotion activities are prevalent in every shopping mall. According to Anselmsson (2006), promotion is defined as a mode to please the customers. As stated by LeHew and Fairhurst (2000), promotional activities of the mall are used to increase customer traffics, differentiate the mall's image through communication and stimulate merchandise purchase. This is similar to that mentioned by Jin and Suh (2005), who addressed that promotion of shopping malls on sale and discounts in the pricing will create a higher flow of shoppers to that particular shopping mall. The common practice of shopping mall management is to provide an essential shopping experience and use sales and promotions like mega sales, warehouse sales, change of season sales and festive offers to attract the shoppers to the mall (Wong & Nair, 2018). A previous study by Kalaivani and Shakar (2017) revealed a strong relationship between sales promotion and shopper behaviour, concluding that promotion activities induce customers to consume products on the market, thus increasing consumption rate and sales volume.

With the abundance of shopping malls today, consumers have become more thoughtful about what they demand and prioritise services. According to Hui, Zhang and Zheng (2013) study, the shopping mall service dimensions affect customer satisfaction. To ensure the shopper and visitor choose their mall as a preferred shopping mall, mall management must offer the best experience to them. Understanding the

customer's expectations can lead to better service delivery and attributes of the mall (Jumat et al., 2012; Parasuraman, 2002). Based on Telci (2013), mall management needs to provide services to the customer as one of the attraction factors of the mall. Customer service is one shopping mall activity that increases visitors' value when shopping (Levy & Weitz, 2007). The level of customer service depends on the retailers' characteristics, competitors' services, stores' price and image, the target market's income and the cost of providing services (Lusch et al., 2012). Satisfying the visitors or consumers through goods and customer services provides long-term shopper satisfaction.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The non-probability sampling method was chosen as the sampling technique in this study. The target population in the study involved adults in a shopping mall. In this research, 116 respondents were used to represent the urban shopper population in Johor Bahru. Paradigm Mall JB was selected as it is located within the city centre, easily accessible and offers a variety of tenant mixes. The questionnaire was selected as the method for this research as it is a cost-effective and time-saving data collection tool. The first part required the respondents to disclose their demographic information such as age, gender, salary, marital status, occupation, race and visit frequency. The question asked in the second part of the questionnaire were related to indicators of shopping mall attractiveness attributes in Table 1. Five points Likert scale format was used; (“1”) Very Unattractive, (“2”) Unattractive, (“3”) Slightly Attractive, (“4”) Attractive or (“5”) Very Attractive to record respondents’ response to identifying the reasons of shoppers choose to shop in a shopping mall.

Table 1: Sample Description

Variable	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	46	39.66
Female	70	60.34
<b>Age</b>		
<20	18	15
21-30	52	43.33
31-40	13	10.83
41-50	14	11.67
>50	23	19.17
<b>Race</b>		
Malay	85	73.28
Chinese	20	17.24
Indian	10	8.62
Others	1	0.86
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	66	56.90
Married	47	40.52
Others	3	2.59
<b>Occupation</b>		
Government Sector	40	34.48
Private Sector	25	21.55
Student	40	34.48
Others	11	9.48
<b>Salary</b>		
<RM3000	58	50
RM3000-RM5000	17	14.66
RM5000-RM7000	16	13.79
RM7000-RM9000	14	12.07
>RM9000	11	9.48
<b>Visit Frequency</b>		
1-4 times	103	88.79

To analyse the data gathered from the participants, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 26 and Microsoft Office Excel were used. To achieve the objectives of this study, 33 indicators of shopping mall attractiveness attributes were analysed using a relative important index to rank the attractiveness attributes according to the level of importance. Independent samples T-test and one-way ANOVA were used to assess the relationship between attractiveness attributes and demographic factors.

#### 4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyse the attractiveness attributes of the shopping mall from an urban shopper perspective. Hence, a relative important index was performed to test the 33 indicators on shopping mall attractiveness attributes.

Table 2: Ranking Scores for Attractiveness Attributes

Attractiveness Attributes	RII	Ranking by Category	Overall Ranking
<b>A. Entertainment Dimension</b>			
Cinemas	0.793	1	1
Recreational Facilities	0.778	2	2
Restaurant	0.764	3	8
Arcades	0.733	4	20
Special Events	0.719	5	24
Children Play Areas	0.669	6	31
<b>B. Tenant-Mix Dimension</b>			
Variety of stores and merchandise	0.776	1	5
Reputable anchor tenants	0.769	2	6
Small retailer	0.747	3	13
<b>C. Physical Dimension (Design Factors)</b>			
Furnishing	0.778	1	2
Style of décor	0.769	2	6
Mall layout	0.743	3	17
Equipment	0.738	4	18
<b>D. Physical Dimension (Ambience Conditions)</b>			
Lighting	0.759	1	9
Air Quality	0.747	2	13
Colour	0.745	3	15
Scent	0.734	4	19
Music	0.716	5	26
<b>E. Facilities Services Dimension</b>			
Air-Conditioning	0.778	1	2
Security	0.757	2	10
Washroom Facilities	0.752	3	11
Parking Facilities	0.745	4	15
Signage and directory	0.731	5	21
Lift and Escalators	0.726	6	22
Availability of Public Transport	0.707	7	28
ATM Facilities	0.693	8	29
Child Facility	0.691	9	30
Surau	0.652	10	33
<b>F. Promotion Dimension</b>			
Entertainment Based Show	0.717	1	25
Price-based Promotion	0.710	2	27
<b>G. Service Dimensions</b>			

Operations Hours	0.750	1	12
Customer Service	0.726	2	22

The analysis showed that the five highest attractiveness attributes selected by urban shoppers in Johor Bahru were cinemas, recreational activities, furnishing, air-conditioning, and various stores and merchandise. It can be seen that the cinema was ranked in the first position in the attractiveness important index score. This was maybe because urban dwellers love the escape and choose cinema as the best place to rest and chill their minds with their family and friends while watching movies on the bigger screen. In contrast with the studies of Yavas (2003), Atalay et al. (2016) and Masitah (2016), studies mentioned that cinemas have the least impact on shopper selection in the shopping mall. This means that urban shoppers in Johor Bahru prefer cinemas in the entertainment dimension as the highest factor of attractiveness attributes that attracts them to the shopping mall. Air-conditioning was the third-highest factor. Since Malaysia is a country with hot weather, air-conditioning inside the shopping mall becomes essential for the urban buyers to provide a comfortable environment for them to shop and spend their leisure time. Variety of stores and merchandise obtained the fifth-highest important index with 0.776. This was because most shopping malls in Johor Bahru provide the same stores and merchandise. A previous study by Yuan (2011) stated that this factor, which is a variety of stores and merchandise, also greatly impacted mall selection in Johor Bahru.

The second test analysis was conducted to identify any statistically significant differences between the means of shoppers group with the shopping mall attractiveness attributes. The five highest attractiveness attributes were cinemas, recreational facilities, furnishing, air-conditioning and a variety of stores and merchandise. Based on these sub-factors, this analysis focused only on the five highest attractiveness attributes. T-Test analysis was used to compare the mean gender in selecting cinemas, recreational facilities, furnishing, air-conditioning and various stores and merchandise. Whereas the one-way ANOVA was used for the race, marital status, salary, occupation and visit frequency with cinemas, recreational facilities, furnishing, air-conditioning and a variety of stores and merchandise.

Table 3: Summary of significance level between demographic factors and attractiveness attributes

	<b>Cinemas</b>	<b>Recreational Facilities</b>	<b>Furnishing</b>	<b>Air-Conditioning</b>	<b>Variety of Stores and Merchandise</b>
<b>Age</b>	0.186	0.052	0.293	0.267	0.099
<b>Gender</b>	0.145	0.008	0.083	0.170	0.053
<b>Race</b>	0.158	0.028	0.404	0.106	0.454
<b>Marital Status</b>	0.829	0.594	0.035	0.080	0.044
<b>Occupation</b>	0.001	0.001	0.027	0.028	0.004
<b>Salary</b>	0.854	0.199	0.011	0.059	0.120
<b>Visit Frequency</b>	0.198	0.087	0.157	0.717	0.052

The analysis clearly shows which demographic factors that influence urban shopper decision-making. For cinemas, only occupation factors showed the difference in attractiveness selection. Levene's test showed a p-value of  $0.001 < 0.05$ , which means that the variances were significantly different. This may be due to the profile of the respondents, which comprises students and workers. The flexibility of time and the preferences in terms of the movies have probably led to this variance.

For recreational facilities, three factors affected attractiveness selection which was gender, race and occupation. Levene's test value for gender was 0.008,  $p > 0.05$ , which means that the variances of the two groups are not equal. This study demonstrated that female urban shoppers in Johor Bahru are more interested in doing extreme activities when visiting the Paradigm Mall. Levene's test for race test showed  $0.028 < 0.05$ , which is significantly different between recreational facilities selection and respondent race. Malay respondents were more interested in recreational activities when visiting the Paradigm Mall.

The same goes for furnishing, which has three factors: marital status, occupation and salary. Levene's test between marital status and recreational facilities was  $0.035 < 0.05$ . This means that the furnishing selection between respondents' marital status is not equal. Single urban dwellers choose a shopping mall that is relevant to current trends. Levene's test showed a p-value of  $0.027 < 0.05$  for occupation. From the results, the variances were significantly different and can be concluded to be unequal for the occupation of respondents and

furnishing selection. Levene's test between salary and furnishing was  $0.011 < 0.05$ . This means the furnishing between respondent salary is not equal. Urban shoppers with high-income levels usually prefer shopping malls with beautiful, new excellent designs and up-to-date furnishings.

Air-conditioning showed only one factor, which is occupation. Levene's test showed a p-value of  $0.028 < 0.05$ . The results recorded the variances that are significantly different and can be concluded as unequal for the occupation of the respondents and the factor of air-conditioning

Lastly, the variety of stores and merchandise showed two demographic factors influencing urban shopper selection: marital status and occupation. Levene's test between marital status and variety of stores and merchandise showed a value of  $0.044 < 0.05$ . This means that the variety of stores and merchandise selection between respondents' marital statuses were not equal. Levene's test showed a p-value of  $0.004 < 0.05$ . The p-value was less than 0.05. From the results, the variances were significantly different and can be concluded to be unequal for the occupation of respondents and the variety of stores and merchandise selection.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Shopping malls are valuable investment assets that can profit greatly if they meet the visitor preference, especially the urban shoppers with more spending power. This study identified the dimensions urban shoppers valued in Johor Bahru in shopping mall attractiveness attributes. Among the five dimensions of mall attractiveness attributes identified in the urban shopper context were cinema, recreational activities, air-conditioning, variety of stores and merchandise and furnishing. Demographic factors have been found to play an important role in determining urban shopper attractiveness attributes perspective. Categorisation of the shoppers based on age, gender, race, level of income, marital status and occupation can help organise the mall's products and service offerings. This factor will assist shopping mall management in determining how to make their shopping mall more attractive to various groups of customers.

Shopping malls are the best place where shoppers can enjoy their leisure time with family, friends and loved ones besides having many entertainment options and a variety of products. Urban shopper income levels are increasing year by year. The increase in income level makes their spending and purchasing ability higher, leading urban shoppers to be more selective. The findings showed that urban shopper perspectives based on their working sectors were significantly different coupled with marital status, race and gender factors. Shopping mall attractiveness attributes like furnishing and air-conditioning were considered important factors for urban shoppers in Johor Bahru since Malaysia has tropical weather; an excellent air-conditioning temperature will provide a comfortable environment for shopper.

For the marital status of urban shoppers, it was shown that shopping malls with various stores and merchandise are attractive to single visitors. Some young consumers mostly love spending more time in malls that offer a variety of products and brands that can suit their current shopping lifestyle. This factor is also similar to a study by Porral et al. (2018), stating that shoppers prefer to shop at shopping malls offering a variety of products and brands rather than shopping malls with limited choices. Understanding the urban shopper demographic factors will help developers and investors in planning and as a reference for their new proposed shopping mall. These demographic factors and attractiveness attributes will help improve shopping mall planning determination.

While this study has achieved its goals, several limitations have been observed. First, this research only focused on the city of Johor Bahru. Therefore, the results of the research may not be relevant to other cities in Malaysia. Furthermore, the case study mainly focused on Paradigm Mall, Johor Bahru. In addition, the sampling amount was limited to 116 respondents, which is a small amount for this kind of research. Lastly, this research was limited only to identifying the urban shopper attractiveness perspective and based on their demographic factors. Further research is required to obtain more understanding of urban shopper motive and compare it with other cities in Malaysia. Next, future studies can examine shopping mall attractiveness attributes based on macroeconomics factors. Lastly, the chi-squared test can be used to examine the relationship between the demographic background of urban shoppers.

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