RESEARCH ARTICLE

DAVAOEÑOS' PREFERRED CHARACTERISTICS OF SHOPPING MALLS DURING COVID-19

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ABSTRACT - The purpose of this study is to determine the preferred selected characteristics of shopping malls among Davaoeños during Covid-19. It specifically seeks to determine the level of preference among Davaoeños' preferred shopping mall characteristics according to (1) service experience, (2) internal environment, (3) convenience, (4) utilitarian factors, (5) proximity, and (6) demonstration. This study also seeks to determine if there is a significant difference in the preference level for shopping malls when respondents are grouped according to their profiles. Quantitative research design was used, and simple random sampling was utilized with 100 respondents. As for the major findings, there is a significant difference in the shopping mall's internal environment when respondents are grouped according to their age, occupation, and civil status.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Retail Industry is no doubt a big contributor to its economy from employment to buying and selling of products. In fact, in 2018, it made about 23 per cent of the total services industry and has contributed massively to the service sector, with a total gross of value added (GVA) in real terms increasing by 1.8 times to P 1.22 trillion in 2018 from P 686.3 billion seen in 2009 (Devere-Philippines, 2019). They serve as a bridge to connect the manufacturers to their final consumers. One popular type of retail store is the mall which Filipinos are fond of going as it offers services to its consumers in the form of convenient access to a desirable mix of retailers within a managed environment which provides a satisfying, safe, shopping, and leisure experience (Kushwaha, Ubeja, and Chaterjee, 2017)

Mall-going is a known beloved Filipino pastime such as loitering, window shopping, eating at restaurants, watching movies in the cinemas, going to arcades, etc. These can be done alone, with friends or with family. Thus, it became a part of Philippine Culture and a ubiquitous aspect of urban lifestyle (Ranada, 2020) However, Covid-19 came and globally forced people to stay at home and they are only allowed to go to retail establishments such as malls to buy necessities. In buying for their necessities, Filipinos' movements became limited considering the strict compliance to the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) policies. Furthermore, during the lockdown, retail operations in the Philippines were also restricted specifically shopping malls where they only allow the supermarket and the tenants who only sell essential products to operate. Additionally, some were even used as vaccination sites, resulting in a sudden shift of consumer behavior in buying goods from traditional (going to a brick-and-mortar store) to buying online. However, as the number of Covid-19 cases decreases due to high vaccination roll-out; and due to the ailing condition of the economy, compared to the earlier periods of community quarantine, more establishments are now allowed to resume operations (Cordero, 2022). This caused a large influx of Filipinos to go out to visit parks, beaches, and especially their beloved malls.

Despite the presence of the virus, shopping malls are already 100% in full operation, which results in another challenge by the mall owners which is getting the people to trust them, that their establishments are safe to go to. According to a foreign study, 32 per cent of people still feel unsafe or very unsafe visiting shopping malls (Thomas, 2020). Additionally, in the national setting, a 2021 survey of the Filipino workforce by health maintenance organization PhilhealthCare, Inc. (PhilCare) found that a majority of the 1,500 respondents "strongly agree" that the thought of being exposed to the virus still causes stress (Lacsamana, 2022). Thus, even though malls religiously follow IATF policies, there are Filipinos who are still uneasy going to the malls. However, from a survey done during the start of Covid-19 conducted by Colliers from Luzon and Visayas, 80 per cent of Filipinos still chose brick-and-mortar retail (Bondoc, 2020). Also, in an e-mail by Santos Knight Frank Head of Research, Mr John Paul D. Custodio to Business World last December 15, 2021, he said that despite the emerging e-commerce industry, mallgoers were observed to shop at a brick-and-mortar store. He highlights the importance of seeing first the actual product before buying it (Valmonte, 2022)

Due to the situation besetting above, identifying that there is still the stress of going out because of the presence of the Covid-19 virus and the observation of the preference of mallgoers to still shop at a brick-and-mortar store, the researchers would like to determine the preferred characteristics of shopping malls of Davaoeños during Covid-19. This study is

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timely for Covid-19 is still present and there is still no research related to this topic involving Mindanaons, more specifically, Davaoeños as the respondents.

The aim of this research is to determine Davaoeños preferred characteristics of shopping malls. Specifically, it seeks to determine the demographic profile of the respondents according to their age, sex, occupation, and civil status. Also, it aims to determine the level of preference among Davaoeños' preferred characteristics of shopping malls in terms of (1) service experience, (2) internal environment, (3) convenience, (4) utilitarian factor, (5) proximity, and (6) demonstration. This study also aims to determine if there is a significant difference in the preference level of characteristics of shopping malls in Davao according to their profile.

This paper used the IMRAD format in organizing the contents of the study which includes the Introduction part of the study, the Methods to be used in the conduct of the study, and the presentation of the Statistical Results and Discussion of the results of the study.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer preference is a subjective measurement of the utility of an individual. It gives them permission to rank the bundles of goods according to the benefits the consumers receive. Moreover, it is independent of income or prices (Consumer Preference, Paul Samuelson, 1938). In this study, the researchers will determine the Davaoeños' consumer preference for shopping malls from selected characteristics using the results from the study of Kushwaha, Ubeja, and Chatterjee (2017) to measure the respondent's preferences which are (1) service experience, (2) internal environment, (3) convenience, (4) utilitarian factor, (5) proximity, and (6) demonstration.

2.1   Service Experience

Service experience is derived from customers' perceptions, own thoughts, or feelings and their reactions and emotions when they use or consume a service (Afifah, Pirzada, & Daud, 2020). Many customers have noted that the degree of their involvement in providing a service's overall experience plays a significant role in their general opinion of customer satisfaction with a company (Bravo, Martinez, & Pina, 2019). In addition, service experience and customer emotions may influence customer satisfaction with the service brand. A satisfied customer is a combination of a result of the brand stimuli that are both tangible and intangible and customer expectations for the brand. It is dependent on satisfied customers' relationships with the brand (Bravo, Martinez, & Pina, 2019; Afifah, Pirzada, & Daud, 2020). Furthermore, the service experience is vital in achieving brand image enhancement. It argued the fact that a company's image cannot be calculated until its customers' perceptions of the company's vision and brand image are found.

Shopping malls' safety and security provisions are key attributes because shoppers prefer shopping in shopping malls rather than in a traditional market (Thomas & Sharma, 2019). It also indicates that shopping malls must work on this aspect seriously since shopping malls accommodate a large number of shoppers daily. With that, shoppers must have the urgency or the feeling of being safe inside the mall, walking, and enjoying the scenery. Kursunluoglu, (2015) stated that there are eight factors mentioned. However, only four of these eight factors greatly impacted satisfaction and loyalty towards shoppers who experienced customer service in shopping malls. The four factors impacting shoppers' loyalty and satisfaction are Customer Service about Atmosphere, Incentive Customer Services, Customer Services in Encounter Stage, and Customer Service About Payment. As mentioned in the study, the essential factor is the Customer service atmosphere since it affects both the satisfaction and loyalty of customers or shoppers.

In addition, Vinotha and Gurupandi (2020) stated that customer service is a vital tool that influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. When a shopping mall provides good services, customer assistance, and complimentary services, the shopper will be satisfied, which will lead to the customer's loyalty to the mall or any establishment. Based on the study of Dubihlela (2014), it was stated that there are critical attributes of shopping malls that will determine the satisfaction of shoppers located in Southern Gauteng in South Africa, which are Merchandising, Atmosphere, Accessibility, Entertainment, and In- mall convenience. As a result, the survey respondents have chosen Merchandising, or the quality, varieties, and availability of products in shopping malls, as the most significant aspect or attribute in selecting a shopping mall, making it the highest, followed by the Atmosphere, Accessibility, Entertainment, and In-mall convenience.

2.2   Internal Environment

Analysis of environmental variables is essential when managing a shopping mall retail store as it strengthens the ability to increase and attracts the interest of a broader audience. Nusairat (2015) indicated that the internal environment refers to the overall surrounding environment inside the shopping malls, including the architecture, ambience, theme, lighting, and odor in the air, as well as technology like multimedia and the construction of a booming mall, and attractive amenities that create a more pleasant environment.

According to Cai, Ng, and Aun (2019), customers do not want to purchase in a "neutral" setting, so retail locations must have a clear visual design, strategic strategy, and merchandise advantage. This affects and impacts the attitudes and behavior of the consumer. The shoppers who want to combine their excitement for shopping with a positive experience and associated feelings prefer engaging and fun-inducing shopping environments that promote buying behavior. Shopping

malls, in general, work to boost the positive emotions in the consumer, but at the same time offer a calm environment where the customer can feel relaxed and create a setting where they can remain loyal to the shops.

In the study by Brown, Dubois, and Gjestland (2015), the acoustic environment is used as the term to describe different kinds of sounds that people hear in the same environment, room, or place. It could be outdoors or indoors. These sounds could be soft, loud, pleasant, or unpleasant. The sources of these different sounds could be a natural or artificial activity such as playing music, voices, noises, vehicles, groups of birds, wind in trees, ocean waves, water flowing, machinery, footsteps, raindrops, telephones, dog barking, and the beeps of the electronics.

According to Kanev (2021), it shows that acoustics is one of the determinants to consider aside from the other physical characteristics of an establishment like the mall. The reason is that the acoustics of malls will affect the comfortability and the intelligibility of the workers/employees and especially the shoppers or the customers, thus, the shopping experience of the customers will also be disturbed if the mall itself is too noisy and customers hear unnecessary sounds. However, it was also mentioned in the study that large-volume areas without sound-absorbing materials could cause or lead to an acoustically uncomfortable atmosphere. An example of that is the food court in the shopping malls. The study included two types of studied public places in shopping malls, the food court, and galleries. It turns out that the food court provides poor acoustic comfort out of other spaces in malls due to many occupants who spend more time there, making the noise level extensively high. After the survey, the food court improved its acoustics. Furthermore, an excellent acoustic condition can only be enhanced with the sound absorption attached to the walls and ceilings in public spaces of shopping malls.

As stated by Nowicka (2020), acoustic quality in commercial spaces should be prioritized and studied comprehensively at the same time in the planning and designing stages to address emerging acoustic problems. The study unveils the three types of malls' commercial spaces: shops, corridors, and atriums. It assesses what methods should be utilized by the designers and architects to determine solutions. There is a distinct selection of main architectural and acoustic parameters in designing each type of commercial space in malls or any establishment to achieve and ensure speech intelligibility and to produce excellent quality auditory conditions without noise disturbance to the occupants.

The study by Han et al., (2019) shows factors that provoke shoppers to pay a visit and spend some time in shopping malls. These factors are the ambience, built environment, and entertainment that have essential roles and unique features in shopping malls, driving shoppers and consumers to enjoy and be more comfortable. These factors will captivate the heart of every shopper as they visit the shopping mall making their shopping experience livelier and more fascinating. These factors make the facilities of shopping malls more attractive, with their most delicate architectural designs and other elements paired with vivid colors in a safe environment, which will add to the satisfaction of shoppers and the number of shoppers.

According to Kiriri (2019), there are determinants of the attractiveness of shopping malls, and it was mentioned that the design and aesthetics are one of the determinants that makes the malls attractive to shoppers. In addition, there are eight factors that determine the attractiveness of shopping malls that will satisfy the shoppers, consumers, and visitors (Said, Hasmori, & Pa'wan, 2020). Two of those eight factors are the facilities and service, and the aesthetic. These factors showcase the aspects that shoppers are concerned about or look forward to when they visit shopping malls. The facilities and service will add to the comfort of every shopper because of the cleanliness, comfortable restrooms, suitable temperature, safety, spacious, etc. enabling the shoppers to spend more of their time roaming and having fun because they know that the shopping mall itself is offering a safe shopping environment. It is also said that the excellent atmosphere of shopping malls that provides aesthetics and architectural designs will influence the shoppers to stay and persuade them to buy and feel relaxed at the same time.

2.3   Convenience

According to Bhabra and Sandhu (2020), convenience ranked two as the key attributes for customers' satisfaction in visiting malls. They revealed that the convenience of a shopping mall is relatively crucial for the customers, providing comfort in terms of location and the visibility of the mall, level of traffic, parking lots, footfalls, and pedestrian areas. These will shape the enjoyment and shopping experience as shopper desires convenience and accessibility whenever they visit shopping malls. As stated by Kiriri (2019), the five dimensions: design and aesthetics; service options; convenience and safety; service employees; and practical value, convenience, and safety were determined to be the most important in terms of impacting the appeal of shopping malls. As a result, the respondents are more likely to be concerned if the shopping mall is close to their workplace and residences, providing convenience and ensuring safety.

In shopping malls, there are influencing variables in the consumer's choice, and one of those factors is the term convenience (Cai, Ng, & Aun, 2019). The accessibility, or in other words, the convenience of the shopping mall itself, is relatively essential since it is an element that leads to patronage. If the mall is located with high accessibility rather than low accessibility, then that would mean that consumers will have to choose the mall with high accessibility since it has a good location and fair travel distance. It is more likely a convenient shopping experience because it decreases the amount of time and effort spent on the purchasing process. The study stated that customers might use geographical convenience as a motivator to travel since it might improve an enjoyable buying experience that meets their needs. Lestari and Wiastuti (2019) stated that to improve shopping tourism's sustainability, a shopping mall must enhance its accessibility level of a shopping mall by providing malls that can be accessible to everyone. The more shopping mall there is, the more chances

people or customers must visit the mall. Thus, a shopping mall must also pay attention to continuous improvement to meet the demands and expectations of the visitors. Moreover, to maintain and expand the tourism value, it is necessary to have a convenient and accessible location.

Tenant placement, distance from house or office, and ease of movement inside mall grounds are all elements that influence a business's desirability (Gupta, Mishra, & Tandon, 2020). To anticipate and meet the needs of customers, particularly those who are economically and price-conscious, it is necessary to reduce perceived psychic costs, which refer to the amount of money, effort, and price that the organization has accrued. The provision of convenience or accessibility is a prerequisite for anticipating client wants, particularly those who are economically and cost-conscious. Purchases are more likely to be made by customers at stores that are close to their homes or places of employment, such as office buildings or university campuses (Andruskha & Nugroho, 2019). This indicates that convenience is an important consideration when deciding which shopping center to visit. When it comes to shopping malls, the convenience of a one-stop shopping center is something that many people look for when selecting. It refers to the reality that most of a person's purchasing needs may be addressed simultaneously in a single location instead of multiple locations.

Convenience adds value to customers' lives by allowing them to save non-monetary expenditures such as time and effort while purchasing or shopping, as well as by enabling them to save money while buying or shopping (Lloyd, Chan, Yip, & Chan, 2014). Convenience is becoming increasingly important to consumers, demonstrating that this architecture is a "new territory" that demands further research to understand better how it operates and functions. Customers' incentive to purchase in malls will be positively related to convenience (Andruskha & Nugroho, 2019). Increasing customer perceptions of the retailer's derived functional value is essential in meeting customer expectations and developing customer loyalty as well as a positive relationship with customers. Convenience is essential in developing customer loyalty and a healthy customer connection. The growth of commitment and forming a positive relationship with consumers depend on customer convenience (Gupta, Mishra, & Tandon, 2020).

2.4   Utilitarian Factors

Utilitarian factors derive from 'the service/product,' which is the idea that people consume to satisfy their desires (Basaran & Büyükyılmaz, 2015). It refers to deciding, like finding out products or services based on what people want, along with considering the price, such as looking for the best products or the best services for the best value and the most cost-benefit in comparison. Although this principle has led us to the conclusion that shopping starts from the acquisition of goods and tasks, some scholars assert that it is primarily derived from this principle that our drive to achieve objectives in our favor in a competitive environment underpins our goal or task completion of objectives under stress.

Utilitarian buying value is the product of a deliberate pursuit of an expected consequence (Yu, Zhang, & Liu, 2018). It examines whether the market demand that prompted the purchase has been met. Shopping is perceived as a positive experience from the utilitarian viewpoint, where customers can have an emotionally rewarding experience connected to the shopping operation whether they make a purchase or not (Chakraborty & Soodan, 2019). It provides an attractive aesthetic value to the individual who spends less effort on obtaining it while getting a comparable benefit. For instance, customers tend to only focus on the practical aspects of the shopping experience, such as the challenge of getting an item for themselves and perceive the activity as a hassle. Alternatively, on the other hand, some customers wish to have fun when doing their shopping.

The efficiency of the buying process is at the heart of customer utilitarian shopping motivation (Andersson, Palmblad & Prevedan, 2021), and it is associated with those customers who are well-oriented as well as those who are motivated by the goal of completing their shopping assignment. On the other hand, consumers who engage in practical shopping behave as "rational problem solvers" and consider shopping a task that must be completed as quickly as possible. Utilitarian customers are those who are helpful in their purchasing decisions and aim to satisfy their most utilitarian criteria (Koksal, 2016). This group has been described as minimalists, serious, and mission shoppers. Utilitarian purchasing, as defined by Vijay, Prashar, and Sahay (2019), is defined as purchasing products to provide the best possible value by acting logically and with a clear objective in mind, with consumers emphasizing the functional characteristics of those products. The acts of customers who complete their predefined clear requests without any emotional attachment and while concentrating on achieving the desired result generate utilitarian value from their efforts.

2.5   Proximity

As acclaimed by Sharma and Sharma (2020), one of the significant factors influencing consumers to go shopping is the proximity and location of the shopping mall. A shopping mall is a collection of retail establishments all under one roof. Nowadays, shopping malls are rapidly changing over time to attract and satisfy consumers increasingly. Thus, there are several factors to consider that affect consumers in selecting a shopping mall. The study by Kushwaha, Ubeja, and Chatterjee (2017) stated seven factors. Mostly, these elements significantly impact customers, given that these factors help them in decision-making. Basically, these factors are the bases of a consumer in terms of selecting a place to go shopping, and one of the factors is the proximity or the nearness of a shopping mall. Consumers are more inclined to go to or visit retail malls near their homes and offices since they are more convenient and they can avoid traffic and traveling, which is very time-consuming.

Accessibility is considered one of the significant factors in selecting a shopping mall site, as per the fact that it measures the proximity or the accessibility of shopping malls in terms of metro, railways, and highways since the visibility of shopping malls in this area will be an opportunity to entice a large number of consumers, which will be the advantage of shopping malls (Ghorui et al., 2020). Moreover, the study aims to find the optimal shopping center location so that consumers can easily access and experience comfort while shopping in malls on a particular site. Since then, the mall has provided a variety of retail stores, from department stores, food courts, restaurants, and entertainment to salons and spas. In addition, a proper site selection will result in more considerable footfall entering the mall, making it more profitable, thus benefiting the economy of that specific region.

Rajagopal (2010) stated that aside from distance in predicting shopping center nearness and purchasing behavior, time is one of the key elements influencing urban shoppers' shopping habits. Consumers commonly preferred shopping at malls because of the distance to where they are located. It is one of the significant determinants for consumers to shop because of the mall's proximity. As supported by Banerjee (2019), one element that influences people to shop is distance. Thus, the recommended structure of the shopping malls is to be close to residential houses. It also mentioned that consumers do not want to travel long distances to shop.

Ibrahim and Ng (2002) stated that consumers would probably choose to shop in nearby malls because of the comfort, safety, and reliability of consumers when going to shopping malls. In their study, the results stated that the most influencing the consumers to shop is the traveling time and the distance they are traveling from and going to the mall near them.

2.6 Demonstration

Salespeople's effectiveness plays an essential role in providing positive customer value and strengthening the salesperson's relationship between the customers and the business (Yeo, Hur, & Ji, 2019). Thus, the salesperson is considered necessary since he is the firm's representative in showcasing the products and services a firm has to offer. They facilitate the customer in addressing their needs, giving suggestions, and providing the best products and services that suit their needs and meet their expectations and satisfaction. In the study, they mentioned that customer orientation is one of the reasons that empowers the relationship of a salesperson to its customers since the salesperson focuses on providing relevant products based on the needs and desires of the customer. Hence, adaptive selling is another factor and a sales strategy or technique to meet the customer's expectations and gain consumer trust that leads to a good relationship with consumers and boosts sales performance.

According to the study by Nusairat (2015), the employees' appearance and behavior are the primary key elements that consumers judge. The appearance of employees could affect the consumers' minds, especially when employees are dressed-well. They can associate the consumers with their greater expectations such as store image, service quality, and their knowledge about the product they are offering, or they can significantly assist the customers with their needs without being irritated because of some employees' lacking knowledge.

Demonstrations in the business sector include product samples, trials, return policies, online review platforms, and any other ways a company allows consumers to learn about the value of a new product (Andersson, Palmblad, & Prevedan, 2016). A demonstration of a new product can also help individual consumers determine whether they prefer it over an existing alternative. The innovative company oversees determining the informativeness of the demo. Offering fully informed demonstrations that split the market and restrict levels of price competition is in the business's best interests if an innovative firm commits to demonstrated policies and there is pricing freedom. On the other hand, in reaction to pricing adjustments, a company might alter its demonstration approach. The firm prefers only partially informative demonstrations focused on increasing its market share at the expense of other alternatives.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

In this study, a quantitative research design was utilized. According to Hopkins (2008), researchers can utilize a design for a study to distinguish a particular phenomenon or build an interference through a sample about an occurrence in a population. Moreover, it covers the use of numerical data and its interpretation using a specific statistical approach to answer questions such as who, how much, what, where, when, how many, and how (Apuke, 2017). All items must be answered honestly by the respondents by giving their own perspectives on the preferred characteristic of a shopping mall during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.2 Research Respondents

The researchers utilized simple random sampling. According to Singh (2003), simple random sampling is considered the most straightforward technique. The researchers preferred to utilize simple random sampling to select various participants from consumers because they are the ones who can provide the information to test the preferred characteristic of shopping malls. Mainly, there were 100 different participants in Davao City to be surveyed.

3.3 Research Instrument

The tool that was utilized in the data collection process is an adapted survey questionnaire to extract information about the variables that are being utilized in this survey. The survey questionnaire deals with the preferred characteristic of a shopping mall during Covid-19 in terms of service experience, internal environment, convenience, utilitarian factors, proximity, and demonstration. The items will be put on a 5-point Likert scale from Level 1:Not Preferred to Level 5: Highly Preferred

The range of interpretation shown below is the rating scale to be utilized to elucidate the responses for the indicators under preferred characteristics.

Table 1. Rating scale

Rate	Mean Range	Description	Interpretation
5	4.21 - 5.00	Very highly preferred	Characteristic is most preferred
4	3.41 – 4.20	Highly preferred	Characteristic is preferred
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderately preferred	Characteristic is fairly preferred
2	1.81 – 2.60	Least preferred	Characteristic is slightly preferred
1	1.00 – 1.80	Very least preferred	Characteristic is very slightly preferred

3.4 Research Procedures

The following procedures were the steps undertaken by the researchers. First would be the securing of permission to conduct the study whereby the researcher asked permission from the Dean of Business Administration to conduct the study. After securing the approval to conduct the study, comes the validation and distribution of the questionnaire to random consumers using Google Forms. Then, the retrieval and collation of data gathered by the researchers comes next. And finally, the statistical analysis and interpretation of data wherein the raw scores were subjected to statistical analysis and results were interpreted for presentation.

3.5 Statistical Treatment of the Data

The acquired data will be examined by a prominent statistician to quantitatively answer the study questions. Percentage and frequency were used to determine the respondent's distribution profile when analyzed according to their category. Meanwhile, the mean was used to determine the level of preference among Davaoeños' preferred characteristics in a shopping mall. Finally, Mann Whitney U Test and Kruskal-Wallis were used to determine significant differences in the respondent's level of preferred characteristics.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Shown in Table 2 is the profile of the respondents. The respondents answered the questionnaires provided by the researchers in a respective manner. Notably, the analysis of the respondents is as follows: Sex, Age, Occupation, and Civil Status. There were 100 respondents in the study. The research was conducted from February 5, 2022, to February 15, 2022. A total of 100 respondents responded, making the retrieval rate 100 per cent. The research tries to identify if there is a significant difference in the preferred characteristic of a shopping mall during COVID-19.

Table 2. Profile of the respondents

Profile of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	42	42%
Female	58	58%
Total	100	100%
Age		
24 and below	73	73%
25 – 35	21	21%
36 and above	6	6%
Total	100	100%
Occupation		
Student	56	56%
Working	44	44%
Total	100	100%

Table 2. (cont.)

Profile of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Civil Status		
Single	90	90%
Married	10	20%
Total	100	100%

Table 2 also shows that in terms of their sex, there were 42 per cent Male and 58 per cent Female respondents. In terms of their age, 73 per cent of the respondents' ages are in the range of 24 and below; 21 per cent of the respondents aged 25 - 35 years of age, and 6 per cent of the respondents aged 36 and above. In terms of their occupation, there were 56 per cent students and 44 per cent working adults. In terms of their civil status, 90 per cent were single, 10 per cent are married, and there were no widowed respondents.

4.1 *Level of Preference among Davaoeños' Preferred Characteristics of Shopping Malls during COVID-19*

Table 3. Level of preference among Davaoeño's preferred characteristics of shopping malls during Covid-19

Indicators	Mean	Std. Dev	Description Level
Service Experience	4.26	0.46	Vert highly preferred
Internal Environment	4.13	0.86	Highly preferred
Convenience	4.16	0.72	Highly preferred
Utilitarian Factor	4.31	0.62	Very highly preferred
Proximity	3.85	0.79	Highly preferred
Demonstration	3.95	0.73	Highly preferred

Table 3 presents the Level of Preference among Davaoeños Preferred Characteristics of shopping malls in terms of Service Experience with an overall mean of 4.2633 and a standard deviation of 0.45701. The respondents strongly agreed on the preference for shopping malls during Covid-19. For Internal Environment, with an overall mean of 4.1375 and a standard deviation of 0.86338, the respondents show a high preference. On the contrary, respondents agreed on the importance of Convenience in shopping malls during Covid-19 with a mean of 4.1633 and a standard deviation of 0.72396. The Utilitarian Factor has an overall mean of 4.3133 and a standard deviation of 0.62643 which shows a very high preference among respondents. On the other hand, the Proximity shows a high preference result with an overall mean of 3.8567 with a standard deviation of 0.79315. Lastly, the Demonstration has an overall mean of 3.9567, and a standard deviation of 0.73345, which also indicates a high preference among respondents.

Table 4. Significant difference in the level of preference of shopping malls according to their age

Indicators	Test	Sig	Decision
Service Experience	Kruskal Wallis Test	0.275	Failed to reject
Internal Environment	Kruskal Wallis Test	0.003	Reject
Convenience	Kruskal Wallis Test	0.616	Failed to reject
Utilitarian Factor	Kruskal Wallis Test	0.507	Failed to reject
Proximity	Kruskal Wallis Test	0.165	Failed to reject
Demonstration	Kruskal Wallis Test	0.444	Failed to reject

Table 4 presents the statistical results on significant differences in the level of preference when analyzed according to age using Kruskal-Wallis. Results revealed that significant differences were established in the Internal environment which leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. In contrast, no significant differences were established on the other remaining variables as reflected by the higher obtained p-value as compared to 0.05 level of significance. This failed to reject the null hypothesis.

This result supports the results of the study conducted by Hameli (2017). Consumers aged 15-24 go to shopping malls for aesthetics and socialization. On the contrary, consumers aged 25-34 and 35-44 preferred to go to shopping malls for the reason of convenience. In relation to Bawa, Sinha, and Kant (2019), consumers aged 23-28 preferred to shop at their scheduled or suitable time. Consumers aged 29-31 would choose evening and weekdays, except for the 32-34 group who prefers to shop between noon time to 3 p.m. Najdený et al. (2019) focused on the consumer behavior of seniors regarding what aspects or factors convince them to visit shopping malls. Hence, the most crucial factor that impacts senior consumers is the accessibility or distance of a shopping mall as their main concern of choice, followed by the additional services, prices, feelings, and the tenant mix.

Table 5. Significant difference in the level of preference of shopping malls according to their sex

Indicators	Test		Sig	Decision
Service Experience	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.049	Reject
Internal Environment	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.419	Failed to reject
Convenience	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.973	Failed to reject
Utilitarian Factor	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.637	Failed to reject
Proximity	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.166	Failed to reject
Demonstration	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.700	Failed to reject

Presented in Table 5 are the statistical results on significant differences in the level of preference when analyzed according to sex using the Mann-Whitney U test. Results revealed that a significant difference was established only in service experience as shown by the lower obtained p-value as compared to 0.05 alpha level which leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. No significant differences were established in the other variables in the study.

The findings support the results of the study conducted by Archana et al. (2017) that 54 per cent of females and 42 per cent of males thought the ambience of malls is great. 70 per cent of females and 72 per cent of males agreed that a facility is necessary. Regarding cleanliness, 90 per cent of females and 88 per cent of males thought it was good. The same scenario may be seen with Parking (46% female and 80% male), Staff Guidance (72% female and 74% male), and Sanitary/Toilets available (68% male and 78%). On the other hand, the null hypothesis for the internal environment with a significance of 0.419, convenience with a value of 0.973, utilitarian factor with a sense of 0.637, proximity with a significance of 0.166, and demonstration with a force of 0.700 were not rejected since these results do not conform to the 5% significance level (p =<0.05).

According to analysis, shopping mall visits vary in terms of sex which factors entertainment and socializing. Women are fonder of having fun in going to shopping malls than men. Purposively, men shop in malls to mix more than women (Hameli, 2017). In the study by Kiriri (2019), there was 48 per cent of male respondents while 52 per cent were females, and the result identified the five dimensions of shopping malls: Design and Aesthetics; Service Options; Convenience and Safety; Service Employees; and Utilitarian Value. Thus, convenience and safety are identified as the most important and preferred characteristics of shopping malls' attractiveness. Banerjee (2019) confirmed that entertainment and other facilities and mall atmospherics are the factors or attributes that drive consumers to go to shopping malls.

Table 6. Significant difference in the preference level of shopping malls according to their occupation

Indicators	Test		Sig	Decision
Service Experience	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.493	Failed to reject
Internal Environment	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.000	Reject
Convenience	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.064	Failed to reject
Utilitarian Factor	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.002	Reject
Proximity	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.936	Failed to reject
Demonstration	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.051	Failed to reject

Table 6 presents the significant difference in the level of preference of shopping malls when respondents are grouped according to their occupation using the Mann-Whitney U test. Results revealed that there were significant differences established on indicators of the internal environment and utilitarian factor as indicated by the lower obtained p-value of 0.000 and 0.002 respectively. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. In contrast, there were no significant differences in the other remaining variables with p-values greater than 0.05 level of significance, failing to reject the null hypothesis.

Owners of shopping malls have historically viewed a favorable mall atmosphere as a competitive advantage since it might positively impact the facilities and aesthetics of the mall, increasing consumer happiness (Astono, 2014). In opposition, there was no significant difference in the level of convenience with a significance of 0.064. It was not rejected since this result does not conform to the 5% significance level (p =<0.05).

Furthermore, working customers do not have much time to shop at shopping malls, and most visit malls on their rest days (Rousseau & Venter, 2014). On the contrary, there was a significant difference in the level of the Utilitarian factor with a significance of 0.002. To support this, the result of the study by Youngju(2014) found that the essential elements in selecting a shopping mall for students are product variety, the number of shops, and the existence of food and beverage options. On the other hand, there were no significant differences in the level of proximity with a significance of 0.936, and the demonstration with a significance of 0.051. These were not rejected since these results do not conform to the 5% significance level (p =<0.05).

Nowadays, shopping malls are developed and organized in such a manner that students and employees not only go there to buy items, but they also find them to be in their comfort zone and utilize them for other purposes. Basically, there

are varieties of factors that influence students and workers to purchase in shopping malls. Furthermore, the majority of them prefer the shopping mall's proximity, convenience, product variety, and overall experience.

Table 7. Significant difference in the preference level of shopping malls according to their civil status

Indicators	Test		Sig	Decision
Service Experience	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.519	Failed to reject
Internal Environment	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.001	Reject
Convenience	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.562	Failed to reject
Utilitarian Factor	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.850	Failed to reject
Proximity	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.078	Failed to reject
Demonstration	Mann Whitney	U Test	0.273	Failed to reject

Table 7 shows the significant difference in the level of preference of shopping malls when respondents are grouped according to their civil status using the Mann-Whitney U test. Results showed that a significant difference was observed only on the indicator internal environment as reflected by its obtained p-value of 0.001 which is lower at a 0.05 level of significance. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. On the other hand, no significant difference was found in the other variables under study with p-values greater than 0.05 alpha, thus failing to reject the null hypothesis.

The research conducted by Wong et al. (2012) revealed that music, ambience, and layout were all significantly associated with the excitement produced by a mall and the reason why customers continue to visit. Results of the study further support the study of Steinhofer (2005) who believed that mature consumer choices, whether single or married, are mainly predictable because shops understand their shopping habits and preferences. Furthermore, single customers enjoy convenience, and a varied product selection, are not price sensitive, and are looking for something new. This essentially suggests that single customers are willing to spend money on goods. They enjoy convenience and variety and are more interested in new and unique ideas. However, most married couples purchase more items because most married couples have children.

5.0   CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1   Conclusion

Service experience and utilitarian factors are highly preferred shopping mall characteristics by the respondents during Covid-19. It shows that the respondents prefer to go to malls during the pandemic because of the security and safety features and helpfulness of the mall staff. Practicality, having wide and different products offered and having different retail stores under one roof are also contributing factors. According to Afifah, Pirzada, and Daud (2020), the service experience is derived from customers' perceptions, own thoughts, or feelings of their reactions and emotions when they use or consume a service. Meanwhile, utilitarian factors refer to deciding, like finding out products or services based on what people want, along with considering the price, such as looking for the best products or the best services for the best value and the most cost-benefit in comparison. Although this principle has led us to the conclusion that shopping starts from the acquisition of goods and tasks, some scholars assert that it is primarily derived from this principle that our drive to achieve objectives in our favor in a competitive environment underpins our goal or task completion of objectives under stress (Basaran & Büyükyılmaz, 2015)

5.2   Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are suggested:

Government. The government should focus on the needs of the customers in terms of convenience and proximity by focusing on highways, road repairs, and water pipelines. Strict audits when it comes to obedience to IATF policies should also be the focus.

Shopping Mall Owners. The owners should focus more on the internal environment, service experience, and utilitarian factors. Improving the mall's services cape and putting appropriate and visible signages, rebuilding and improving parking space, putting emphasis on security and safety features, and positioning it as a "one roof solution" through promotions are also crucial. Furthermore, mall owners should choose a location that is more convenient to all shoppers, wherein they can easily travel from their residences to shopping malls, without experiencing traffic and hassle-free.

Future Researchers. The researchers recommend that future researchers broaden this study to emphasize areas that need more action/attention and adapt to the latest trends.

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