



## Research Article

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# Transformative Influence of Shopping Malls on Albanian Consumer Behavior

Eduina Maksuti<sup>1</sup>

Isa Erbaş<sup>2</sup>

Elton Noti<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer,  
Aleksandër Moisiu University,  
Durrës, Albania

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer,  
University College Bedër,  
Tirana, Albania

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## Abstract

*The emergence of shopping malls in Albania has had a remarkable impact on the behavior of Albanian consumers. Initially, people visited these malls out of curiosity, then for entertainment, and eventually for shopping purposes. The new retail format has started changing the way customers shop. By offering products and services that appeal to customers they simultaneously provide a friendly and pleasant environment. This study delves into the impact of shopping malls on consumer behavior in Albania, focusing on factors such as product availability, accessibility, and atmosphere. A quantitative approach was utilized, emphasizing deductive reasoning. Primary data was collected through face-to-face surveys and analyzed with SPSS. According to the results, customers love shopping malls for their variety of products, exclusive items, and safe environment. They find malls accessible, thanks to easy navigation and parking, and they highly value cleanliness. The study highlights the significant impact of shopping malls on Albanian consumer behavior, driven by product variety, convenience, and amenities.*

**Keywords:** Shopping malls, Albanian consumers, consumer behavior, impact, product variety

## 1. Introduction

The fall of the Albanian communist regime in the 1990s brought about significant political and social changes and at the same time new economic trends. After decades of a state-owned and centralized economy, the country opened up to the market and free trade, which had been almost forgotten from the past.

After the transition, Albania had to restart and rebuild the economy from a position far from those of other countries which had made significant progress. This resulted in a chaotic coexistence of modern, luxury shops and street sellers, goods of first and last quality. It was a complete reflection of the different socioeconomic classes at that time.

Shopping malls emerged in Albania almost a decade after the introduction of the market economy. Initially, they were just small centers including a variety of shops, lacking the cohesive structure of a traditional shopping mall.

In fact, Albania had previously tried to establish a mall-like concept called MAPO (Popular Stores) during the communist period. While concentrating various stores that offered standard goods, they were different from the contemporary shopping malls, lacking many factors as entertainment, atmosphere, etc. Despite the shortcomings, MAPO-s were favorite among customers as they served as a place of gathering and interacting with people, while enjoying shopping.

The first contemporary shopping mall, Universe Shopping Center (QTU) was inaugurated in October 2005, being followed by others during the years. The centers quickly became important destinations for the customers seeking more than shopping.

The introduction of shopping malls brought new opportunities for the customers and at the same time challenged their behavior towards stores and shopping. What do shopping malls offer differently than street stores? What makes them more or less attractive than a traditional bazaar? The objective of this study is to analyze the effect of the shopping malls on the consumer behavior in Albania, the way they have changed the consumer choices, buying behavior and the perception of the shopping experiences. At the same time the study aims creating a picture of the past and actual shopping culture in the country.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Evolution of Trade Culture in Albania*

The trade culture in Albania has a unique character closely linked to political regimes, social and economic conditions, and the country's changes over time. In the past, after gaining independence, Albania was left in a semi-feudal and semi-capitalist economic regime. According to the Albanian State Archive, the country was characterized by minimal state and private economic activity, except for street shops and sellers. The country's trade mainly relied on the agricultural sector, while the industrial sector comprised only 3% of the entire market (UPI, 2012).

The establishment of the Albanian Kingdom constitutes an important turning point in the improvement of the market infrastructure and the increment of the merchants who offered higher variety and quality of the products. However, until the end of World War II, Albanian trade culture remained underdeveloped and mainly agrarian, resembling a typical eastern bazaar. The industrial market was almost non-existent, except for clothing, which was imported and sold mainly in urban areas.

During the communist system, the trade underwent a transformation as all the economic activities were controlled by the state, leaving no room for private traders. It is worth noting that the economy was entirely centralized, with a single authority controlling everything. Studies from that time show that urban stores strictly followed the organizational structure imposed by the state, and providing a small selection of products with no flexibility for integrating any innovative idea.

Despite the isolation and highly centralized economy, some small manifestations of Western ideas were implemented, notably in the form of Popular Stores, called MAPO. These centers, resembling an imitation of the western shopping centers, were famous for various reasons, including their collection of shops, fashionable appearance at the time, more or less exclusive products, and state-owned services such as shoemakers, barbers, etc. MAPOs survived until the end of the communist regime when the country began the process of democratization, and all shops were privatized through a simple auction procedure (IBP, Inc., 2011). Thus, after nearly 45 years, the reopened its doors to market economy.

## 2.2 The emergence of the shopping malls in Tirana, Albania

With the transition to the capitalist system, Albania made a significant shift in the retail landscape by adopting the idea of shopping malls from other countries. The first modern and contemporary shopping center, Universe Shopping Mall (QTU) was inaugurated in October, 2005. Situated only 6 km from the center of the capital city, the center quickly became a top shopping destination for the Albanian customers. With over 70 shops and restaurants, QTU succeeded to suit a wide range of tastes. It offers the latest fashion trends, various dining options, and engaging entertainment for kids (QTU, 2024).

Following the QTU's success, Citypark Shopping Mall opened in December 2009. It features a large hypermarket and stores offering clothing, accessories, perfumes, and household products. The center is designed to provide a friendly atmosphere for visitors to enjoy while they shop (Citypark, 2024). Tirana East Gate (TEG), actually the biggest shopping mall in the country, is a 54,000-square-meter shopping center with 150 stores offering the latest fashion trends, home decor, entertainment and gastronomy. The shopping mall was inaugurated in November, 2011 (TEG, 2024).

Besides the above-mentioned shopping malls, all located in the city's suburbs, other malls started to appear, particularly in the center of the city. They contributed to Tirana's retail landscape with their strategic location, and helped to broaden the range of shopping options for customers. Although QTU and its counterparts gained attention for their spacious layout, these city-centers malls made a difference by offering a special combination of accessibility, convenience and locally focused retail experience.

Despite the diverse locations, architectural designs, layouts, and features, the shopping malls all contribute significantly to the development of the retail scene in Albania.

## 2.3 Shopping mall influence: A Paradigm Shift in Consumer Behavior

In the past, shopping has been considered merely as a need to acquire essential goods. The emergence of shopping malls revolutionized consumer behavior towards shopping. Actually, shopping malls have changed shopping perception from an ordinary activity into a new experience offering and providing comprehensive environments. According to Bloch et al., (1994) visitors can not only purchase and consume various products and services, but the mall itself offers experiences which are consumable. Idoko et al. (2019) empathize that customers do not just visit a shopping mall to purchase products and services alone, but also to obtain inspiration for their visit, release stress, feel the serenity of the shopping mall and overcome boredom and isolation. This is in consistence with the experiential retail trends, where the emphasis is not only on product purchase but also on fulfilling experiences for shoppers. Terblanche (1999) also, opined that apart from shopping motive other features like entertainment, relaxation and spending good time with friends attract customers towards shopping malls. Moreover, Tabački (2020) mentions that the controlled environment of malls, which includes regulated temperatures, security, and cleanliness, provides a sense of safety and convenience that attracts a broad demographic of shoppers, from families to teenagers and the elderly.

So, researchers continuously have been trying to trace out the factors that motivate customers to buy from shopping malls. Researchers like Jarratt and Michael (1993), Nicholls et al. (1996) and Roslow et al. (2000) have tried to identify specific facets of the shopping experience that motivate customers to prefer shopping malls over small shops. Jarratt and Michael (1993) derived three factors namely activity in lifestyle, innovation and service to have significant effect on customers' perception to shop. Mohd. (2006) found accessibility, reliability, convenience, distribution, socialization, search ability and availability to be the dominant factors affecting customers' perception towards shopping in malls. Shah and Trivedi (2005) in their study explored quality, variety, operating timings, attitude of salesmen, location and stock replenishment to be major factors affecting consumers' decision towards choosing particular store. Also, significant role of store environment in affecting customers'

perceptions towards products, service quality and store image was found (Baker et al.,1994) which was further supported by Fiore and Ogle (2000) by stating that store's formal, expressive and symbolic qualities affect consumers' aesthetic and instrumental value. Other components in shopping malls such as shops, food court, restaurants, cinema, children's games area, interactive entertainment, social use areas, relaxation places and promotion areas were found to be playing dominant role in attracting customers towards malls (Terblanche, 1999). Furthermore, Bloch et al. (1994) found seven factors such as aesthetics, escape, flow, exploration, role enactment, social and convenience to be playing dominant role in determining consumers' motives for visiting malls. Apart from these factors, some other such as price, control, ease of use, subjective norms and attitude of salesmen were found to be affecting consumer behavior to purchase from a particular retail format.

#### 2.4 Factors affecting consumer behavior

A complete analysis of the current literature, highlights how shopping centers have transformed customers' behavior by introducing a new trend in the retail environment. This trend forms new preferences for the customers, therefore increasing the role that shopping malls play in day to day lives of the consumers. This new concept, together with the other key elements have been used to research the effect of some specific factors that influence the customers' behavior within the shopping malls. These elements include the quality, diversity of goods, the environment and layout of the shops within the center and the convenience provided for the customers. A careful analysis of the above-mentioned elements can provide a complete picture of the reasons that push the customers to choose shopping malls over other alternatives.

Consumer behavior can be defined as the decision process and physical activity individuals engage in when evaluating, acquiring, using, or disposing goods and services (Kumar, 2014).

Some scholars argue, based on sufficient proofs, on the existence of determinant factors which are responsible in shaping the perception of customers about the forms of retail. Particularly, the following factors affect customers' approach and choice to shop from the shopping malls:

##### Factor 1: Product

Besides the unique characteristics that differentiate shopping malls from other retail services and formats such as markets, small shops or online retail, the priority for the customer remains the product itself and a "tangible" way of shopping. In addition to the factors mentioned above, some of the inherent features of the products sold through the malls also tempt the customers to shop from this retail format. These features include; variety and quality of the products. Various studies, including research conducted Shah and Trivedi (2005) also found variety and quality to be important variables affecting customers' behavior to purchase from organized retailers. Respondents in their studies consistently reported that shopping malls offer more products and that the products sold in malls are mostly genuine, exclusive, and of higher quality than those found in other shopping formats. Therefore, malls must continue to prioritize both quality and variety in order to remain competitive in the future.

##### Factor 2: Atmosphere

Teik et al.'s (2015) research reveals that there are significant positive relationships between interior settings, music, and employee engagement with consumer behavior. A mall that has good atmospherics is one that motivates shoppers to linger around, take their time doing their shopping, and encourages people to use the mall to experience leisure, social, and community events. The studies conducted by Craik and McKechnie (1977) and Newman and Cullen (2001) also found layout of the store to be important variable in determining customers' behavior towards a particular retail format. Most respondents in different studies agree that layout of the shopping malls not only attracts them but also helps in locating the stores and other attractions easier. Promotion of customer confidence and simultaneously the word of mouth, pushes shopping malls towards allocation of special sections for similar types of products and guiding the customers through clear instructions. It seems that shopping malls layout is an indispensable element for customers'

satisfaction.

Factor 3: Shopping mall preference

Reliability, in terms of product quality, payment security, and personal information security, was found to be of utmost importance to customers. Furthermore, "product warranties" and "guarantees" in shopping malls also increase customers' confidence.

The study conducted by Osman and Ismail (1989) found that customers were more likely to visit shopping mall again if they found the shopping experience comfortable. Furthermore, researchers like Smaros and Holmstrom (2000), Walsh and Mitchell (2005) also found enjoyment while shopping to be one of the most important dimensions affecting customers' behavior towards shopping malls. Therefore, capitalizing on these features can help shopping malls to attract more customer.

Factor 4: Security

Generally, the customers have always been very cautious about certain aspects, be it related to their personal matters or information relating to their financial aspects. Hence, while exploring customers' perceptions, the factor called security emerged as a very important factor.

Studies conducted by Miyazaki and Fernandez (2001), Ramus and Nielsen (2005), Shergill and Chen (2005), Ranaweera et al (2005), confirm that security is a top priority for customers. The participants in their studies greatly emphasized payment and shopping environment security.

Factor 5: Accessibility and parking

Accessibility and parking are crucial factors customers consider when shopping. Shopping in street stores where there is no parking spaces, makes it difficult for the customers. As empathized by Pojani (2011), accessibility and car parking proved significant customer obstacles, making shopping difficult and tedious. Çakmak (2012) also argues that among others two important criteria in choosing a shopping center are easy accessibility and navigation.

Respondents in many studies have claimed that are quite satisfied with the accessibility of the shopping malls, their location and certainly very happy with the free parking and the large parking areas.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative methodology and examines how shopping malls affect consumer behavior in the Albanian market. It will evaluate customers' behavior towards shopping malls based on specific criteria such as product availability, accessibility, service quality, parking, atmosphere, and preferences for shopping centers. The quantitative research approach is an objective, formal, systematic process in which numerical data are used to quantify or measure phenomena and produce findings. It describes, tests and examines cause and effect relationships (Burns and Grove, 1987).

The main instrument used in the study is a survey with a questionnaire consisting of literature-based questions to gauge customers' perceptions of shopping malls, and adopted to the current context when necessary.

Surveys are usually conducted using questionnaires that ask questions of interest, providing insight into specific areas. A survey method is a systematic processor technique in which the researcher collects data for the research by asking questions to a predetermined population or a sample group (Hasan, 2023).

A five-point Likert scale, which ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), was utilized in the questionnaire. The order of the Likert Scale is advised to be ascending (Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree) to lower respondents giving positive answers (Chyung et al, 2018).

#### 3.1 Data Collection

As mentioned above, the study used questionnaires to collect primary data. They were administered by the researcher at three prominent shopping centers in Tirana, Albania: QTU, TEG, and City Park. Additionally, the survey was conducted with random participants on the streets and selected state

institutions. The survey was administered for one week, during various hours every day, to ensure coverage of morning, afternoon and evening shoppers on both weekdays and weekends (Sudman, 1980). An intercept technique was used to avoid decay that occurs in emotional concepts such as attitude and shopping value felt as a result of the shopping experience (McIntyre and Bender, 1986). As shoppers exited the mall, those who agreed to participate were seated at mall-provided tables and presented with paper-and-pen surveys. The same method was used for randomly questioned participants on the streets, with portable supports provided for questionnaire completion. Out of 422 received questionnaires, 410 responses were deemed usable and analyzed.

### 3.2 Sampling

The sample population included individuals randomly selected from mall shoppers. This selection was employed to ensure an equal chance of the potential participants of the study to be included. As a result, the selection bias was minimized and the findings could be generalized to a broad population of mall shoppers. Aiming to increase the integrity of the sampling procedure, the researcher made efforts to include participants with different demographic data such as gender, age, education level, and income. This sampling technique provided a representative sample of the mall shoppers in Albania, by increasing the validity and reliability of the findings.

## 4. Result and Findings

The following analysis is derived from the questionnaire conducted at the three prominent shopping centers mentioned earlier. Diverse customers, including those of varying age groups, genders, professions and attitudes towards shopping malls, completed 410 questionnaires. The data was analyzed through SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences).

### 4.1 Demographic profile

#### 4.1.1 Age

The demographic profile offers insights into the age distribution of the survey respondents. Most respondents fall within the age range of 18 to 40, comprising 76.5% of the total sample. Specifically, 34.3% of respondents are between 18 and 30 years old, while 39.2% are between 31 and 40. Additionally, 18.6% of respondents are between 41 and 50 years old. A smaller proportion of respondents, 7.8% of the total sample, are either 18 years or younger (2.9%) or are 50 years or older (4.9%).

#### 4.1.2 Gender

The demographic profile provided reveals the gender distribution of the survey respondents. Most respondents identify as female, comprising 58.8% of the total sample, while 41.2% identify as male. This suggests a slightly higher representation of females among the respondents. The gender distribution indicates a relatively balanced sample, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of perspectives across genders.

#### 4.1.3 Marital Status

The data provided offers insights into the marital status of the survey respondents. Most respondents fall within categories related to marriage and family, with 72.5% of the total sample being married or having children. Specifically, 27.5% of respondents identify as single, while most are married or married with children. Among the married respondents, 5.9% are married without children, while

30.4%, 28.4%, and 7.8% are married with one, two, or three or more children, respectively. This distribution reflects a diverse representation of marital statuses, with a notable proportion of respondents being married and having children.

#### 4.1.4 Education level

The provided data offers insights into the education levels of the survey respondents. Most respondents, comprising 92.2% of the total sample, have completed at least a bachelor's degree, indicating a high level of educational attainment among the participants. Specifically, 67.6% of respondents hold a bachelor's degree, while 5.9% have pursued post-graduate education. Additionally, 19.6% of respondents have completed high school education, while a smaller proportion, 4.9%, have primary education.

## 4.2 Variables Frequency

### 4.2.1 Product factor

#### 1. I can get a variety of products in shopping malls

Upon analyzing responses to a statement about the availability of products in shopping malls, a clear consensus emerged among participants. The statement received strong agreement from 62.7% of respondents and agreement from an additional 26.5%, resulting in an overwhelming majority of 89.2% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Only a tiny minority of 3.9% express disagreement or strong disagreement, while 6.9% remain undecided.

#### 2. There is a combination of mall's products like quality, price and comfort

The analysis of the responses to the statement regarding the combination of factors such as quality, price, and comfort in shopping malls reveals a predominant trend towards agreement among the respondents. The majority, 89.2% of the participants, either agree or strongly agree with the statement. Expressly, 38.2% of the respondents agree, while a significant 51.0% strongly agree that shopping malls offer a combination of products that encompass quality, price, and comfort. Conversely, only a small minority, totaling 6.9% of the participants, expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement. Additionally, only 4.9% of the respondents remain undecided.

#### 3. I can find exclusive products in shopping malls

The analysis of the responses to the statement regarding the availability of exclusive products in shopping malls indicates a notable trend towards agreement among the respondents. The statement was agreed with by a significant majority of the participants, with 84.3% strongly agreeing or agreeing. 54.9% of the respondents agree, while 29.4% strongly agree that shopping malls offer exclusive products. Conversely, only a small minority, totaling 6.0% of the participants, expressed disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement. Additionally, 9.8% of the respondents remain undecided on the matter.

#### 4. Shopping mall's products are genuine

The analysis of the responses regarding the genuineness of shopping mall products highlights a predominant trend towards agreement among the respondents. 68.6% of the participants either agree or strongly agree with the statement. 20.6% of the respondents agree, while 48.0% strongly agree that shopping mall products are genuine. Conversely, 30.4% of the participants express disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement. Additionally, 18.6% of the respondents remain undecided on the matter.

#### 5. I can find all the required products in malls concerning brand and fashion.

The analysis of the responses regarding the availability of required products in malls concerning brand and fashion indicates a predominant trend towards agreement among the respondents. A significant majority, 83.3% of the participants, either agree or strongly agree with the statement. 34.3% of the respondents agree, while 49.0% strongly agree that malls offer all required products



concerning brand and fashion. 6.8% of the participants express disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement. Additionally, 9.8% of the respondents remain undecided on the matter.

#### 4.2.2 Atmosphere factor

##### 1. I like the shopping mall for its pleasant atmosphere

The data provided offers insights into respondents' perceptions of a shopping mall's atmosphere, specifically focusing on its pleasantness. Most participants, representing 96.9% of the total sample, express positive views towards the shopping mall's atmosphere. Among them, 32.4% agree, while an overwhelming 64.7% strongly agree that the shopping mall offers a pleasant atmosphere. Conversely, only a small fraction, constituting 3.0% of respondents, either disagreed or remained undecided about the pleasantness of the atmosphere.

##### 2. The decoration of the shopping mall is attractive

The data provided indicates respondents' perceptions of the attractiveness of the decoration within a shopping mall. Most participants, accounting for 95.1% of the total sample, express positive views regarding the decoration's appeal. Among them, 49.0% agree, while 46.1% strongly agree that shopping mall decoration is attractive. Conversely, only a small minority, comprising 4.9% of respondents, either disagreed or remained undecided about the attractiveness of the decoration.

##### 3. The shopping mall offers entertainment and fun

The data reveals respondents' perceptions of a shopping mall's entertainment and recreational offerings. The majority of participants, representing 91.2% of the total sample, expressed positive views towards the mall's provision of entertainment and fun. Among them, 35.3% agree, while a significant majority of 55.9% strongly agree that the shopping mall offers entertainment and fun. Conversely, only a small fraction, totalling 9.0% of respondents, either disagreed or remained undecided about the mall's entertainment offerings.

##### 4. I am not vulnerable to atmospheric factors

The data provided indicates respondents' perceptions regarding their vulnerability to atmospheric factors. Most participants, 92.1% of the total sample, express confidence in their resilience against atmospheric factors. Expressly, 24.5% agree, while a substantial majority of 67.6% strongly agree that they are not vulnerable to atmospheric factors. Conversely, only 8.0% of respondents, either disagree or remain undecided about their vulnerability.

##### 5. I can find activities for family

Most participants, 85.3% of the total sample, express positive views towards the availability of activities suitable for families. 31.4% agree, while 53.9% strongly agree that they can find activities for their family. Conversely, only 14.7% of respondents, either disagree or remain undecided about the availability of such activities.

##### 6. Theatre and cinema shows are one of the reasons I go to shopping malls

A significant portion of participants, 53.9% of the total sample, express positive views towards theatre and cinema shows as motivating factors for visiting shopping malls. 20.6% agree, while 33.3% strongly agree that theatre and cinema shows are one of the reasons they go to shopping malls. Conversely, a considerable portion, 45.5% of respondents, either disagreed or remained undecided about the influence of such shows on their mall visits.

##### 7. In shopping malls, I can always find cleanliness

95.1% of the total sample, express positive views towards the cleanliness of shopping malls. 28.4% agree, while 66.7% strongly agree that they can always find cleanliness in shopping malls. Conversely, only 5.0% of respondents either disagree or remain undecided about the cleanliness of shopping malls.

##### 8. I can easily find each shop according to the plan of the mall

The analysis of the responses regarding the ease of finding each shop according to the mall's plan suggests a strong trend towards agreement among the respondents. 94.2% of the participants either agree or strongly agree with the statement. 42.2% of the respondents agree, while 52.0%



strongly agree that they can easily find each shop according to the mall's layout plan. 4.9% of the participants express disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement. Additionally, 3.9% of the respondents remain undecided on the matter.

#### 4.2.3 Shopping Mall Preferences

##### 1. I always go shopping at shopping malls

71.6% of the total sample express positive views towards shopping at shopping malls. The responses also indicate a variability in shopping preferences. 24.5% agree, and 47.1% strongly agree that they always go shopping at shopping malls. Conversely, 28.4% of respondents disagreed or remained undecided about their preference for shopping malls.

##### 2. I go to shopping malls due to their transport facilities

75.5% of the total sample express positive views towards shopping at malls due to their transport facilities; the responses also indicate some variability in opinion. 39.2% agree, while 36.3% strongly agree that they visit shopping malls because of their transport facilities. 20.6% of respondents either disagreed or remained undecided about the influence of transport facilities on their decision to visit shopping malls

##### 3. I go to shopping malls due to enjoyable facilities

91.2% of the total sample, express positive views towards visiting shopping malls due to the presence of enjoyable facilities. 32.4% agree, while 58.8% strongly agree that they visit shopping malls because of their enjoyable facilities. Conversely, only 8.8% of respondents either disagreed or remained undecided about the influence of enjoyable facilities on their decision to visit shopping malls.

##### 4. I go to shopping malls due to the retail environment

89.2% of the total sample, express positive views towards visiting shopping malls due to the retail environment. 25.5% agree, while 63.7% strongly agree that they visit shopping malls because of the retail environment they offer. Conversely, only 10.8% of respondents, either disagree or remain undecided about the influence of the retail environment on their decision to visit shopping malls.

##### 5. I go to shopping malls due to their location.

The data provided offers insights into respondents' motivations for visiting shopping malls, mainly focusing on the influence of the mall's location. A significant majority of participants, comprising 79.4% of the total sample, express positive views towards visiting shopping malls due to their location. Expressly, 49.0% agree, while 30.4% strongly agree that they visit shopping malls because of their location. Conversely, only 17.6% of respondents either disagreed or remained undecided about the influence of the mall's location on their decision to visit shopping malls.

##### 6. I feel more secure while being in shopping malls

The data provided reveals respondents' feelings of security in shopping malls. Most participants, comprising 94.1% of the total sample, express positive feelings of security in shopping malls. Approximately 25.5% agree, while 68.6% strongly agree that they feel more secure in shopping malls. Conversely, only a small fraction, 6.0% of respondents, either disagree or remain undecided about their sense of security.

#### 4.2.4 Security and service factor

##### 1. I feel safe while being in the shopping mall

The analysis of the responses regarding the feeling of safety in a shopping mall indicates a predominant trend towards agreement among the respondents. 97.6% of the participants either agree or strongly agree with the statement. 28.4% of the respondents agree, while 69.6% strongly agree that they feel safe in a shopping mall. 2.0% of the participants, express disagreement with the statement.

##### 2. I may convey every problem to the security

86.3% of the participants either agree or strongly agree with the statement. 52.0% of the

respondents agree, while 34.3% strongly agree that they may convey every problem to security. Conversely, only a small proportion, 13.7% of the participants, expressed uncertainty about conveying problems to security or disagreed with the statement.

3. The mall's products are safe regarding warranty and expiration.

The analysis of the responses regarding the safety of the mall's products concerning warranty and expiration reveals a predominant trend towards agreement among the respondents. 78.4% of the participants, either agree or strongly agree with the statement. 34.3% of the respondents agree, while a substantial 44.1% strongly agree that the products in shopping malls are safe regarding warranty and expiration. Conversely, only a small minority, totaling 7.8% of the participants, express disagreement with the statement. Additionally, 13.7% of the respondents remain undecided on the matter.

4. I think that customer service is providing the necessary information

The analysis of the responses regarding the perception of customer service providing necessary information in shopping malls reveals a strong consensus among the respondents. 91.2% of the participants, either agree or strongly agree with the statement. 30.4% of the respondents agree, while 60.8% strongly agree that customer service provides the necessary information. Conversely, only a small proportion, 8.8% of the participants, express uncertainty, disagreement, or strong disagreement with the statement.

5. I find the staff quite helpful

91.2% of the participants either agree or strongly agree with the statement. 29.4% of the respondents agree, while 61.8% strongly agree that they find the staff helpful. 9.0% of the participants, express disagreement or uncertainty about the helpfulness of the staff.

6. I think that shopping mall hours are convenient

95.9% of the participants either agree or strongly agree with the statement. Expressly, 24.5% of the respondents agree, while 71.6% strongly agree that shopping mall hours are convenient. Conversely, only a small proportion, 3.9% of the participants, expressed uncertainty or disagreement with the statement. This data suggests a prevalent perception among the surveyed individuals that shopping mall operating hours are convenient.

#### 4.2.5 Accessibility and parking factor

1. I can easily access the shopping malls from highways or main roads

The analysis of the responses regarding the ease of access to shopping malls from highways or main roads indicates a significant trend towards agreement among the respondents. 94.1% of the participants either agree or strongly agree with the statement. 33.3% of the respondents agree, while 60.8% strongly agree that shopping malls are easily accessible from highways or main roads. Only 6.0% of the participants express disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement. Additionally, 3.9% of the respondents remain undecided on the matter.

2. In my opinion, a shopping mall is one-stop shopping place

The statement was agreed or strongly agreed to by 89.2% of the participants. Among the respondents, around 38.2% agreed while 51.0% strongly agreed that shopping malls provide an all-in-one shopping experience. Disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement was expressed by 7.9% of the participants. 5.9% of the respondents could not decide.

3. In my opinion there is ease of parking lot

The analysis of the survey results regarding the ease of parking lot reveals a predominantly positive perception among respondents. 89.3% of the total sample either agree or strongly agree that the parking lot is easy to navigate. Approximately 27.5% of respondents agree, while 61.8% strongly agree with this sentiment. Conversely, only a few respondents express disagreement or uncertainty, with 2.0% disagreeing and 8.8% undecided.

4. I think that the parking is safe and well-guarded

With 88.3% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the parking is safe and

well-guarded, there appears to be a prevailing positive sentiment towards the security measures. 26.5% of participants agree, and 61.8% strongly agree with this assertion, indicating a solid consensus among the majority. Conversely, 11.8% of respondents remain undecided about the safety and security of the parking facility.

5. You can also find handicapped parking places

A significant portion, constituting 50.1% of the total sample, either agree or strongly agree that these facilities are accessible. However, a considerable number of respondents, comprising 43.1%, remain undecided about the availability of handicapped parking places, indicating a level of uncertainty or lack of awareness. 5.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

6. Parking is equipped with all security means and signs

The data illustrates respondents' perceptions of security measures and signage within a parking facility. 86.3% of the total sample either agree or strongly agree that the parking lot has all the necessary security means and signs, indicating a widespread positive sentiment towards the facility's security infrastructure. 27.5% of participants agree, while 58.8% strongly agree with this assessment. Conversely, only a small fraction of respondents disagree (1.0%) or remain undecided (12.7%) about the adequacy of the security measures and signage.

7. Parking is free or at reasonable prices

Most participants, comprising 90.1% of the total sample, either agree or strongly agree with the statement. Among them, 22.5% agree, while 67.6% strongly agree that parking is free or offered at reasonable prices. Conversely, only a small fraction, 1.0%, disagree with this sentiment, indicating a minimal dissenting view. Additionally, 8.8% of respondents remain undecided about the affordability of parking.

The thorough analysis on the factors that influence shopping mall experience leads to the conclusion that product variety plays a determinant role in forming the perception and preferences of customers. The main part of the participants stated their satisfaction on the price, quality, genuineness of the goods, availability, variety and comfort of products. The safety and reliability of the products was also expressed by the individuals. Another essential factor that was highly appreciated by the participants was the accessibility of the shopping malls from main roads and highways and the comfort of finding shops easily based on the mall's plan. Regarding security and service, the individuals expressed their appreciation with helpful staff and a sense of security. Spacious parking lots, affordability and easy access from the shopping malls was positively reviewed as one of the main components that made shopping malls a favorite destination for shopping. Another element that was also highlighted as crucial, was the environment and atmosphere including the attractive decoration, entertainment options, and cleanliness. Generally, the findings from the comprehensive analysis, provided helpful data on the factors that influence customers' preferences and satisfaction within the shopping malls.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The impact of the shopping malls on costumers' behavior is significant. In a very short period, shopping malls have changed the way and manners of shopping of the Albanian customers. The conducted survey generated important data on the demographic profile of the customers, variables frequency and specific preferences of shopping mall customers. The findings offer an important understanding and comprehensive overview that can be used to process strategies for enhancing services and experiences.

In general, it has been found the following findings about the profile of the participants of the survey: Our sample consists predominantly by married participants, belonging to 18 to 40 years old, with a slight lower percentage of men, mostly holding a bachelor degree. Although shopping has always been considered as a feminine "hobby or duty", shopping malls have attracted both genders, the gap between women and men is not that large.

The study has shown that a considerable number of Albanian customers prefer shopping at

shopping malls not only as a new trend in the Albanian market sector but indeed for many other reasons. They perceive shopping malls as centers for purchasing a variety of exclusive and genuine goods, combined with a strong sense related also to warranty and expiration. The combination of price and quality makes shopping at the shopping centers much more convenient. According to Terblanche (1999) and Jung (2023) who studied customer preferences and behavior in shopping environments, factors such as aesthetics, convenience, and the availability of diverse amenities as key drivers influencing customers' preference for shopping malls over small stores.

Participants of the study found the shopping malls accessible from highways and main road, together with the convenience of navigating within the malls according to their layout plans.

Many considered malls as one-stop shopping destinations, where the service offered is comprehensive, starting with the help desk, staff, and safety inside and in the surroundings. In addition, the customers are quite satisfied with the ease of indoor and outdoor parking, security, clear warning signs and affordability. These findings are in accordance with the study of Wong and Nair (2018), which states that some elements of the physical atmosphere include the safeness and cleanness of the environment and particularly convenient facilities such as parking since most shoppers drive to reach their preferred malls.

The pleasant atmosphere, attractive decorations and various entertainment options are evaluated as important aspects of the shopping mall experience by the participants in the study. Unique shopping experience is important for the retailers that start with the store exterior, when customers like the exterior atmosphere of the retail store; they experienced higher pleasure and arousal, which increased purchase intentions (Sangvikar, 2012).

Moreover, the results highly valued cleanliness and family-friendly activities in a shopping mall which contribute to a positive ambience. As confirmed by Çakmak (2012), one of the main criteria to choose malls is the cleanliness, together with closeness to the city center, easy accessibility, safety and quality product sales and café and restaurants.

Overall, the findings underline the importance of different factors in forming customers' perception and satisfaction towards shopping malls. This provides crucial data for mall operators and administrators in policymaking aiming to enhance the mall experience for customers.

## 6. Recommendations

After the data analysis, the following points came out as recommendations for the shopping malls. Their implementation could help shopping malls improve the ways of providing a wider range of customers' needs, become more attractive and keeping up with the same appeal in the retail environment. Shopping malls should concentrate in enhancing the overall customer experience. This recommendation will help them increase their appeal. Safe and secure environment, as one of the key elements of attraction, should be maintained always in focus. While the accessibility was widely praised as one of the most distinguished elements of shopping malls, it should be improved in order to meet new criteria for people with special needs. A better focus on environmental issues and adaptation of sustainable practices could help enhance the mall's image and attract environmentally conscious consumers.

Shopping malls have a unique feature which makes them different from other retail ways but this does not mean that they are not prone to competition. In order to stay in the groove, they must conduct regular research in order to better understand the customers' needs, preferences and new trends.

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