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ATTRIBUTES THAT INFLUENCE MALL DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Malls and shopping spaces are at a crossroads in their societal positions. The change in these retail spaces is in a state of flux. Some have gone out of business, others in the state of decline, and while others are prospering. The primary question is: what are the differences among these operations? This is a difficult question to answer and there are many perspectives. A way of trying to understand the audiences and how the shopping spaces can develop knowledge of customers' desire is through attributes. These attributes must be understood in terms of strengths and weaknesses. A SWOT analysis was completed on different types of shopping spaces. The results indicated a wide disparity of what an audience desires in these malls.

Key Words: Malls, SWOT Analysis, Retail Shopping, Shopper Attributes, Progressive Approaches

INTRODUCTION

Shopping, in the past, has been one of the most popular leisure activities. With the development of on line purchases, the pattern of shoppers has significantly changed. (Rushe, 2017) The number of online purchases has significantly increased while retail store consumption has decreased. The increase of on line sales has many reasons for its success. (Welch, 2019) The three most important are convenience, cost, and selection. Because of the change in shopping patterns, many malls are experiencing a downturn in business. (Coutinho and Pedro, 2019) This downturn has substantially caused many of the traditional malls to have empty space or be out of business.

Malls are at a crossroads and have to adjust with the shopping trends. (Alexander and Muhlebach, 2019) Those that have not changed with the times are the ones that are in trouble. (Coughlan and Soberman, 2004) There is much discussion about how malls need to change to successfully compete with on line shopping. (Teller, Wood, and Floh, 2016; THOMPSON, 2017) The more successful malls are the ones that provide an enriching experience. One of the successful approaches has been the development of huge malls where size is the uniqueness and the number of stores provides the variety needed to attract customers. They also emphasize a unique mix of leisure and entertainment. Another approach has been the development of specialty shopping spaces. These venues provide a unique environment associated with the theme of the shopping experience. An alternative approach that has been successful is Outlet Shopping Malls. (Coughlan and Soberman, 2004) These have been successful primarily because of the price and brand selection.

Traditional malls are under tremendous stress because they represent a real estate investment that must continue to show a profit. If they show a significant loss, this represents a negative investment and requires action. Many of these malls are defended on the basis of community need for shopping space. (Owen, 2016) It is difficult to justify the shopping space on the basis of community need instead of a reasonable business profit. What this really means is that the community has found additional places to shop or they are shopping online and have changed their patterns significantly, therefore, the investment is a loss on the balance statement. One of the models that has been very successful is the development of mega malls with a great variety

of brands and leisure and entertainment activities. (Bailey, 2015) The mix of the brands and activities has attracted not only the community, but a wide variety of tourists. This has been a very profitable model for the return on investment. There have been some of these mega malls that have failed or have not had a good return on investment. The reason for their failure is not having the right approach to appeal to the community and/or tourist shopping needs. Even with aggressive marketing, these malls have not been a success. These malls have not been successful because they have adopted a transfer model. They emulate other models that have been successful and have transferred that design. The successful approach is one that is reflective of a community and tourist audiences. An intensive needs assessment, related to the community and potential tourist audiences, is necessary. This will help in developing unique approaches that will be successful. (Stengel, 2018)

The developer and investor have the responsibility to understand the needs of the community and tourists in their location. (Mirel, 2016) An aggressive needs assessment does not ensure success. These needs must be translated into an effective architectural design that provides an atmosphere that allows for the growth of a program through an effective approach for their expression. (Roman, 2018) Even when these requirements are met, an effective management and marketing team are required to cultivate an efficient team to sustain operations. This includes the ability to allow the mall to evolve and change as the shopping behaviors adjust. (Kundu, 2019) Another essential element to this management team is personnel who understand how to fulfill consumer's needs and provide an atmosphere so that a return visit is desired. (Sanburn, 2017) The management philosophy sometimes is based upon a supply-side model, where money is no object in terms of expenses and the primary purpose is the theater or show. This type of method uses the philosophy of money invested brings good profits. (Ronse, Boussauw, and Lauwers, 2015) Another approach is a cost-based management philosophy. Expenses are the key to profits. If costs can be controlled, profits can be maximized. (Ronse, Boussauw, and Lauwers, 2015) A third tactic is a max min approach. This is a combination of balancing the two previous methods. Money is invested to ensure quality product and expenses are structured so that money expenditures are not out of control.

Malls are a complex system of design and management and the models mentioned are not the only ones. (Botha and Prawlall, 2017) Those identified are the most popular because of their success. Many traditional malls are successful because they keep up with the changes in customer's behavior and have provided a product that serves their needs. Each mall is unique in terms of its attributes. (Kabadayi and Paksoy, 2016) These differences are what give a mall its characteristic atmosphere. (Roberts, 2013) The characteristics have to be matched with the populations served.

The purpose of this manuscript is to review attributes of different types of malls and try to determine their importance. There cannot be a direct comparison of the way these attributes are perceived for the populations served and the uniqueness of each mall. This does not suggest that the designs of some of the malls are not similar, but the primary attributes that makes them disparate is its location and the populations served.

METHOD

A SWOT analysis was used to study attributes. This is an analysis that defines the strengths and weaknesses and what makes malls different. (Gurel and Tat, 2017; Phadermrod, Crowder, and Wills, 2019) This methodology is usually employed in the context of identifying audiences and having them provide a list of strengths and weaknesses. A modification of this methodology is where one is asked to justify his/her responses. Another modification is where the participant is asked to identify a position in regard to the strengths and weaknesses on a scale. The strengths and weaknesses are usually qualitatively analyzed. If a scale is used, they are expressed in terms of the real numbers and analyzed quantitatively.

In this study, the data source used to identify strengths and weaknesses of malls was tripadvisor, by using their ratings and comments. Tripadvisor has limitations. These limitations include statements by representatives who are trying to market the malls. There are also individuals who are providing comments that are disgruntled for some reason. These comments could not be removed because of the volume of the data. The number of responses is critical to minimize these limitations. The more comments, the less influence these types of statements have. In tripadvisor, the individual is asked to rate a mall on a one through five scale. The ratings are: 1. Terrible, 2. Poor, 3. Average, 4. Very Good, and 5. Excellent. Comments are provided to justify the ratings. A four and five score, in this study, is a strength and scores with a one through three rating is a weakness. Remarks gave insight into the importance and meaning of the attributes. Reasons given for each attribute were noted for consistency of response. The review period was from 2017 through 2019.

Attributes were analyzed through a text analysis. This is a method where words and phrases are examined and identified in relation to their frequency in the text with associated comments.

<https://www.online-utility.org/text/analyzer.jsp>

The identified words and phrases with their frequencies were evaluated by content experts. These content experts reviewed the word patterns and made conclusions about the nature of the comments in relation to the overall perspective of the mall. A consensus method was used to identify the attributes and their meaning. The words and phrases identified were reviewed independently, and then the experts met to analyze their patterns. If there was not a consensus, a two out of three vote was used to make decisions about the meaning of the words and phrases.

The stratifications for the study were international malls, malls inside the United States, and outlet malls in the United States. The data for malls inside the US were further stratified by number of stores. A stratification of square footage could also have been used, but it was believed that the number of units was a better stratification because the shopper do not usually identify with square footage. A megamall, in this study, was defined as a mall with over 300 stores. A medium-size mall was 200 to 299 units. A smaller mall was defined as one with less than 199 stores. Attributes were identified by the comments for each mall type. These characteristics were not associated with a particular mall, but data was aggregated into the categories and presented by size for the malls in the United States. Three malls were selected from each category to analyze as a representative of the classification. The overall reason for selecting a mall was on the basis of the number of comments and the overall rating. A mall had to have a score of four or above to be incorporated into the study. Eight international malls were selected to analyze. These malls were selected, based upon geographic location, to represent a global perspective. Eight outlet malls were selected to represent the different geographic locations in the United States. International malls tend to be much larger than those in the United States. No stratifications were included in the analysis of the international malls, except that they had to be over 250 units. The outlet malls did not have any stratification, except they had to have over 50 stores. The international malls and the outlet malls had to have a score of four or above to be incorporated into the study.

RESULTS

The responsibilities for the future of malls are the primary function of the developers and investors. These individuals have contributed significantly to the success or failure of malls, internationally, and in the United States. This does not diminish the influence of management companies, but the initial development directly depends upon the developers and investors.

These individuals have the responsibility for cultivating the basic master plan and putting in place a compatible management team to implement the plan. The renovation and redevelopment of the malls is directly influenced less by the developers and investors than the customers and their needs. Once a mall has been in operation for a period of time, it must be renovated and redeveloped to keep up with the customer trends in order to be successful. It is the responsibility of management to inform the developers and investors about changes that need to be made to continue or sustain the success. This is the framework that must be used to interpret the findings.

The one issue that was common to all types of shopping malls is safety. This is the one attribute that was on consumers' minds and must be addressed with some type of security that will make shoppers comfortable. The security cannot be overpowering or there will be a negative reaction. Those shopping facilities that have overcompensated have made the customers very uncomfortable and they question the nature of the environment and why this type of security is needed.

Findings were reported by the stratification's and common themes, based upon the number of times an issue was identified (Minimum 3 times to be reported) in each category.

International Malls Table 1

Identification of Malls outside the United States/International

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_shopping_malls

Eight international malls were selected to be analyzed. These venues represented the most popular malls in a region. All malls had a rating of four or better as to identify successful operations.

The first observation was that these venues had a cultural perspective based on their location. This perspective was very favorable to the residents. There was also a very positive experience for tourist. The cultural aspect was accepted as a learning experience for tourists. The key to understanding these attributes for tourists is when it is counter to their culture it is a negative

experience. An example is when toilet paper is not provided and it is a culturally accepted norm for tourists.

Primary attributes indicated that the shoppers were seeking a convenient, well-maintained, comfortable and stimulating environment that serves all members of the family or an individual's social group. These attributes translated into a high degree of satisfaction for the clients. Those elements that were weaknesses were primarily concerned with the condition of the mall, in order to sustain and keep the mall viable. Management must use popular culture as a thematic element. Size was an important element, but it can be overwhelming, if the organization of the mall is not well planned. The nature of the shopping experience must be based upon high-end stores.

USA Malls Table 2

Identification of Malls in the United States

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_shopping_malls_in_the_United_States

https://shoppingcenters.com/?keyword=mall%20data&creative=228670896616&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI7aOh6-2c5wIVjP7jBx0M1AOFEAAYASAAEgLDYfD_BwE

Stratifications: A. 300+ Units, B. 200-299 Units, and C 199 Units or less

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2 A/300 Units or More

These are comprehensive malls that can be titled mega malls because of their level of services. These are true destinations that include theme parks, recreational and leisure activities, and entertainment in addition to an extensive list of shopping venues. The strengths of these types of malls were the atmosphere that is created because of the great diversity of activities that serves all members of the family or an individual's social group. These were set in an environment that

creates an atmosphere of high energy. The decorations were very aesthetically pleasing and provide a warm atmosphere that was very festive. The mix of products was high-end, as well as economic based. There were unique stores that cannot be found in any other venue. This venue was constantly being re-created with new attractions and special events. Weaknesses centered on operations and design issues. Cleanliness, parking, security were the operational elements that reflect a gap in management. Confusion from signage and crowdedness were design problems which reflect a lack of understanding the needs of the shopper. Most of the weaknesses were result of the size of the mall. The shopper because of the size had a great degree of frustration and anxiety. The personal nature of the mall was lost in its size.

2 B/200-299 Units

Malls, in this category, provided many of the same services as the larger malls. Their emphasis did not in provide the same level of recreation and leisure, entertainment, and special events, but were searching for effective methods to fulfill the same needs. These efforts were not the “wow” factor of the larger malls, but sought diversity to satisfy customer’s needs. These venues pursued design and decoration to provide an environment that had a personal feel and as, a result, increased the desirability for repeat visits. This atmosphere that was created also helps in the development of sustainability. One question that arises out of this approach was the ability to renovate and make the experience new because of a limited budget. The emphasis was upon providing services that make the shopping experience easier. It also helped in providing a multilevel experience for all members of the family or an individual’s social group. Weaknesses were primarily a function of their location that gives raise to such problems as the homeless and an overabundance of teenagers. The primary concern, at this level, was safety and not providing an adequate level of security. Other problems were related to not providing essential services such as parking and bathrooms. These issues may be a lack of budget or they may be a lack of leadership. Many times, there was complacency, and once these venues were successful; they may lose their competitive edge.

2C/199 Units or less

Malls, in this category, had to be creative because their budgets were not as large as other categories of malls. The strengths indicated that the design item as decorations, artwork, and theme created a very positive atmosphere. This atmosphere had a very homey feel and helped stimulate feelings that serve basic human needs. It was also recognized that many of these malls

were more community based and had less tourists. They also addressed basic operational elements very well. Special events were used extensively to overcome issues in regard to attendance. These events helped make the facilities new again to the customers with decorations associated with the event. Weakness factors that were affecting some of the malls were operational issues. There also was a lack of understanding of the need to renovate and keep the mall updated and fully leased. These operational factors can override any positive affect of the experience.

Table 3/Outlet Malls

Identification of Outlet Malls

<https://www.outletbound.com/outlet-malls>

<https://www.icsc.com/news-and-views/newsstand/value-retail-news-and-international-outlet-journal>

<https://www.icsc.com/news-and-views/value-retail-news>

Individuals who shopped at outlet malls were bargain hunters. The elements that influenced their perspective were the price of products, as well as name brands. Other aspects were of secondary consideration. Operational elements such as parking, cleanliness, and security were important and can override the experience because the shopper can seek their deals elsewhere. Design factors such as beautiful fountains, landscape, and architecture were elements that enhanced the experience and influenced whether the customers can be retained. The operational design factors were essential in confirming that the customer had made the right decision. Weaknesses were primarily centered on personal issues such as friendliness, sales staff knowledge, and safety. These consumers tended to be very sophisticated shoppers because they knew their product and the prices and were very discriminating. Even though they were bargain hunters, they were seeking the same qualities as shoppers in other malls. There was homogeneity in many of these malls because they are owned by corporations such as Tanger and Premium. The design and management had a great degree of consistency because of this common ownership.

Technology

An attribute that did not surface in the study was technology and the modification of the shopping experience to help malls compete. (Matthews, 2019; Scherba, 2017) This attribute is in line with the findings which suggested the development of the shopping experience is directly related to the audiences' interests and perceptions. It is the added value of the experience that is unique to the venue. (Gilliland, 2019; Matthews, 2019) Technology is the element that is prevalent in today's society and helps engage and involve the client directly in the shopping experience. These attributes can enhance the shopping experience through personalized interactions. (Ciarniello, 2018) Personal technologies are advancing at an unprecedented rate, so the retailing is in a constant state of change. Some of the technologies that hold some implications are:

<https://econsultancy.com/examples-digital-technology-in-retail-stores/>

Autonomous Shopping Carts

Mobile Wallet

<https://limbicmedia.ca/8-interactive-technologies-future-shopping-malls/>

Interactive Window Displays

Sound and Light Shows and Simulated Experiences

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2018/06/25/a-vision-of-the-future-mall-four-innovation-scenarios/#39395b71413a>

Use of AI and Machine Learning, Digital Pathways and Drones

Wellness at the Mall Called "Betterment Zones"

<https://info.otipro.com/blog/new-technology-in-shopping-malls>

Smart mirrors

Digital signage and virtual assistants

<https://innotechtoday.com/malls-technology/>

Robot Assistants

Smart Bathrooms

The primary concern about technology is its cost. Some technologies have a high cost and place a great stress upon the retailer, especially with its rapid change. (Patton, 2019) It is often outdated before it is installed. There are many personal technologies that have potential application and represent a minimal cost. Creativity is the essential element to the application of these technologies. The most important element, relating to cost, is finding technologies that relate to the audience. (Patton, 2019)

It must be remembered that technology can be impersonal. Everyone has had a phone call that is answered by computer, and you have a problem that cannot be resolved and you cannot reach an agent. There causes a high degree of frustration. The personal touch has to be combined with the technology to individualize the experience. (Gilliland, 2019) It must be emphasized that the people gatherings are an important aspect a part of everyday life. (Morgan, 2018) Many people consider technology to be an element that isolates the individual. The creation of community is an essential part of technology to be successful. This technology, in order to create a community, must be interactive.

An interesting example is where a social group had attended football games in England through their youth. These individuals were scattered across England and the World. They were able to receive the games through television and able to interact with one another using Skype. The focus of this example is that people gatherings have been created with interactive technology that has a direct impact. (Ciarniello, 2018; Morgan, 2018) Technology has to be adapted and changed to create a personal experience to be effective.

CONCLUSIONS

Three of the primary attribute themes were security, quality of the food, and personnel issues. These are internal operational elements that can be addressed through evaluation and training. There has to be some type of assessment process, as a way of resolving problems. Required training, either provided by the unit lease or the mall would help solve these issues. An interesting example is a hospitality training provided by one mall. An assessment process needs to be instituted by the mall in order to determine the effectiveness of their operational factors. Consumer surveys by each unit in the mall are preferable. This type of approach will help better define the nature of the problem and its source.

Two other issues identified were size and effectiveness of management. It is assumed that the larger malls with a greater number of units have a more effective management system. What it really depends upon is the managers being professionalized with training. There is a need for an ongoing assessment process to help develop analytic management skill set. An important part of the skill set is creativity that relates to size and budget. It is well recognized that the larger malls have a bigger budget, but more money does not necessarily translate to effective management and creating a satisfactory experience for the shopper. Many smaller malls have overcome their problems of budget with effective creative solutions.

Design problems also had an effect upon the shoppers' experience. Problems such as parking, difficulty in navigating the mall, and signage caused confusion, frustration, anxiety. These creative elements had a profound effect upon the experience, as well as their desire to return, even if the shopping itself had been a positive experience. Another issue was factors such as empty stores and not updating the mall. This creates an impression that the mall does not have a progressive attitude and, in some cases, there is a thought that the mall is run down. Another design factor was that there is not anything new or exciting about the shopping experience. This condition causes malls to be boring and the experience is depressing.

This study is not definitive, but only suggestive of additional research that is needed, based upon the consumer's perspective and the use of this information to design a positive experience for the clients. The attributes, both strengths and weaknesses, must be addressed to have a proper perspective about design and management. The future directly depends upon professional organizations and the training of leaders.

Leadership

<https://www.icsc.com/who-we-are/leadership>

Talent Development

<https://www.icsc.com/find-and-connect/talent-hq>

<https://www.icsc.com/join/become-a-member/college-and-university-partner-program>

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Table 1

International Malls

Malls were selected that represent a global perspective. Words and phrases identified are in alphabetic order. Frequent of the words and phrases were not reported.

Strength

able to do everything under one roof
activities for all members of the family
all in one
brand shops good
children's play area so could shop
clean

cookie-cutter
decorations good
easy to get around
entertainment
entertainment diverse
everything under one roof
excellent atmosphere
excellent infrastructure/convention center/hotels
excellent location
family/always something to do
food quality goods
free Wi-Fi
friendly
fun activities
fun environment
glamorous
good food
good selection of stores
ice rink
IKEA
interesting design
large number of diverse stores
music good
near home
near hotels
parking convenient
playground
recreational activities
relaxing
sophisticated
spacious
theme great
theme Park
toilets clean
very convenient design
website design good
well kept
well organized
well-maintained

Weakness

angry about decorations/culturally inappropriate
confusing
crowded
dangerous design
depressing/stores close
does not accept credit cards
empty stores
food not good
impossible to navigate
long wait times
no facilities for the disabled
no toilet paper
no water
not friendly
not what I expected
overcrowded
parking inconvenient
parking problems
poor food
poor service
security to aggressive
service quality not good
shops close to early
shutdown elevators at midnight
staff does not understand products
too much walking
traffic problems
two big/no cohesion
unorganized

Table 2 A

300 Units or More

Malls were selected that represent a comprehensive regional and national perspective. Words and phrases identified are in alphabetic order. Frequent of the words and phrases were not reported.

Strength

always new experience
amusement park
aquarium
beautiful environment
bigger is better
clean and safe
convenient parking
decoration
destination itself
easy to navigate
families
family vacation
first class
food excellent
friendly atmosphere
fun
fun environment
good entertainment
great atmosphere
great choices
high-end brands to discounts
impressive
lots of restrooms
museum
not dying
options

parking garage
pleasant atmosphere
quality of food good
security
something for everyone
special events
special events getaway trip
theme
unique stores
variety in stores excellent
variety of food good
very convenient
very pop culture related
walking/need good shoes
warm place in the winter
wristband rides

Weakness

confusing
crowded
disruptive staff
filthy
food not good
high prices
homeless problem
need printed map
need walking shoes
needs updated
not friendly
not good food
pricey
same old same old
same thing every time of visit
signage
sterile environment
to high-end
unorganized
website not effective

Table 2B

200-299 Units

Strength

beautiful environment
clean
concierge services
decorations outstanding
diversity of stores
elegant
excellent layout
excellent stores
excellent theme
exciting
fun environment
good atmosphere
good brand selection
good entertainment
good food
good mix of high end and bargain stores
good parking
great fun
happy and pleasant environment
hot fashions and high technology
infrastructure good and close to mall
location good
multiple attractions
recreation activities
shop and play
so much to do

something to do for everyone in the family
special events make it new
stress reduction
very modern

Weakness

bad services
bathrooms
boring
crowded
drugs
empty
food not good
homeless
not friendly
not safe
overpriced
parking
parking not convenient
punks
too many high-end stores
tourist trap

Table 2 C

199 Units or less

Strength

artwork makes sophisticated environment
beautiful
civic space
clean
consistent theme
decorations
decorations add much to the environment
decorations excellent
excellent location
festive place
friendly people
friendly staff
fun
good brand selection
good food
good variety
high-end stores
magic oasis
many deals
many sales/no empty stores
no empty stores
not closed in
open space/natural concept
outdoor design
parking convenient
pristine condition
relaxing atmosphere
renovations constant
safe environment
something for everyone
unique stores

upscale stores
variety of stores
very bright
very calming
very clean
very reasonable food
well maintained

Weakness

bad hours
bathrooms
boring
empty stores
information poor
needs to be updated
outdated
outside needs renovation
parking not good
pet store not well run
run down
scam on tickets
staff rude
terrible food

Table 3

Outlet Malls

Strength

attractive
beautiful design
beautiful landscape
beautiful/fountains
brand variety great
clean
clean restrooms
easy in and easy out
easy parking
excellent brands
expensive
food very reasonable
fun
good brands
good deals and bargains
good service
good variety in stores
good variety of stores
great diversity of stores
helpful and friendly staff
like being able to browse
location
no empty stores
parking convenient
pleasant environment
pleasant setting
prices great
very comfortable atmosphere
website informative
well-designed outlet
well-managed

Wi-Fi

Weakness

boring
closes to early
crowded
deals terrible
depressed area
empty stores
expectations are not met
expensive
food not good
music too loud
No kid stores
no playground
not friendly
not good location
not pedestrian friendly
not safe
parking not good
poor layout and to spread out
quality of food not good
restrooms need attention
rude
salespeople not knowledgeable
same old same old
security
shops poorly staffed
slow salespeople
staff not competent
staff not friendly
too much walking
traffic pattern bad
website not true
wrong type of music