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When Shopping and Leisure Go Together in Malls. User Experiences in Barcelona

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Abstract

The presence of shopping malls where people consume and practice leisure has increased in recent decades. Given the importance of shopping malls for both consumption and leisure, and the lack of studies that explain these behaviors in our context, this study describes the activities accomplished and the experience of visiting shopping centers in Barcelona. The participants were 411 men and 379 women aged between 16 and 56 ($M = 35.87$, $SD = 9.74$); information was collected with a questionnaire, which included items about activities, frequency of attendance, and evaluations of visiting the mall. The results offer a characterization of Barcelona's shopping-center users (by gender, age, what they do there, and how malls are experienced), and add to the discussion about shopping centers as placed-based leisure settings.

Keywords

Leisure; shopping malls; daily activities; consumer behavior

Quando las compras y el ocio van de la mano en el centro comercial. Las experiencias de los usuarios en Barcelona

Resumen

La presencia de centros comerciales donde las personas consumen y practican ocios ha aumentado en las últimas décadas. Dada la importancia de los centros comerciales tanto para el consumo como para el ocio y la falta de estudios que expliquen estos comportamientos en nuestro contexto, este estudio describe las actividades realizadas y la experiencia de visitar centros comerciales en Barcelona. Los participantes fueron 411 hombres y 379 mujeres de 16 a 56 años de edad ($M = 35,87$, $SD = 9,74$); la información se recopiló con un cuestionario que incluía elementos sobre las actividades, la frecuencia de asistencia y las valoraciones de las visitas

al centro comercial. Los resultados ofrecen una caracterización de los usuarios de los centros comerciales de Barcelona (por género, edad, qué hacen allí y cómo los experimentan) y contribuyen a la discusión sobre los centros comerciales como lugares de ocio.

Palabras clave

Ocio, Centros comerciales, Actividades diarias, Comportamiento del consumidor

1. INTRODUCTION

In her awarded novel *What Was Lost*, O'Flynn (2007) deals with the idea of shopping malls as a city attraction and a plentiful place of fun, mystery, fear and illusions; actually, the story illustrates the importance shopping centers have gained over the years, not only from an economical but also a psychosocial standpoint. In this sense, Pratt & Pratt (1960) pointed out more than half a century ago the changes shopping malls had produced in behavioral patterns – either in consumption or social practices – showing their relevance to social sciences.

In the case of Spain, the presence of shopping malls has increased, especially since 1986, when the country joined the European Union (AECC, 2016; Serrano, 1997) and this presence has contributed to the development of new city landscapes, as well as new economical, social, and cultural practices (Codina & Pestana, 2010; Peralta Torres, 2002); furthermore, shopping malls have become another axis of urban life, eliciting specific identification processes with the environment (Codina & Pestana, *ibid.*; Jiménez-Domínguez, Becerra Mercado & Olivera, 2009) and an attractive leisure tourism experience (Johnson, 2013; Rabbiosi, 2015; Zaidan, 2016).

The research shopping malls have generated has been classified in two general tendencies (Manzo, 2005). The first tendency deploys shopping malls as places that favor retail activities, marginalizing huge sectors of the population (Abaza, 2001; Langman, 1991; Padilha, 2006). The other perspective underlines the variety of psychosocial processes shopping malls can bring out, in addition to consumer behavior (Roy & Tai, 2003; Holroyd, 2016). Following this second tendency, buying anything includes other activities and experiences closely associated to those of leisure (Jansen-Verbeke, 1987, 1991; Roberts, 1987; Wong & Wan, 2013).

The study of shopping malls from the leisure studies standpoint can be included in the analysis of leisure as placemaking (Henderson & Frelke, 2000), which means that leisure goes hand in hand with the construction of meaningful places, giving new tools to broaden the understanding of personal and social leisure cues (conjoint visions of place and leisure issues, also in Hunt, 2008; Smaldone, Harris & Sanyal, 2008). This idea had also

been considered by Uzzell (1995), who specifically described shopping malls as places that satisfy social, psychological and physical needs through commercial, community and leisure facilities. In this sense, Erkip (2005, p. 102) has described leisure at shopping malls as a practice merged not only with shopping but also “the urban style in general”, and following this idea, Zaidan (*ibid.*, p. 4) says that the combination of shopping and other leisure options creates a “cosmopolitan-based shopping experience”. Put differently, when studying shopping malls, taking the leisure perspective into account may enrich the set of experiences that visiting those spaces induce (for a detailed analysis of the leisure characteristics of shopping, see Timothy, 2005).

In Spain, research about shopping malls connected to the leisure perspective has remained almost unexplored, even though visiting shopping centers is considered a leisure activity for 42% of the Spanish population (García-Ferrando, 2006) and the Annual Report of Retail in Spain (CBRE, 2017, p. 5) announces “new centres now increasingly aiming to become places that people visit not just to shop, but to socialise with friends and family”. Consequently, shopping centers in Spain appear as a setting for place-based leisure experiences, which should also be considered. Specifically, this contribution is focused on Barcelona's shopping-mall visitors, taking into account several of the activities they accomplish during their visits.

With regard to the main variables, which previous contributions in shopping mall research have worked with, different groups can be distinguished. For example, socio-demographical variables associated with patterns of attendance at shopping centers (Chebat, 1999; Chebat, Gélinas-Chebat, & Therrien, 2005; Kuruvilla, Joshi & Shah, 2009), where combinations have shown some users' profiles to be gender and/or age-based (Jackson, Stael & Brantley, 2011). Another group includes the experience of visiting shopping malls (Baker & Wakefield, 2012; El Hedhli, Chebat & Sirgy, 2013; Gilboa & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013; Michon, Chebat, & Turley, 2005; Miller, 2014; Rabbiosi, 2015; Swinyard, 1998; Wesley, LeHew & Woodside, 2006). Last but not least, there is the importance of the activities performed while fre-

quencing the shopping malls (Bloch, Ridgway, & Dawson, 1994; Brochado, Oliveira, Rita & Oliveira, 2018; Romeo, Codina, Yepes-Baldó, Pestana & Guàrdia, 2013; Ruiz, Chebat, & Hansen, 2004; Sit & Birch, 2014). The diversity of these activities demonstrates that the purpose of going to shopping malls goes further than consumption. In sum, drawing on the variables this literature has pointed out, the present study aims to discover the activities accomplished at and the experiences of visiting malls in Barcelona, in order to characterize their users by gender, age, what they do there, and how shopping centers are experienced, offering new trends about the potential of shopping malls as placed-based leisure settings.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

The respondents were 411 men and 379 women, aged 16-56 yrs. ($M = 35.87$, $SD = 9.74$), from the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (which includes 36 municipalities). For analysis purposes, age values were divided into five intervals: up to 19 years (1.9%), 20-29 (29.6%), 30-39 (32.7%), 40-49 (24.3%), and 50 plus (11.0%) – four people (0.5%) did not give information about their age. Distribution of the quotes was based on general population statistical data available, according to the Catalonia Statistics Institute (IDESCAT by its Catalan language acronym: <https://www.idescat.cat/tema/xifpo>).

All subjects gave written informed consent prior to the collection of the research data. The requirements of the Ethics Committee of the University of Barcelona were applied to the study, which meant that additional approval for the research was not required as the data obtained did not involve animal or clinical experimentation. Additionally, this study complies with the recommendations of the General Council of Spanish Psychological Associations (Consejo General de Colegios de Psicólogos) and the Spanish Organic Law on Data Protection (15/1999: Jefatura del Estado, 1999).

2.2 Procedure, Instrument, and Data Analysis

An on-line panel was used to recruit the sample; panelists were recruited by invitation from the research team. The panel respected the privacy law previously acknowledged by the panelists, also following the established empirically tested guidelines covering the use of online panels (e.g., Scherpenzeel & Toepoel, 2012). The convenience sample followed quotas for gender (men and women) and age (from 15 to 64). They were admitted to the sample on the basis of an initial screening question about having visited any shopping mall in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area in the week before collecting the data, using a previously-tested ad hoc questionnaire. The final analy-

sis included variables such as gender, age, frequency of attendance (daily, weekly, monthly, or less than monthly), activities performed while visiting shopping centers (listed according to the pilot test results), and evaluations of the experience of visiting shopping centers (through 5-point scale-items response categories ranged from 'Totally disagree' to 'Totally agree'). On average it took 12 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The relationships among gender, age, frequency of attendance, and the activities performed at the shopping centers were explored with Pearson's Chi square. Scores obtained with the items for the experience of the visit were analyzed with either Student's *t* (in comparing groups for gender and activities) or One-Way ANOVAs (in the cases of age and frequency of attendance).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Attendance patterns and activities performed while visiting shopping malls

The frequency of attendance to the shopping malls showed that 33.4% of the participants were monthly visitors; 31.3%, weekly visitors; 31.1%, less than monthly visitors; and only 4.2% visited the shopping mall daily. No significant associations were found among the shopping malls visited, frequency of attendance, gender and/or age.

There were 24 activities the participants performed during their last visit to the shopping mall (Table 1). Two activities, performed by each of the 43.16%, included buying clothes, shoes and home products and walking. Activities performed by approximately one third of the sample included buying food (36.84%), going to a restaurant (32.53%), and buying leisure products (29.62%). Other activities to be underlined were going to movies (21.14%), and trying electronic gadgets (14.68%). The rest of the activities were performed by a small proportion of participants, less than 10% of the total sample.

The performance of activities was associated with gender and age variables (Table 2), as well as with the frequency of attendance (Table 3). As Table 2 shows, gender differences were observed in four activities: buying clothes, shoes and home products ($n = 341$); buying leisure products ($n = 234$); trying electronic gadgets ($n = 116$); and window-shopping ($n = 14$). The proportion of women was higher than men in buying clothes, shoes and home products ($\chi^2 = 19.11$; $p < .001$), as well as in window-shopping ($\chi^2 = 5.34$; $p < .05$). Men were the majority of the participants who had bought leisure products ($\chi^2 = 20.83$; $p < .001$) and tried electronic gadgets ($\chi^2 = 9.91$; $p < .05$) during their visit to the shopping center.

Age intervals were also significantly associated with performing five activities at the shopping mall (see Ta-

Table 1. Activities Accomplished at Shopping Malls (N = 790)

Activities	N	%
Buying clothes, shoes and home products	341	43.16
Walking	341	43.16
Buying food	291	36.84
Going to a restaurant	257	32.53
Buying leisure products	234	29.62
Going to movies	167	21.14
Testing electronic gadgets	116	14.68
Buying cleaning and perfume products	71	8.99
Testing perfume products	48	6.08
Listening to music	32	4.05
Watching a show / performance	16	2.03
Window-shopping	14	1.80
Having a coffee	14	1.80
Buying books	5	0.60
Buying other products (not specified)	10	1.30
Games	6	0.80
Going to the bar	5	0.60
Going to the hairdressing	4	0.50
Meeting somebody	2	0.30
Comparing prices	2	0.30
Going to the laundry	2	0.30
Services	2	0.30
Reading	2	0.30
Other activities (not mentioned above)	3	0.40

Note. More than one activity could be mentioned.

ble 2): buying clothes, shoes and home products ($n = 341$), walking ($n = 341$), buying food ($n = 291$), testing perfume products ($n = 48$), and listening to music ($n = 32$). Participants aged 30-39 predominantly bought food ($\chi^2 = 20.30$; $p < .001$), listened to music ($\chi^2 = 11.93$; $p < .05$), and tested perfume products ($\chi^2 = 11.18$; $p < .05$). This group, as well as participants aged 20-29,

pointed out that they had just walked while visiting the shopping mall ($\chi^2 = 12.48$; $p < .05$). Participants aged 20-29 were also the main group that bought clothes, shoes and home products ($\chi^2 = 11.07$; $p < .05$).

These activities were also associated with the participants' frequency of attendance to those places (see Table 3). Weekly visitors tend to buy food ($\chi^2 = 52.47$; $p < .001$) and cleaning/perfume products ($\chi^2 = 33.17$; $p < .001$), as well as go to a restaurant ($\chi^2 = 13.42$; $p < .05$) and to movies ($\chi^2 = 15.56$; $p < .05$). Even so, the proportion of monthly visitors buying leisure products ($\chi^2 = 7.46$; $p < .05$) is slightly higher than that of the weekly amount.

In sum, activities performed in the shopping malls appear to be associated with gender, age, as well as frequency of attendance. Specifically, gender and frequency of attendance are each significantly associated with four activities, while age had significant associations with five activities. Men were predominant among the participants who bought leisure products and tried electronic gadgets; buying clothes/shoes/home products, and window-shopping were performed mainly by women. With regard to the frequency of attendance, going to either a restaurant or the movies was accomplished weekly, a frequency which also characterized the performance of buying cleaning and perfume products; buying leisure products, in general, was performed monthly. Participants aged 30-39 were the majority of those who walked, bought food, tested perfume products and listened to music, while buying clothes, shoes and home products was characteristic of participants aged 20-29.

3.2 Experiencing shopping malls

In valuing the experience of visiting shopping malls, higher values were obtained with the statements 'Their clients are diverse' ($M = 3.65$; $SD = 0.86$) and 'I meet people similar to me' ($M = 3.23$; $SD = 0.92$). Lower scores were given to the items about the shopping mall as a meeting point ($M = 2.98$; $SD = 1.03$), as a place

Table 2. Prevalence (%) of Activities Accomplished at Shopping Malls According to Gender and Age

Activities	Gender				Age						
	n	Men	Women	χ^2	Until 19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50 - more	NA	χ^2
Buying clothes, shoes and home products	341	43.1	56.9	19.11***	2.3	33.4	29.9	22.6	10.6	1.2	11.07*
Walking	341	51.0	49.0	0.24	1.8	34.0	34.3	20.5	9.4	0.0	12.48*
Buying food	291	52.1	47.9	0.00	1.4	20.9	36.0	29.8	11.6	0.3	20.30***
Buying leisure products	234	64.5	35.5	20.83***	1.3	27.4	32.1	29.1	10.3	0.0	6.23
Testing electronic gadgets	116	65.5	34.5	9.91*	3.4	27.6	34.5	25.9	8.6	0.0	3.57
Testing perfume products	48	41.7	58.3	2.19	0.0	14.6	33.3	31.3	18.8	2.1	11.18*
Listening to music	32	62.5	37.5	1.46	9.4	28.1	34.4	25.0	3.1	0.0	11.93*
Window-shopping	14	21.4	78.6	5.34*	0.0	28.6	28.6	35.7	7.1	0.0	1.37

Note. Only includes activities with, at least, one significant association with either gender or age. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Prevalence (%) Among Participants Who Accomplished Activities at Shopping Malls According to Frequency of Attendance

Activities	n	Frequency of attendance				χ^2
		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than monthly	
Walking	341	5.3	32.6	33.1	29.0	2.92
Buying food	291	4.1	44.5	33.6	17.8	52.47***
Going to a restaurant	257	6.1	37.5	31.0	25.3	13.42*
Buying leisure products	234	3.0	34.6	37.2	25.2	7.46*
Going to movies	167	6.6	40.7	31.1	21.6	15.56*
Buying cleaning and perfume products	71	2.8	60.6	25.4	11.3	33.17***

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

in which we can meet people from our neighborhood ($M = 2.71$; $SD = 1.14$), or the option of going to another place if it were possible ($M = 2.51$; $SD = 0.96$).

Shopping mall experiences were associated with gender and age. Men ($M = 2.04$; $SD = 0.73$) more than women ($M = 1.89$; $SD = 0.78$) perceived shopping malls as a meeting point ($t = 2.71$; $p < .007$). With regard to age (information not tabulated), participants aged 20-29 and 30-39 considered shopping malls as a meeting place ($p < .012$).

Experience perceptions that accompany visits to shopping malls are associated with the frequency of attendance (information not tabulated). With regard to the experience of visiting them, for daily as well as monthly visitors, shopping malls show diversity in clients ($p < .001$). Daily visitors also consider shopping malls as a meeting point ($p < .000$), in which meeting people from the neighborhood is possible ($p < .000$), whereas weekly visitors consider they meet people similar to them at shopping malls ($p < .000$). Less than monthly visitors rated the statement 'I would not come to the mall if there were another place' ($p < .000$) with the highest value.

As can be observed, the more people visit shopping malls, the more they consider shopping centers as meeting points. This experience is also manifested by men (more than women), as well as by young adults (between 20-39 yrs. old).

3.3 The interplay between activities and experiencing shopping malls

Shopping mall visit valuations were associated with the activities performed while going there (Table 5); as a matter of fact, significant associations were found in activities where percentages in the sample ranged from more than 40% to less than 10%. Hence, participants whose activity had been walking (43.16%), manifested their disagreement with the item related to not going to the mall if there were another place to go ($t = 2.10$, $p < .05$). Buying

food (36.84%) is an activity where performers considered shopping malls as a place in which it is possible to meet people similar to them ($t = 2.64$, $p < .001$) and neighbors ($t = 4.31$, $p < .001$). Additionally, those who bought food expressed that they would not have gone to another place if it were possible ($t = 1.97$, $p < .05$). Participants who had gone to a restaurant (32.53%), when visiting the shopping mall, perceived their clients as diverse ($t = 2.43$, $p < .05$). Moreover, participants who had not gone to a restaurant were those who perceived the shopping mall as a meeting point ($t = -3.62$, $p < .001$).

Buying leisure products (29.62%) was another activity whose accomplishment (or not) shows significant associations with shopping mall visit evaluations. So, participants who bought these products considered the shopping mall as a place in which similar people are found ($t = 2.61$, $p < .001$). With regard to going to movies, participants that performed this activity (21.14%) valued shopping malls as a place in which neighbors could be found ($t = 2.23$, $p < .05$). Contrasting with this tendency, participants that did not go to movies valued the

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations Regarding Perceptions of the Experience of Visiting Shopping Malls (N = 790)

Experience of visiting malls	M	SD
I meet people similar to me	3.23	0.92
The mall is my meeting point	2.98	1.03
Their clients are diverse	3.65	0.86
I would not come to the mall if there were another place to go	2.51	0.96
I meet people from my neighborhood here	2.71	1.14

Note. Scores refer the following answer options:

1 = *Totally disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neither disagree nor agree*, 4 = *Agree*, 5 = *Totally agree*.

Table 5. Group Differences Between Individuals Who Did or Did Not Accomplish Activities in Shopping Centers on the Experience of Visiting Them

Activities		n	I meet people similar to me			The mall is my meeting point			Their clients are diverse			I would not come to the mall if there were another place to go			I meet people from my neighborhood here		
			M	SD	t	M	SD	t	M	SD	t	M	SD	t	M	SD	t
Walking	Yes	341	3.24	0.93	0.22	1.91	0.77	-1.98*	3.67	0.87	0.50	2.38	0.66	0.51	2.72	1.15	0.22
	No	449	3.22	0.91		2.02	0.75		3.64	0.86		2.36	0.69		2.70	1.13	
Buying clothes, shoes and home products	Yes	341	3.26	0.90	0.92	1.97	0.76	0.87	3.70	0.84	1.34	2.43	0.66	2.10*	2.77	1.12	1.42
	No	449	3.20	0.93		1.97	0.75		3.61	0.88		2.32	0.68		2.65	1.15	
Buying food	Yes	291	3.34	0.86	2.64***	1.96	0.72	-0.44	3.70	0.81	1.13	2.43	0.64	1.97*	2.93	1.08	4.31***
	No	499	3.16	0.95		1.98	0.78		3.62	0.89		2.33	0.69		2.57	1.15	
Going to a restaurant	Yes	257	3.24	0.98	0.25	1.83	0.76	-3.62***	3.76	0.88	2.43*	2.40	0.70	0.89	2.74	1.17	0.58
	No	533	3.22	0.89		2.04	0.75		3.60	0.85		2.35	0.66		2.69	1.12	
Buying leisure products	Yes	234	3.36	0.89	2.61***	1.91	2.77	-1.53	3.68	0.79	0.63	2.38	0.67	0.35	2.68	1.10	-0.34
	No	556	3.17	0.93		2.00	0.75		3.64	0.89		2.36	0.68		2.71	1.15	
Going to movies	Yes	167	3.05	0.96	-2.76***	1.82	0.78	-2.81***	3.68	0.87	0.53	2.26	0.72	-2.12*	2.88	1.14	2.23*
	No	623	3.28	0.90		2.01	.75		3.64	0.86		2.39	0.66		2.66	1.13	
Buying cleaning and perfume products	Yes	71	3.39	0.85	1.69	1.89	0.78	-0.94	3.77	0.83	1.31	2.52	0.62	2.14*	2.90	1.09	1.57
	No	719	3.21	0.92		1.98	0.76		3.64	0.87		2.38	0.68		2.69	1.14	

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

shopping mall as a meeting point ($t = -2.81$, $p < .001$) where similar people can be found ($t = -2.76$, $p < .001$), also disagreeing with the affirmation concerned with not going to the shopping mall if there were another place to go ($t = -2.12$, $p < .05$). In addition to this, participants who bought perfume and cleaning products (8.99%) at the shopping mall manifested their disagreement with the item about not going to the shopping mall if another place were available ($t = 2.14$, $p < .05$).

In sum, these associations brought to light which activities are more linked to the experience of visiting shopping malls. Going to the movies was the activity that offered the highest number of significant associations (four), followed by buying food (three significant associations), and going to a restaurant (two). Activities that only showed one significant association were: walking; buying clothes, shoes and home products; buying leisure products; and, buying cleaning and perfume products. With regard to the items for the experience of visiting the shopping malls, the statement with more significant associations (four) was 'I would not come to the mall if there were another place to go'; three significant associations were observed with the statements 'I meet people similar to me' and 'The mall is my meeting point'. Two significant associations with the activities was the case of the item 'I meet people from my neighborhood here'. Finally, one significant association was observed with the item 'Their clients are diverse'.

4. DISCUSSION

This research about shopping malls in the Barcelona metropolitan area confirms previous findings from other contexts. It also offers new trends to be studied in future research, especially for place-based leisure experiences in similar settings (e.g., Codina & Pestana, 2010; Jansen-Verbeke, 1987, 1991; Roberts, 1987; Romeo et al., 2013).

Activities have been considered behavioral variables complementary of socio-demographical indicators, which allow us to go into depth about retailing issues (see Bloch et al., 1994; Gilboa, 2009; Rabbiosi, 2015; Ruiz et al., 2004; Sit & Birch, 2014). In this sense, our data reveals characteristics about Barcelona's shopping mall users, according to what they do (including their pattern of attendance) related to their gender and age. Specifically, a higher proportion of women was found in buying clothes, shoes and home products and in window-shopping, while men were the majority in buying leisure products and testing electronic gadgets. With regard to age, participants aged 30-39 predominantly bought food, listened to music and tested perfume products; this group, as well as the group aged 20-29, just walked while visiting the shopping center (participants aged 20-29 were also the majority in buying clothes, shoes and home products). These segmentation issues could be completed with information about socio-economic indicators such as income, or the time distribution people have during either workdays or weekends.

Moreover, it should be mentioned that all the activities performed in the shopping malls were not directly addressed to consumption (especially the most accomplished); so walking, testing products, listening to music or watching a show/performance do not explicitly imply buying. Considering this, further research should take into account not only the type but also the meaning any activity has for the person that accomplishes it. Put differently, activities not related explicitly with consumption may be useful for promoting attendance of shopping malls, specifically if they are addressed to the targets that predominantly perform the activities. In this sense, the role shopping malls play as a meeting point can be underlined, especially when it seems that there is a lack of other places for meeting with the same things to offer shopping malls do.

Even though our data does not allow for specifying the causal influences among activities and visit valuations, these results encourage further research to address precisely whether, in shopping malls, activities favor certain experiences or vice versa. Additionally, differences related to age groups in experiencing shopping malls not only advertise the diversity of needs shopping centers cover for different ages, but also suggests the changes that current users will experience across their lifespan.

By demonstrating the interaction between activities with visit evaluations in shopping malls, this research manifests the potential for place-based leisure in this urban setting within Barcelona's metropolitan area. In this sense, future studies with other groups and from different contexts will offer new data to develop the idea of shopping malls as spaces for place-based leisure.

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