

# Perception of Shoppers on Visual Merchandising in a Philippine City

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## ABSTRACT

Rivalry in mall operations has painted a new shopping culture that is aimed at providing shoppers the necessary convenience and pampering they deserve. The use of visual merchandising is a means of orchestrating a distinct, worthwhile, and pleasurable shopping experience. It is a soundless and effective marketing tool that communicates to the customers in a matter of seconds and instantly trigger their impulse whether to buy or not. This study describes customers' views toward important factors of visual merchandising utilized by retail or department stores or malls to influence their purchasing behavior. The descriptive research method was employed in the study to explain the characteristics of mall-goers. Ninety percent of shoppers usually notice visual presentations of malls, and yet the majority of the shoppers made no buying decision based on impulse or visual effects alone. A simple store environment is enough for them. The top three factors of VM that influence their preference on retail or department stores or malls to visit – well-planned store arrangement and layout, courteous salesperson, and product assortment and broad aisles and more spaces. Customers usually tend to engage in impulse shopping behavior when retail or department store or mall deals and other enticing offers are material, especially those that are price related.

**Keywords** — marketing, visual merchandising, descriptive method, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Visual merchandising, according to (Kaur and Patiala, 2013), is a silent salesperson that communicates the sales message without having to try so much but simply present visual tools. With a few seconds allotted for each marketer or mall operator to take hold of the attention of a prospective passing customer. They will endeavor to make each precious second count with the hope of a profitable encounter. This merchandising activity is tied to strategic marketing to withstand the ferocious business war. Competition in retail has transformed the way merchandisers or mall operators think and do business. They have to rise above the mere resemblance of their offerings at par with that of their rivals (Saini, Gupta, and Khurana, 2015). Modern shopping has never been pleasurable and enjoyable an experience (Sharma, Tiwari, and Verma, 2008). The jaunt to the mall is a way of life rather than just one that is related to consumption (Kim, Lee, and Suh, 2015). It is seen as a culture, “a status symbol and a one-stop retail solution.” A good attraction for every shopper who is promised with convenience and other comforts and pampering (Swamynathan, Mansurali, and Chandrasekhar, 2013).

Gone are the days when malls or shopping complexes are merely for purchasing items. Today, it is an avenue for leisure activities where entertainment gives them a sense of connection and shopping trips as a social activity, which involves being with others. The managers or mall operators have expanded their focus on satisfying customers to be more than just product and now to include the customer’s experience as cited in (Hu and Jasper, 2015). They are now viewed as one who orchestrates the shopping experience of mall-goers. Traditionally, they were regarded as one who puts in one complex a wide array of products. Nowadays, it has included the buzzword – shopping experience. The customers’ expectations are always at the top of the list for retailers. They have placed so much emphasis on the presentation of their merchandise to please the customers. The mall operators have resorted to utilizing visual merchandising.

With this, the researcher endeavors to identify the factors that influence their preference for retail stores or malls to patronize and what triggers impulsive buying.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on the identification of possible factors affecting shoppers' perception of the visual merchandising activities and efforts of shopping complexes in DU City, Philippines, and its link to their impulse purchases. Specifically, it endeavors to answer: (1) the profile of the shoppers in DU City, in terms of (a) age, (b) sex, (c) civil status, (d) occupation, and (e) individual income, (2) the factors that influence the preference among shoppers toward malls they patronize in DU City, (3) the factors that affect their intention to make impulse purchases, (4) the issues and challenges that shoppers encounter in the shopping complex's visual merchandising efforts.

## FRAMEWORK

The trip to the mall has become a lifestyle for many shoppers. This is the outcome of the marketing activities of mall operators in providing the shopping mall brand experience (Kim, Lee, and Suh, 2015). Customers have become sophisticated beings when it comes to their shopping expectations. For retailers, keeping up with this pace requires them to offer a multi-sensory and all-encompassing shopping experience (Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, and Roggeveen, 2014). Shopping used to be a burdensome activity until the mall culture was introduced and adopted where shopping for varied merchandise is under a single roof of a mall. A one-stop-shop facility. It has turned into an enjoyable, leisurely, and social experience and has become a favorite past time for housewives and teens (Sharma, Tiwari, and Verma, 2008). Today's mall patrons are leisure driven, according to Nicholls *et al.*, 2002 as cited in Hu and Jasper (2015). Some shoppers make conscious effort to shop at malls which offer experience package that fit their shopping behavior and personality. It is a key mall preference criterion. Shoppers' satisfaction gets manifested by their overall enjoyment of the attributes of the mall. They cannot help but enjoy the pampering of mall operators.

In the Philippines, mall operation has led to a "mallings" culture that plays a central role in the day to day urban lives of Filipinos marked by the sense of comfort it brings. This retail sector attributes much of the country's development as it runs under the capitalism platform. Business tycoons of the country who operate malls and superstores make it to the top list of the country's richest people, thereby reflecting the lucrative nature of the business (Rico and de Leon, 2017).

Mall operators are often caught up in intensifying their efforts to provide better services to their customers and in an attempt to win their patronage (Ibrahim and Ng, 2002). The retail platform has been faced with numerous challenges, as some of its players operate the old fashion way. As the numbers rise, retail innovation becomes a must. It must now offer customers “ultra-convenient shopping experience” [pp.175] (Teo, Rathi, and Saidi, n.d.) on its mix of merchandise, the person they hire, pricing strategies, and variety of products are the noticeable store image elements that stimulate customer satisfaction.

In Singapore, its retail sector remains competitive. Retail space is expanded to meet the growing number of tenants entering the retail game. The country, despite being known as “Southeast Asia’s shopping hub” (Fatt, 2001), is challenged by its regional rivals from the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, among others. Retailers who do not level up their game or keep up with competition just wrap up their businesses and leave. Some retailers who used to cater to tourists are now turning their attention to local shoppers. Consumer profile in Singapore is turned out to be an aging population. This would only command the need for shopping convenience, which the retailer has to address. Singaporeans are always on the hunt for quality services, merchandise, and facilities. Retailers who adhere to their standards are surely rewarded as their customers are set to enjoy and pay for it. Mall operations should be able to keep up with the contemporary conditions and stick to providing customer satisfaction to its target market. It may be in the form of better facilities and “communal activities.”

Moreover, careful selection of the tenants in malls is important. Most customers are attracted to trying something new in each of their store visits - from food, products, movie, and other offerings. Creativity is key. Retailers in Singapore have eyed on the commuting public as an opportunity to expand their market. They have brought their mall operations close enough to the rail transit system, and yet they must study customers’ perceptions and behavior about it carefully. Fatt (2001) found that consumers are after accessibility and convenience, the array of products carried, and the cleanliness and good air-conditioning MRT malls have to offer.

Moreover, facilities also matter to these customers. MRT malls are very visible and convenient for commuters. However, their shopping stopover is not primarily about purchasing but more with a form of recreation. These types of customers need to be enticed and drawn to the mall through its features. There must be orchestration of visual and audio effects to give them reasons to visit and eventually buy products. MRT malls offer a portfolio of products and services

to Singaporeans in the convenience of a single location, a shopping complex where entertainment, food, shopping, and other services are made available to customers. This is highly favorable as massive foot traffic would only mean more customers and sales.

Many players entering the retail industry. It is apparent for retailers to differentiate themselves from each other. As products are similar, one of the areas in which they can differentiate themselves is store presentation in terms of visual merchandising. Mall operators are very keen on designing and giving attention to details on the first touchpoint with the customers – the window display (Mehta and Chugan, 2013). Visual merchandising may not be the top reason; mall operators cannot just ignore this. There are many types of customers to please and impress. Some of these customers are easily coaxed by the magic of visuals and aesthetic tricks (Kaur and Patiala, 2013). It would be pointless for retailers or mall operators to have untargeted strategic marketing. The employment of visual merchandising tactics must be carefully planned and executed to capture the right shoppers-audience for their activities. Otherwise, they will end up incurring losses that do not add any returns to their shopping complex. The key to every mall operator's success is his understanding of every customer (Garg, 2014.).

According to (Garg, 2014), there are three characteristics and kinds of consumers. They must be carefully studied as their store choice behavior would affect every mall operator's moves. First, recreational shoppers. These are the type who view shopping as fun, and a visit to stores are, most of the time, unplanned. They have all the time in the world to browse every corner of the shopping mall. These are the mall operators' favorite since these shoppers are impulse buyers too. Second, apathetic shoppers. These shoppers do not have an interest and are often reluctant to shop. Shopping for them is a boring activity. They want to seal every deal as soon as possible. They can be a mall operator's well-loved shopper as they buy branded products, not taking too much fuss of the price attached to it, and lastly, the economic shoppers. These are the types who love to save money. Each of their store visits is planned and complete with the shopping list that matches their budget. Big discounts make their day. Retailers have given much attention to consumers these days and capitalize and devote time and resources to cater to their every need. Luniya and Verghese (2015) posed a challenge on the shifting shopping behavior among consumers from traditional planned to one that is based on impulse. Impulse buying can provide lots of opportunities to retailers. Traditionally, customers enlist items to buy before going to the store.

But with several factors affecting them, this has changed over time. Now, they make unplanned purchases. Unplanned purchases are those done without prior idea nor intention. It can range from a random purchase to those when exposed to item or advertisement allows them to remember about it and then buy, to purchases that one has no idea of buying but upon seeing the item thinks of its benefits and to those that are planned and intended purchases that will have to be considered in relation to price and other elements to evaluate. Impulse purchases are based on customers' demographics, environmental, personal considerations, and other factors.

Customers' age, gender, and income affect their decision on buying items based on impulse. The way retailers stage their merchandising activities can trigger impulsive buying too. Moreover, customers make unplanned purchases based on mood, identity, culture, and the satisfaction he gets out of it. Wherever the customer looks, either inside or outside the store and which paints a favorable picture of the store and good enough to give a push to purchase products is a manifestation of visual merchandising (Babu, 2016). On the part of the retailer, this provides the basis for their tactics to be able to influence customers in their choice whether to patronize or not the store. Impulse buying is a behavior done in a swift manner with no thought of alternatives. It is common and has become a principal factor for retailers in their strategic moves. A study by Kaur and Patiala (2013), their findings were that a good number of customers resort to impulsive buying after an effective visual merchandising activity initiated by malls. Visual merchandising is a stimulus that triggers the natural tendency of shoppers to make impulse or unplanned buying behavior even upon entering the mall. It is reinforced by in-store browsing where purchase urges are at its peak. However, despite the visual lure – a shopper's spending may not likely show their fascination. And much to the dismay of the mall operators, as they will have to shoulder all the expenses on the events, they have sponsored in an attempt to bait customers into spending their money (Hu and Jasper, 2015).

Competition has driven retailers to take radical moves to outsmart their competition through differentiation. One way to do this is through visual merchandising. Saini, Gupta, and Khurana (2015) revealed that visual merchandising activities have bearing over buyers' behavior, and this includes unplanned buying. Some authors signified that the way retailers visually manage their stores trigger customers to behave the way they do. While other authors believed that retailers are able to distinguish their products apart from their rivals through visual merchandising, which allows them to stay ahead in the

competition. In addition to that, a few authors considered that customers exposed to visual merchandising activities need not necessarily enjoy the merchandise on display and buy it thereafter, but the exposure escalates the chances of purchase up to four times or more. Visual merchandising efforts lead to impulse buying as it is intensified by elements of color, merchandise on display, music being played, lighting effects, good sanitation, and store display. Stores that visually manage their channels position themselves into the minds of customers. It helps them recall significant events and spend more money on it. However, its impact is, to a certain degree. Customers always stand by their own personal choices and the quality of the merchandise on display.

Niazi, Haider, Hayat, Awais, and Hassan (2015) painted visual merchandising and its unadorned beginning to where it has taken the retail industry to a sophisticated level at this contemporary time. They traced it to 1840, where department stores heeded to technological challenge and orchestrated a window display that changed the face of how things were. Le Bon Marche, at that time was the largest in the world and took pride in its massive array of products and large windows. Within the first decade of 1900, visual merchandising activities included leaving the lights on 24/7 even when the store was already closed. This called for the introduction of window shopping. People were fascinated by the visual effects they saw. And then came window displays in the 1930s. Three decades after window displays included social trends in it. The pioneering brands that adopted the development of visual merchandising were Gucci and Prada, two mega-brands who spent a hefty amount on their marketing campaigns to be prominent in the market. In the 21st century, visual merchandising has evolved to include more and more elements including but not limited to displays, signages, merchandise presentation, shelf display, the arrangement of the store, and display windows.

Retail strategies are now pointed at attracting customers in the best way possible. The variety of visual merchandising efforts allow customers to envision how it is like to have the product displayed on the store window. It intensifies their attraction to it and takes the first step towards the store. Visual merchandising includes how windows are being presented, the mannequins and other props displayed the floor configuration and the signages. And all of these, based on the Minal, Sanjay, and Urvashi (2012), proved to be significant and can really influence buying intentions among customers.

The needs and wants of the market have always been the main focus among retailers as they craft methods and strategies. Consumers have changed over time,

and so should the store activities to be staged by retailers. Merchandising activities are revolutionized to be more intensive, purposeful, and skillful since efforts are directed towards consumers' spending more. Soomro, Kaimkhani, and Iqbal (2017) dealt with the impact of visual merchandising on consumer perceptions. It proved to be subliminal and implicit in stirring curiosity to the merchandise. Retailers are faced with the dilemma as to whether their visual merchandising efforts are indeed instrumental in adding merit to customers' exposure and impression. It is their very weapon to entice shoppers towards purchasing goods, whether on an impulse or planned visit or trip to the store. Visual merchandising can cause consumers to decide whether there is the initial contact with the store or a return trip thereafter. It goes through thorough scrutiny that causes them to conclude on the overall standing of the store in terms of its product offerings, service, quality issues, and the delight of customers. The truth of the matter is, it is when the product they intend to buy in their visit to the store is on display, and will they notice the displays being staged. Store displays orchestrate a store's avenue for branding and retailing their merchandise. Retailers communicate their message to their target groups to help them decide on their buying decisions associated with their own realities. How customers judge a store's environment is dependent on the objective of their visit, their perception has a lot to do with this, including mood.

Perceptions of customers are very important as it points out the image the store portrays and its character. Visual merchandising forms, in part, the perception of shoppers as they make their purchasing decisions (Cant and Hefer, 2014). Impulse buying behavior is often triggered by being exposed to visual merchandising activities of malls. Retailers have chosen to include visual merchandising activities as part of their strategic marketing management as it is viewed as critical to weather the turbulent retail competition. Visual merchandising is hailed as the "silent salesperson". It has that lure-factor that draws and magnetizes customers toward merchandises and has become the great influencer of their purchase decision (Saini, Gupta, and Khurana, 2015). Customers, subconsciously, are more active in examining the products on display as visual merchandising is at play in the aesthetics and visual presentation of the store. In-store activities have slowly gained popularity as a means to encourage shoppers to stay longer and buy more in malls. Merchandising is no longer the sole focus of mall operations (Cant and Hefer, 2014). Most customers get enamored by the creativity of merchandisers in presenting their products in a unique manner that supports good aesthetics. The works of merchandisers do

not go fruitless, for it brings about higher sales and foot traffic in the malls, either out of curiosity or the intention to really get hold of the products and take it home. The choice of what malls to patronize will always rely on the basic reasons every shopper has.

It is interesting for retailers to seize customers' interest as they position products to create appealing shopping experiences under a contemporary and diverse shopping atmosphere. Kernsom and Sahachaisaeree (2012) studied on how varied window display design and setups communicate effectively to target markets. Window displays are vital demonstrations of tactics in selling products. It is likened to wrapping products to make it more appealing to stimulate purchase intentions among customers. Effects on lighting, color management, choice of materials, and art staging are put to work to make customers desire to buy the products. However, even with efforts done on store displays that affectively influence consumers, it could not outdo the fact that they were rational in their purchasing decision. The authors mentioned pricing as part of the store image features. The price set by the store is the most enthralling attribute for customers to be able to spend money reasonably. It influences, in a decisive way, a shopper's buying actions. Just like in any other country, the Malaysian market has diverse customer demographics (Teo, Rathi, and Saidi, n.d.). It includes price sensitive to Malaysian consumers. Pricing constitutes an important role in their pre-purchasing decision. In addition, the quality of items is top of the list alongside the discounts customers get from the stores (Kaur and Patiala, 2013). Moreover, a good store image can infuse loyalty among its customers to be able to perform well in its industry (Teo, Rathi, and Saidi, n.d.).

Somoon and Moorapun (2016) viewed the aesthetics of products that can stir interest among buyers more than the value given by customers [tourists] to the function of the product. An on-line survey was conducted to volunteer respondents. In Thailand, they surveyed how customers perceive window display and its effect on the buying plans of customers. The chosen respondents were 150 tourists around the world but did not represent the population, and yet their views are applicable in contributing to the understanding of the impact of store windows to customers. Moreover, the authors explained how the physical environment contributes to how customers respond to the efforts of the store. Customers evaluate in advance the store causing them to advance or retreat. Its impact on customers can either be material or non-material, their product evaluation varies a lot, and their basis for judging do not necessarily follow logical reasoning or the gratification they get from the product. The way customers

behave and respond to the store display on the windows, and its offerings are very telling of the benefits that can be reaped. There is a psychological play that happens to the way customers feel that causes them to purchase or not from the store. Customers' buying intention has been influenced by different elements of window displays. It covers the color, lighting effect, props, and other accessories, mannequins, and how big the window is. Window display triggers customers to behave in a certain manner, which provides the luring factor to result from the possibility of purchase of products.

Gajanayake, Gajanayake, and Surangi (2011) conceptualize that elements of visual merchandising like the layout of the store, color, product display, music, lighting, and cleanliness results in the intention of customers to patronize a store. The results of the study revealed that product display plays the most crucial role among the visual merchandising elements in influencing patronage, cleanliness comes next and followed by color scheme. Music, however, came as the least element considered by customers as they patronize supermarkets. In addition, store atmosphere, loyalty programs, and products contribute to customer experience (Mohd-Ramly & Omar, 2017). However, in department stores, less importance is given to communication, whether direct or indirect, and post communication service since customers do not mind at all due to the self-service nature of its operations. It differs, though, depending on the type of customers who patronize the retail store, whether upper class, middle class, or lower end.

There is a renewed meaning of the word shopping experience. It is in the unique set of multifaceted shopping encounter that fascinates and charms every shopper (Hu and Jasper, 2015). Mall operation competition has brought retailers to offer experiential consumption rather than product consumption alone (Davis, 2012). Shopping complexes are now spacious, well lighted, sweet-smelling, clean, and complete with auditory detail.

The demographics of shoppers have become more and more diverse, and this diversity brings challenges in catering to their every shopping needs and expectations. Retail store and mall operators have leveled up their game in winning the approval of their client base.

The satisfaction of shoppers, whether favorable or not, significantly depends on the shopping atmosphere and environment provided by retail or department store and mall operators. The following factors contribute, favorably or unfavorably, to their shopping experience: ambiance, attractive displays, better window displays, broad aisles, and mall space, color management in the store, courteous sales personnel, good lighting effects, music selection, product

assortment, well-planned store, arrangement, and layout, and other factors. In their overall assessment of the experience package and the degree of their satisfaction would lead to purchases – planned, unplanned, or even both. It is of interest to the mall operators to identify which type of purchases are frequently made by the shoppers as it is vital to their operations. For instance, impulse purchases or impulse buying behavior of the shoppers yield higher profits for them. Thereby, most of their efforts are directed to making the shopping environment as pleasant and leisurely as possible to provide good stimuli for shoppers to spend more money in the malls because of the attention it drew – attributable to visual merchandising. Each customer touchpoint like window displays is carefully planned, designed, and executed, including the other factors mentioned earlier to be able to maximize profits.

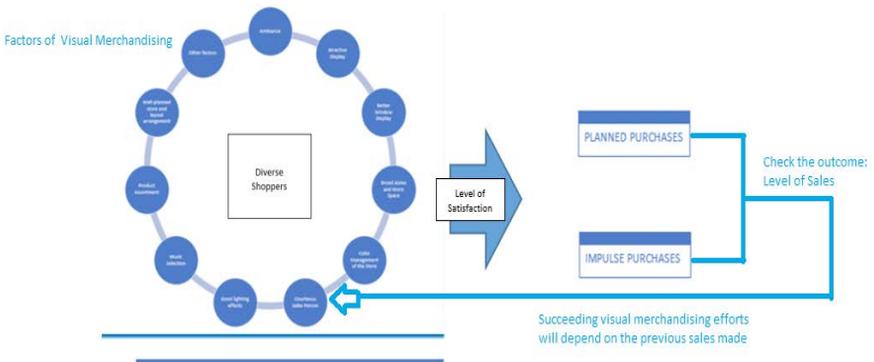


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Site

The research was conducted in DU City, Philippines, where department stores and malls thrive to serve its mix of customers: students, working professionals, government employees, retirees, foreigners, and the locals. It has more or less six shopping complexes classified as either department store or mall and with a mix of home-grown and nationally known shopping complexes.

## Participants

One hundred fifty- seven respondents were picked out of convenience. They were the only ones who agreed to accommodate the request to fill up the survey questionnaire in the two mall food courts right after they finished shopping in the aftermath of the holidays: Christmas and New Year. The selection of respondents was purposive; the data were directly solicited from shopper respondents in their natural habitat and at the height of their shopping experience after very significant celebrations. In effect, the responses are raw, a matter of fact, and exposed to zero to minimal adulteration.

## Instrumentation

Data were gathered through survey questionnaires with ten items be answered, where the respondent provides a set of different responses through ticking yes or no boxes, filling in the words to describe their perceptions, and ranking, among others. It is the primary aim of the researcher to have a data mine on these perceptions of the local shoppers in DU City and extract meaningful information about visual merchandising.

Content validity was done to ensure the constructs characterize those that are to be evaluated by the instrument (Yaghmaie, 2003). Some of the authors and their respective studies on the factors of visual merchandising literature are cited hereafter. The factors are also found on items of the questionnaire; this proves that it is supported by extant literature.

Factor(s) of Visual Merchandising addressed by the author(s)	Author(s) and Year
<i>Attractive displays</i>	Cant and Hefer (2012) Gajanayake, Gajanayake, and Surangi (2011)
<i>Broad aisles and more space</i>	Davis (2012)
<i>Color management in the store</i>	Soomro, Kaimkhani, and Iqbal (2017) Gajanayake, Gajanayake, and Surangi (2011) Kernsom and Sahachaisaeree (2012)
<i>Good lighting effects</i>	Soomro, Kaimkhani, and Iqbal (2017) Gajanayake, Gajanayake, and Surangi (2011) Davis (2012) Kernsom and Sahachaisaeree (2012)
<i>Music selection</i>	Gajanayake, Gajanayake, and Surangi (2011)

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<i>Product assortment</i>	Teo, Rathi, and Saidi, (n.d.) Fatt, J.P.T. (2001)
<i>Well-planned store and arrangement layout</i>	Gajanayake, Gajanayake, and Surangi (2011) Minal, Sanjay, and Urvashi (2012)
<i>Window displays</i>	Somoon and Moorapun (2016); Minal, Sanjay, and Urvashi (2012) Kernsom and Sahachaisaeree (2012) Mehta and Chugan, 2013 Niazi, Haider, and Hayat (2015)
<i>Other items in the study</i>	
<i>Impulse purchasing Behavior</i>	Teo, Rathi, and Saidi, (n.d.)Luniya, P. and Verghese, M. (2015) Babu (2016) Cant and Hefer (2012) Ramly and Omar (2017)
<i>Store image</i>	

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## Gathering of Data

The researcher started the survey process by corresponding with the officers in charge of mall operations to survey the designated area convenient for the respondents and authorized by the management. When permission was given, the actual survey was conducted on weekends, a day or two after Christmas and New Year. This time was favorable as all the spirits of the shoppers were on a spree and high. Each respondent was requested to fill out the survey form. Distribution and retrieval of the survey questionnaire were done on the very same day. However, there were a good number of shoppers who declined to be part of the study – their reason, they are in a hurry or simply wanted to be left alone. The descriptive research method was employed in the study.

## Ethical Considerations

Alsmadi (2008) noted that in terms of ethical challenges, marketing is an area that has numerous defiance. Respondents of marketing research have to be protected about their rights to be informed, to maintain anonymous to parties other than the research team, and free from risks after their participation in research. Online marketing research has breached the confidence of their respondents and demand for guidelines of research ethics. Respondents [consumers] should be informed of their right to choose whether to respond or not to researchers' [interviewers'] inquiry. The latter must also show the appropriate courtesy in dealing with the former. Moreover, truthfulness should also be observed in the entire duration of the research to avoid causing any deception or risk of harming the subjects. Precautionary measures are needed. Researchers should

only distribute questionnaires when the participants are willing and receptive to becoming part of the study. Moreover, the location site of research can also pose challenges as there are regulations to be followed.

This study adhered to the code of conduct expected of researchers in dealing with human subjects [the respondents].

1. The researcher communicated with the two malls through the owner [department store] and administrator [mall]. Both granted permission to distribute the survey questionnaires at the food court. The authorized date and time were specified and special instructions that the said activity will not disturb unwilling to shopper-participants or invade the shopping public's enjoyment in the mall.

2. Customers [respondents] were courteously approached and invited to participate in the survey and asked to sit on the mall's food court. Once willing and amiable, they were handed the questionnaire and pen, the collection of which was at their respective pace. Tokens were given as a sign of gratitude, there were just simple office supplies like pens and pencils, among others. Distribution and retrieval took place on the very same day—an added advantage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The highest percentage of mall-goers in the survey were 21-35 years old and followed by the 17 to 20 bracket. There is almost a good balance between men and women mall-goers as covered in the survey, a 43-57 percentage.

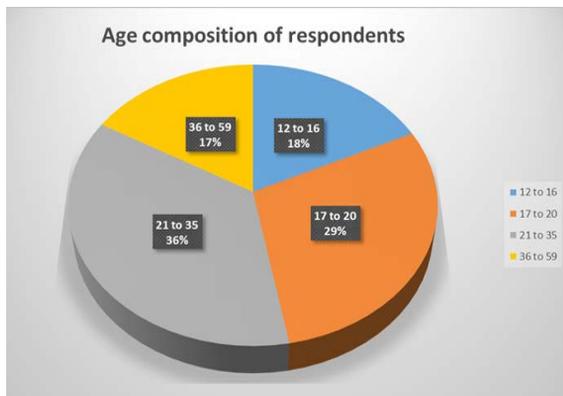


Figure 2.

Seventy-eight percent of the respondents were single, and seventy-five percent of the respondents were students, and also those who were unemployed. These two groups have low purchasing capability as compared to the ten percent of the other respondents who were government employees. As reflected and basing on their income information, the purchasing capability is low. Most of the respondents have low monthly income or allowance.

Table 1. Respondent's Occupation

Type of Occupation	Number of Respondents	%
Government	16	10
Private Employee	13	8
Businessmen	9	6
Professional	1	1
Others (Students, Unemployed, etc.)	118	75
Total	157	100

There is not much expectation among 92% mall-goers; they just want a simple store environment. The most frequently visited shopping center in DU City is LSP, a homegrown, and the first one-stop-shop complex in the city. It is followed by RP, the first and only mall chain. There are more or less six shopping complexes. Almost sixty percent of the respondents visit the mall weekly, and a little more than twenty percent go there once a month. The department or division frequently visited by shoppers is the supermarket. And the second and third divisions are the Ladies Department and Men's Department, respectively. More than sixty percent of the respondents do not make a buying decision on an impulse.

Table 2. Choice of Store Environment

Preference of Store's Merchandising	Number of Respondents	%
A simple store environment	145	92
An extravagant, "showy Store"	12	8
Total	157	100

Ninety percent of the respondents have noticed the visual enhancement efforts initiated by malls. Consciously or unconsciously, mall-goers have been exposed to visual merchandising. The shopper-respondents consider the following

factors as their responses to what will make them purchase items on impulse: product assortment, well-planned store arrangement and layout, and courteous salesperson. However, the order of preference has changed. The top 3 answers in this item are 1 – well-planned store arrangement or layout, 2 – courteous sales personnel, and 3 – product assortment and Broad aisles and more spaces. Nevertheless, these are factors that need to be addressed by the mall operators and managers to encourage further the shoppers to spend more in the shopping complexes.

Table 3. Ranking Factors of Visual Merchandising

Factors of Visual Merchandising to rate	$\sum fx/n$	Rank
Ambiance	1.31	5
Attractive displays themed displays	1.26	4
Better window display	1.37	7
Broad aisles and more spaces	1.25	3
Color management in the store & displays	1.31	5
Courteous sales personnel	1.2	2
Good lighting and its effect	1.36	6
Music selection played by the store	1.48	8
Product assortment	1.25	3
Well-planned store arrangement or layout	0.92	1

## CONCLUSIONS

Shopper demographics present opportunities and drawbacks to mall operators. The result of the study showed that majority are at the age bracket of 21 to 35 this, however, does not directly reflect a favorable condition. There was an indication of low level of income, moreover, most respondents were students who primarily relied on the allowance given to them. The views of both men and women were suitably represented because of the 43-57% representation of both sexes.

Customers just want a modest store, and yet they could still be influenced to buy based on impulse by three attributes of VM in the following order: first is product assortment, second is well-planned store arrangement and layout, and third is courteous personnel. The very same factors were also rated as top influence on their mall preference in the following order: top of the list is well-

planned store arrangement and layout, next is courteous personnel, and the top three is shared by product assortment and broad aisles and more spaces.

With six retail or department stores and malls operating the city and sixty percent of the shoppers visit the shopping complexes weekly, retail stores that meet the expectations and shopping needs of customers get the bulk of mall patrons. This does not come easy with just displays, merchandises, and other orchestrations. It takes more than that. The respondent-shoppers of the city are in no hurry to buy merchandises. Each trip to the mall is planned and with an objective or two in mind.

### **TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH**

The study will be translated to serve as the basis for artists and merchandisers in the planning store's attractive and creative displays and add to the literature stream on visual merchandising and the consumers' behavior as they patronize shopping complexes. Moreover, instructional materials and course outlines in universities can be drawn from this study.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The malls investment in-store environment or visual effects may not yield so much or result in additional or over board spending among shoppers. Mall operators can go with catering to the more basic expectations of well-arranged displays, good product assortments, and courteous salespersons. Anything beyond that is appreciated, but pegs return on the same level in the absence of visual merchandising efforts and activities.

Local shoppers' visit to malls are planned and with a budget at hand. Mall operators can lure shoppers through making available hard to resist on sale items and orchestrate mall events that compel them to stay longer and thus spend more and not on just a few departments in the malls. They must endeavor to delight their customers and provide them with those store display effects that exceeds their expectations for them to feel the shopping vibe. It is always noticed. There is always room for improvement.

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