Shopping malls and commercial strips: an examination of factors affecting shoppers behaviour in Kuwait

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Abstract: Traditional malls are as popular as the modern malls in Kuwait. In this study, the authors examine the shopping orientation and patronage of mall shoppers in Kuwait. A sample of about 2,500 consumers was surveyed and the survey was focused on the factors that influence shopping behaviour. The result of the study shows that females and younger respondents tend to favor modern shopping malls over traditional malls. Mall preference was based on the availability of different shops followed by nice environment. Advertising was found to be the major influence in selecting products and services, while the importance of family, peers, and friends came second followed by price. In Kuwait, most people shop for quality and value rather than price.

Keywords: advertising; Kuwait; product quality; shopping behaviour; shopping mall; shopping motives; traditional malls; value.


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1 Introduction

With the steady increase of large modern shopping malls in Kuwait together with the increased affluence of the Kuwaiti society due to rising oil revenues, western style shopping malls have become an important part of Kuwait society and local culture. However, with the expansion of large shopping malls, a significant portion of the population still uses traditional market places ‘the neighborhood shopping mall strips’ and unplanned business districts with independent small stores. The coexistence of modern shopping malls and more traditional commercial strips in Kuwait and consumers’ attraction for both these market places is a very interesting phenomenon. A significant youth population in Kuwait with plenty of free time and limited places to go for entertainment together with continued government subsidies and generous transfer payments has created a generation of young and older consumers who are willing to spend significant time and money in malls and strips. Rising level of income, search for material comfort, individualistic lifestyles, and mobility have made shopping an important consumer pastime (Reimers and Clulo, 2004). In the US, mall shopping is considered a leisure time activity (Moss, 2007), but in Kuwait it has become a way of life. Lack of leisure-related activities in Kuwait presents mall shopping an important phenomenon and had not been studied previously, hence needs some academic rigor.

The rapid increase in number of shopping malls and increasing demand for goods and services that are offered by these malls in Kuwait is unique in shopping mall behaviour, in an era where the consumers are making fewer mall trips (Nicholls et al., 2002; McColl-Kennedy and Kiel, 2000). The temporal shift of consumer preferences, perhaps has offered a wider selection of goods and services that will cater to the needs of the present generation consumers. Most specifically, mall locations are chosen to maximise target market by locating closer to access routes and populated areas (Farrell, 2003; Underhill 2005). As the number of malls continue to grow, the competition and population pressure on centralised areas lead to the emergence of magnet centres (Ewing, 1997). These magnet centres were polycentric in nature (Parr, 2004) and recently the shopping centre entertainment became the most successful and attractive component of the shopping experience.

Integration of leisure activities as part of shopping mall design has altered functions of the malls. In a seminal study, Reimers and Clulow (2004) found that leisure is the core attribute of shopping mall and shopping strips. Although, shopping malls are more convenient compared to traditional commercial strips, given a relative functional similarity between them indicates that other factors can influence variation in consumer preferences. Considerable research has been performed to understand the consumer preferences and the decision-making process of the buying behaviour. However, few studies have focused on consumer preferences comparing shopping malls and strips (Reimers and Clulow, 2009). Although, buying presumably involves a rational economic decision-making process, oftentimes these decisions are considered to be very much subjective and not rational. Some researchers contend that consumption rationality assumption does not hold outside of the cultural context (McCracken, 1989; Süderdem, 1993; Antonides, 1998). However, others argue that it does hold.

The gulf region economic landscape has changed dramatically within last three decades transforming the economy from old traditional mud brick structures to modern state-of-art buildings. Kuwait is with no exception and has become a very affluent society with current price gross domestic product per capita of $43,722 (International Monetary
The number of modern new malls and size of existing malls continue to increase in urban and semi-urban areas in Kuwait. However, traditional Kuwaiti shopping strips (souks) continue to be popular and very attractive shopping locations among the locals and tourists. The literature studies suggest that as a society becomes affluent, the traditional shopping mall’s retail volume become smaller and less attractive for women (Louargand, 2011). The parallel popularity of traditional and modern malls in Kuwait makes a very interesting study and needs a scholarly inquiry.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the variation in shopping orientation of Kuwaiti consumers towards the shopping malls and commercial strips and to investigate the associated factors that determine consumer orientation. The remainder of the paper is organised into four sections: first, a detailed literature review on consumer preferences concerning the shopping malls and buying decisions is provided; second, the data collection method is outlined; third, the results and discussions are presented. Finally, the summary of the findings is presented.

2 Literature review

In the recent past, a considerable consumer-related research on shopping mall had been focused on patronage and non-patronage behaviour. In the literature studies, objective and subjective measures were used to examine the mall patronage. Pioneering research on mall patronage indicates that loyal customers with positive attitude are likely to show repeated patronage to malls (Dick and Basu, 1994). The critical factor that is associated with patronage behaviour is the loyalty. Different factors influences the loyalty including mall image (Koo, 2003; Hunter, 2006); image and motives (Bellenger et al., 1977; Nevin and Houston, 1980; Finn and Louviere, 1996); convenience, pricing, and quality of shopping centres (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006); mall size and convenience of access (Huff, 1964); atmosphere and friendliness of store people (Bearden, 1977). However, these factors are not uniform across the cultures and regions. In Malaysia, young shoppers are attracted to malls because of the mall interior design, opportunities for socializing and convenient one-stop shopping (Ahmed, Ghingold and Zainurin, 2000) while in India retail environment is a concern among mall shoppers (Sinha, 2003).

Consumers are assumed to buy products to meet their basic needs. Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986) finds that consumers have functional, social and experiential needs. Further, in the buying process, consumers are subjected to experiences and exposures. These experiences and exposures include emotional reflection, social integration, social perception and recognition, and finally consumption as a winning game (Solomon, 2004). Apart from this, the value consumers place on a product depends on the nature of the product (tangibles and intangibles), place, time of the purchase (situation), and other social environmental factors. Consumers make purchasing decisions valuing more of the intangible properties than tangible ones (Forét and Procházka, 2007; Lefkoff-Hagius and Mason, 1990); while other researches indicate that tangible properties of the product are more important (Nelson, 1970; Zeithaml, 1981; Bhatnagar, Misra and Rao, 2000). Kuwait traditional malls may be providing as much as utility as modern malls in terms of meeting the functional and social needs while preserving local culture.

Culture of nations and behaviours are unique and has become consistent over the time (Clark, 1990). The consumers’ buying decisions are influenced by consumer culture.
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Ackerman and Tellis (2001) found that American and Chinese cultural groups have dramatically different shopping practices. Firms develop marketing strategies based on cultural aspect of the consumers (Brennan, Courtney and Luloff, 2009). Although the cultural variables known to have a significant influence on consumer purchases (Laroche, 2002), but little research is known about its impact on consumer mall shopping behaviours (Laroche et al., 2005). In some cultures, gender is known to have an impact on society and consumer behaviour (McCabe, 2001; Palan, 2001). Other researchers have found that market choice and place are not necessarily based on product purchase but rather on social relationship and become more important when a social group consider losing its identify (Miller et al., 1998). Further, the consumer shopping behaviour and belief have an influence on the choice of a marketplace and affect the consumer decision towards shopping (Rajagopal, 2010). McColl-Kennedy and Kiel (2000) have found that in Australia’s once influential strip malls became less dominant. Although, the precise reason for the decline is not known, Teller (2008) maintains that the empirical literature lacks why the consumers show more preferences towards shopping malls compared to traditional strip malls or downtown malls. In a related literature studies, Teller and Reutterer (2008) suggest that consumer’s preference can be cluster around satisfaction, retention proneness, and patronage intention. On the other hand, mall or store characteristics such as ambience of shopping malls, assortment of stores, sales promotions, and comparative economic gains in the malls attract higher customer traffic to the malls (Rajagopal, 2009).

Growth of shopping malls and consumers’ equal attractiveness towards traditional mall strips in Kuwait needs to be examined in context of consumers perception of malls in terms of consumers socioeconomic status, cultural and aggregate retail outlet characteristics.

Based on the previous studies related to mall shoppers behaviour, mall patronage, and loyalty, the following null hypotheses are examined;

\( H_0 1: \) Gender is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination.
\( H_0 2: \) Age is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination.
\( H_0 3: \) Educational attainment is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination.
\( H_0 4: \) Citizenship is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination.
\( H_0 5: \) Employment status is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination.
\( H_0 6: \) Income level is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination.
\( H_0 7: \) Shopping reason is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination.

3 Data and methodology

Measuring consumer preference for shopping mall type is closely related to construction of consumer’s perception, image, and the ability to provide expected service to the consumer. The combination of these complex factors having tangible (Martineau, 1958), intangible (Sherman, Schiffman and Mathur, 2001), and functional (Sinha, 2003) values,
which are likely to shape the consumer preferences and choices. To examine the factors that influence the shopping strips and malls patronage, data were collected using a self-administered survey questionnaire. Almost all the questions had close-ended responses. These responses were included in the survey based on previous studies and literature. The survey was administered in person and in two languages, Arabic and English. In fall 2010, junior and senior students at the American University of Kuwait who were enrolled for the principles of marketing and business research methods conducted the survey across a broad spectrum of consumers in Kuwait. Before commencement of the survey, the students were made aware of the nature and purpose of the study. The survey was conducted during October to December, 2010. The questionnaire was primarily focused on consumer’s demographic information, motives of visiting and purpose of buying, nature and frequency of visit to different shopping centres and the social and economic factors that influence the buying decision. A total of 2,694 observations were collected and of which 2,570 were included in the study. The incomplete observations were excluded in the analysis.

Reimers and Clulow (2009) proposed that mall patronage behaviour can be examined using demand and supply side analysis. The demand side analysis encompasses using the consumer attitude to differentiate the mall and strip patronage behaviour, whereas supply side focuses on malls and strips characteristics that attract the consumers. In this paper, the authors adopt a similar approach but on demand side of the analysis. Consumer personality traits were also used as an explanatory variable. In the mall patronage behaviour, the respondents were asked their preferred shopping location (malls or strips), followed by the primary motives of visiting a shopping mall or strip. Knowing the previous two aspects helps to discover the consumers’ attitude towards their preferred shopping destination. In the supply side of the analysis, the respondents were asked what makes a particular shopping destination attractive to the customers. Two separate set of questions were developed to examine consumers’ motivation. The first set of questions was focused on recreational, experience, and convenience motivation and second set was developed to determine economic motivation.

3.1 Analysis

The data were analysed using SAS software. Different statistical analyses were performed to address the stated research objectives. These analyses include descriptive analysis, ANOVA, and cross tabulation. The descriptive statistics was performed to determine the characteristics of the sample and to examine the shopping motives of the consumers. ANOVA is used to examine the factors that influence consumers most preferred shopping destinations to be shopping strips and malls.

3.2 Descriptive statistics of respondents

Majority of respondents were local (Kuwaiti) citizens (67%), followed by other GCC citizens (8.5%), then Egyptians (6.3%), Lebanese (5.7%), and the rests from other nationalities. The respondent’s gender was skewed towards women (57%) and the rest were men. A greater proportion (52.4%) of the respondents were 21–30 years old followed by 23.7% of less than 20 age group. About 41.1% of respondents were still in school, 31.1% of them have a full-time job and about 12.9% of the respondents were unemployed. About 44.1% of the respondents have an average monthly income of less
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than 500 Kuwaiti Dinars (US$1,750), about 24.4% and 20.9% of the respondents respectively have income between 500 and 1,000 and 1,000 to less than 2,000 Kuwaiti Dinars monthly. Two separate questions were developed to investigate weekly number of trips the respondents make to shopping malls and strips. The results show that the number of trips the respondents makes to shopping malls and strips vary significantly. Of the respondents who visit shopping malls, about 65% of them visit one to three times a week, while only 52% of the respondents make one to three trips to shopping strips. About 5% of the respondents make three to five trips a week to shopping strips while about 17% of them make similar number of trips to shopping malls.

By age, older people, over 50, tend to visit malls less frequently than younger people. In fact about 37% of the ‘older than 50’ group indicated that they do not go to malls. Compared to malls, less people visit traditional downtown shops. In fact 37% of correspondents never visit these shops, while 52% of them visit these traditional shops one to three times per week. By age, younger people, less than 30, tend to visit traditional downtown shops less frequently than older people. Correspondents in the 30-50 range are the major visitors of downtown strips. Most of them visit such stores one to three times per week.

3.3 Shopping motives

The consumers’ motives are important factors that will determine mall patronage choice. The major reason for shopping was for need by 54% of females, compared to 70% of males. That is almost half of the females go shopping for reasons other than purchasing what they need. This study results indicate that the 61% of the respondents visit retail outlets to buy what their needs, while 25.5% of the respondents shops for fun or as part of their leisure. About 8.5% of the respondents visit a retail store just to-go-out and spend their time. The remaining respondents visit retail store for combination of the above purposes. The consumers in Kuwait are predominantly functional shoppers and this findings contradict some of the previous findings where the consumers primary motive to shop is for shopping experience (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Khare, 2011). The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1  Shopping mall patronage motives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motives</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Row total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To buy what I need</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>1537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For pleasure/fun</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To-go-out</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column total</td>
<td>1097</td>
<td>1426</td>
<td>2523</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey results indicate that about 39.2% of the respondents prefer fashionable shopping malls compare to 7.8% prefer traditional shopping strips. Surprisingly, about 38% of the respondents prefer malls and strips (both) while the remaining 14.4% did not have any preference for a particular type store format. Very few respondents indicated that they only prefer traditional strips. This result is not surprising. Dunne and Lusch (2008) reported that a car-oriented society is less likely to prefer shopping strips.
In Kuwait, there are 1.2 million cars for 3 million population and significant proportion of the local population own cars. A larger proportion of respondents prefer both malls and traditional strips, which indicate traditional shopping strips are as equal as attractive as malls. Then the respondents were asked to state the factors that make the store typed to be the most preferred store. Of those who prefer mall most, 31% of the respondents stated that having different shops and nice surrounding environment make the mall to be most attractive. About 25.2% of the respondents stated that they prefer shopping strips because of different shops that can be found in strips, followed by 21% of the respondents found that shopping strips have nice surrounding environment while 22% found that mall/shop layout make the shopping easier in shopping strips.

About two-thirds of the respondents make about one to three weekly trip to shopping malls while only half of them make one to three trips to traditional shopping strips. Previous research suggests that functional or purpose-driven customers likely to make fewer mall visits compared to leisure-driven customers (Anderson et al., 1999). Hence, the results indicate that traditional shopping strips’ retail outlets sell products that meet the functional needs of the consumers. In each visit to shopping mall on average about 38.2% of the respondents spend between 1 and 3 hours while 33% of them spend between 3 and 5 hours. Interestingly, these figures are very much in contrast with time spent in shopping strips, where the majority of the respondents (42.4%) do not spend any time, while about 38.7% of them spend between 1 and 3 hours. In a related literature, Dunne and Lusch (2008) found that shopping strips are located close to working population and tend to offer one stop multi-purpose shopping. With regard to what do they consider in buying; about 48.1% stated for best value (price/quality), 26.3% high quality, and 12.8% for brand names. When the respondents were asked to rank the most important factor that influence buying decisions, about 22.6% indicated advertisement; about 17.9% indicated family; about 25.3% listed peers and friends; 2.3% listed salesman; about 22.9% indicated price, and 8.9% indicated promotion that influence them the most.

The data analysis specifically focused on gender and shopping preference, the factors that influence the selection of the type of shopping centre that being preferred by the consumer, the location characteristics that attract the consumer to a particular preferred shopping centre, and finally the factors that influence consumers’ buying decision. Although, Fischer and Arnold’s (1994) egalitarian orientation likely to be found for some traditional societies, like in Kuwait gender role norms are institutionalised. Apart from entertainment and rest, shopping centres also caters to the cultural needs (Pride and Ferrell, 1983). As such, men and women tend to have different frames of reference, motives, and behaviour as they shop in different shopping centres. Our analysis first focused on the shopping centre preference choice for male and female consumers. Cross tabulation between the variables and chi-square test results are presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Shopping malls</th>
<th>Shopping strips</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>No preference</th>
<th>Row total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>1103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>1442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column Total</td>
<td>1016</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>2545</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Chi-square statistics value 58.67 and $p < 0.0001$
The results show that majority of men and women respondents prefer shopping malls compared to shopping strips. It is known that some specific malls and shopping centre characteristics are associated to gender. For example, Lee, Ibrahim and Hsueh-Shan (2005) found that shopping centre features, special events, and value-added features are attracted to men. Females prefer the shopping malls about 50% more as men, while men prefer shopping strips twice as much as females. This result is consistent with the previous studies. Dholakia (1999) found that women are twice more likely to use the shopping malls than men.

Previous research indicates that traditionally consumers visit malls frequently because they offer a wider variety of merchandise in single location, while other research suggests that mall or store attributes are important for consumers’ buying decisions (Wilhelm and Mottner, 2005). Other literature studies indicate that the consumers moved away from malls and look for specialty stores or discount shops (Kang, Kim and Tuan, 1996). The next analysis focused on factors that influence most preferred shopping centre to be shopping malls or shopping strips. An ANOVA analysis was performed on preferred shopping centre being the dependent variable and gender, age, level of education, citizenship, employment, income, reason for shopping are being the independent variables. The ANOVA test examines whether the means of various independent variables used to explain the preference of a particular shopping centre vary over a particular shopping centre over the other shopping centres. For the purpose of this analysis, a separate dummy variable was used one (1) being if a particular shopping centre is preferred and zero (0) otherwise. The null hypotheses of the variables and the results from the ANOVA tests are given in Tables 3 and 4, where the dependent variables are preferred shopping centres are malls and shopping strips, respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Null hypotheses</th>
<th>ANOVA test results</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H0 1: Gender is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination</td>
<td>$F(1,2226) = 58.47, p &lt; 0.05$</td>
<td>Reject the null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H0 2: Age is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination</td>
<td>$F(4,2226) = 21.59, p &lt; 0.05$</td>
<td>Reject the null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H0 3: Educational attainment is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination</td>
<td>$F(3,2226) = 2.65, p &lt; 0.05$</td>
<td>Reject the null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H0 4: Citizenship is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination</td>
<td>$F(7,2226) = 3.41, p &lt; 0.05$</td>
<td>Reject the null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H0 5: Employment status is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination</td>
<td>$F(4,2226) = 1.28, p &gt; 0.05$</td>
<td>Do not reject the null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H0 6: Income level is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination</td>
<td>$F(4,2226) = 0.72, p &gt; 0.05$</td>
<td>Do not reject the null</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H0 7: Shopping reason is not associated with mall as preferred shopping destination</td>
<td>$F(3,2226) = 7.71, p &lt; 0.05$</td>
<td>Reject the null</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results in Table 3 show that consumers’ preference of shopping malls as preferred shopping centre is associated with gender, age, education, citizenship, and shopping reason. While the results in Table 4 show that the selection of shopping strips as preferred shopping location is associated with gender, age, employment, and shopping reason. Although the gender, age, and shopping reasons are associated with most preferred shopping location as shopping malls and traditional shopping strips, education, status of employment, and citizenship differentiate between the two shopping destinations.

Interestingly, there is a significant association between education attainment, citizenship, and shopping malls as preferred shopping destination. Among those whose preferred shopping destination is malls, about 87% of them have high school and college degree education. The mall characteristics that are attracted to the education group are mall surrounding environment, different shops, and a mall layout. Importantly, about two-third of those who prefer shopping mall as their preferred shopping destination are locals (Kuwaiti’s) and the same characteristics (mall surrounding environment, different shops, and a mall layout) found to be attractive for the locals to visit the malls. To have a better understanding of why the consumers in Kuwait prefer shopping malls or shopping strips as most preferred shopping centre, a cross tabulation was constructed between shopping centres and selected characteristics of shopping centres. The results of the cross tabulation along with the chi-square test is presented in Table 5.
Table 5  Shopping centre characteristics and preferred malls/strips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shopping centre characteristics</th>
<th>Malls</th>
<th>Strips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nice surrounding and environment</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive architecture</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mall/shop layout make the shopping easier</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are varieties of shops</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good place to socialise</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to residence</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers are frequencies, chi-square statistics value 37.71 and $p < 0.0001$

An equal number of respondents prefer shopping malls because the malls have different shops to shop about and have a nice surroundings and environment, while a significant number of respondents prefer shopping mall as mall layout makes the shopping easier. Mall architecture appears to be less important while the proximity to the residence is least important to those who to prefer to shop at shopping malls. In general, the malls are known to be located in geo-demographic targets, which are in close proximity to consumers (Farrell, 2003; Underhill, 2005). It is possible that sometime consumers may travel long distances to achieve their shopping motives or overcome the constraints. The shopping motives might include multipurpose shopping (Ghosh, 1986) or buying different goods on the same trip while the constraints could be time and income (Kang, Kim and Tuan, 1996). Different shops that are available in the shopping strips is relatively more important for those who prefer to shop at shopping strips, while about 21% of each would prefer to shop at shopping strips because of nice surroundings and environment, and shop layout. About 12.3% of those who prefer to shop at shopping strips found that it was a good place to socialise and closer to their residence.

4 Conclusion

Shopping malls and traditional shopping strips continue to be popular and attractive to shoppers in Kuwait. The findings are not consistent to what other researchers have observed in US and Australia, where shopping malls numbers have been declining. Women are more attracted to shopping malls and men are more attracted to shopping strips. Culture plays a dominant role in Kuwaiti society. Women are less likely to take part in outdoor leisure activities and shopping malls may be an alternative location to offer leisure. Subsidised fuel prices and the absence of any form of tax make the travel cost cheaper and shoppers visit shopping centres disregarding proximity to their residence and making more frequent weekly trips. Younger and middle-aged (less than 30 years) shoppers are more likely to go to malls while middle-aged and older shoppers are prefer to visit shopping strips. Traditional strip-shop layout and vehicle accessibility to the strips may be still attractive to shoppers. Surrounding environment, different shops and shop layout make the malls to be preferred shopping destination.
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