

## Consumer Acceptance of Urban Open-Air Mixed-Use Centers: A Cross-Generational Comparison

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The purpose of this study is to investigate factors influencing college students' and senior citizens' (age 60 and older) interest in and acceptance of urban open-air mixed-use shopping centers versus traditional regional mall centers. Data were gathered regarding existing open-air malls in Florida, and a questionnaire was developed to measure attitudes of college students and senior citizens, as well as shopping preferences and knowledge about open-air and traditional malls. Senior citizens ranked eleven qualities of traditional malls and nine qualities of open-air malls more favorably than college students, even though college students tend to go to malls more often and spend more money than senior citizens. The majority of consumers stated that they have no preference for shopping at open-air versus traditional malls. Weather tends to be an important factor differentiating the two, as results indicate that senior citizens prefer to shop in a traditional mall versus an open-air mall setting when weather conditions are less than favorable; college students do as well, but to a lesser degree. All respondents accepted open-air mixed-use centers, and indicated that they do shop for and purchase merchandise at these types of malls.

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### Introduction

Research shows that consumers are generally open to new retail formats. Heitmeyer and Kind (2004), for example, indicate that residents of New Urbanist communities such as Celebration, Florida and Haile Plantation, Florida are open to new retail formats in which to shop. In addition, Anderson, Burns, and Reid (2003) note that consumers are drawn to retail formats that are somewhat new and innovative. Conversely, according to Pacelle (1997), there has been a trend of declining consumer patronage at traditional regional mall centers, leading to a decline in sales growth. Consequently, some anchor stores are moving to new retail formats; one example is the relocation of J.C. Penney's from a traditional regional mall to the open-air Wiregrass Commons in Wesley Chapel, near Tampa, Florida (Sasso, 2005). Wakefield and Baker (1998) report that consumers state that many malls look identical, they do not enjoy the experience in traditional malls, and mall stores often offer the same merchandise. In addition, consumers are not simply shopping; they are also looking for entertainment, whether the entertainment be through the retail format itself or with other establishments such as coffee shops, bars, theaters, music venues, or sports arenas.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence the preferences of college students and senior citizens for urban open-air mixed-use centers versus traditional regional mall centers. The hypotheses below are developed according to the Diffusion of Innovations theoretical framework (Rogers, 1995):

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- H1: There will be significant differences between college student and senior citizen consumers' **awareness and perception** of the open-air mixed-use shopping centers as a "new" shopping format in which they would like to shop.*
- H2: There will be significant differences between college student and senior citizen consumers' **willingness to shop and purchase merchandise** in open-air mixed-use shopping centers versus traditional regional mall centers.*
- H3: There will be significant differences between college student and senior citizen consumers' **level of perceived risk** in switching to this open-air mall.*
- H4: There will be a significant difference between college student and senior citizen consumers' **preference for level of customer service** while shopping.*
- H5: There will be significant differences between college student and senior citizen consumers' **adoption or rejection** of the open-air mall shopping format.*
- H6: There will be a significant difference between college student and senior citizen consumers' **utilization of mall amenities**, such as entertainment or housing.*

## Review of Literature

### *Open-Air Mixed Use Shopping Centers*

According to the ICSC (2004), the open-air mall may be defined as "an attached row of stores or service outlets managed as a unit, with on-site parking usually located in front of the stores with common areas that are not enclosed, often referred to as an 'open-air center.'" The mixed-use center contains "retail and service outlets as well as entertainment, office, hotel, residential, eateries, recreation, sport stadiums, and/or cultural venues." Conversely, the traditional regional mall is defined as a "center that provides general merchandise and services in full depth and variety. Its main attraction is the combination of anchors, with numerous fashion-oriented specialty stores" (ICSC, 2004).

The aim of urban open-air mixed-use malls is to fulfill consumers' retail needs along with their desire for entertainment. For example, Mizner Park in Boca Raton, Florida, offers a variety of entertainment options. It is home to the Boca Raton Museum of Art and Mizner Park Amphitheater, and since it opened in 2002, Mizner Park Amphitheater has presented at least 20 concerts and events each year. The Amphitheater seats up to 4000 guests and is adjacent to the Mizner Park shops. The

Avenue Viera in Viera, Florida not only has a 16-screen stadium-seating movie theater on site, but it also presents regular events, such as concerts, hosted by many of the retailers found in the center.

City Place, located in West Palm Beach, Florida, also exemplifies the entertainment options that can be found at these new urban open-air mixed-use centers. In addition to a 20-screen movie theater, City Place is also the home of the Harriet Himmel Theater for Cultural and Performing Arts. The Himmel Theater offers cultural programming for the community, including music and dance, and can accommodate 600 guests for theater performances and up to 900 for receptions. City Place also offers occasional live entertainment, such as CityJams, where live music from South Florida musicians is featured. This event is sponsored by The Palm Beach Post and takes place on certain Friday and Saturday nights during the summer.

By providing consumers with entertainment, these urban open-air mixed-use centers are also addressing some of the characteristics of regular shopping malls that consumers did not prefer in the study by Wakefield and Baker (1998). In that study, consumers stated that many malls look identical, and that they do not like the shopping experience alone and want to be entertained. Whereas traditional enclosed malls may have similar offerings, urban open-air mixed-use malls combine high-end specialty stores with everything from supermarkets to mass merchandisers.

For instance, St. John's Town Center in Jacksonville, Florida features many smaller, high-end specialty stores, such as Restoration Hardware, Lucky Brand Jeans, Sigrid Olsen, and J. Jill. Alongside these retailers are anchors like DSW Shoes, Dick's Sporting Goods, and Ashley Furniture, plus restaurants, including The Cheesecake Factory, P.F. Chang's, and Maggiano's. Developers of St. John's Town Center surveyed consumers and found they wanted more of a street-type feel in their shopping experience (Geddes, 2003). These findings are also supported by Heitmeyer and Kind (2004). This street-feel is actually a characteristic that is common among urban open-air mixed-use centers. Many centers are designed specifically to give consumers the feeling of walking downtown on Main Street, which creates a very pleasing shopping environment.

The architecture and design of urban open-air mixed-use centers is of the utmost importance. The shoppers' overall experience is enhanced by the unique architecture and visual appeal of the center itself. The exterior of each storefront at St. John's Town Center, for example, has a different architectural style and look, giving the center an old-fashioned downtown feel. Street lamps and trees line the pedestrian streets, and a park in the middle of the Center emphasizes the village-like atmosphere. Mizner Park was also built to resemble a European shopping plaza with its gazebos, fountains, and palm trees. All of these features add to the consumers' experiences while shopping at an urban open-air mixed-use center.

The ambience of these centers is also enhanced through lush landscaping and water features, such as fountains, which are quite a common feature in this mall format. City Place has three fountains on-site; the first "performs" elaborately choreographed displays incorporating lights, water, and music every half hour for visitors, and the other two fountains (the Vicenza Fountain and the Wall Fountain) were both imported from Vicenza, Italy. These fountains, along with lush landscaping and plenty of seating, help

create an ambience in City Place that is distinctive to open-air lifestyle centers. The major difference the open-air mall exhibits over the traditional mall is incorporation of these water features, many of which are interactive for children such as the fountain at Country Club Plaza in Kansas City, Missouri, into beautiful outdoor landscaping.

In addition to satisfying consumers' retail and entertainment needs, many urban open-air mixed-use centers offer residential and office space. Three residential areas are currently located on site at St. John's Town Center, including 450 condominiums and a 120-room hotel. The second phase of the project is expected to open in October 2007 and will include an additional hotel and 500 luxury condominiums. City Place also encompasses both office and residential space; City Place Tower houses offices, and over 570 private residences can be found throughout the center, such as those in The Metropolitan, an urban mid-rise condominium.

While many urban open-air mixed-use centers do incorporate many similar features, they can be found all across the country in various forms. Other notable open-air mixed-use centers outside of Florida include Atlantic Station in Atlanta, Georgia; Aspen Grove in Littleton, Colorado; Deer Park Town Center in Deer Park, Illinois, and Pavilion at La Costa in San Diego, California.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This study is based on the theoretical framework of the Theory of Diffusion of Innovations. Rogers (1995) defines the concept of an "innovation" as an "idea, practice, or object perceived as new by an individual." It is important to note this is the individual's perception of an object as new, and not whether it has, in fact, been recently developed. Characteristics that govern the acceptance of an innovation are:

- *relative advantage* (the degree to which an innovation is perceived as more satisfactory than previous alternatives),
- *compatibility* (the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters),
- *complexity* (the difficulty a person perceives in understanding and using an innovation),
- *trialability* (the degree to which an innovation may be tested on a limited basis),
- *observability* (the degree to which an innovation is visible and communicable to others), and
- *perceived risk* (the degree of risk the consumer feels they will encounter by trying the innovation).

With this concept in mind, this study examines how consumers were made aware of the new mall concept. Surveys were used to gauge their interest in shopping in these locations, evaluate convenience and preferences for this shopping format, collect information on actual purchases made, ascertain level of customer service preferred, and determine the adoption or rejection of this new shopping format by consumers.

Information was also collected on the geographical location of existing open-air malls to determine if marketing campaigns actively inform the consumer about this type of shopping format.

## **Methodology**

### *Sample*

This research study targeted two demographic groups of consumers, college students and senior citizens (60 years of age and older) and investigated their preferences for type of shopping center design and level of customer service. A mailing list was purchased from infoUSA.com to secure the sample for the Florida senior citizen consumers, and the college student responses were obtained through convenience sampling of students enrolled at a major Florida university. These students' official residences were located throughout the state of Florida.

These two demographic groups were chosen, as both are important to the success of open-air centers. College students have much more disposable income to spend for shopping and entertainment today than they did in the past. As reported at the ICSC 2004 research conference in Boston, college students make 60% more shopping trips per year than the average consumer, and they do purchase merchandise while shopping (Lund, 2004). Senior citizens control more than 50% of discretionary income and spend more than \$60 billion annually in the U.S. (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004).

### *Questionnaire*

Data were gathered through a consumer survey developed by the researchers to gain an understanding of interest in, and acceptance of, urban open-air mixed-use shopping centers and traditional regional mall centers for targeted consumers. The questionnaire development was conducted in two stages. The first stage was to gather information on existing open-air malls via site visits, the Internet, and personal communication. Open-air malls were identified in cities throughout Florida and characteristics such as size, amenities, retail establishments, restaurants, and housing were listed. The identified Florida malls were used in stage two of the research.

The second stage was to develop a questionnaire that gathered information about shopping patterns and preferences for Florida consumers; the questionnaire was approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at Florida State University and was pilot tested. The questionnaire was divided into six sections. Section I gathered information about consumer awareness of open-air malls. Section II asked questions about shopping – amount of dollars consumers spend per month, frequency of shopping trips, and mall and store preferences. Open-air and traditional malls' qualities were included in Sections IIIa (open-air) and IIIb (traditional); sixteen qualities were listed, i.e. ample parking, attractive exteriors; these qualities were gathered through the literature as desirable attributes for shopping locales. Then consumers were asked to rank each of these on a seven-point Likert scale as to whether they thought it was "very likely" or "very unlikely" that the mall possessed this quality. Section IV covered

mall amenities, Section V was consumer involvement in the shopping experience, and Section VI was demographics.

### *Procedure*

Five-hundred surveys were mailed out to consumers throughout Florida to the targeted population of senior citizens over 60 years of age. Surveys were administered to college students on campus at a large university in Florida. Completed surveys were returned from 205 of the college students, and 84 completed surveys were returned from senior citizens, with 11 being unusable, resulting in a total sample of 278 consumer responses. The return rate for the mailed surveys was 16.8%. The college students were a convenience sample of randomly selected classes on campus.

## **Results**

### *Demographic Characteristics of the Study Populations*

The demographic characteristics of the study's two sample groups are shown in Table 1. With regards to gender, the majority of both groups (87% of the college students and 63% of the senior citizens) were female. In terms of race and ethnic origin, the college student sample group was more diverse than the senior citizen group: whereas 100% of the senior citizen respondents identified themselves as Caucasian, only 72% of the college students did so. Of the remaining college students surveyed, 13% stated they were Hispanic, 8% were African American, 2% were Asian, and 4% said they were of other origin. The college students were mostly single (97%), but 66% ( $n = 48$ ) of the senior citizens were married, 15% ( $n = 11$ ) were divorced, 14% ( $n = 10$ ) widowed, and 6% ( $n = 4$ ) were single.

Household incomes ranged from less than \$25,000 to more than \$126,000. The majority of college students (61%) said their income was less than \$25,000, with 15% stating they had a household income greater than \$126,000. This wide range is probably due to the fact that some students listed their own individual income while others listed their parents' household income. The senior citizens' income range was slightly more evenly distributed; the top two most frequently cited income ranges were \$26,000 to \$50,000 (25%), and less than \$25,000 (21%). A small portion (16%) did not give any income information.

Regarding education level, most college students stated they had either an associate's degree (48%) or a high school diploma (32%). While 34% of the senior citizens indicated they had a high school diploma, 32% had a graduate or professional degree. The remaining senior citizen respondents either had an associate's degree (19%) or a bachelor's degree (15%).

### *Descriptive Shopping Behaviors*

Participants were asked several questions regarding their mall shopping behaviors and patterns, and the results are shown in Table 2. First, the two sample

Table 1.  
*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.*

Demographic Characteristic		College		Senior Citizens	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	26	12.7	25	34.2
	Female	179	87.3	46	63.0
<b>Race</b>	White	148	72.2	73	100.0
	Black	17	8.3	-	-
	Hispanic	27	13.2	-	-
	Asian	5	2.4	-	-
	Other	8	3.9	-	-
	<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	198	96.6	4
	Married	7	3.4	48	65.8
	Divorced	-	-	11	15.1
	Widowed	-	-	10	13.7
<b>Income Level</b>	Less than \$25,000	125	61.0	15	20.5
	\$26,000-50,000	9	4.4	18	24.7
	51,000-75,000	11	5.4	13	17.8
	76,000-100,000	10	4.9	5	6.8
	101,000-125,000	12	5.9	-	-
	\$126,000 or above	31	15.1	10	13.7
<b>Education</b>	Less than high school	1	5.0	-	-
	High school diploma	65	31.7	25	34.2
	Associates degree	98	47.8	14	19.2
	Bachelors degree	37	18.0	11	15.1
	Graduate/Professional	3	1.5	23	31.5

\*Values may not round up to 100 due to rounding and missing data.

groups were asked how much money they spend in malls per month. Although the college students' incomes tended to be lower than those of the senior citizens, their responses indicate that they spend slightly more money at malls than senior citizens: 26% of college students stated they spent between \$200 and \$499 per month, compared to 18% of senior citizens and this value was statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  significance level in a Chi-square goodness-of-fit-test.

College students also visited malls more frequently than the senior citizens. Thirty-seven percent of students said they went to the mall twice a month, compared to only 19% of senior citizens, and the majority of senior citizens (62%) stated they went to the mall once a month or less, compared to 29% of college students. A Chi-square goodness-of-fit test analysis was conducted and there was statistically significant difference between the two groups for all variables.



Table 2.  
*Mall Shopping Behaviors of Respondents.*

Behavior		College		Senior Citizens		Chi Square
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Money spent at mall/month	Less than \$200	138	67.3	53	72.6	1.34
	\$200-\$499	53	25.9	13	17.8	6.56*
	\$500-\$999	11	5.4	4	5.5	0.02
	More than \$1,000	2	1.0	1	1.4	0.27
How often visit to mall	Once a month or less	59	28.8	45	61.6	40.16*
	Twice a month	76	37.1	14	19.2	29.91*
	Once a week	50	24.4	9	12.3	21.23*
	Two or more times/ week	17	8.3	1	1.4	67.65*
Why shop at mall on regular basis**	I don't	25	12.2	27	37.0	34.67*
	Store selection	105	51.2	29	39.7	6.35*
	Customer service	13	6.3	7	9.6	2.35
	Price	56	27.3	19	26.0	0.09
	Brands	97	47.3	11	15.1	135.31*
	Convenience	101	49.3	26	35.6	10.14*
	Variety of merchandise	108	52.7	26	35.6	16.00*
	Prefer malls	26	12.7	9	12.3	0.01
	Other	17	8.3	5	6.9	59.77*
Most of my shopping is**	Department stores	28	16.1	18	38.3	22.40*
	Specialty stores	131	75.3	7	14.9	426.12*
	Discount stores	14	8.0	22	46.8	55.85*

\* Values may not round up to 100 due to rounding and missing data.

\*\* Respondents could choose more than one answer.

Participants were also asked a multiple response question concerning their reasons for shopping in malls on a regular basis. The top three responses were: “variety of merchandise” (53% of college students, 36% of senior citizens); “store selection” (51% of college students, 40% of senior citizens); and “convenience” (49% of college students, 36% of senior citizens). These top three reasons given were similar between the two sample groups, but the share of respondents for each reason was consistently higher for the college students than for the senior citizens and the statistical analyses supported that notion. The two groups differed significantly in the level of importance given to brands, as 47% of college students said they regularly shopped in malls because of brands, compared to 15% of senior citizens and the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test analyses found that brands was the most statistically significant of all of the variables. Other reasons given for shopping at malls were “price” (27% of college students, 26%



of senior citizens), “a preference for malls” (13% of college students, 12% of senior citizens), and “customer service” (6% of college students, 10% of senior citizens) and none of these variables were significant in the Chi-square analysis. However, a larger share of respondents within the senior citizen sample group (37%) stated they did not shop in malls regularly, compared to 12% of the college students.

Furthermore, respondents were asked where they do most of their mall shopping. The majority of the college students indicated they did most of their shopping in specialty stores, while the senior citizens were more likely to shop at department stores and discount stores. The Chi-square analysis revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the two groups for all types of stores.

### Hypotheses Findings

As mentioned previously, this study focuses on six hypotheses developed under the Diffusion of Innovations theoretical framework. Each hypothesis will be discussed with findings.

*H1: There will be significant differences between college student and senior citizen consumers' **awareness and perception** of the open-air mixed-use shopping centers as a “new” shopping format in which they would like to shop.*

In the survey, consumers were asked to identify all of the open-air malls they recognized from a list of ten malls throughout the state of Florida; also included was an open-ended response for additional known open-air malls. The results are given in Table 3. Comparing the two groups of respondents, college consumers were much more aware of open-air malls. The results of a Chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicate that for  $p < 0.05$ , college students and senior citizens have significant differences in their awareness of the following open-air malls: Destin Commons, St. John's Town Center, Pointe Orlando, Waterford Town Center, The Falls, and Sunset Place.

Related to awareness, a goal of the study was to determine marketing efforts in existence to inform consumers about the new open-air malls. Therefore, respondents were also asked about how they heard about the open-air malls in their area, and the results are shown in Table 4. The most popular response was “word of mouth” for both senior citizens (44%) and college students (71%). Formal marketing of the malls was channeled through a media mix of newspapers, magazines, television, tourist information, billboards and the Internet. College students listed “newspaper/magazine ads” as their second highest response (19.5%), while senior citizens chose “news media” as their second most common way of learning about these malls. A Chi-square goodness-of-fit test shows that between the two groups, all of the data on reported sources of awareness are significantly different at  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, the findings of this research also indicate that one of the best ways to advertise to senior citizens and college students is through word of mouth, news media outlets, and newspaper or magazine ads. Also, word of mouth is the number one way that college students learned of open-air malls. Perhaps, mall developers and retailers could target their

Table 3.  
*Awareness of Florida Open Air Malls.*

Open-Air Mall	College Students		Senior Citizens		Chi Square
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Destin Commons, Destin	49	23.9	7	9.6	43.80*
St. John’s Town Center, Jacksonville	54	26.3	11	15.1	17.30*
Pointe Orlando, Orlando	62	30.2	3	4.1	340.70*
Waterford Town Center, Orlando	46	22.4	8	11.0	24.65*
Mizner Park, Boca Raton	29	14.1	10	13.7	0.03
Coconut Point, Bonita Springs	7	3.4	2	2.7	0.34
Waterside Shops, Naples	16	7.8	8	11.0	1.86
Baywalk, St. Petersburg	29	14.1	13	17.8	1.74
The Falls, Miami	44	21.5	9	12.3	13.88*
Sunset Place, Miami	44	21.5	7	9.6	30.14*

\* Significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level, critical value of 3.84.

marketing efforts through radio and other entertainment avenues for college student consumers and continue with media packets and news releases to target the senior citizen group.

In summary, *H1* is supported, as the analysis shows a statistically significant difference between the two groups of consumers regarding awareness of Florida open-air malls and sources of information about these malls. College student consumers are much more aware of all but one open-air mall in the Florida market than senior citizens, and the use of all information sources are statistically different between the two groups.

*H2: There will be significant differences between college student and senior citizen consumers’ willingness to shop and purchase merchandise in open-air mixed-use shopping centers versus traditional regional mall centers.*

The 16 qualities of open-air and traditional malls shopping centers that consumers were asked to evaluate in the survey are given in Table 5. Respondents were asked to rank whether open-air mixed-use shopping centers and traditional malls have these qualities using a scale from 1 (“very unlikely”) to 7 (“very likely”). Out of the 16 characteristics, two scores for open-air shopping mall characteristics have significant differences between the means for the responses from the college student and senior citizen respondents. On the other hand, the traditional mall had 11 characteristics that had mean scores with significant differences between college student and senior citizen respondents.

Examining the respondents’ concepts of the open-air shopping mall, there was a significant difference in the means for the evaluation of “favorable weather conditions,” with a mean of 4.61 for senior citizens and 3.83 for college students.

Table 4.  
*Survey Question: How Were You Made Aware?*

Awareness Source	College Students		Senior Citizens		Chi Square
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Newspaper/Magazine ads	40	19.5	23	31.5	9.92*
Television Commercials	21	10.2	15	20.5	11.03*
News Media	32	15.6	24	32.9	19.32*
Tourist Information	33	16.1	8	11.0	4.59*
Word of Mouth	146	71.2	32	43.8	33.07*
Billboards	34	16.6	4	5.5	44.89*
Internet	12	5.9	1	1.4	29.42*
Never heard of them	10	4.9	13	17.8	19.55*

\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$ , critical value of 3.84..

From this data senior citizens indicated it more likely that open-air malls would have favorable weather conditions when they shopped than did college students. "Pleasing landscape" is another variable that has a significant difference in means between the two age groups of consumers, with a mean of 5.34 for senior citizens and 5.77 for college students. Students thought it more likely than did seniors that pleasing landscapes would be an integral part of the open-air mall. One of the advertised features that differentiates the open-air malls from other shopping settings is the very striking and attractive landscaping that has been incorporated in the overall layout of the center, and the literature indicated this is a desirable attribute. If consumers appreciate attractive outdoor environments, they most likely will spend more time browsing at the open-air mall, which increases the probability of increased purchases. The other variables are not significantly different at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Therefore,  $H_2$  is partially supported for the open-air mixed-use mall format.

An examination of the consumer attitudes towards the features of traditional malls reveals some interesting trends. There are significant differences between the means for "ample parking" between the two groups; senior citizens have a mean of 6.04 and college students have a mean of 4.44. It would appear that senior citizens feel that traditional malls had plenty of parking for consumers, while college student consumers feel less so. Another related variable, "Short walk between parking and stores" has significant differences as well, with college students having a mean of 4.29 and seniors having a mean of 4.73. Therefore, seniors appear to feel that close parking is more prevalent at traditional malls than did college students. When examining the traditional mall, other variables that have significant differences between the two groups of shoppers with the senior citizen group having a higher mean in all of the following variables: "favorable weather," "low crowding," "good quality," "variety of merchandise," "variety of stores," "variety of brands," "pleasing landscape" and "sufficient outdoor lighting," and "attractive interiors." Obviously, the senior citizen group is more comfortable shopping in a traditional mall in many aspects. The senior

Table 5.  
*t*-tests of Consumers' Evaluation of Characteristics of Open-Air Mixed Use Shopping Centers and Traditional Malls.

	College Students		Senior Citizens		<i>p</i> -value
	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>n</i>	Mean	
<b>Open-air mall</b>					
Ample parking	201	4.76	63	4.89	0.614
Short walk btw. parking and stores	198	4.45	60	4.60	0.521
Favorable weather	201	3.83	62	4.61	0.002*
Low crowding	197	4.73	60	4.88	0.481
Good quality	199	5.42	62	5.65	0.192
Variety of merchandise	201	5.48	63	5.57	0.601
Variety of stores	200	5.41	63	5.51	0.585
Variety of prices	200	5.23	63	5.21	0.922
Variety of brands	200	5.48	63	5.51	0.871
Pleasing landscape	201	5.77	62	5.34	0.023*
Sufficient outdoor light	201	5.73	60	5.52	0.247
Attractive interior	200	5.33	63	5.44	0.498
Attractive exterior	200	5.69	62	5.35	0.067
Sales personal know	199	5.00	63	5.00	1.000
Sales personal will assist	201	5.05	63	4.90	0.481
App # of sales	201	4.97	62	4.65	0.123
<b>Traditional Mall</b>					
Ample parking	204	4.44	70	6.04	0.007*
Short walk btw. parking and stores	201	4.29	70	4.73	0.030*
Favorable weather	203	4.80	69	5.75	0.000*
Low crowding	196	4.08	68	4.74	0.001*
Good quality	203	5.33	71	5.68	0.033*
Variety of merchandise	203	5.45	70	5.84	0.016*
Variety of stores	204	5.52	70	5.84	0.045*
Variety of prices	204	5.25	70	5.56	0.088
Variety of brands	204	5.41	70	5.80	0.017*
Pleasing landscape	204	4.50	70	5.09	0.006*
Sufficient outdoor light	204	4.50	70	5.19	0.001*
Attractive interior	204	4.97	69	5.59	0.001*
Attractive exterior	204	4.60	70	4.80	0.357
Sales personal know	204	4.60	70	4.66	0.748
Sales personal will assist	203	4.81	70	4.71	0.650
App # of sales	204	4.70	70	4.31	0.088

\*Significant at *p* < 0.05 level.

citizen respondents indicated that a traditional mall would have better quality and variety of merchandise, stores and brands than the college age group. In addition, aesthetics played a significant role in the seniors' means of a traditional malls' amount of space, landscapes and interior decor were also higher than the college student group. *H2* is supported for the traditional mall, as 11 of 16 qualities are significantly different between college student and senior citizen consumers.

*H3: There will be significant differences between college student and senior citizen consumers' level of perceived risk in switching to this open-air mall.*

The variable that can be considered to be linked to the level of perceived risk is the perception of the importance of "favorable weather conditions," especially since the open-air mall is not an enclosed shopping environment. Senior citizens often expressed concern in the surveys about the weather and how it would affect their decision to visit an open-air mall (as did the college students, but to a lesser extent). Also, many senior citizens commented about their concerns related to driving long distances; many of the open-air malls are too far from their homes and they perceive this as a definite risk if they wish to visit these malls. Finally, many of the senior citizens said that they "just want to get in, get what I need and leave." Therefore, *H3* is supported as there is a significant difference in the means of the risk variable "favorable weather conditions" between the college student and senior citizen respondents.

*H4: There will be a significant difference between college student and senior citizen consumers' preference for level of customer service while shopping.*

There is no significant difference between college student and senior citizen consumers in their preference for levels of customer service while shopping. Three questions in the survey addressed preference for level of customer service: "sales personnel knowledgeable," "sales personnel are willing to assist you," and "appropriate number of sales personnel in stores." Customer service was not a deciding factor for consumers when choosing an open air mall over a traditional mall. Therefore, this hypothesis is not supported.

*H5: There will be differences between college student and senior citizen consumers' adoption or rejection of this open-air mall shopping format.*

Several questions were placed in the survey to examine *H5*, the responses for which are given in Table 6. The first read simply, "Do open-air malls meet your shopping needs?" For this question, both college students (84%) and senior citizens (51%) stated "yes" and the differences were statistically significant in the Chi-square analysis. When asked if this shopping format was new to them, only about one-third of the respondents (35.1% of the college students and 39.7% of the senior citizens) overall

stated it was new and the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test was not statistically different between the two groups for this variable. Therefore, most of the consumers in this study appear to be knowledgeable about open-air malls. When asked mall preference (open-air versus traditional), most respondents stated that they had no preference. However, comparing the two demographic groups of consumers who stated open-air malls were their preference, 36% of college student consumers compared to 15% of senior citizens chose open-air. This difference was statistically significant in the Chi-square analysis. When asked which mall type was easier to shop in, over 70% of college student consumers and nearly 80% of the senior citizen consumers chose the traditional mall. When asked if they had purchased merchandise at an open-air mall, about 90% of the college and about 70% of the senior citizen consumers answered yes, and there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups .

In summary, *H5* was supported as the college students have appeared to adopt the open-air mall format with a positive response rate of 84% whereas only 51% of the senior citizens have adopted it. This difference was statistically significant at the  $p > 0.05$  level in the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test.

*H6: There will be a difference between college student and senior citizen consumers' utilization of mall amenities, as entertainment or housing.*

In the survey, questions about mall amenities were also examined. In the sample population, few respondents lived in residences at open-air mixed-use centers: only 2% of college student respondents and none of the senior citizen respondents. Of the students surveyed, 17% would like to live in residences on-site at a mall, but all senior citizens stated they did not want to live in mall residences. Socializing with friends at the mall was noted as an activity by 64% of college student and 18% of senior citizen respondents and the Chi square analysis revealed that the difference between the two groups was statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$ . All consumers desire a variety of services (post office, mailboxes, cleaners, copy center, banking) at the open-air mall, with 94% of students and 64% of senior citizens noting they would utilize entertainment amenities at a mall. The Chi square analyses indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups for the utilization of mall entertainment but not mall services. From this analysis, *H6* is supported, as a greater percent of college student consumers versus senior citizen consumers would use mall amenities such as housing and entertainment.

## Discussion

This study addresses college student and senior citizen consumers' acceptance of the urban open-air mixed-use mall and analyzes perceptions of the open-air and the traditional enclosed mall. Open-air malls are noted for attracting upper end retailers, and the college student respondents responded to this fact. They, and to a lesser extent their senior citizen counterparts, like the variety of stores, prices and brands offered by the open-air mall. Therefore, it is compatible with their shopping needs. Complexity and trialability are not a problem with the new mall format, as it is very easy to shop

Table 6.  
*Adoption or Rejection of Open-Air Malls.*

	College students		Senior Citizens		Chi Square
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<b>Do open air malls meet your needs?</b>					
Yes	172	83.9	37	50.7	21.36*
No	24	11.7	23	31.5	
<b>Will weather conditions prevent you from visiting an open air mall?</b>					
Yes	180	87.8	52	71.2	5.97*
No	22	10.7	18	24.7	
<b>Have you purchased anything at an open-air mall?</b>					
Yes	180	87.8	52	71.2	4.77*
No	23	11.2	17	23.3	
<b>Is it a new type of shopping experience for you?</b>					
Yes	72	35.1	29	39.7	1.85
No	132	64.4	41	56.2	
<b>Do you prefer open air over traditional malls?</b>					
Yes	74	36.1	11	15.1	57.66*
No	30	14.6	22	30.1	
No preference	96	46.8	37	50.7	0.89
<b>Is it easier to shop in open air rather than traditional malls?</b>					
Open air	49	23.9	11	15.1	8.35*
Traditional	149	72.7	57	78.1	2.26
No preference	4	2.0	1	1.4	0.37
<b>Is it easier to travel to open air mall?</b>					
Yes	90	43.9	27	37.0	1.42
No	27	13.2	18	24.7	
No preference	80	39.0	22	30.1	3.63

\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$  (critical value of 3.84).

\*\* Values may not round up to 100 due to rounding and missing data.



Table 7.  
*Mall Amenities.*

	College Students		Senior Citizens		Chi Square
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<b>Some malls have residences on site. Do you live there?</b>					
Yes	5	2.4	0	0.0	∞*
No	199	97.1	73	100.0	
<b>Would you like to live there?</b>					
Yes	35	17.1	0	0.0	∞*
No	169	82.4	73	100.0	
<b>Do you meet friends at the mall to socialize?</b>					
Yes	131	63.9	13	17.8	242.86
No	72	35.1	59	80.8	
<b>Would you utilize the entertainment amenities?</b>					
Yes	193	94.1	47	64.4	22.92*
No	11	5.4	23	31.5	
<b>Is it important to have a variety of services at the mall?</b>					
Yes	111	54.1	40	54.8	0.05
No	93	45.4	32	43.8	

\* Significant at the p-value < 0.05 level, critical value of 3.84.  
 \*\* Values may not round up to 100 due to rounding and missing data.

at the stores within the open-air mall; the senior citizen respondents did express more of a perception of risk regarding the weather and driving conditions associated with open-air formats than the younger group. Observability was gauged in the survey through consumers’ awareness of the malls; from the results, it would seem that most respondents are aware of several open-air malls in their residential area. Overall, the consumers in this study state they shopped and purchased merchandise in the open-air mall, so they have accepted this new shopping format.

Comparing the two groups of consumers, there are a number of differences in shopping preferences. Senior citizens rank most qualities of the open-air and traditional mall as more favorable than their college student counterparts. The “generation gap” does play a significant part in comparison of some differences in shopping patterns between the two groups. It appears that senior citizens are satisfied with their shopping experiences as this research found that they like to “get in, get what they need, and get out.” Several senior citizens indicated in the survey that they do not like to go

shopping and only shop when necessary. whereas the college student group seeks to be entertained. College students go to the mall to shop, to socialize, and for “relaxation.”

Many of the college student respondents indicated that they go to the mall several times a week “for fun” and many of them stated that they work at a mall. Mall developers and retailers would appear to have had success in making malls, both traditional and open-air, entertaining for college students, but it would seem from these results that they are missing the mark for the senior citizen group. Even though college student respondents’ incomes tended to be lower than that of the senior citizen respondents, their responses indicate that they spend slightly more money at malls than senior citizens. Many of the college students also have disposable income from their parents, and probably spend quite a bit of that money on shopping and entertainment.

The college students indicated that they shop at specialty stores and the senior citizen respondents noted that they shop at department and discount stores. One possible strategy for attracting senior citizens to open air malls might be to offer retail space to discount stores as well as specialty stores that cater to senior citizen shoppers. The college students indicated that a wide store selection and a variety of brands are important to them in deciding where to shop, whereas the senior citizens did not. Retailers could also seek to gain the senior citizen submarket through brand image, promoted by advertisements that target the mature population.

The most popular malls in this study are the open-air malls located in Orlando, Jacksonville and Destin, Florida. Orlando and Jacksonville are large, urban cities which would account for their popularity; however, within the State of Florida, tourism is the state’s number one industry. Therefore, as Orlando and Destin are two very popular vacation spots, this would undoubtedly increase the awareness of malls there. New malls in hot tourist locations may be a lucrative market for mall developers and retailers.

The only open-air mall that senior citizens reported more often than college students in the awareness survey was Baywalk in St. Petersburg; this could be due to the high percentage of senior citizens living in this area. According to Albert Corti, principal of the Corti Gilchrist Partnership, developers in San Diego, open-air malls need to be designed to fit into the community (Fasig, 2000). The centers require the essential elements of the right demographics, correct mix of retailers, right tenant mix and right location (Fasig, 2000). Based on the results of this research, open-air malls located in areas with high senior citizen populations could increase their appeal by offering discount and department stores as well as high end specialty stores.

When asked whether they prefer shopping in an open air mall versus a traditional mall, the issue of favorable weather conditions was very important. Florida experiences very hot weather conditions with temperatures reaching over 95 degrees on most summer days with high humidity. Also, rain conditions would lead the senior citizen consumers to prefer shopping indoors in the traditional mall, whereas the college student consumers may be more tolerant of unpleasant weather conditions. Concern was also expressed that rain, high temperatures, or wind could prevent them from visiting an open-air mall. This is not surprising, considering Florida’s propensity for frequent thunderstorms and occasional hurricanes. These findings concur with comments made by Christopher Cawthorn, executive vice president of Strategic Weather Services who

stated that open-air malls may prove limited in their ability to attract people to shop in less than ideal conditions, given that the greater exposure to the elements would mean that weather would be more likely to affect consumer behavior (Fasig, 1999). Temperature and conditions do affect where a person chooses to shop, and shoppers would have a tendency to go to an enclosed mall if the weather is undesirable (Fasig, 1999). Mall developers might explore the possibility of landscaping that provides shade and protection from the elements, which would also perhaps have benefits for the aesthetic appeal of the landscaping. Given that this study focused only on the State of Florida, results in other states would vary.

Availability of parking and the distance required to travel to the mall are also important for senior citizens. Regardless of open air versus traditional, senior citizens do not want to walk or drive long distances to shop. Mall developers need to keep this in mind when determining site locations within a city and creating site proposals by utilizing demographic and GIS data from the neighborhood, region, and state.

Regarding mall amenities, college students are more likely to want to live in a mall development, while none of the senior citizens surveyed expressed this desire. This could be interpreted as a desire by the college student cohort to be amidst “fun” and activity. However, despite the fact that senior citizens did not seem to desire on-site living, they were positively inclined towards the idea of being able to go to one location and take care of their shopping, cleaning, banking and postal service needs, or to meet a friend for coffee. As suggested by their aversion to traveling long distances, they do not want to drive all over town to complete their errands. This could be important for mall developers when selecting retail establishments and service providers in their proposed malls, if they wish to attract more shoppers from the senior citizen demographic.

## Conclusions

The results of this study provide a better understanding of the potential success of commercial retail centers in open-air malls. This cross-generational study found consumers are aware of the open-air mall. They enjoy shopping and purchasing merchandise in this new setting. Attractive exteriors, including lush tropical landscapes, appeal to Florida consumers. With today’s emphasis on green marketing, a timely marketing strategy would be to promote the extensive green landscapes surrounding open-air malls with the concept of sustainability; consumers may feel they are helping the environment by patronizing establishments that have created sustainable environments, which will lead to an improved environment for future generations.

Incorporation of discount and department stores may influence the senior citizen consumers to increase their spending as these are their preferred retail formats. By providing an innovative shopping experience for consumers and meeting consumer needs, increased profits for both retailers and mall owners may be expected. The ultimate goal was to expand shopping center research to include new shopping destinations and consumer perceptions of them, so that developers, investors, and retailers can create successful urban open-air mixed-use communities in which residents can have a truly innovative shopping experience across generations.

Future research may include examining differences between designated consumer groups in terms of their opinions of open-air versus traditional mall formats in a controlled environment via mall intercept interviews. Another facet to explore would be the differences in success rates for open-air malls in cold climates, as Colorado, compared to hot weather climates as in this study. Also, regentrification of downtown or older malls, such as the Pearl Street Mall in Boulder, Colorado, would be an interesting study; to determine consumer perceptions of the reclaimed “downtown” areas of cities.

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