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# HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS' SHOPPING MALL EXPERIENCES, PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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## ÖZET

Alışveriş merkezleri (AVM), Türkiye’de özellikle de büyük şehirlerde ekonomik ve sosyal hayatın önemli bir parçası haline gelmiştir. İzmir’de halen sekiz AVM bulunmaktadır. Tüketicilerin ve yatırımcıların yoğun ilgisi doğrultusunda bu sayının artması beklenmektedir. Bu durum rekabetin artmasıyla birlikte bu sektörde doygunluk noktasına gelinmesine de neden olabilecektir. Bu nedenle, müşterilerin AVM’lerdeki deneyimlerinin ve bu merkezlerin imajı ile ilgili algı ve beklentilerinin iyice anlaşılması çok daha fazla önem kazanmaktadır. AVM imajı kişilerin müşteri olama kararı, dolayısıyla da herhangi bir AVM’ye bağlılığı açısından kritik öneme sahiptir. Bu nedenle, çalışmamızda lise düzeyindeki genç kızları AVM’lere neyin çektiğini belirleyebilmek için onların beklenti, deneyim ve alguları üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır. Bu amaçla, altı odak grup çalışmasından oluşan nitel bir çalışma düzenlenmiş ve katılımcılara bir anket uygulanmıştır. Amaç, katılımcıların ideal bir AVM’de olmasını bekledikleri imaj bileşenlerini belirlemek ve onların alış veriş güdüleri ve beklentileri hakkında daha derinlemesine bilgi edinmektir. Çalışmadan elde edilen sonuçlar akademisyenlere, AVM yöneticilerine ve perakendecilere bu pazar dilimiyle ilgili daha geniş bir bakış açısı sağlayacak ve iş

dünyasının daha etkin pazarlama stratejileri geliştirmesine yardımcı olacaktır.

## ABSTRACT

Shopping malls have become an important part of the economic and social fabric of Turkey especially in some of the big cities. In Izmir, there are currently eight shopping malls and this number is expected to increase due to the interest of consumers and investors in shopping malls. This can lead to over saturation triggering high level of competition. Thus deeper understanding of consumer expectations, experiences and perceptions regarding mall image has become much more essential.

Shopping mall image is critical for patronage decision hence loyalty. For this reason, in this study we have focused on the expectations, experiences and perceptions of high school girls to see what attracts them to the malls. Therefore we designed a qualitative study that includes six focus groups and a questionnaire. The aim was to identify image attributes of participants’ ideal shopping malls, shopping motives and expectations of high school girls. This insight into high school girls’ patronage behavior and motivations will provide academics, mall developers, and retailers with a better understanding of the various components that

*contribute to the female adolescent mall experience and allow them to study this market segment more effectively.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Rapid growth in Turkish economy and population offers potential for different kinds of investments. Among those investment fields shopping malls have become popular thus increasing the competition in this aspect. For this reason, choice of shopping destination is a topic receiving increasing attention. Regardless of their sizes, all shopping malls are attraction centers for people to come together to socialize, see new developments, and do the shopping. Overall malls are critical retail venue that contributes to consumer experience (Haytko & Baker, 2004) and they are among the most frequently visited retailers (Dholakia, 1999).

A location itself may be a source of pleasurable experience for its visitors (Bloch, Ridgway & Dowson, 1994). Carbone (1999) claims that, any future purchase is more a result of how customers feel about a company than what they think about the product or service they buy. Also several researchers have argued that the goal of much consumption activity is to obtain satisfying experiences rather than simply goods (as cited in Haytko and Baker, 2004). So in this research we conducted a qualitative study, examining expectations of young girls from malls and the characteristics of the malls that form their experiences, thus perceptions. The results of the study will provide insights to the expectations of Turkish adolescent girls as present and prospective consumers which in turn will offer practical guidance for investors of malls and marketers.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: we firstly present the development of shopping malls in Turkey and next the literature related with shopping mall expectations, experiences and perceptions is reviewed. Finally the methodology employed in our study is explained; results are reported followed by discussions of the findings.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF SHOPPING MALLS IN TURKEY**

Compared to developing countries, shopping malls in the developed countries such as USA began to flourish much earlier. For example, after 1950s, role of shopping malls in the economy of USA increased with the number of malls having boosted from 100 malls to 43,662 at the end of 1998. (Beyard, O'Mara et al., 1999) In Turkey, modern retail organizations started their operations 60 years

later than they did in the USA and about 30-40 years later than in European countries (Tek and Özgül 2005). The first modern enclosed shopping mall Galleria opened in Turkey in 1988. This was followed, a year later by the foundation of first Metro cash and carry outlet. The success of those gave an immediate indicator for the potential for modern retail development in Turkey and prompted other companies. Thus, this led to a steady development of modern retail centers throughout the 1990's in major cities (Aslanyürek, 1999).

The development of shopping malls in İzmir the third largest city of Turkey, started with the opening of EGS Park Bornova in 1998, followed by Çiğli – Kipa, EGS Mavişehir, CarefourSa, Agora, Konak Pier, Palmiye and Orkide. Also for the year 2006 two new projects are planned to be completed which will lead to increased competition in the market.

Although number of shopping malls in Turkey is still expanding, in some developed countries shopping malls and retailers are operating in an increasingly competitive environment characterized by chronic overcapacity and declining customers (Shim and Eastlick, 1988; LeHew and Fairhurst, 2000; Kotler and Armstrong, 2006; Nicholls et al., 2002; Prendergast et al., 1998; Wakefield and Baker, 1998). The reasons for this decline are stated as increase in time pressure on consumers, developments in e-business facilities, decrease in the enjoyment level of shopping, and scarcity of unique merchandise. (Nicholls et al., 2002; Wakefield and Baker, 1998)

This may not be the case for Turkey for the time being, but it seems like a clear trend that will result with the same developments. Thus in an environment where there is an increasing need for malls to compete both among themselves and with alternative retail destinations (Kirkup and Rafiq, 1999), retailers will have to choose target segments carefully and position themselves strongly (Kotler and Armstrong, 2005).

Considering the development of shopping malls in Turkey, it is seen that their introduction took place after mid-1980s. 1980 was a turning point in Turkish economy because of the liberalization movement and changing economic structure. Strengthening of private sector, increased level of foreign investments and changes in demographic and economic environment also affected the buying patterns. In this sense, preferences for and attitudes towards products/services thus shopping mall practices changed very fast. These changes for shopping malls are still continuing and severe competition is increasing in this domain.

Finally, to keep pace with those developments, and unique needs of each market, it is important for marketers to monitor these improvements and identify their consumers' needs and wants very well. Because cumulative results inferred from the studies on shoppers in developed countries may or may not be applicable to a developing country. Any given mall that ignores the reality of the country where it is located and copy mechanically the "advanced" western models may fail (Li et al. 2004). So, it is vital to develop strategies according to the unique needs of countries.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A shopping mall is "a group of retail business planned, developed, owned, and managed as a unit". (Kotler, Armstrong, 2006:407; McKeever et al., 1977; Prendergast et al., 1998) "Unit" characteristic of shopping malls is underlined in this definition. In addition to this characteristic, shopping malls as a part of the urban panorama have been considered as consumer "nesting places" or habitat. (Swinyard, 1998) So these places are important venues that enhance people's experience.

Experience is the consequence of acquiring and processing stimulation over time. It is one of the personal selection factors that affect perception (Solomon, 2004). Hence, it can be said that the shopping mall experience is the result of acquiring and processing stimulation in the mall over repeated visits. Experience is also affected by the personal characteristics of teenagers that in turn influence their shopping mall perceptions. Especially for the teenagers, shopping practices at malls are perceived as a social experience (Taylor and Cosenza, 2002) As Durakbaşa and Cindoğlu (2005) state, shopping malls are places where boys and girls can come together and socialize under a closed secure place. Haytko and Baker's study (2004) which explores the adolescent girls mall experiences found several new factors specifically relevant to girl shoppers, aged 12-19. One of the factors was the image of the shopping mall. Image refers to how a retailer is perceived by customers and others. To succeed, a firm must communicate a distinctive, clear and consistent image. Numerous factors contribute to a retailer's image, and it is the totality of them that forms an overall image (Berman and Evans, 2004). In Haytko and Baker's study (2004), five image attributes of the shopping mall was found to influence the girls' perception of their experiences: comfort, safety, retail mix, accessibility and atmosphere. Additionally, two characteristics of girls namely education cohort and trend consciousness affected how they perceived their experiences. Also the situational influences of

mall companion and motivations for going to the mall were uncovered.

According to Catalog Age (1999) reports, teens have been considering the shopping activity as "an experience rather than a job, an event rather than a duty". (as cited in Taylor and Cosenza, 2002) Age is a factor affecting shopping motivations significantly. For example, the teen consumer group has stronger diversion/browsing, and social experience shopping motivations compared to other age groups. (Kim et al., 2003) Teenage market has a vital importance for the marketers. Firstly, they have discretionary spending power. For example, in 1998, teens spent approximately \$ 141 billion. (Mangleburg et al., 2004) When they spend, they use their parents' money. Second, they affect parents' spending decisions. (Martin, Bush, 2000; Moschis, Churchill, 1979) Third importance of teenage market comes from trendsetter characteristics of them. Teenagers are more concerned with trends than probably any other age group. (Martin, Bush, 2000) Last and the most important factor creating the critical role of the teenagers are future buying potential of them. They are "future consumers". (Martin, Bush, 2000; Taylor and Cosenza, 2002) Future buying potential of teenagers should be emphasized by marketers. According to Meyer's (2001) "catch them young" theory, "consumers form their brand preferences between the ages of 15 and 25". (Taylor and Cosenza, 2002) If the marketers overlook this age period, they will be obliged to spend more endeavor to apprehend them. For that reason, marketers should focus on consumers of the future.

In Turkey, 15 and 25 age ranged people have a great majority in the total population. Ages range from 15 to 25 includes approximately 14 million people in year 2000. This amount reflects 20.4 % of the whole population. When the data that cover only the females are examined, the outlook does not change. In year 2000, female population was 33.4 million and there were 6.7 million people (20.2 %) between these age ranges. Our study focused on the females between the ages of 15 to 19. The number of them was 3.5 million in 2000 and they were the largest group among different age ranges (State Institute of Statistics, Population by Age Group, 1935-2000) thus represents a large market segment.

We chose to focus on the girls because shopping is usually seen as a gendered activity.

Researchers have been reporting gender differences in terms of shopping preference and behavior for many years, and research shows that men's and women's shopping behavior differs on many levels like they process information differently (Peter and

Olson, 1999). Besides, they load different meanings to value and material possessions, go shopping for different reasons. (Dittmar et. al., 1995, 1996) Women go shopping to browse around and see shopping as an enjoying activity while men go shopping just to meet their needs seeing it as a duty. (Durakbaşa and Cindoğlu, 2005) Available research on shopping behavior seems to suggest that it is women who go shopping and that shopping is categorized as a “female typed” task (South and Spite, 1994). For example tracking shopping centre usage between 1986 and 1991, it is seen that the dominant female: male ratio (2:1) has remained relatively constant (Dholakia, 1999). Also Erkip (2004) found a positive relationship between gender and liking shopping activities. In other words, it can be concluded that women like shopping more.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study we used focus groups; the most widely employed qualitative research method (Malhotra, 2004), and a short questionnaire. One of the application fields of focus groups is gaining insight to perceptions, preferences, and behaviors regarding a product category, (Malhotra, 2004) which is the shopping mall in this study. We chose to employ a qualitative method, because just a questionnaire would not be sufficient to provide the depth needed to understand the respondents’ perceptions.

The population in Turkey is concentrated between 15-19 age groups which correspond to the high school period and freshman years of universities in Turkey. We selected to conduct our research just on high schools because including freshmen in the focus groups would distort the homogeneity of focus groups. Thus, in the study we conducted 6 focus group discussions and a short questionnaire with female students of six selected high schools in İzmir. Since the school lasts generally three years, focus groups included three girls from each of the classes, totaling up to 9 girls per group.

It is worth mentioning that there are several types of high schools in Turkey. Students should pass different kinds of entrance exams to enter different kinds of high schools like Anatolian high schools and private high schools. Students not successful in those exams are free to register to state high schools in their neighborhood. In this research, we selected six schools, of which three were state high schools, two Anatolian high schools, and one private school. Thus, the state schools could be represented as well as those schools that accept students with an exam. The registration in state high schools depends on the place of residence of the student, i.e. students can register in those schools located in their

neighborhood. However, the rest of the schools in the sample can accept students from everywhere in the city, because they accept students that passed the entrance exam regardless of their residence. For this reason, a criteria that we considered while choosing the state high schools were their location, because we thought that it could influence the girls’ residence, hence their mall preferences. Although this may seem irrelevant for Anatolian high schools and private high schools it is an important factor for students attending government schools.

In the focus group discussions, we wanted girls to describe their shopping mall visits, to get a deeper understanding of their experiences, likes, dislikes and motivations related with those visit. Therefore we asked some basic questions like; the reason, frequency, timing and the duration of the visits. Moreover there were questions about the companion, mostly preferred shops and their shopping habits in the malls. Finally we also asked them about their likes and dislikes regarding shopping malls and wanted them to describe their favorite and ideal shopping mall.

In the questionnaire applied we asked such questions as: age, class, income level, occupation of parents, existence and number of siblings, automobile ownership of the family, residence place, hobbies and leisure time activities.

The focus group discussions lasted about 60 minutes. All of the discussions are recorded to audiocassettes. The discussions were led by two moderators, one responsible for the well-ordered flow of the discussion and one responsible for the coverage of specific issues in the discussion, a procedure called dual-moderator group (Malhotra, 2004).

## **FINDINGS**

### **Characteristics of the Sample**

Findings gathered from questionnaire results related with the age, class, income level, occupation of parents, existence and number of siblings, automobile ownership of the family, location, hobbies and leisure time activities of participants are summarized below. As can be seen from Table 1, focus group participants were in the relevant age range. Most of the participants (42.9%) were 16 years old, 21.4% of them were 17 years old, 19.6% were 15 years old, 14.3% were 18 years old and there was only one girl of 19 (1.8%). 32.1% of these girls attended 9<sup>th</sup> class while 33.9% attended 10<sup>th</sup> class.

Participants' distribution by their place of residence can be seen in Table-2. It is seen that most of the participants live in Karşıyaka and Konak followed by other districts.

As it can be seen from Table 3, 28.6% of the girls declared that their monthly household income falls in the 1,501-2,000 YTL income categories. 19.6% of them have a monthly household income of 501-1,000 YTL while 16.1% of them 2,001-2,500 YTL. 12.5% have a monthly household income exceeding 2,500 YTL. (Exchange rates were approximately \$1=1.40 YTL and €1=1.70 YTL when focus groups meetings were held).

Also 44 of the participants' (78.6%) families own an automobile. 62.5% of the girls have one sibling. Most of the girls' mothers (62.5%) are housewives. Among the working mothers, 10.7% of them are teachers.

Mostly cited leisure time activities were listening to music, shopping, reading, going to the cinema, meeting friends and watching TV respectively. All of the girls said that they visit shopping malls.

Questionnaire results showed that girls mostly visited movie theaters, restaurants/café's, boutiques and other entertainment venues respectively.

The questionnaires revealed that 39.3% of girls visit malls once a week while 26.8% go to malls twice a month. In focus group discussions, some contingency factors affecting these frequencies were discovered. For example, a girl said that, they go more frequently in winter and summer because of the extreme weather conditions. Another girl said that since they should go to supporting courses they visit malls less frequently.

**Table-1: Age and Class Distribution of the Participants**

Age	N	Percent	Class	N	Percent
15	11	19,6	Preparation *	10	17,9
16	24	42,9	9 <sup>th</sup> Class	18	32,1
17	12	21,4	10 <sup>th</sup> Class	19	33,9
18	8	14,3	11 <sup>th</sup> Class	9	16,1
19	1	1,8			
Total	56	100,0	Total	56	100,0

\* It should be noted that Anatolian high schools and private high schools have a preparation class in which students have only foreign language courses. Therefore some high schools have four classes.

**Table-2: Participants Place of Residence by Municipality**

	N	Percent
Karşıyaka	20	35.7
Konak	18	32.1
Buca	6	10.7
Bornova	4	7.1
Gaziemir	3	5.4
Güzelbahçe	2	3.6
Aliağa	2	3.6
Narlıdere	1	1.8
Total	56	100.0

**Table-3: Average Monthly Household Income**

Average monthly household income	N	Percent
Less than 500 YTL*	1	1.8
501-1000 YTL	11	19.6
1001-1500 YTL	8	14.3
1501-2000 YTL	16	28.6
2001-2500 YTL	9	16.1
More than 2501 YTL	7	12.5
Total	52	92.9

\* Approximately, \$1= 1.40 YTL and €1= 1.70 YTL.

**Table-4: Activities Engaged in the Shopping Mall**

	N	Percent
Movie theaters	47	26.1
Restaurant/ Café	46	25.5
Boutique	36	20
Other entertainment venues	32	17.8
Supermarket	14	7.8
Others	5	2.8
Total	180	100

**Table-5: Frequency of Mall Visits**

Frequency of mall visits	N	Percent
Twice a week	6	10.7
Once a week	22	39.3
Twice a month	15	26.8
Once a month	6	10.7
Less frequent than once a month	7	12.5
Total	56	100.0

### Results of Content Analysis

Focus group data were content analyzed. As it is the case for qualitative research, the results are not conclusive but exploratory. However, although they can not be generalized there are a number of clear outcomes apparent from the results. Typically, a content analysis consists of four steps called coding, developing themes, organizing codes and themes, and describing and commenting on findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003).

Coding process was done by the participation of all the authors. The codes were guided by the literature, questions asked in the discussions and interpretations of the authors. Then, the codes are grouped under different themes/categories named by the authors.

Readers should be warned that there were no meaningful differences between participants we choose to quote and those we did not. The quotations we chose reflect common ideas.

**Table-6: Organization of Themes and Codes Related with Participants' Experiences**

They go to shopping malls to	Companion	Time	Duration	Frequency	Spending Money
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eat</li> <li>▪ Watch movie</li> <li>▪ Entertain</li> <li>▪ Shop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Friends</li> <li>▪ Mother</li> <li>▪ Family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Weekends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3 to 4 hours</li> <li>▪ whole day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Once a week</li> <li>▪ Twice a month</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ They spend money every time they visit the mall</li> </ul>
	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
	Contingent on activity	Contingent on timing of supporting courses	Contingent on Activity and Situational Factors		on Food, Entertainment, Movie, Clothing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Watching movie and entertaining with friends</li> <li>▪ Shopping with mother</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Afternoon or morning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3-4 hours are enough for shopping</li> <li>▪ Watching movie increases duration.</li> <li>▪ If it rains they can stay there whole day.</li> </ul>		

Firstly we organized themes based on participants' experiences (see Table-6), and in this organization process we identified six themes as "duration, timing, companion, frequency, spending money, reasons for visiting the favorite shopping mall". In the second part, we analyzed the participants' positive and negative perceptions and their expectations (see Table-7).

The researchers tried to discover the activities girls engage in a shopping mall. Most of them stated that they eat in a mall, go to a movie, shop, and visit other entertainment venues. This result is parallel to questionnaire results (see Table 4). It should be noted that the activities they plan to do in the mall also determine their companion. Specifically, they shop for clothing with their mothers, but they choose friends to have fun, eat and watch movies.

Most girls stated that they usually visited the mall with their friends but sometimes with their mothers. Again, their companion is contingent on why they are going to the mall. For example if it is for the sake of entertainment or cinema they go with their friends but if they actually want to do shopping they may go with their mothers either because they tend to rely on the opinion of the mother or because of financial reasons. Some of them can choose something to buy with their friends but take their mothers or fathers for purchasing the selected item.

Many girls expressed that they stayed for 3 to 4 hours in shopping mall. In addition to these exact expressions, some girls expressed that time they spend there depended on what they do. Some girls expressed that 2 to 3 hours are enough for shopping but movie visits increase the duration of the stay in a mall. They may spend the whole day in a mall when it rains or if they are in a mall located in an unfamiliar district, because they do not know other places. They do not visit malls at nights, because they are not allowed. They mostly stay in malls from 2 p.m. until 6 or 7 p.m.

Girls mostly go to the shopping malls on weekends. A small number of girls expressed that they visited malls on weekdays. If they visit malls on weekends, they usually go in the afternoon. An exception to this pattern is the group which attends supporting courses for university entrance exam; these courses are usually attended at weekends either from morning to noon or from noon to evening, Saturdays or Sundays, or both. If the girls attend those courses in the mornings they go to malls in the afternoon, and vice versa. Similarly, if they go on Saturday, they visit malls on Sunday, and vice versa.

Except for one girl, all of the participants declared that they spend money every time they visit a mall. They mostly spend their money on food, entertainment and movie followed by buying clothing, jewelry, hair slides, CD, magazines and shoes. Probably, they have to spend money because they stay 3-4 hours in the mall which is quite a long time considering the small size of Turkish malls. Hence, they do not have adequate alternatives to do something without spending money.

Girls expressed that they could visit a mall just because a specific store is located there. However that does not mean that they will spend their time in the mall because, some of them said that they visit only that store and leave the mall thereafter. So if the mall itself can not be an attraction center, attractiveness of one store can only create an in an out movement.

In Kirkup and Rafiq's (1999) framework related with the shopping centre marketing mix; key elements of the shopping centre marketing strategy to attract and retain customers are suggested to include accessibility/location, external and internal design, the assortment of retailers, leisure attractions, the communication mix, the cost of access, the customer services provided, and the interaction between, centre, store and customer participants. Our focus group results are similar to literature with some differences due to distinguishing characteristics of this age group and cultural factors. There were mainly 6 factors related with the mall itself that shaped the girls' experiences and was important for their selection of the favorite malls: merchandising, entertainment, atmosphere, location and accessibility, security and personal service. Another factor was clientele which is not directly related with the mall itself but important in the selection process of adolescent girls. Lastly, there are some factors related with the participants themselves. Each of these is discussed below.

### ***Location***

In literature location is suggested as probably the single most important success factor for a shopping mall (Dowson, 1983; Nicholls et al., 2002). Location is usually discussed as proximity to city and easiness of access. For our participants location seems to have a critical importance as they do not have driving licenses, they want to go to the nearest possible place. So they tend to choose places close to their homes, schools or supporting courses. However there is another important factor in this patronage decision. They may choose a mall because it is close to where their friends live or because it is a kind of meeting place even if it is far

from their houses. As one participant stated “*There is no shopping mall close to me. I mean I go to mall x cause it’s close to Özge’s house (best friend)*” Also another important factor related with the location is the vicinity of the mall for two reasons. First they want to spend their leisure time

with other activity alternatives after they leave the mall; therefore there should be other activity alternatives around the mall. Second they do not want to be patrons of malls that are located in run-down neighborhoods because of security problems.

**Table-7: Organization of Themes and Codes Related with Participants’ Positive and Negative Perceptions and Expectations**

Factors		Ideal Shopping Mall Expectations	Reasons for being patrons of a specific mall (Positive perceptions)	Reasons for not visiting a specific shopping mall (Negative perceptions)
Merchandising	Assortment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Variety of stores</b></li> <li>- Magazines, CDs and Music, Accessories, Clothes shop, Sportswear, Gift, Hobby</li> <li>- No supermarket</li> <li>▶ <b>Product Variety</b></li> <li>- Reflection of “my” style</li> <li>▶ <b>A large number of stores</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Product variety</b></li> <li>- Reflection of “my” style</li> <li>▶ <b>A large number of stores</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Variety of stores</b></li> <li>- Accessories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Product variety</b></li> <li>- Low product variety</li> <li>- Does not match my style</li> <li>- Not rejuvenating stores</li> <li>▶ <b>A small number of variety of stores</b></li> <li>- A vast supermarket area</li> </ul>
	Pricing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Lower prices and targeting every income level</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Discounts</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Value for money</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>High prices</b></li> </ul>
	Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Quality products</b></li> </ul>		
Entertainment Venues	Food Vendors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>A large number of restaurants and cafés</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Different cuisines</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Distinctive decor of cafés</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Existence of food courts</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Unattractive cafés</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Cafés without independent sitting places</b></li> </ul>
	Specialty Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Existence of specialty entertainment places</b> -</li> <li>- Snooker, bowling, play area</li> <li>▶ <b>Movie Theater</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Play ground for kids</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Sport center</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Dance clubs</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Existence of specialty entertainment places</b></li> <li>- More entertaining activities</li> <li>- Karaoke</li> <li>- Game centers (play area)</li> <li>- Watching football matches</li> <li>▶ <b>Movie Theater</b></li> <li>- Comfort of the movie theater rooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Limited number of specialty entertainment places</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Uncomfortable movie theaters</b></li> </ul>
	Special Events or Exhibits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Fashion shows</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Concerts</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Celebrities signing autographs</b></li> </ul>		
Atmosphere	Interior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Big Size</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Attractive décor and ornaments</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Comfort</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Attractive decor and ornaments</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Big size</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Unattractive decor</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Poor lighting</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Small size</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Technical problems</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Discomfort</b></li> </ul>
	Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Functional store grouping</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Existence of resting places</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Comfortable layout</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Having separate specialty stores</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Functional store grouping</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Ineffective store layout</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Department type of stores</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Uncomfortable</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Lack of resting places</b></li> </ul>

Factors	Ideal Shopping Mall Expectations	Reasons for being patrons of a specific mall (Positive perceptions)	Reasons for not visiting a specific shopping mall (Negative perceptions)
Location and Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Proximity</li> <li>▶ Environment and vicinity around the mall</li> <li>▶ Other activity alternatives in the vicinity of the mall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Proximity</li> <li>▶ Other activity alternatives in the vicinity of the mall</li> <li>▶ Environment and vicinity around the mall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Far from the city center</li> <li>▶ Run-down neighborhood (in a very bad condition)</li> </ul>
Clientele	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Not a lot of superfluous crowd (just a selective crowd)</li> <li>▶ Peers visiting the mall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Not a lot of superfluous crowd (just a selective crowd)</li> <li>▶ Peers visiting the mall</li> <li>▶ Popular among peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Popular among elderly (esp. Parents)</li> <li>▶ Various visitors from everywhere</li> <li>▶ Overcrowded</li> <li>▶ Very empty</li> <li>▶ Wolf whistling</li> <li>▶ Unpopular among peers</li> </ul>
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Secure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Secure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Insecure</li> <li>-Far from the city center</li> <li>-Insufficient security services</li> <li>-Clientele</li> </ul>
Personal Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Desire to be cared</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Bad treatment</li> <li>▶ Bad experiences</li> <li>▶ Insisting salespeople</li> </ul>
Others		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Habitual behavior</li> <li>▶ Feeling at home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Fed up with the mall because of repeated visits</li> </ul>

## Merchandising

From the literature it is seen that the range or assortment of tenants in a mall is widely recognized as a key factor in determining the image of a mall (McGoldrick, 1990) and thus attracting and retaining customers (Nevin and Huston, 1990; Finn and Louviere, 1996). Considering the results of content analysis, we can see a clear match between the participants' leisure time activities and their expectations from the malls regarding store variety. Specifically, girls stated that they mostly listen to music, read books, go to shopping and movie and meet with friends in their spare times. Most of these activities can be undertaken in a shopping mall. However, girls stated especially the inadequacy of stores where magazines and CDs are sold.

The number of stores and product variety is very important but not enough to be a differentiating attribute because almost all the malls have similar merchandising assortments. They want malls to reflect their own styles. As one girl stated "Teenagers go to mall x. Mall x is just for us. Mall

y is more feminine so that may be the reason". Besides, they want stores to rejuvenate themselves because they can get bored quickly. Using experiential merchandising can be a good way to attract and keep these age group girls longer in the mall.

Also, from our findings it can be seen that hypermarket-led shopping malls with large department stores are not among the favorite of girls. This finding is similar to Haytko and Baker's (2004) findings. However availability of those kinds of stores has been found to be important mall choice criteria for adults (Finn and Louviere, 1996). One reason for this is that those kinds of malls, especially the ones with hypermarkets attract a lot of people especially the parents. As one girl said "Which child wants to go to the same place as her parents?"

From our analysis it seems that adolescent girls usually find the prices of the stores within the mall higher. For that reason, they spent their money on food, movie, and other entertainment activities

(Table-6) but they spent very little on clothing. This can be attributed to the fact that the prices for food, movie and other entertainment activities generally are similar everywhere. Thus they select most convenient place where they can find all of the activity alternatives together. On the other hand, they do not prefer malls for clothing shopping because of the dominance of famous brands known for their higher prices. Most of the participants indicated that they selected central business districts and open bazaars for shopping for clothing.

Quality of products was cited as an ideal shopping mall attribute, but not stated as reasons for visiting or not visiting a specific shopping mall. That may be a result of participants' not seeing any difference between malls in terms of quality. Thus quality is not being considered as a differentiating attribute for the time being.

### ***Entertainment***

Shopping at the mall seems to evoke different responses. These responses seem to be influenced from the characteristics of girls and their motives for shopping. Marketing literature indicates that shoppers may vary significantly in terms of shopping motivation, shopping criteria, shopping patterns and purchase behavior (Li et al., 2004). Shoppers' motivation varies in terms of their hedonic or utilitarian concerns. Shoppers influenced by utilitarian concerns believe "shopping is a form of work". Others are driven by hedonic concerns and they include enjoyment, excitement, experiences gained from shopping activities. (Nicholls et al., 2002, Kim et al., 2003) In literature it is suggested that shopping malls are places especially for teenagers where they can socialize with friends, enjoy entertainment or solve their loneliness or other psychological stresses (Bloch et al., 1994). Wakefield and Baker (1998) also reached that shopping enjoyment positively affected excitement. Individuals who spent more time and money while shopping were also found to enjoy the mall. If the individuals did not enjoy to be in a mall, they shopped quickly and spent less money. Thus only creating utilitarian value may not be enough to attract customers.

Our participants seem to seek utilitarian value when they go to malls for shopping, but most of the time malls are not places for them to shop, but have fun and meet with friends. It seems that girls are most likely to prefer malls for the entertainment purposes, thus seems to be hedonic type of shoppers. So entertainment based activities appealing to the hedonic shoppers may be more successful in attracting the girls, as it can also be

clearly seen from the ideal mall expectations of our participants.

There seems to be no consensus about the classification of entertainment alternatives. Usually, they are classified as a part of the merchandising, however in our study, it is seen that entertainment has special importance for our participants, for this reason we chose to place it under a special heading as "entertainment venues" similar to Sit et al. (2003). Further, we categorized the entertainment venues under three themes named: "food vendors", "specialty entertainment" and "special events or exhibits". We used a different categorization from literature by including food vendors under the entertainment venues category. The reason for this is that our participants view eating activities as an activity to meet with friend, to see people and to socialize which is also part of the fun. This also reflects Turkish lifestyle viewing eating out as an entertainment activity. So for our participants it is not just an activity extender as cited in literature (Beyard, O'Mara, 1999) but also an activity generator.

Among entertainment venues, food vendors are important attraction centers. The reason for the food courts to be an important attraction center is quoted as. *"For example teenagers go out with friends. So I think, the activity should be suitable to do with friends. That way it would be much more enjoyable. Maybe it is the reason why cafes are popular"*. Although every shopping mall has food vendors, girls want much more variety like different cuisines. They want cafés to be distinctive with their décor. They do not prefer food courts grouped around a common or public sitting area which usually is the case with the shopping malls, but rather prefer cafés with private sitting places encouraging longer staying.

Presence of different kinds of specialty entertainment facilities like snooker, bowling, movie theatre etc. has a vital importance for the attraction of participants. Other than the classical entertainment venues existent in the shopping malls in İzmir, they want things like sport centers, dance clubs. Other than the variety of those alternatives the features of them are also important. Especially comfort of movie theatres turned out to be the differentiating factor rather than its existence in a mall. Additionally, play ground for kids was a significant place because when they go shopping with their families, they do not want to be annoyed with existence of their little brothers/sisters.

In their ideal malls, participants declared that there should be special events or exhibits like fashion shows, concerts, celebrities signing autographs.

However, those activities appear on neither positive nor negative attributes of malls. Namely, this shows that none of those special events are used effectively by shopping malls. In this sense, just arranging an activity is not enough but also it should be effectively communicated.

As a result, the longer the customers stay at the mall, the greater the chances are that they will make a purchase (Li et al., 2004). Thus it is important to keep customers at the mall longer. The way to this is, making the shopping experience more pleasant. Our girls usually tend to stay at the mall for entertainment purposes, so it seems that to make the experience for our girls much more pleasant we need to increase entertainment efforts.

### ***Atmosphere***

A retailer's image depends heavily on its "atmosphere", the psychological feeling a customer gets when visiting that retailer. For a store based retailer, atmosphere refers to the store physical characteristics that project and image and draw customers. (Berman, Evans, 2004) According to our content analysis, atmosphere was divided into two sub- themes called interior factors and layout.

Almost all the girls had something to say about the atmospherics of their favorite, disliked and ideal malls. Mostly referred themes related with the atmosphere of the mall were the comfort of the mall, and that is mainly related with the store layout facilitating girls to find what they are looking for. Our participants preferred different kinds of specialty stores to be grouped separately so that it would be more convenient to find what they are looking for. (Such as shoe store in one place and accessorize stores in another place)

Mall size is an important factor for participants. Because as the mall size increases the offerings of a mall will increase. Attractive décor and ornaments are factors perceived as essential. An important aspect to emphasize is that even though participants did not declare interior factors as critical to be patrons of malls, the inadequacy and inefficiency of those kinds of factors were among the important reasons for not selecting a mall.

### ***Clientele***

From literature it is known that for teenagers going shopping, to malls in particular, is a kind of social activity. Thus, in this social activity they want to see people like themselves. So, peer influence in this case seems to be very important; they tend to choose places that are popular among their peer

group. We can also see this obviously from the remarks of our participants: "*I am not even aware of where I am, when I am with people I want to be*". Erkip (2004) also analyzed the appeals of mall in Ankara. According to this study result, it is seen that, age has a critical importance on socialization. "Liking other people", "liking this place being crowd", "coming because everybody does" show a significant difference with age.

In our study, we found a factor, not directly associated with the mall itself but which is seen to be very important in the selection process of girls; customer profile of a mall. They are kind of selective in the type of clientele they want to see in the mall. This influence of clientele factor can also be seen in their selection of two favorite malls, which are characterized by their high-end merchandise. While one of them does not have a supermarket, the other one has a supermarket attracting relatively higher income level customers. The existence of supermarket is an important factor influencing the clientele profile. Especially if the malls' most important magnet store is a hypermarket following every day low pricing strategy, the mall will be the attraction center of elder people especially parents. One girl expressed her discomfort about this, by saying "*If I were the manager of a mall, I wouldn't let grown ups to enter the mall.*" Additionally this kind of mall would appeal to various visitors from every social class. This can be defined as "superfluous crowd". From the viewpoint of our participants this kind of a crowd makes them feel uncomfortable and creates insecure conditions. While overcrowded places are very irritating for them they do not want to be empty places either. This may be a result of crowded places being generally identified as a nasty experience in shopping practices and creating stress tendency hence leading to satisfaction problem. (Michon et al., 2005) But at the same time empty places does not offer an opportunity to socialize. The remark of a girl explains this very clearly: "*Mall x is full of teenagers, it is lively. Even when I am very down, I go there and I cheer up. I didn't come out of the mall upset even once*".

### ***Security***

Shopping malls are a good place to find a lot of people together carrying money and credit cards. Also several features such as vast parking areas, various types of clientele, crowdedness of shopping malls generate a place that can be stimulating for criminal activities. Despite its importance, security, has taken limited assessment and usually associated with different attributes like quality of the mall, facilities, clientele, and atmosphere. (Sit et al., 2003; Haytko and Baker, 2004) Our participants

expected their ideal mall to be a secure place but did not declare many problems related with the security. They said that *“There is no difference between mall and street regarding security”*. But a small number of security concerns they have were ascribed to insufficient security services, the location, and variety of clientele. For example, some of the girls mentioned: *“Security guards ignore the entrance control. While some people enter the mall, alarms ring but nobody cares. What if they have gun or things like that???”* Another comment regarding bad experiences of girls show the importance of clientele in mall: *“Even though nothing else happens, we are faced with wolf whistling and staring men”*

### ***Personal Services***

Regarding personal services our participant stated bad experiences about bad treatment of sales people and very insisting attitudes of them. Overall, all of the participants desire to be cared by the service providers. This could be inferred from the comment of one participant: *“I entered a store alone, nobody paid attention to me, but when I entered with an adult, they gave a friendly welcome. I experienced this in the same day. Because they see me young, they think that I can’t purchase by myself.”* Though the stated problems above are concerned with the services provided by the individual stores within the mall, they directly influence image of the malls. For that reason, mall management should try to communicate the importance of individual shops’ services to the mall image by effective internal marketing and also create a control mechanism on the quality of services provided by them.

### ***Other Factors***

Lastly, there are other factors associated with participants’ themselves like habitual behavior and feeling at home. They tend to be patrons of malls with which they are familiar. But on contrary to this, some of the participants claimed that if the mall does not rejuvenate itself they may be bored because of repeated visits. In this sense, while shopping malls should keep the warm relationship, they should also catch up with new trends to create more attractions for adolescent girls.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

This study is an initial attempt to understand the adolescent girls’ mall expectations, experiences, perceptions and factors influencing them. It is an exploratory study based on 6 focus group discussions with 56 girls ranging from the ages of

15 to 19. Most of the findings are parallel to the existing literature; however some findings show variation originating from different cultural backgrounds, as well as needs and wants of this age group.

According to various segments, the importance of image attributes is interpreted in an extended array. Hence identification and understanding of different segments is important and could assist mall managers in developing their marketing strategies. Although marketers of shopping malls use mass marketing strategy, they replace this strategy with segmented market strategy in order to attract the new consumers and/or maintain current consumers (LeHew, Fairhurst, 2000). Teenagers make up the largest part of the population in Turkey. They are not financially independent at the moment, but they represent a considerable market for coming years. Considering the demographic trends in Turkey and increasing importance of adolescents in the market as customers with relatively higher disposable income (Kim et. Al., 2003: 140) we can propose that considering teenagers as one of the important segments and acting accordingly would be beneficial.

As a result of our content analysis, 6 factors related with the mall itself were found to shape the girls expectations, experiences and perceptions. Those factors are also significant for the patronage decision of our participants. The factors mostly mentioned during the focus group conversations are grouped under merchandising, entertainment, atmosphere, location and accessibility, security and personal service. Another factor uncovered to be influential was the other patrons of the mall called clientele. Clientele is not directly related with the mall itself but critical for the selection process of adolescent girls. Lastly, there are other factors related with the participants themselves like “feeling at home, habitual behavior, and getting bored”.

We have seen that our participants mostly adopt malls for entertainment purposes. In other words we can call them hedonic types of shoppers. For this reason, for malls trying to attract adolescent girls, the variety and quality of entertainment offerings namely food vendors, specialty entertainment and special events are crucial.

As a concluding remark, we can say that shopping malls are in the growth stage in Izmir, this can be seen from increasing competition. Under this condition, it is vital for shopping malls to differentiate themselves or else; their customers can be captured by the newest shopping mall. However differentiation is a multifaceted process. It can be

difficult because of the need to get the acceptance and support of the tenants. Also during the rejuvenation process major problems can arise, adding up to the costs, and duration of it. For that reason, most of the shopping malls continue offering similar products and services. However our participants seek for change and capturing them depends on being open to new trends, especially related with entertainment. The participants of this study perceive the shopping malls as places that meet their social needs. On the other hand, some of the participants claimed that if the mall does not renew itself they may be bored because of repeated visits. For that reason, if the shopping malls diversify entertainment venues such as opening a dance clubs in the mall and differentiate them from others, they may attract more adolescents.

Another result we reached from content analysis is that girls' companion for visiting shopping malls is mostly their friends. Friends may be expected to act as a referent group. Therefore, peer influence should be taken into consideration and actions should be taken to increase the good word-of-mouth communication among this group. This can be attained by the effective use of the external marketing (anything that communicates the consumer before service delivery like traditional communication efforts plus personnel and physical facilities) or interactive marketing communication. Since the malls do not usually use advertising as a communication tool, they are recommended to shift their public relations efforts to teenagers. They could arrange teen-oriented social interactions (concerts, fashion shows) and exhibits. Also, they have to modify their offerings like merchandise, entertainment facilities, and the atmosphere in general according to needs and wants of them.

The findings of the study should be interpreted with caution because there are some limitations. As mentioned in the methodology part, the results are not conclusive but exploratory. The method we used made it possible to attain a deeper and richer understanding of the concepts but limited the number of participants. So even though we have a large amount of data, it can not be generalized to the adolescent girls living in İzmir. For this reason, extending and supporting this study by a quantitative research would be appropriate.

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