



Pedestrians crossing the street outside the Pavilion Mall in downtown Kuala Lumpur. The demographic survey shows that male shoppers have risen to 48% versus women at 52%

Males the X factor for shopping complexes

- **Designers** or mall managers told to pay attention to men's shopping experience
- **More** percentage of F&B outlets as Malaysians like to eat in malls



Guest writer

by Lum Youk Lee

THERE is a myth that women make up the larger population amongst the shoppers in malls, with a ratio of as high as 80:20. This reinforces the belief that women contribute to the larger portion of the sales transacted at retail shops.

However, a sampling data carried out last year by Stratos Marketing and Malaysia Shopping Malls Association (PPK Malaysia) at three mid- to upper-end malls in the Klang Valley indicated that the ratio between male and female shoppers is closer to 48:52. While this may come as a surprise to many, it also means the mall industry has to start paying equal attention to men.

48:52 is the new number

This statistics resulting from an accumulative research initiative over 2015-2016 implies that the footfall of a shopping mall is almost half of the men and the rest women. In the absence of the prior database, this would be a new benchmark for the mall industry.

Why nearly 50:50? Maybe women drag their male counterparts along for every shopping trip, or maybe men do shop a lot too, or maybe it has always been like that except we have never

paid attention to the elephant in the living room.

First, we must acknowledge that this does not diminish the important role of female shoppers, but it implies that men are no less significant than the female shoppers in modern shopping malls.

Academically speaking, how does it affect designers or mall managers when now we are told that we also need to pay attention to the men's shopping experience?

Firstly, aim for the stars and you will land on the moon, so what makes a woman happy usually also works for men, eg clean toilet facilities, bright car parks, idiot-proof way-finders, generous parking bays and so forth. These are all ingredients for a winning formula.

Although there are things that do not bother men much, except for ladies, such as overly reflective floor tiles, steep escalators, cramped lifts, these are considered extras, and they do not particularly make a man happier but we do at least to keep the other half of your shoppers satisfied.

Are there any particular things that make men happier patrons at our malls? There are and it goes like this – "a bored woman shops and walks, a bored man sits and watches" – this is written in men's DNA.

In other words, the trick is WiFi and benches – give men generous access to the internet and a fairly comfortable place to sit, they can stay in a mall for half a day whilst the companion (wife/girlfriend) shops all day long, worry-free.

But idling men on a sofa playing candy crush do not spend money, and that's not what a mall wants to happen – just wait when they run out of batteries or start feeling hungry, they will find a cafe with power sockets.

Some men may not spend more than RM15 for a T-shirt, but

RM15.90 for a cappuccino and another RM4.99 for a donut – this is a no brainer. These will keep the men busy for another three hours before the spouse returns from shopping and they go for dinner together.

Who eats more, men or women?

"Definitely MEN!", but says who? The statistics show the contrary, out of the surveyed female respondents, 64.8% patronised food and beverage (F&B) outlets in a mall compared to 59.8% men.

This implies that for every 10 females entering a mall, seven of them eat or dine compared to six out of 10 male shoppers. Recent news has reported that Singapore malls have begun to increase the percentage of F&B outlets from the conventionally 10% to nearly 40% amongst the rest of the trades.

According to RCMC Sdn Bhd retail consultant Richard Chan, the percentage of F&B in the tenant mix for Malaysian malls started with 10%. These days, it has grown to 20% and above, with some recent malls already reaching the 40% mark.

The percentage of F&B in the trade mix is also dependent on the mall's positioning. For example,

neighbourhood malls tend to have a higher percentage of F&B and groceries compared to fashion outlets.

The ball park is Malaysian shoppers eat in malls. Although the difference between males and females is marginal, it is simple trivia that the female shopper has high expectations in her eating choices, and common sense tells us that women definitely cannot tolerate an inferior ambience and low quality food, compared to the male.

These numbers are giving us a hint, modern shopping malls must offer adequate F&B in order to capitalise on such a spending pattern.

The research also shows the ratio of female to male shoppers with patronage for groceries and convenience goods of 22.2% against 15.7% respectively.

This is old school and for obvious reasons – household shopping is still a female-dominated chore. However, if we see the other side of the coin, these numbers mean that every two out of 10 ladies in the mall buy grocery items, and almost two out of 10 men do, too.

To rationalise this, merchandise in supermarkets or hypermarkets these days successfully reach out to men, no less than ladies.

Fashion – a women thing?

Men no longer settle for what is in the fridge. These days, they want to play a role in filling up the fridge, too.

The gap is close, as statistics show the difference between the male and female fashion shoppers in a mall is a ratio of 0.7:1, or for every three females shopping for fashion products in a mall, two men do so, too.

However, we must qualify that the statistics' definition of "fashion" covers general fashion from head to toe, and not only luxury labels. Nevertheless, this implies that fashion products in a mall is no more a "women" thing alone, men's purchases of fashion products are substantial, too.

According to Catherine Chin, former director of BRC which owned labels such as Quiksilver and Roxy, "In the mid-2010s, there was a changing trend of male

fashion. They demanded more fashionable instead of technical products.

"Retail sales increased almost double due to such change of buying behaviour. In most of our stores, we had 50:50 stock keeping units for both males and females for certain mixed gender labels."

If so, with the rise of fashion awareness amongst the men, this implies that modern malls need to prepare sufficient fashion outlets in the merchandise mix that will capitalise on such a trend.

One interesting new observation was that although there is still a qualitative difference between the fashion purchase between men and women, the qualitative difference is close to none. Amongst the 2,638 surveyed male/female shoppers, their fashion purchase spent is the same – this is at least valid when it comes to mid-market fashion purchases.

The 2017 *iFashion Consumption Trend* report, jointly released by CBNDData and Tao Bao iFashion, suggest a 2:1 ratio of female shoppers against male shoppers in terms of fashion products. However, the growth rate and significance of males in the fashion industry definitely must not be overlooked.

So what the modern malls must plan is to capitalise on this rising market, for a start, we need to start paying attention to men's shopping psychology.

Malaysia's malls have never paid much attention to men – we know little about them. But for a start, we know they are impulsive, impatient, have no budget for things they like and the only spur for them to buy anything is nagging by the wife.

Changes in waiting

So what does this mean? Mall designs will have to change. Just like in most of the construction process, the domain of mall designers and contractor is mostly a male-dominated affair, from architects to engineers to interior designers and construction workers.

Therefore, some shopping malls are made very masculine and derived from a "rational-centric"-based design process. We build large, big and tall. The placement of escalators, lifts and signage are designed based on compliance, savings and efficiency based instead of "convenience-based" thought processes.

But thanks to the growing competition amongst shopping malls especially in the cities, shopping malls have learned to be generous in their designs by moving from "compliance-based" to "shopper friendly-based" design processes, an all-out investment catering to shoppers' whims and fancies to lure them in.

Malls have long begun to invest in more escalators, brighter car parks and generous baby rooms, all with the goodwill and intention to put a smile on the faces of our female shoppers.

In the new millennium, the survival and success of mall business lies on how well it caters to both sexes. **FocusM**

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What will the malls do to align themselves to the findings?