

Developing Divisoria as shopping tourism destination amidst COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract | The inevitable circumstance of Covid-19 to different tourism destinations requires a concerted effort of the government, industry, and academe in finding ways to continue tourism activities which safeguard the health of the people while contributing to the economic development of a destination. Thus, this research focuses how Divisoria may be branded as a potential shopping tourism destination for local and foreign tourists. Specifically, the variance in the assessments, motivating factors for shopping, and the necessary actions to make Divisoria a tourism destination that prioritizes welfare of tourists amid Covid-19 pandemic were investigated. Six (6) tourists were initially interviewed on how they think Divisoria can be promoted as a shopping tourism destination in the country and how the destination can be adept to Covid-19 pandemic. Sixty (60) respondents were then surveyed on the potential of Divisoria on being a tourist shopping district, focusing on the aspects of shopping culture, service quality, product value and reliability, physical features of stalls and supporting facilities. Tourists are found to be motivated to shop in Divisoria because of cheap finds, accessibility to transportation, variety of goods sold, and availability of local produce. They are also attracted to visit Divisoria due to the accounts of family and friends which increase their curiosity of the place, as well as the association of the destination to holidays. The added value of experiencing vast cultures in the Philippines through Divisoria can be considered a unique selling proposition of the place that may translate to multiplicity of positive word-of-mouth marketing.

Keywords | Divisoria, shopping tourism, shopping district, culture, tangibles

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1. Introduction

Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification, becoming one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. Tourism and shopping are closely related as stated by Egresi (2017), and the influence of shopping has always been a major component on a tourist's motivation to travel and cannot be excluded from a travel experience. Previous research has indicated that shopping could make up for a significant part of the tourist experience and could provide significant benefits to destinations by contributing to local retail revenue and by generating many jobs (Egresi, 2017). However, in the case of shopping when traveling, pleasure is not the only primary reason especially when the destination is regulated as a low-priced destination. The misleading concept of low-priced destinations should not be a hindrance to attract other visitors aside from bargain hunters.

When exploring a city, it is also worthwhile for a traveller to experience the culture of a destination. According to Egresi and Polat (2016), shopping is

considered as a secondary motivation to travel but still plays an important role on the tourist's travel experience. Buliah (2018) proposes that offering the right product and providing exceptional service to tourists that would entice them to shop are important aspects in developing a place for shopping.

In the Philippines, a place called Divisoria is seen as an emerging shopping destination in the country. People find their way to different malls and streets of Divisoria any time of the day to look for potential shopping items to buy. Tourists do not mind the voluminous people in the destination as they scout for cheap finds in the place. With a perceived limitation of the shopping destination on facilities and safety, the researchers see the importance of knowing how both local and foreign tourists provide significant input in further improving the international appeal of Divisoria as a shopping tourism destination. Finding ways on how this place can be developed into one of the preferred shopping destinations in Asia is an important contribution to the tourism industry of the country.



Figure 1 | Tourists shops for a variety of products in the streets of Divisoria before COVID-19 pandemic
Photo Credits: <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/philippines/articles/the-8-best-markets-in-manila-philippines/>

With common knowledge of people on the place as a destination for cheap finds, people still flock Divisoria for their shopping needs despite the Covid-19 pandemic. The local government of the City of Manila reminded tourists to follow minimum health and safety protocols during the peak of holiday shopping in December 2020. As social distancing is enforced in shopping destinations

this time of pandemic, physical shopping of goods has been challenging to tourists. Wearing of face masks and face shields are also enforced to protect oneself from getting infected with the virus. These circumstances may cause discomfort and fear to tourists in doing face to face shopping and may result to other means of getting the goods they need and want.



Figure 2 | Tourists doing holiday shopping during COVID-19 pandemic

Photo Credits: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/doh-tells-private-hospitals-increase-covid-19-beds-preparation-holiday-surge>



Figure 3 | Tourists shopping in Divisoria wear face masks and face shields

Photo Credits: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/12/07/20/covid-19-cases-in-ph-top-441000>

The relationship between shopping and tourism can be divided into two categories. The first one, where the primary source of the tourist trip is to shop, is termed *shopping tourism*. The second is called *tourist shopping*, where shopping is done as a secondary activity during a trip which may be motivated primarily by something other than shopping. Whichever is the reason of a tourist for shopping, the destination of choice benefits from the financial activity of buying something for themselves or for other people in a specific tourist place. Research shows that due to the constant growth of shopping malls, developers attracted consumers to malls by offering an assortment of stores in a single location. These stores include fast food courts, art exhibits, restaurants, video arcades, movie theatres, hair salons and dental offices. This prompts the customers to consume products and services in a variety of ways within a mall (Bloch, Ridgway, Dawson, 1994).

With respect to shopping motives, Buttle (1992) believes that shopping motives vary according to various contexts. For instance, the motive in grocery shopping is different from gift shopping. The studies of Sheth (1983) and Eastlick and Feinberg (1999) proposed that shopping motives comprise functional and non-functional motives. Functional motives refer to tangible attributes such as convenience, variety and quality of merchandise, and physical facility. Non-functional motives, on the other hand, include social needs for interaction with other people and non-tangible retailer attributes such as company reputation and customers' perceptions.

Divisoria is a commercial centre located in the bisection of Tondo and Recto, retailing diverse products for affordable prices. It is branded as a "bargain hunters' haven", thus, making it possible for Divisoria to qualify as a low-priced tourist shopping destination. It is sectioned into different malls and outdoor stalls. The area is famous among the locals, having around 700,000 visitors daily in 2017, according to the Manila Police District. As Mong-

kok Night Market in Hong Kong and Rot Fai Market in Thailand were transformed into a well-known tourist shopping districts in Asia, it is not impossible to position Divisoria for the same purpose. Since Hong Kong and Thailand markets are like Divisoria in terms of their environment, volume of visitors, and concept of selling styles - in this case competition-oriented selling is used, the potential of Divisoria becomes worth investigating.

With the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic for almost a year and a half now, it is necessary to know how a budding shopping tourism destination in the Philippines can be developed as part of the bucket list of travellers. The accounts of both local and foreign tourists are essential in knowing how it can become an attractive destination where one can enjoy a shopping experience amidst the pandemic.

2. Literature review

2.1. Shopping as reason for tourism

Shopping and tourism are seen as mutually dependent in popular destinations like Singapore and East Asian countries. In fact, shopping is considered a tourist attraction and a lucrative tourist activity in Singapore (Henderson et al., 2011). Meanwhile, there is a high percentage of tourists in South Africa who visit the country because of shopping and trade (Saayman & Saayman, 2012) as shopping also leads to more tourism-related activities such as booze and nightlife tourism (Toubes & Vargas-Sanchez, 2021), gastronomic tourism and heritage tourism.

In general, shopping is rated as the second most important expenditure item in tourism after accommodation; however, when it comes to well-known shopping destinations, such as Hong Kong, shopping is number one expenditure (Turner and Reisinger, 2001).

2.2. Tourist Shopping Preferences

Studying shopping patterns and behaviors of tourists are essential in tourism planning and promotion (Heung & Qu, 1998). Mall shopping is important to senior travellers (Littrell et al., 2004). Cleanliness and services are identified to be significant to those travellers between 50 and 90 years old (Littrell et al., 2004). In addition, some importance is noted on mall appearance (Sheth, 1983).

In cross cultural buyer-seller interaction, there are values and perceived expectations which are functional, social or organizational, personal or emotional, and epistemic or innovative in nature (Egresi & Kara, 2015). Customer satisfaction is important for guaranteeing long-term existence in the competitive business environment (Bhuiyan & Darda, 2021). Tourists who are called dedicated shoppers and spend 40% or more of travel budget on shopping in Istanbul are from non-Western countries and motivated to travel because of shopping (Egresi, 2017).

People do catalog shopping with high regard to functional motives, having convenience, perceived value and order services as priorities (Egresi, 2017). Malkowski, Mickiewicz and Malkowska (2020) segmented shoppers as product-focused shoppers, cultural experience shoppers, reluctant shoppers, difference seekers, and total shoppers. In Polish-German borderland, shopping tourism becomes an important element of information policy and regional and local marketing for it increases the competitiveness of the cross-border region (Choi et al., 2016).

2.3. Marketing a destination for shopping tourism

To develop tourism shopping villages and marketing plan, there must be a cooperation between tourism and retail industries (Littrell et al., 2004). A planning tool for developing marketing strategy

in the hotel, restaurant and travel include product, promotion, place or channels, price, marketing organization, and budget (Buttle, 2015). Theme Shopping Tourism (TST) can be conceptualized when commodities are luxurious, price are low, and routes to sightseeing spots are advantageous to shopping tourism (Liu & Wang, 2010). It is suggested that providing a higher level of shopping experience for tourists and increasing the contribution of shopping to the regional economy require supporting indigenous local people via various fiscal and educational instruments to continue producing and retailing authentic handicrafts and souvenir goods.

2.4. Economic benefit from shopping tourism

For the last decade, the direction of international tourism development has been the growth of emerging economy destinations through developing unique shopping experiences that add value to the touristic value of the destination while representing a significant source of income for the economy (Rifai, 2014). In fact, shopping tourism is currently emerging as a growing component of the travel experience, thus destinations have huge opportunities to leveraging the market trend through developing authentic and unique shopping experiences that add value to the touristic value of the destination while representing a significant source of income for the economy (Egresi & Kara, 2015). This translates to more booked hotels, more diners in restaurants, and more purchases in retail stores.

Shopping tourism can be considered as one of the solutions to economic problems of cities through avoidance of business closures (Henderson et al., 2011). Retailers are important component in the tourism in the tourism industry of Singapore since they have several favorable qualities as a shopping destination (Henderson et al., 2011). It is important to initiate joint strategies with traders and local institutions that promotes sustaina-

ble shopping tourism in a destination (Henderson et al., 2011).

In the Integrated Multilevel Perspective Theory of Timothy (2005), he introduced the conceptual relationship among consumption, shopping, and tourism. He described the connection between shopping as a leisure activity and tourism as a form of leisure. Shopping is among the most common and enjoyable activities undertaken by people on holidays and, in numerous cases, provide a major attraction and basic motivation for travel. A point is also made regarding how tourists are encouraged to shop in different tourism locations by its means of uniqueness, attractive nature of shops, range of foods, and the ambiance of the stores. Shopping may not be the primary attraction in vacation destinations, but shopping opportunities are important element in destination marketing.

Having the COVID-19 pandemic up to this time, the landscape of shopping activities abruptly changed. Shopping with face masks and face shields, as well as the thought of getting infected from other shoppers and business owners, makes shopping not a leisure activity anymore. What used to be an exciting tourism activity turned to be a struggle for shoppers, as well as to the business owners and peddlers who also finds leisure on overwhelming number of shoppers without thinking of possible health hazards.

2.5. Research Gap

Though there are a number of tourism research done, there is still limited number of studies on shopping tourism which may focus on tourist enjoyment, tourist emotions, and tourism experience (Henderson et al., 2011). Though Globe Shopper Index recognizes the importance of the role of destination attributes in the competitiveness a shopping destination, previous studies in shopping tourism have not focused on this (Henderson et al., 2011). With this study, how Divisoria can

be marketed as a shopping tourism destination through the insights of both local and foreign tourists can be investigated. The knowledge on destination marketing in the context of Covid-19 is considered a timely and relevant information in the tourism and hospitality industry that may be used for recovery strategies (Sengel, 2021).

This paper aims to evaluate the potential of Divisoria as a shopping tourism destination that is comparable to other destinations in Southeast Asia and even in other regions. Specifically, this research investigates how local and foreign tourists assess Divisoria as a potential tourist shopping district in terms of shopping culture, service quality, product value and reliability, physical features of stalls and other shopping and shop supporting facilities. This also intends to determine the variance between the assessments, the motivating factors that affect the shopping experience tourists, and the factors that may contribute on the success of Divisoria as a shopping tourism destination.

3. Methods

3.1. Procedure

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used by the researchers to gather data. Through employing a survey among respondents, this study can gain generalizable results on the perception of both foreign and local tourists on the different aspects this shopping tourism destination has. Meanwhile, the interviews with the participants provide thick descriptions of their thoughts on the shopping experiences, as well as the concepts they have about shopping in Divisoria.

The variables indicated in this study are the bases of the researchers in constructing the survey questionnaire and interview guide. The quantitative aspect used comparative research while the

qualitative part used analytical research in data organization. The researchers gained understanding and validated results using mixed-research.

3.2. Participants

The participants in this research are the shoppers in Divisoria, which include both local and foreign tourists. The selection of the participants is based on the consideration of tourists as the core of the destination and its development.

The researchers used a sample of the population of the consumers selecting 30 local tourists and 30 foreign tourists in Divisoria to answer a self-administered survey questionnaire. As for the interview part of data gathering, the researchers selected four (4) local tourists and two (2) foreign tourists. Non-probability sampling, specifically convenience sampling, was used.

A survey of the consumers is necessary to gather data with numerical results, in which each number has a corresponding interpretation. This helped the researchers since the data gave an exact value, as well as the impression of Divisoria as a potential tourist shopping district from the consumers' point of view was interpreted clearly by the researchers. The survey is divided into five parts: Personal Profile, Shopping Culture, Service Quality, Product Value and Reliability, Physical Features of Stalls and Supporting Facilities.

An interview of the tourists in Divisoria was necessary to gather specific data based on the statements that they provided, which gave the researchers information on how to further develop the action plan of developing Divisoria as a potential tourist destination.

4. Results

4.1 Assessment on the Potentials of Divisoria as a Shopping Tourism Destination

The survey among local and foreign tourists includes close-ended questions which solicit information on their perception on the potentials of Divisoria as a shopping destination in the Philippines. The indicators considered include shopping culture, service quality, product value, physical features and supporting facilities.

Table 1 | Respondents' Assessment on Divisoria as a Potential Shopping Tourism Destination

Indicators	Local		Foreign		Composite	
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI
Shopping Culture	4.13	S	4.33	HS	4.23	HS
Service Quality	3.59	S	3.45	S	3.52	S
Product Value	3.65	S	3.71	S	3.68	S
Physical Features	3.47	MS	3.30	MS	3.39	MS
Supporting Facilities	3.31	S	3.18	MS	3.25	MS

Response Code: 4.21-5.00 – Highly Satisfied (HS); 3.41-4.20 - Satisfied (S); 2.61- 3.40 Moderately Satisfied (MS); 1.81-2.60 - Dissatisfied (D); 1.00-1.80 – Highly Dissatisfied (HD)

Based on the local consumer's results on satisfaction level of overall criteria, most of the results are very satisfactory in terms of "shopping culture", "product value and reliability", "service quality" and "physical features of stalls". However, "supporting facilities" is rated as satisfactory. The overall mean value of the locals in terms of their satisfaction level on the overall criteria of Divisoria as a potential tourist shopping district is 3.63 with a rate of very satisfactory. On the other hand, foreign consumers rated "shopping culture" as excellent followed by the "product value and reliability" and "service quality" with the rate of very satisfactory and differ on their mean values 3.71 and 3.45, respectively. Similar to the foreign consumer's result, both "physical features of stalls" and "supporting facilities" are rated as satisfactory with mean values of 3.30 and 3.18 respectively. The overall mean value for the foreign consumers in terms of their satisfaction level on the overall criteria of Divisoria as a potential tourist shopping district is 3.59 with the rate of

very satisfactory. This proves that the supporting facilities in Divisoria needs more improvement.

The composite ratings show that the results of local and foreign consumers' criteria of Divisoria are similar but differ on their mean value. However, the overall mean value of the composite ratings resulted to 3.61 rated as very satisfactory.

4.2. Variance on Assessment on Divisoria as a Potential Tourist Shopping Destination

The results of the assessment of both local and foreign tourists were analyzed using t-test. This is to determine the variance in the assessments of these two (2) different groups of tourists. See Table 2.

Table 2 | Test of Significant Difference on Respondents' Assessment on Divisoria as a Potential Shopping Tourism Destination

Indicators	t-Test Results
Shopping Culture	11.7988*
Service Quality	-2.39937
Product Value	0.9880
Physical Features	-2.4693
Supporting Facilities	-2.5298

Generally, there is no significant difference on the assessment of local consumers on the potentials of Divisoria as a tourist shopping district. However, it was found out that there is a significant difference on the assessment of the foreign and local consumers in terms of Shopping Culture.

Based on the results, there was a variance found between the local and foreign consumers' rating in terms of Shopping Culture. The overall rating of local consumers' satisfaction level of shopping culture is very satisfactory, while foreign consumers' satisfaction level in terms of shopping culture is excellent, which it makes it different from each other's level of satisfaction. On the other hand, local and foreign consumers' satisfaction level in terms of service quality, product value and reliability, physical features of stalls, and support-

ing facilities were found to have no significant difference.

The high regard of foreign tourists on the cultural experience in Divisoria shopping suggests various business opportunities for the mall and stall concessionaires. If cultural aspect is identified as having much value to customers, Divisoria may have been starting to establish itself with an image as a shopping destination that is rich in cultural experiences for foreign tourists.

5. Discussion

5.1 Motivating Factors that Affect the Shopping Experience

Pull Factors of Divisoria as a Shopping Destination.

One of the reasons for foreign and local tourists to be attracted to Divisoria is its image of being a shopping haven. It considered as a place where almost all items one need at home, in school, or even at work can be bought. The variety of shopping items that Divisoria offers to its varied clients attracts tourists to explore what the destination has to offer to suit their needs and wants. As how Egresi (2017) puts it, tourism and shopping are inseparable. People go to places which satisfy their desire for shopping and this phenomenon of being able to attract people to shop leads to an industry in tourism.

Aside from the variety of products one can find in Divisoria, tourists appreciate the availability of local products of the Philippines. When people shop in a certain place, they are also after the culture that comes with it. For the tourists, the local products that can purchase in Divisoria emanates a shopping experience that makes them appreciate how people do things in the Philippines and how culture is reflected in these products. As mentioned in Liu and Wang (2010), supporting in-

indigenous people in retailing authentic handicrafts and souvenir goods provides a higher level of shopping experience.

What contributes more to the attractiveness of Divisoria is the relatively low prices of goods sold. Compared to other malls, local and foreign tourists think that their money has more value when they spend it in Divisoria. With a certain budget for shopping, they believe that they have maximized their potential of buying what they need in the least cost possible. This cost-effectiveness is even strengthened by the destination's location being considered as accessible to all means of transportation. Being in a prime spot in the middle of Manila, Divisoria can be reached by bus, jeepney, taxi, and light rail transit (LRT) if tourists choose to commute to and from Divisoria.

Push Factors of Divisoria as a Shopping Destination

Tourists visit Divisoria as they hear positive word-of-mouth from their relative and friends. The favorable shopping experiences of these people whom tourists trust in the aspect of recommending a place to shop. These people are considered as key opinion leaders for tourists as they need somebody to provide them with reliable leads for a good shopping experience. Such is one push factor which can be observed in their decision to shop.

Based on these positive feedbacks, their curiosity on a certain place increase. As these influential people for tourists create a consistent account of Divisoria, they become interested in visiting the place and hopeful that they too will have the similar favorable shopping experience. Divisoria, being branded as a shopping destination for holiday shopping, is perceived as a one-stop-shop where all the relevant shopping needs of tourists can be made. The wide array of choices of products that are linked to shopping seasons even made Divisoria more attractive to them.

Lastly, the impression of value for money drives

tourists to consider Divisoria as the perfect place to maximize their budget. The numerous stalls where they can see similar products provides them with an opportunity to compare prices and to proceed with buying the same products at the lowest possible price. This behaviour of tourists presents a price-driven set of clients who value their budget while enjoying the shopping experience in a certain destination. Understanding the quality of these tourist experiences is essential for tourism development such as in the case of Divisoria, as it helps to better position the brand by engaging both visitors and residents (Ghasemi, 2019).

5.2. Prioritizing safe shopping experience in Divisoria

As physical features and supporting facilities are found to be moderately satisfactory to both local and foreign tourists, administrators must capitalize the current low volume of shoppers as an opportunity for needed structural renovations. Divisoria should be recreated as a shopping tourism destination that does not only provide shopping needs of tourists, but also ensure customer mindset that the shopping experience itself can still be safe and enjoyable despite the onset of Covid-19 pandemic.

Local and foreign tourists pinpointed an important aspect for a shopping tourism destination – that is, a convenient space where one can easily shop for their needs and a safe space which ensures their protection from being infected with Covid-19 during actual shopping. This finding also suggests that the appearance of the malls in Divisoria is no longer at par with the other shopping destinations that they have been and the amenities it has no longer conform to the expectations of these travellers when it comes to a destination choice for shopping. When this area of concern is given much attention the soonest possible time, Divisoria may be able to sustain the shopping interests of those

who have been there, as well as may attract more local and foreign tourists who are interested with the destination but are particular to the physical features and supporting facilities of a place.

5.3. Highlighting cultural shopping experience in Divisoria

Apart from repackaging Divisoria as a safe destination, focusing on the culturally diverse shopping that Divisoria can make a tourist experience may further attract more shoppers. The added value of experiencing vast cultures in the Philippines through Divisoria can be considered a unique selling proposition of the place that may translate to multiplicity of positive word-of-mouth marketing.

The variety of shopping items that are available in Divisoria creates a haven of culture-rich shopping opportunity where local and foreign tourists would have access to the local produce of the Philippines, as well as to the imported goods from other Asian countries and even outside the region. The wide array of products that are readily available for purchase in retail and wholesale provides tourists the opportunity to be acquainted with what other countries have to offer in a product which in one way or another, reflects their way of life, beliefs, traditions, and even practices.

Aside from the cultural experiences derived from the products, tourists can also have the opportunity to mingle with other shoppers, retailers, and wholesalers as they hop from one stall to another in looking for products that they may consider as a good find and as having value for money. As they stroll in the different alleys of the shopping mall, tourists may have potential interaction with people whom they consider as casual acquaintance or may even develop into new friendships whom they can share cultural experiences as well.

6. Conclusion

Divisoria has established an image of being the top-of-mind choice when doing holiday shopping for a variety of low-priced goods. Tourists value the narrative accounts of shoppers with previous shopping experience in Divisoria. The rich cultural diversity present in the availability of a variety of products may be capitalized as a unique shopping experience for tourists where choice of physical layout, concessionaires, and events can be anchored. Mall management, together with the city administrators, must consider improving its physical facilities geared towards health and safety protocol compliance in shopping during the new normal.

With the high risk for researchers in conducting face to face survey and interview with shoppers, this study only included a relatively small number of samples. This limitation can be mitigated by future researchers through utilizing communication technologies which can serve the same purpose of soliciting information on how a specific shopping location can be developed into a tourism destination. Future researchers may conduct more in-depth investigation on how a shopping tourism destination can still thrive in its sales and operations though physical shopping is very limited at this time.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect other shopping destinations in the world, it is necessary to study how a tourist spot can be adept to the changing needs of time. A thorough investigation of how both local and foreign tourists perceive a shopping experience with a destination is a valuable contribution on how this industry can become more resilient and even advance its strategies on making the most of the place amidst the pandemic.

Since this study is conducted during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines, there are only a few local and foreign tourists who are included in the study. There could be more insightful discussion of shopping tourism potenti-

als of a destination when more tourists were considered in this study. Aside from knowing their experiences with the place, sustainability of being a shopping tourism destination would have clearer descriptions through how tourists foresee developments that would make their shopping experience more appealing, enjoyable, and convenient. Future studies on how destinations can be branded and re-branded so as to meet the changing preferences of tourists as we recover from the negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry.

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