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Public Perceptions of Restaurant Led Urban Change: Questionnaire Findings from Mall 1, Gulberg, Lahore

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ABSTRACT

This questionnaire based study explores user and stakeholder perceptions of the transformation of Mall 1, Gulberg, Lahore, based on findings from a structured questionnaire survey. Once a predominantly retail-oriented area, Mall 1 has gradually evolved into a food- and dining-focused urban corridor. The research examines how this shift has influenced key aspects of the built environment, particularly accessibility, safety, and spatial experience. The results indicate that most respondents appreciate the increased activity and social vibrancy introduced by the concentration of restaurants and cafés. At the same time, several concerns emerge, including insufficient parking capacity, unclear signage, and the limited provision of facilities for differently abled users. These issues affect the overall usability and inclusiveness of the area. Drawing on user feedback, the paper proposes context-specific guidelines that emphasize the improvement of shared amenities, the adoption of universal design strategies, and the integration of greenery and cultural activities to support a more balanced and inclusive food-led urban environment.

Introduction

Food-based urban transformation constitutes a defining feature of cities today, in which food practices, leisure spaces and social events have a decisive influence on the identity and economic dynamics of place. Internationally, food streets, restaurant precincts and culinary quarters are popularly recognized as drivers of urban life influencing pedestrian traffic patterns, encouraging sociability and contributing to placemaking (Zukin, 1995; Montgomery, 1998). It is not only that food environments shape consumer behaviour; they also remake physical locations, patterns of mobility, and the cultural significance of locales (Steel, 2008; Richards, 2017). Against this background, the conversion of a former retail corridor into food space as places for eating demonstrates wider social and economic trends as they manifest in an ever changing urban way of life.

The transformation of Mall 1 mimics the global trend. The place long known for small scale fashion and specialty retail has transformed into a more visible food based commercial operation which now also helps boost pedestrian volume and overall attention to the public. Yet, as urban theorists stress what such districts are successful or not depends largely on how they are perceived by users, particularly in terms of safety, comfort and accessibility as well as the experience of their built environment (Gehl 2010; Carmona 2021). And so, the gaze in public is a crucial way in which planners and designers can think through this issue of urban change driven by food.

Understanding these perceptions is particularly important for emerging cities such as Lahore which are experiencing accelerated commercial transitions that largely neglect the provision of public spaces, universal access, public transport and environmental quality. Food-oriented urban places can promote sociability and cultural vitality but may create challenges such as traffic congestion, lack of parking, inadequate public infrastructure and exclusion of weak populations (Mehta, 2014). In this case, user feedback is essential to find out how commercial development diverges from the existing public experience.

The present study is based on the questionnaire data and focuses only on users', architects' and planners' perceptions of the new image provided for Mall 1. Attitudes towards the historical change of the area, its spatial quality, accessibility and safety are all analysed from user responses in a systematic way, as are future development priorities. Rooted in bringing its reflections back to everyday practice and perception, the research also speaks to ongoing debates around human-centered urbanism and food as a force of contemporary urban identity.

Objective

1) To understand public perception on the change in land use from retail to food based.
2) To measure satisfaction in terms of spatial quality, safety and comfort.
3) To evaluate the factors like access, ease of public transportation and inclusivity.
4) To discover user and stakeholder priorities about the future of development.

Research Methodology

The research is conducted in a quantitative survey design and using Likert scale questionnaire. This survey addresses two different groups: users of Mall I and its surroundings on one hand, then stakeholders from urban planning, architecture or local community-related issue on the other. The Likert scale is usually just a bunch of statements, each with responders rating their agreement or disagreement on a range, often going from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." In this format, participants can identify the strength with which they agree or disagree with each statement.

Sampling Method

To ensure a proportionate representation of users and stakeholders in the study, stratified random sampling was used. This approach takes into account the presence of different type of participants. The process was three steps: first, stratification. The complete population was divided into to two group: users, stakeholder. Second, proportionate sample allocation. The total sample size required was divided between the 2 groups based on their relative proportions in the broader population. Subjects were selected at random from each of the subgroups in order to provide an equal opportunity for each person within that classification. The strong data analytic software package SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used for this research.

Survey Design

In the survey, respondents could select "Strongly Disagree" or "Strongly Agree" in response to each statement on a 5-point Likert scale. This standardized presentation of information facilitated data analysis and allowed comparisons across groups such as different user or stakeholder group. Each of the multiple parts constructed for the survey instrument addressed a different aspect of Mall 1 and its environment:

1. **History & Transformation:** Assessed the awareness of users and stakeholders about the historic change from retail to restaurants and what activities are possible here now.
2. **Spatial Experience**: This includes the level of satisfaction with seating areas, paths for pedestrian movement, planting materials, safety and environmental beauty in the design for users and those who promote them.
3. **Access & Public Transport:** User and stakeholder experiences of parking, walking distances, differently abled people and their access, and public transport.
4. **Overall experience:** summarised views from users and stakeholders about the area; pleasant and clean.
5. **Future Development:** Examined desires for new green space, public gathering spots, cultural attractions, family-friendly options, improved connectivity and historic preservation efforts.

Survey Analysis

Results revealed that 65.8% of the respondents were women. But with an emphasis on food-related businesses, it's notsuch a stretch to speculate that the skew mirrors those of folks who shop and dine. The participants come from a diverse range of occupations. Given this focus on the region's architecture and urban morphology, it is not surprising that almost half (47.9%) is architecturally trained. Resident, medical staff/marketing management/residents were the lower representations with most (34.2%) defined as mall users. This mixed demographic reflects on the localised experience and makes recommendations about it, combining design knowledge with user experience and knowledge of community.

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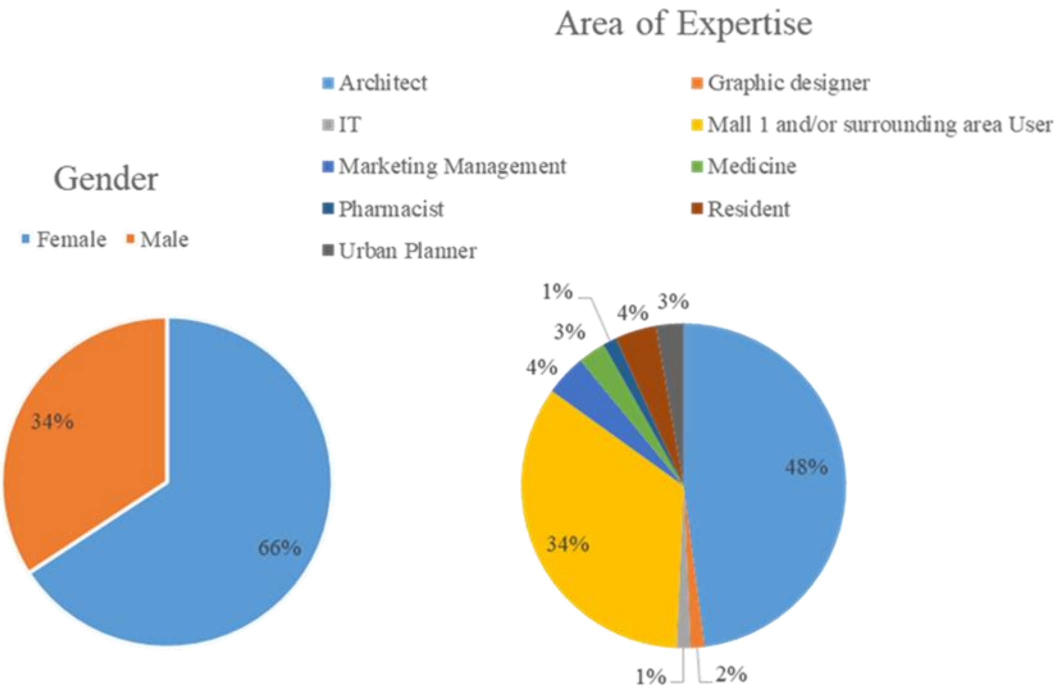

Figure 1 - Demographics of Gender and Area of Expertise linking to the survey

On top of this, we can see that 65.8% of respondents fall between the ages of 25-34. Depending on the marketing strategy or types of businesses that usually end up in these kinds of neighbourhoods, this could signal a focus on a younger demographic. Finally, when queried about frequency of visitation, more than half of respondents (47.9%) reported visiting Mall One and its surrounding area a few times each year. With fewer daily, weekly or ≤ annual visits, and a smaller but still statistically significant percentage (23.3%) visited on a monthly basis. This reflects a customer base with moderate to moderately frequent visiting patterns.

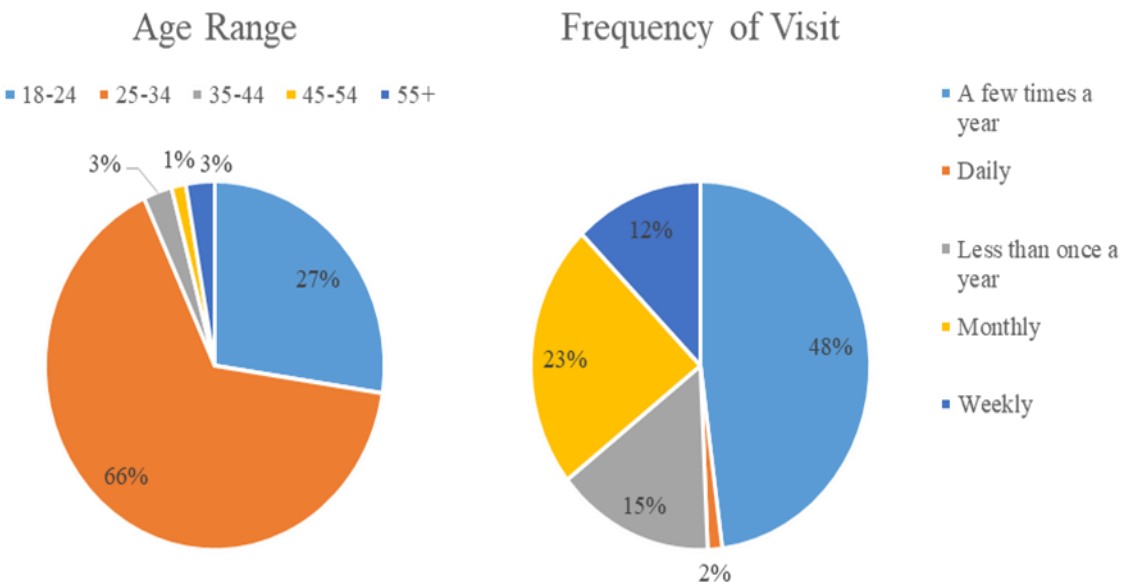

Figure 2 - Demographics of Age Range and Frequency of visit linking to the survey

History and Transformation

The user opinion examination shows an interesting shift in focus of Mall 1 and its vicinity. Even more over half (36% + 11%) of respondents find that there were more clothing stores around in the past. This sense of change is confirmed by the perception data: most respondents (a total 54%; for the 47% that think it's okay and an additional 10%who think it's great) see change toward more restaurants and eateries as having a positive social equity impact. There is evidence that the rise of restaurants has altered the tone of the neighbourhood.

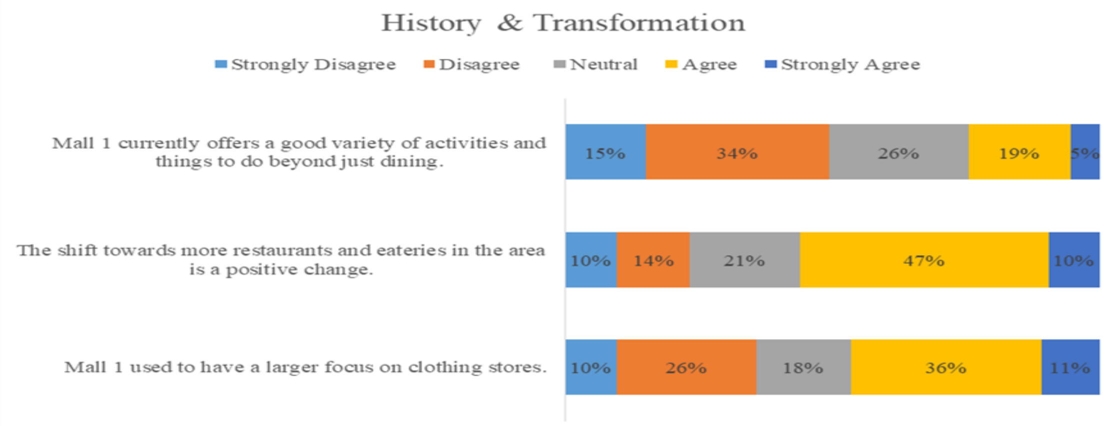

Figure 3 - User perception regarding History and transformation of Mall 1 and surrounding area

Spatial Experience

A high proportion of respondents (41% + 6%) perceived to be safe and secure when visiting, meaning that the place provides safety. Also most of the respondents (59% + 22%) considered ambient and safety during the night enough to be comfortable emitted lighting. Many (44% + 15%) posted the way finding is not appropriate and access to public amenities yet here were more than half (32% + 31%) of all people who were consenting that there was good pavement and places to sit.

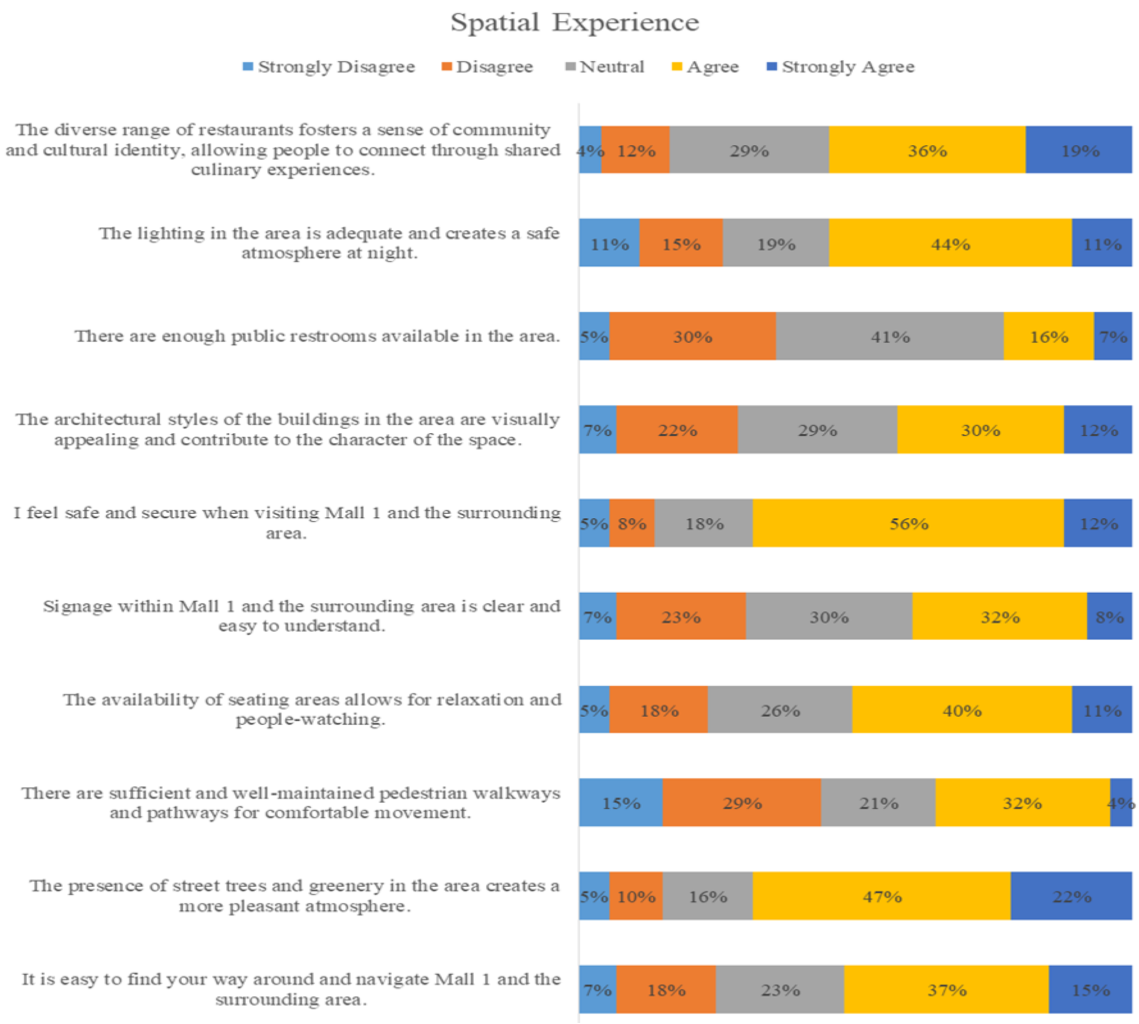

Figure 4 - Charts revealing user perception regarding Spatial Experience of Mall 1 and surrounding areas

Experienced users perceptions are affected by expertise. There was a stronger tendency among architects to view the buildings as "part of the area's character" and as attractive [buildings] in architectural terms (42% vs. 32%). But practical amenities, including clear signage (44% vs. 31% overall) and comfortable seating (64% vs. 43% overal), were high on the list for shoppers at malls. The growing number of food businesses, the research also hints, may have something to do with it. Even if a combined 44% of people (36% + 8%) believe that an array of restaurant variety contributes to a healthy community, the number is similar (49% + 15%) when asked if they desired more options for other activities outside eating. In other words, while the march towards restaurants is nice for some, moderation and variety are also needed in order to capitalize on a broader range of interests and maintain an inclusive, and lively atmosphere.

Accessibility and Public Transport

Mall One is a bitof a 50/50 mix when it comes to the conveniences or issues of its accessibility and public transportation stats, and there are some curious exceptions based on age. 53% of both responses said it's accessible by public transport, arguably. The trend is particularly true for younger age groups (18–34), with 60% of N=1,000 respondents. But a considerable share (37%) express frustration with the convenience and reliability of public transportation choices. This concern appears to be more prevalent for those 25-34 or older — suggesting issues with route coverage and/or wait times.

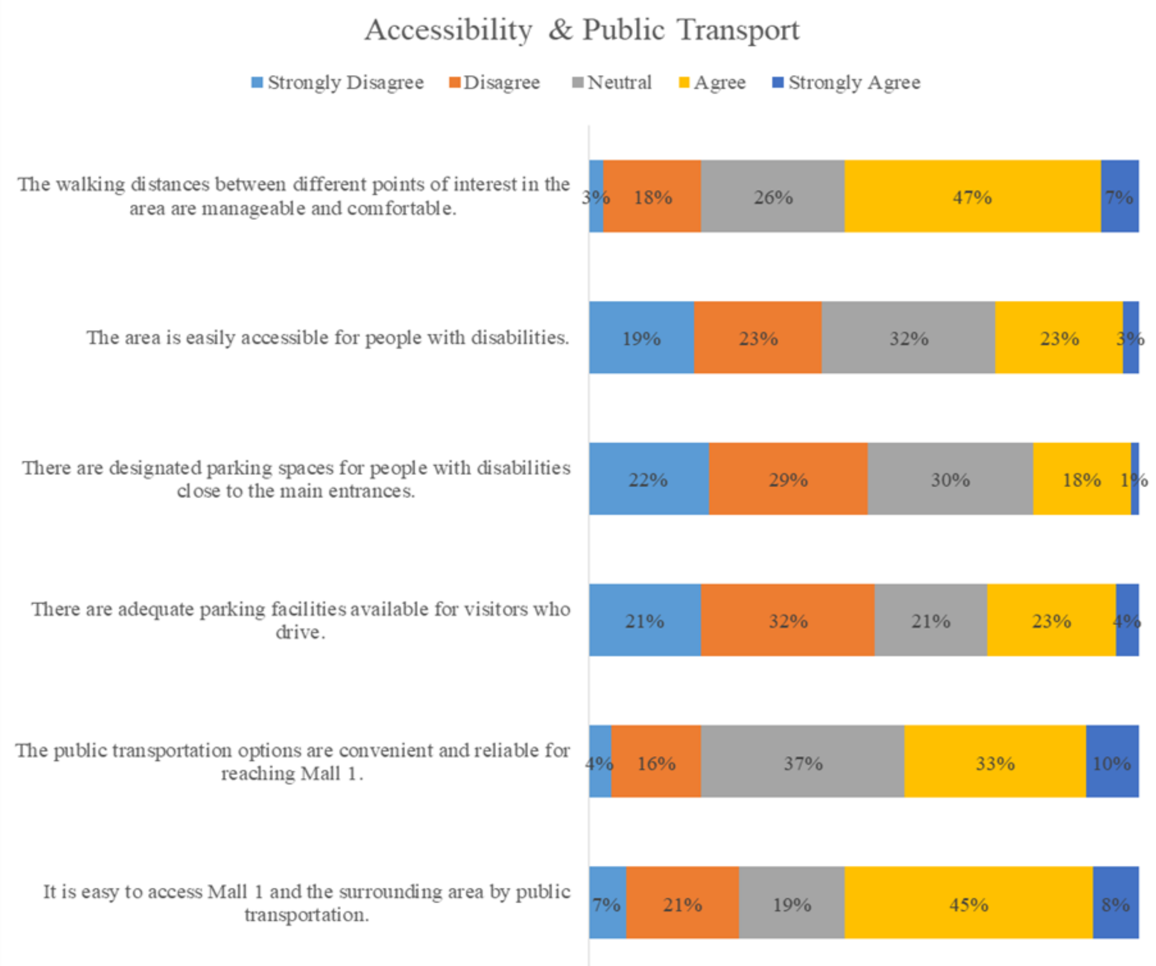

Figure 5 - User perception regarding Accessibility and Public Transport to Mall 1 and surrounding area

From survey, its concluded that parking is inadequate. Most (53%) disagree, though one-in-five (23%) say it's just enough. Curiously, parking is less of a concern to users aged 18–24 compared with those over the age of 25. This may be because younger people are also more apt to use ride-sharing services or public transportation. Nearly half (46%) believe the site is accessible and don't have concerns about their safety at the location, but a sizable minority of 40% are not comfortable with it. All age groups express this concern, to which better infrastructure such as elevators, ramps and specially marked handicap-accessible parking spots near entrances must respond. Walking distances between attractions are just right, according to 74% of those surveyed or who strongly agreed.

Overall, the data implies that Mall One is at present reasonably accessible, but there are opportunities for improvement in perhaps accessibility of public transport and facilities for those with disabilities.

Overall Impression

Data on overall impressions of Mall One are provided in graph that the overall pattern is relatively positive, although the data also show some interesting differences between men and women. On the bright side, most people (67%) agree or strongly agree that the area is clean and well-kept, with no real disparity between the sexes. Likewise, Mall One is also perceived to be an enjoyable and welcoming area by a significant proportion (71%). This was slightly more the case for females (58%) than males (60%). Commonality is cited as the second-strongest motivator, with 71% agreeing or strongly agreeing. It is something both men and women agree on, but more females (63%) than males (56%) support this idea. This would indicate that encouraging a community spirit may be an effective way to improve the overall gestalt, especially for female users.

Analysis of the distinctiveness of the area relative to other parts of Lahore shows a mixed response amongst respondents (54% agree/strongly agree). The sense of belonging and community in the space is another image altogether. Although there is agreement or strong support in a majority (45%), many (32%) also disagree. Females are even more likely to disagree (35%) compared to males (24%). Notably, more males (disagree% 44%) reported concerns about inclusivity than females (disagree% 29%). Finally, the combination of shopping, dining and entertainment choices gets relatively tepid marks (39% agree or strongly agree; 34% disagree).

Finally, the information provides a complicated view of people perception toward Mall One. While there's a general appreciation for cleanliness, aesthetics, and the mix of offerings, there's also a call for a stronger sense of community, inclusivity, and a focus on belonging, particularly among female users. Addressing these aspects can create a more welcoming and engaging experience for everyone.

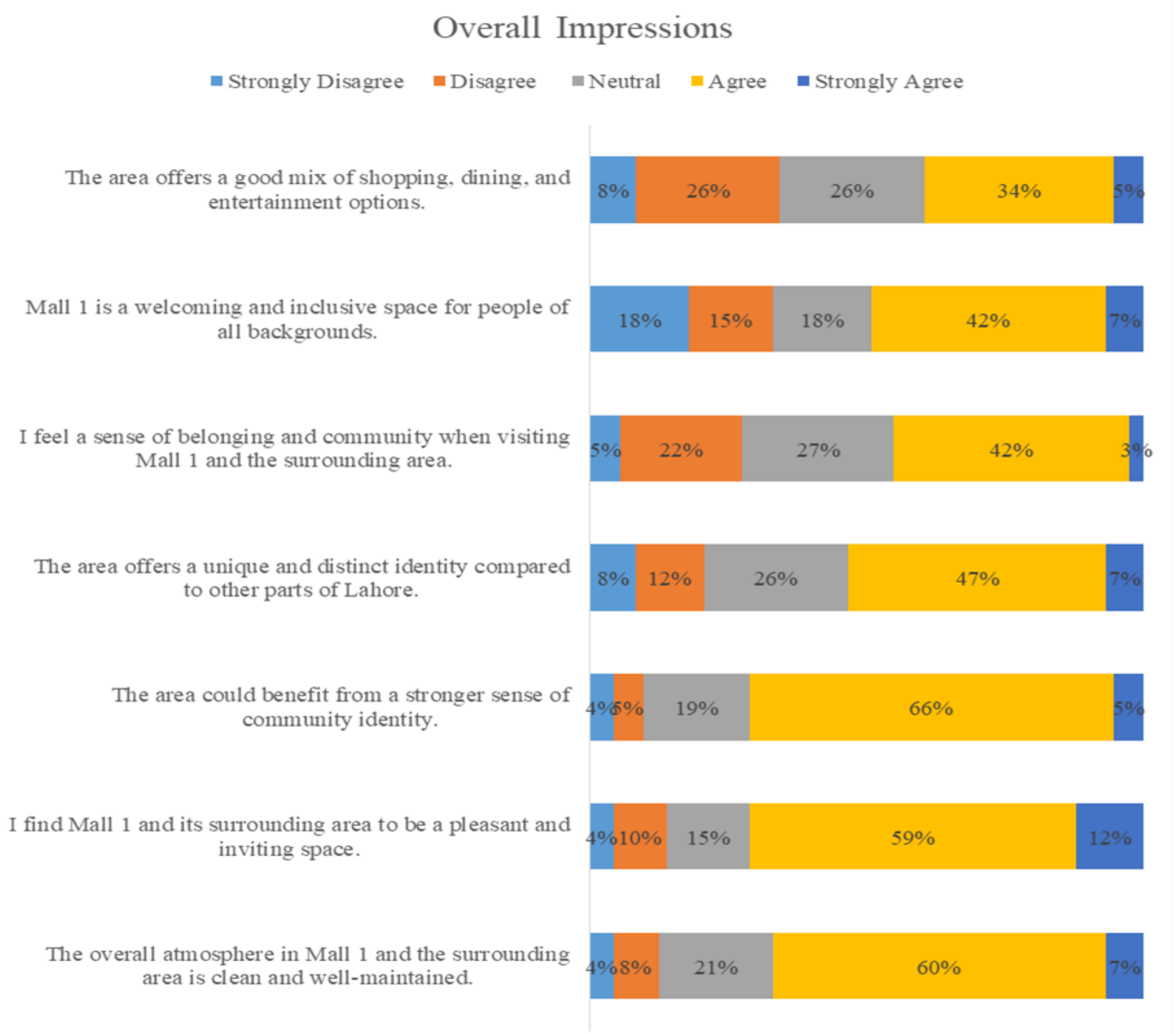

Figure 6 - Charts revealing user perception regarding Overall Impression of Mall 1 and surrounding area

Future Development

Future development is planned at Mall One and its vicinity, so that the area can be responsive to the needs of a broad spectrum of users. As the infographic illustrates, 80% of people feel very strongly about wanting a more connected to nature environment and call on the authorties to deliver more green spaces and outdoor places. This same sentiment resonates in the demand for more cultural events and activities (80% agree or strongly agree). Here as well architects are the foremost proponents, they appreciate that these events can shape an area's identity and add life to it. Yet another recurring one is focusing on families with young children. Dedicated programmes and activities are valuable for a large proportion of respondents (80% agree or strongly agree). This is consistent with the opinion of our marketing management staff, which has the highest level of support (67% do or strongly agree) very likely reflecting an opportunity to grow increased outlet traffic via family members. A stronger consensus is found on the need for better public amenities provision, unlocking a not insignificant 82% of agreement (agree or strongly agree).

Figure 7 - Charts revealing user perception regarding Future Development of Mall 1 and surrounding area

Survey Results

1. **History & Transformation**
   Respondents noted the transition from retail to restaurats. Most considered the change a positive, though many said there needed to be better uses for land use variety than dining.
2. **Spatial Experience**
   Reactions also to the lighting and safety was generally positive. Walkways, landscaping and seating were well received; signage and wayfinding were not adequate.
3. **Accessibility & Public Transport**
   Access to public transportation was in moderate level. Parking dissatisfaction was widespread. A lack of accessibility for differently abled people was recognized as a key deficiency.
4. **Overall Impressions & Future Development**
   Voters thought the area was pleasant, but that it lacked a clear identity. Top of the list were green spaces, public amenities, cultural events and being family friendly.

Conclusion

The results demonstrate that Mall 1's food-led shift has generally been well received, bringing vibrancy and social life. Facilities are a huge issue like lack of access for parking and universal design. Architect participants underlined the importance of saving design quality and heritage, whereas non-architects cared more about comfort, family facilities and mobility. These findings emphasize the significance of user-oriented planning, in which stakeholder driven development is applied on food-hubs on urban scale.

The food-oriented redevelopment of Mall 1 increases appeal and use only; policy and design changes may work to guarantee inclusion with long-term sustainability. Catering to parking problems, developing public facilities, and creating a universally accessible urban design and urban green space are crucial for improving user experience of the city as well as nurturing an overall sense of collective identity

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