

## FUNERAL SERVICE PACKAGE PREFERENCES AMONG A SELECT GROUP OF MIDDLE-AGED FILIPINO MEN

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### ABSTRACT

In previous years, researchers in the field of death studies have been trying to explain the modification and practices in the funeral home industry however there is still lack and very little is known about the funeral services preferences. A total of 200 middle-aged Filipino men in Metro Manila, Philippines were respondents of this study, they were chosen via purposive sampling. The participants were given written consent followed via a survey executed with orthogonal cards. More so, the cards were ranked from 1-13 about the four attributes: Kind of Funeral, Funeral Reception, Type of Casket, and Cemetery Site with their preferences as a basis. It was found that the kind of funeral was the most important attribute (41.31%) while Funeral Reception was the least (16.81%). Each respondent had provided their profiles meaningfully. Results were further discussed for clarification.

**Keywords:** Funeral services, funeral packages, preferences, conjoint analysis

### INTRODUCTION

The overarching objective of this quantitative study is to expound the funeral service packages preferences of a select group of middle-aged Filipino men via conjoint analysis. This study posits that the preferences of middle-aged Filipino men regarding funeral planning are significant and should be given light. This long-standing notion, according to LuBrant (2013) and Mitford (1963) should be considered for funeral directors to satisfy and show value to those whom they desire to serve. Each person has their perspectives when it comes to their choice of funeral and not everyone wants the same kind of funeral (Rowe, 2001); It is a great idea to know the preferences of the middle-aged regarding the funeral service that will be offered to them once they reach mortality; Additionally, according to Gompertz's mortality law, middle-aged individuals increases exponentially in the risk of death after the age of 40 (Pyrkov, Slipensky, Barg, Kondrashin, Zhurov, Zenin & Fedichev, 2018) women live longer than men in most parts of the world (Ginter & Simko, 2013). Ascertaining their fondness can contribute to funeral services to offer preferences that are commonly considered by consumers. Knowing their preferences will help avoid wrong decisions that are in opposition to the lifestyle and decisions that are unacceptable to their family rules and traditions (Rowe, 2001).

Further, funeral services today is deemed more significant for it is solitary, irreversible, includes strong and powerful emotions and contains a high level of symbolism to each member of the family making it important for everyone (Korai & Souiden, 2017) considering the innovations in today's society there had been several changes in the methods of funeral rites (Beard & Burger, 2015). It is evident for the human to memorialize the death of a loved one; on the other hand, the way they choose to memorialize is constantly changing (Janson, 2015). Customarily, the most well-known type of funeral in the funeral industry is the "traditional funeral" however, the consumer's demand and the business side of the industry are greatly affected by the recent changes in society (Beard & Burger, 2015). Societies shape a person's beliefs, values, and practices regarding funeral rites, and it is subject to change by the passage of time (Anderson, 2010; Appel & Papaikonomou, 2013). Such a situation; the structural, cultural, and technological changes in modern society started to influence the methods in memorial and body disposal causing them to have more variations (Beard & Burger, 2015).

Historically, if someone dies at home, the windows are shut and candles are lit near where the remains of the deceased lay (Cowell, 1986) as time elapsed, funerals are handled by the family in small occasions and it included direct burial without embalming; the remains were also stored in a simple wooden casket (Earle, 2008). Moreover, embalming was widely accepted during the Civil War in the United States (Newman, 1997) and

then became a common practice of families. The idea of embalming leads to the wake and visitation of the remains before the internment (Trompette & Lemonnier, 2009). Through several technological innovations, coffins made of wood started to be made of metal. The deceased was able to show their status in the type of casket they have chosen; apart from that, flowers and headstones also became a symbol of their status (Harris, 2007; Earle, 2008; Trompette & Lemonnier, 2009). At present, the funeral industry started to bundle several packages (van der Laan & Moerman, 2017) to provide a "one-size-fits-all" model that is developed by the researchers in the area of death that would be able to explain the changes and practices in the industry (Lowe, Rumbold & Aoun, 2019).

Moreover, it was observed that funerals became a showcase of one's family status (Bowman, 1959) services tend to focus on the needs of the bereaved rather than serving the deceased (Holloway, Adamson, Argyrou, Draper, & Maïau, 2013). It is said to be an occasion that expresses grief and share sorrow and is usually planned by a funeral director and a close family member as a client but recently funerals take away the feeling of grief for the nonfamily (Doka, 2002). The funeral director's goal of satisfying the customer made the funeral rites look like a retail rather than a symbolic event for the deceased (Lynch, 2004). British sociological research noted how families fulfill and accomplish the memorialization but not how the funerals accomplish the bereaved (Holloway, et al., 2013). Furthermore, participating in a funeral can aid survivors to move forward and acquire the feeling of comfort (Doka, 1984-85). Grief counselors and psychotherapists encourage the bereaved to attend or participate in funeral rituals for therapeutic value as observed in a clinical context (Bowen, 1991); but, if participation in a funeral rite is not applicable, the bereaved and other mourners must exercise their rituals to acknowledge the death of the departed for it'll help them in adapting (Bosley & Cook, 1993; Rando, 1988).

According to Da Cruz, Lezana, Freire dos Santos, Santana Pinto, Zancan & Silva de Souza (2017) very little is known about funeral services and its process; likewise, there is not much knowledge about who pays for the services (Darnay, 1994) and the financial effects for the survivors (Bern-Klug, DeViney & Ekerdt, 2000). Moreover, there seems to be a lack of awareness regarding prepaying and paying the funeral, types of funeral, and the funeral rules (Villamin, 2016). Researchers in death studies have attempted in the past to explain change and practices in the funeral home industry (Mitford, 2000). Globally, it is a necessity to know the preferences of people regarding funeral service packages, that is the case a conjoint analysis investigation is conducted.

## Theoretical Framework

This paper is underpinned by rational choice theory. Rational choice theory scrutinizes how human makes decisions. It states that individuals must predict the effects of alternative courses of action and figure out what will be the best choice for them (Scott, 2000). Hence, rational individuals select an option that is likely to provide them a great satisfaction (Heath, 1976). People, being 'rational', appraises the cost and benefits of an action before having a decision and are driven by their wants or goals that reveal their 'preferences' (Scott, 2000). In short, the connection between preference and impediment can be seen in technical terms of

relationship for it is impossible to have all their desires because they must have a choice connected to their goals and the reason, they want to attain their goals (Scott, 2000).

Rational choice theory can be used for funeral service preferences by determining what services are considered most by consumers. By discerning that individuals are rational and satisfied when they make decisions, preferences for funeral service can be arranged in the future according to what they preferred the most allowing the study to become confirmable evidence for it can be validated and reproduced (Hwa, 2006). By implementing the rational choice theory on middle-aged Filipino men to understand their preferences, options for services offered may be improvised and adjusted.

## Literature Review

### Kind of Funeral

The traditional type of funeral is the most common. Hence, it is also the most expensive. It includes fetching the remains from the home or hospital on the way to the funeral home for embalming and preparation. Placing the body in a casket for viewing or visitation for a couple of days in the chosen funeral reception, then lastly the choice of cemetery site (Rowe, 2001). While, direct or immediate burial usually costs less than the other kinds; With this selection, after death, the remains are buried immediately. There will be no viewing or visitation involved in the process (Rowe, 2001) also a simple memorial service may be done at the gravesite. Cremation is a process wherein the remains are burnt, and the bones of the deceased will then be ground and will be placed in an urn or another container. There will be no viewing or visitation, although a memorial service may be performed. The remains can be placed in the chosen cemetery site or scattered in a favorite spot (Rowe, 2001); it has been expanding in its use in the last decades (Da Cruz, et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, most of the bereaved have less knowledge about what is included in the service among the kinds of the funeral; due to their struggle and grief due to the loss, some can take advantage of them (Rowe, 2001).

**H1:** A middle-aged Filipino Men would prefer a traditional funeral service.

### Funeral Reception

Funerals usually take place indoors, in a church, or funeral home (Bordere, 2009). The funeral allows bringing family and friends together in celebrating the life and death of a person (Gonzales & Hereira, 2008) Traditionally, neighbors come to the house of the deceased and assist with chores and Maria Michaela San Jose: Doolittle, J., preparation of the body after death but nowadays, wakes have moved from home to the funeral parlor. It must be noted, however, that some still choose home viewings since it costs less than the other funeral receptions (Gonzales & Hereira, 2008). Consumers often select a funeral home, considering that it is near their home, they acquired the same service before or it has been recommended by a family member or friend (Rowe, 2001).

**H2:** A Middle-aged Filipino Men would prefer a funeral home reception.

Casket Types

As recorded by the Federal Trade Commission of America in 1987, about 75 percent of adult funerals consist of an open-casket ceremony (FTC, 1988). A casket is necessary for planning a traditional funeral, it has variations of styles and sizes. Traditionally, coffins were only made of wood but with the innovations brought by this generation's technology, there had been several variations (Harris, 2007; Trompette & Lemonnier, 2009). Typically, coffins are constructed of wood, metal, or fiberglass. Though regardless of any type, caskets will not preserve the remains of a person, it will delay the decomposing of the remains (Rowe, 2001). Coffins made of wood decomposes easily while coffins made of metal may take over many years (Spongberg & Becks, 2000).

H3: A middle-aged Filipino Men would prefer wooden caskets.

Cemetery Site

A person tends to choose their last resting place in a place where they spent the most time during their life (Casal, Aragonés & Moser, 2010). Deciding for a Cemetery Site is different from funeral decisions because people are more likely to visit the cemetery than the funeral (Bern-Klug, Deviney & Ekerdt, 2000). Financially, cemetery plots are the more expensive (Bern-Klug, et al., 2000) but perpetual care can sometimes be included when purchasing a burial plot. However, if you plan a burial of cremated remains you can store them a mausoleum or columbarium. In addition to that, expect to pay opening and closing fees whenever opening the columbarium (Rowe, 2001). Knowing the Cemetery site preferences support existing theories on landscape preferences and their related aesthetic features. The familiarity and personal exposure affect the person's choice of the cemetery (Al-Akl, Karaan, Al-Zein & Assaad, 2018).

H4: A middle-aged Filipino Men would prefer cemetery plots.

METHODS

Research Design

In this quantitative study, the conjoint analysis was applied to discern the preferences of the middle-aged Filipino men in Metro Manila, the Philippines apropos to funeral service packages. Statistically speaking, conjoint analysis is used in the field of marketing as a tool to discover the general effects of attributes on preferences for a certain service or product (Hobbs, 1996). In the field of transport and environmental economics, conjoint analysis has also been applied (Ryan & Farrar, 2000).

Study Site and Sample

To expound the funeral service packages preferences of middle-aged Filipino men, a total of 200 respondents were purposively chosen from the capital of the Philippines: Metro Manila; based on the 2015 census of the Philippine Statistics Authority, among the 16 cities in NCR, Manila placed second in having the biggest population. Purposive sampling was applied to

select the respondents for the study; the respondents must be a male Filipino citizen aged 45-65 years old and a literate residing in Metro Manila.

Data Measures

From the gathered literature we reviewed, we came up with four major attributes of funeral service preferences. An orthogonal array was formed, and we came up with a set of thirteen choice bundles. We decided to acquire 13 choice bundles from the set we arose from. We used orthogonal cards made out from cardboard cutouts with texts and images that describe each level of the attributes to present the choice bundles we came up with.

Data Collection and Ethical Consideration

The data was executed from November 20 to November 26. Data were collected from 200 participants. Before the gathering of data, the researchers oriented the participants on how the data gathering will be executed and acquired an apprised and written consent. The survey was executed with orthogonal cards. Orthogonal cards are created using the attributes and the studies on which they are based as shown in Table 1. At first, we informed the participants about each attribute and its equivalent levels to make certain of a better interpretation. After sorting the choice bundles, we then go on and acquire the demographic profile of the participants, that comprises the following: (a) gender, (b) nationality, (c) age, (d) location, (e) educational attainment, and (f) salary rate. After the fulfillment of the survey, the researchers gave each participant a small token of appreciation.

Table 1: Theoretical Basis, Actual Attributes Used and Levels of Attribute

Theoretical Basis	Actual Attributes Used	Levels of Attributes
Kind of Funeral includes fetching the remains from the home or hospital on the way to the funeral home for embalming and preparation. Placing the body in a casket for viewing or visitation for a couple of days in the chosen funeral reception, then lastly the choice of cemetery site (Rowe, 2001).	Kind of funeral	Traditional Direct Burial Cremation
Funerals usually take place indoors, in a church, or funeral home (Bordere, 2009).	Funeral Reception	Home-based Funeral Parlor Church Chapel
A casket is necessary for planning a traditional funeral, it has variations of styles and sizes. Traditionally, coffins were only made of wood but with the innovations brought by this generation's technology, there had been several variations (Harris, 2007; Trompette & Lemonnier, 2009).	Casket Types	Wooden Caskets Metal Caskets Fiberglass Caskets
The Cemetery site carries the intention of consecrating the deceased identified as an individual (Rugg, 2000).	Cemetery Site	Mausoleum Columbarium Cemetery Plot

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

As reported (Table 2), most of the respondents are aged 41-54 years old (66%), had college as their highest level of education attained (62%), working in the business field (27.5%), and earns a minimum wage salary (46%).

The conjoint analysis performed was appropriately fit as shown in the results (Table 3); Pearson’s  $r= 1.000$ ,  $p<0.5$ , and Kendall's tau were 1.000,  $p<0.5$ . Among all the attributes of Funeral Service Package Preferences, the kind of funeral was considered to be the most important factor for the Middle-Aged Filipino men (41.31%), to be followed by the type of casket (22.67%), and the cemetery site (19.23%). The Funeral Reception ranked the least important (16.81%).

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents (n=200)

Profile	Frequency	%
<b>Age</b>		
41-54	132	66
55-65	68	34
<b>Educational attainment</b>		
Grade School	7	3.5
High School	35	17.5
College	124	62
Masters	27	13.5
Doctorate	7	3.5
<b>Occupation</b>		
Government and special interest organizations	37	18.5
Professionals	44	22
Business-related	55	27.5
Computer, machinery, and technology	19	9.5
Service, shop, and market work	8	4
Agricultural	13	6.5
Laborers and unskilled jobs	10	5
Special occupations	14	7
<b>Salary rate</b>		
Below minimum wage	30	15
Minimum wage	92	46
Above minimum wage	78	39

Table 3. Funeral Service Packages Preferences among Filipino Middle-Aged Men

Attribute	Levels of Attributes	Utility Estimate	Importance
Kind	Traditional	.428	41.311
	Direct Burial	-.233	
	Cremation	-.195	
Reception	Home-based	.127	16.807
	Funeral Parlor	-.058	
	Church Chapel	-.068	
Casket	Wooden Caskets	-.038	22.656
	Metal Caskets	.150	
	Fiberglass Caskets	-.112	
	Caskets		
Cemetery	Mausoleum	.048	19.226
	Columbarium	-.105	
	Cemetery Plot	.057	

Pearson R= 1.000 ( $p<0.5$ ); Kendall’s Tau= 1.0000 ( $p<0.5$ )

As for the kinds of funerals, the traditional type of funeral ( $r=0.428$ ) is most preferred among the other kinds. In choosing the type of casket, metal caskets ( $r=0.15$ ) are the most preferred over the other two types. Cemetery plot ( $r=0.057$ ) is mostly preferred for choosing their Cemetery Site. Home-based reception ( $r= 0.127$ ) is most preferred wherein the funeral would take place.

DISCUSSION

This study strives to give evidence on the preferences of middle-aged Filipino Men on funeral service packages. The traditional kind of funeral ranked the first level of attribute among the Kinds of Funeral. Filipinos consider their traditional beliefs and culture about death, bereavement, honoring, respecting, and remembering their lamented loved ones, relatives, and friends (Timbol & Caballero, 2014). According to Rowe in the year 2001, the Traditional kind of funeral is the most expensive but despite the cost of this kind of funeral, culture still takes place on our respondents. Over the years, people have been buried in wooden, metal, and fiberglass caskets based on their wealth. The fact that metal caskets are mainly used for today's burial (Doolittle 2013) because it has a rubber gasket to seal the lid and prevent elements from coming inside. Most of our respondents earn a minimum wage. Regardless of how fiberglass caskets are more affordable and lightweight, they still prefer how the metal caskets' protectiveness for the deceased body. The next thing that is considered is the cemetery. According to Hunter in the year 2016, cemetery plots are easily found and affordable. Having practical decisions about financial costs, choosing a columbarium or mausoleum can increase the expenses wherein there are charges for the maintenance and opening fee when visiting. Funeral Reception was ranked as the least important attribute; Bern-Klug, Deviney, and Ekerdt in the year 2000 stated that people are more likely to visit the cemetery than the funeral. Hence, the Reception is not that significant when it comes to funeral planning.

## CONCLUSION

As providing the funeral services with the quality that the people want, It is interesting and necessary to provide and know the preferences of the middle-aged Filipino men regarding the funeral service that they will attain once they reached mortality. This study aimed to determine the selection and perception of the middle-aged Filipino men on funeral service they want among the attributes we have shown to our respondents via conjoint analysis. Each person had their perspectives according to what they want and what should be considered to satisfy and show value to those whom they desire to serve. Since each person has their preferences for every category, it is necessary to contemplate what is acceptable when it comes to traditions to avoid any complications. Notably, this study found the kind of funeral service is the most important attribute in funeral services and the Funeral Reception was considered the least. Unlike numerous previous studies about the Kind of Funeral, Funeral Reception, Casket Types, and Cemetery Site; this study gathered empirical data that can be benchmarked with the current funeral service

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