



MALL TALK

JUNE 2025

ISSUE 47





Anjeev Kumar Srivastava
COO, SCAI

Monsoons have arrived in India with full force, bringing both relief and challenges such as waterlogging and related concerns. During this unpredictable season, indoor spaces become safe havens, and shopping malls have a unique opportunity to leverage this situation. By offering a comfortable and entertaining environment, malls can attract more customers looking for a place to spend quality time with friends and family away from the rain.

To capitalize on this, shopping malls are rolling out monsoon food and fashion festivals along with end-of-season sales and discounts. Since the pandemic, shopping centers have meticulously planned their annual sale calendars well in advance, taking into account seasonal changes and varying customer sentiments. This proactive approach has proven effective in establishing malls as desirable destinations for leisure and shopping.

Understanding the importance of aligning with customer sentiments and rising needs, shopping malls are gearing up for the end-of-season sales. EOSS (End of Season Sale) has become a frenzy, with shoppers eagerly anticipating the best deals and offers. The entire country is gradually preparing for this major retail event, which promises to bring a surge of activity and excitement to the malls.

Shopping malls are focusing on creating a vibrant atmosphere during the monsoon season. Special events like live music, fashion shows, and culinary workshops are being organized to enhance the shopping experience. Additionally, exclusive deals, loyalty programs, and interactive activities for children are being introduced to cater to diverse customer preferences. The goal is to make shopping malls not just a place for transactions, but a holistic destination where customers can enjoy a variety of experiences under one roof.

As the season unfolds, it will be fascinating to see how these efforts bring out the best in customer engagement and satisfaction.

Anjeev Kumar



SHOPPING CENTRES
ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

Copyright @ Shopping Centres Association
of India, Mumbai
Issue 47 , June 2025

EDITED & PUBLISHED BY:
Shopping Centres Association of India
3/116, Pintoo House Marol Co-Operative
Industrial Estate,
Marol, Andheri (East), Mumbai 400059.
Website: www.scai.in
Email : info@scai.in

PUBLISHER:
Shopping Centres Association of India
info@scai.in

DESIGN:



beatscracker@gmail.com

EDITORIAL & ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES:
editormt2008@gmail.com

REGISTERED OFFICE:
Shopping Centres Association of India
S-61A, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi, 110020.



OVERVIEW

FROM COMMERCE TO COMMUNITY:
THE REVIVAL OF THE MALL'S ORIGINAL PURPOSE

04



TRENDWATCH

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IS NOT A DEPARTMENT -
IT'S A CULTURE

06



PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH

RENDEZVOUS WITH MR. ABHINAV C AJMERA

08



MARKET WATCH

FOOD FIRST: HOW F&B IS REDEFINING THE FUTURE OF
MALL LEASING IN INDIA

11



BRAND WATCH

MARKET99: CRAFTING INDIA'S MOST DELIGHTFUL VALUE
RETAIL EXPERIENCE

13



POINT OF VIEW

AMPLIFYING HUMAN INTELLIGENCE IN THE AGE OF AI
A RETAIL HR PERSPECTIVE

17



VISION

ALIGNING EMPLOYEE ROLES WITH ORGANISATIONAL VISION

18



FOOD TRENDS

UNLOCKING THE FUTURE OF F&B IN INDIAN SHOPPING MALLS
YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

20



WELLNESS

15 RELAXATION METHODS THAT WORK WONDERS

21



NEWS WATCH

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS IN TALKS TO OPEN FIRST INDOOR THEME
PARK IN INDIA AS PART OF BHARTI'S MEGA AEROCITY PROJECT

23



WARM WELCOME

24



PRC 2025

PHYGITAL RETAIL CONVENTION 2025 UNVEILED 'INFINITE
INDIA'S' MEGA RETAIL POTENTIAL

25



INDUSTRY NEWS

LULU MALLS SHINE AT THE ICSC GLOBAL MAXI AWARDS 2025
WITH 3 PRESTIGIOUS WINS FOR INDIA

29



OVERVIEW

From Commerce to Community: The Revival of the Mall's Original Purpose

In the 1950s, Victor Gruen envisioned the modern shopping mall as more than a place to shop. His goal was to create vibrant, walkable community spaces—modern-day town squares that foster human interaction. Over time, however, the focus shifted. By the 1980s and 90s, malls had become retail powerhouses, prioritizing commerce over community. Then came the 2000s—a digital jolt. The rise of e-commerce and the global shock of COVID-19 forced malls to reevaluate their relevance. What emerged from this disruption is a return to their roots. Today, shopping centers are being reimagined as community-centric, experiential destinations. Open spaces are hosting events, workshops, performances, and gatherings that bring people together beyond transactions.

Far from being a new idea, this shift marks a full-circle moment. Malls are once again embracing their role as catalysts for connection—transforming from retail centers into the social hearts of the neighborhoods they serve.

Once the epicenter of suburban commerce and weekend hangouts, shopping malls are undergoing a significant identity shift. What started as a vision of community-centric spaces in the 1950s gradually evolved into retail-driven mega complexes. Today, amidst changing consumer behavior, digital immersion, and a renewed longing for real-world connections, malls are returning to their roots — not merely as places of commerce but as vital public arenas for social interaction, cultural engagement, and human connection.

Malls as Town Squares

Victor Gruen, the Austrian architect credited with inventing the modern mall, imagined more than just a climate-controlled retail haven. Inspired by European town squares, Gruen's designs centered on human interaction — places where people could gather, linger, and connect. The Southdale Center in Edina, Minnesota (1956) embodied this ethos with communal spaces, art installations, and a central court designed for engagement, not just transactions.

However, by the 1980s, the pendulum swung. Developers prioritized retail density and profit-per-square-foot metrics. Community spaces were replaced by storefronts. Gruen himself distanced from the commercial evolution, lamenting the loss of his vision.



The Experiential Renaissance

Decades of retail-focused growth led to a tipping point. E-commerce disrupted footfall, the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered thousands of malls, and digital lifestyles reduced the need for physical spaces. But from this disruption, a new opportunity has emerged — a revival of the mall as an experience-first destination. Modern malls are designing for "joy spikes" and emotional resonance. The new metric of success? Not just foot traffic, but the quality and length of dwell time, frequency of repeat visits, and the depth of community engagement.



Case Studies: Global Malls Embracing Community

- **Mall of America (USA):** Beyond shopping, this mega-complex hosts over 400 annual events, houses an indoor amusement park, and offers fitness classes and educational workshops — drawing over 40 million visitors a year.
- **DLF Cyber Hub (India):** Known for its open-air layout and food-centric design, the hub integrates live music, art, and seamless links to nearby offices, blurring the line between work, play, and community.
- **Dubai Mall (UAE):** With over 92 million annual visitors, 30% come not to shop but to experience. The Dubai Fountain, fashion shows, and cultural showcases anchor its non-retail appeal.
- **Phoenix Marketcity (India):** A festival destination featuring film promotions, seasonal celebrations, and family-friendly programs that position it as a cultural epicenter.



Design for Togetherness

Design matters. Elements like central courts, natural light, interactive features, and seating clusters increase comfort and social interaction. These design principles create spaces that don't just serve people — they connect them.

The Path Forward: From Commercial to Communal

The reinvention of malls is not just a strategic pivot — it's a moral and societal responsibility. As digital worlds dominate and public gathering spaces decline, malls have the infrastructure, reach, and scale to fill that void. By balancing commerce with community, they can become the 21st-century town square — where people don't just shop, but belong.

The Role of Malls in a Digitally Disconnected World

With children spending over five hours daily on screens and face-to-face interaction declining, malls offer a unique counterbalance. They can serve as safe, stimulating environments that encourage real-world play, creativity, and social skill development — essential in an increasingly isolated society.

Psychologically, human beings are wired for connection. Social participation improves mental health, lowers anxiety, and fosters belonging. Malls can be retooled to meet this fundamental need.

Programming That Builds Connection

A successful transformation into a social hub requires intentional programming:

- **Live Performances:** Music, dance, and theater create shared experiences.
- **Art Exhibitions:** Local artwork transforms public spaces into cultural galleries.
- **Farmers Markets:** Strengthen local ties through community commerce.
- **Children's Activities:** Engage families and promote physical interaction.
- **Partnerships:** With schools, artists, health organizations, and nonprofits to ensure authentic community representation and value.

The Measurable Impact of Community Focus

Data shows that malls investing in social programming see:

- 78% higher customer retention
- 65% increase in foot traffic
- 43% longer visit durations
- 92% satisfaction among visitors

They also outperform traditional malls in revenue growth, social media presence, and frequency of visits.





TREND WATCH

Customer Experience Is Not a Department – It's a Culture

In today's hyper-competitive, choice-rich digital world, customer experience (CX) is no longer a differentiator—it's the battleground. Yet, despite recognizing its importance, many companies still limit Customer Experience Management (CEM) to a single department—usually customer service or marketing.

This is a fundamental misstep.

Customer experience is not a function. It's a mindset—a company-wide ethos that places the customer at the heart of every decision, interaction, and strategy. The brands winning today aren't those with the largest service teams; they're those where every employee, in every role, feels responsible for delivering value and delight.

Why the "CX Department" Model Fails

When CX is siloed, companies tend to address only surface-level issues: call center scripts, complaint handling, or social media responses. These are necessary, but they're just the visible tip of the CX iceberg.

True customer experience encompasses every touchpoint—from how fast a website loads, to the accuracy of billing, to the friendliness of store staff, to how products are packaged. A single point of friction—a glitchy app, a confusing return process, an indifferent employee—can undermine the entire experience.

Case in Point: United vs. Southwest Airlines



Take United and Southwest Airlines. Both compete in the same industry, yet Southwest consistently earns higher customer satisfaction scores.

Why? It's not just friendlier flight attendants. It's a culture-wide commitment—from executives to gate agents—to making air travel pleasant and human. Employees are empowered to solve problems in real time, and every decision is made with the customer in mind.

CS VS CX		
CUSTOMER SERVICE		CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
When there is a question, issue or problem	Customer interaction	Throughout the whole customer journey
Transactional	Type of relationship	Experiential
Reactive	Approach used	Proactive
CSAT	KPI	CLV, NPS
CS department	Ownership	Entire company

Every Department Shapes the Experience

- **IT:** An intuitive app or fast-loading site can make or break a sale. Apple's seamless UX shows how delight can be designed into technology.
- **Finance:** Confusing invoices or slow refunds erode trust. Zappos built loyalty by offering easy returns and lightning-fast refunds—an operations-led innovation.
- **Logistics:** Amazon's promise of fast, reliable delivery is backed by a powerhouse logistics network—an invisible but vital part of CX.
- **HR & Culture:** Empowered and empathetic employees deliver exceptional service. The Ritz-Carlton famously gives every staff member \$2,000 to solve guest problems—no questions asked.

Building a Customer-First Culture

Transforming CX from a function to a mindset requires a shift in culture—not just systems.

- 1. Leadership Must Lead It**
Executives must model and reward customer-focused behavior. What leaders prioritize, teams emulate.
- 2. Empower the Frontline**
Give employees the tools, training, and authority to act in the moment, not after escalating through layers of management.
- 3. Break Down Silos**
Encourage cross-functional collaboration. Let sales feedback shape product development, and let service insights refine marketing strategies.
- 4. Listen From Within**
Frontline employees often know what customers want before surveys do. Build channels for them to share those insights.
- 5. Measure the Right Metrics**
Beyond NPS or CSAT, track internal signals—like employee participation in CX initiatives or collaboration between departments.



Experience Is the Brand

Today, people don't just buy a product—they buy the ease of the process, the after-sales support, the emotional resonance. They buy the experience. And that experience is shaped by every touchpoint, every employee, every decision.

That's why customer experience can't live in a single department.

Final Thought

Customer Experience Management is not a box to check or a team to hire. It's a strategic imperative and a cultural foundation. Organizations that embed CX into their DNA build stronger loyalty, unlock growth, and set themselves apart—not by what they sell, but by how they make customers feel.





PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH

RENDEZVOUS

In a fast-evolving industry where innovation, strategy, and execution must align, **Mr. Abhinav C Ajmera** stands out as a leader in retail leasing and shopping centre development. With over 30 years of experience, he currently **heads leasing operations as President – Leasing at Omaxe Ltd.**, one of India's premier real estate developers.



Mr. Ajmera has worked with leading organizations such as Pacific, Gumberg India, M3M, Mahagun, and Galaxy, playing a key role in shaping commercial real estate across India. His expertise spans the entire retail development cycle—from planning and leasing to launching successful retail destinations.

An engineering graduate with an entrepreneurial mindset, he blends analytical rigor with market intuition. His competencies include retail leasing, shopping centre design, asset management, branding, tenant coordination, and strategic alliances. Known for managing complex negotiations and building strong industry relationships, he is widely respected as a forward-thinking, dependable leader.

What truly distinguishes him is his calm, solution-focused approach. A soft-spoken yet assertive problem-solver, team builder, and mentor, Mr. Ajmera brings both corporate and entrepreneurial insight to the table.

At Omaxe, he is leading transformative projects like Omaxe Chowk in Old Delhi—developing experiential retail destinations that align with evolving consumer and brand expectations.

Mr. Ajmera continues to be a prominent voice in India's retail real estate landscape—setting benchmarks and shaping the future.

He gives us some insights into business, what he holds closer to his heart, strategies, and growth plans.

Your accomplishments are truly inspiring. We are eager to delve into your background and explore the experiences that have shaped your journey to its current success.

Thank you for the kind words. My journey has been shaped by a deep passion for understanding consumer behaviour and building spaces that connect people with experiences. Over the years, I've had the privilege of leading marquee projects and work with well-known retail real estate developers in North India like Pacific Group, Gumberg, M3M, Mahagun and Omaxe Group, the latest project being "Omaxe Chowk, Chandni Chowk". I've always believed in blending strategy with empathy—understanding not just what consumers and retailers want but also what they haven't yet imagined. That, along with an unwavering commitment to innovation and my team's support, has brought me here.

What exciting developments will shape Indian shopping malls in the near future?

According to me, the future of Indian malls will be driven by three key trends:

- **Experiential retail:** Beyond shopping, malls will offer immersive experiences, events, and entertainment.
- **Hybrid models:** Integration of phygital experiences where digital tech enhances physical spaces.
- **Localized formats:** Malls will be more culturally relevant, curated around the demographics of their catchment areas rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

How can shopping malls address the challenge of visitors primarily coming for multiplexes and dining, while preferring to shop on high streets instead?

Malls must reposition themselves as curated lifestyle destinations rather than mere retail venues. This means:

- Designing cross-category journeys—connecting dining, entertainment, and shopping seamlessly.
- Creating exclusive brand experiences that high streets cannot offer—like curated collections, in-mall events and engagements and loyalty integrations
- Offering comfort and convenience: climate control, valet parking, safety, hygiene, and family-friendly spaces still give malls an edge over high streets.

What about the trends you are noticing in the industry owing to the customer behaviour changes? How do cultural and socio-economic factors influence consumer behaviour differently in northern India compared to other regions?

We're seeing a clear shift toward purpose-driven footfall consumers come with intent and expect more value, personalization, and service. They are quite clear on what they want.

Currently, we have presence majorly in regions of Northern India. What we observe here is a deep cultural link with traditional retail—especially during festivals and weddings so ethnic wear, jewellery, and occasion-based formats thrive and this is exactly what we have focussed on at Omaxe Chowk, Chandni Chowk.



With more young people using malls for showrooming— trying products in-store but purchasing them online—how can malls capitalize on their unique strengths?

The key is to blend the physical and digital. Malls can:

- Offer click-and-collect services, instant gratification and easy exchanges.
- Gamify loyalty programs with real-time rewards for in-store interactions.
- Partner with brands to make malls exclusive launch platforms—offering in-store-only editions or experiences that online platforms can't replicate.

Any process or strategy shifts that you have brought in for your organisation keeping this thought in mind?



Yes, we've introduced a data-driven approach to leasing and zoning, ensuring our brand mix is curated based on catchment analysis, not just rent potential. We've also focused on experience zones, collaborated with tenants for co-branded promotions, and adopted a 360-degree engagement strategy that complements in-mall activities. We are also working on the process of instant gratification to customers against their spends.

In today's digital age, how vital is marketing to a shopping mall's success? While traditional marketing has deep roots, are modern digital strategies now taking precedence?

Marketing has become the most critical—it's the lifeline that connects the mall with its audience. While traditional methods like hoardings and print ads still have value, digital is now at the core. From geo targeted ads and influencer tie-ups to real-time campaign tracking, digital strategies provide agility and measurable impact. A hybrid strategy works best leveraging the trust of traditional media and the precision of digital.

What is the best and worst part of being Head of the institution?

Well, the best part is the ability to shape a vision and watch it come to life—creating spaces that influence how people live, shop, and connect. The most challenging part is balancing diverse stakeholder expectations—from developers and investors to tenants and customers—all while steering the team toward long-term goals and managing the ROI.

What are the key challenges your company is striving to overcome?

I feel the key challenges include

- Balancing profitability with customer experience in a volatile retail environment.
- Adapting to rapidly shifting consumer expectations and providing new and unique experiences every time.
- Differentiating in a competitive market where every square foot must be justified with performance.

What strategies do you utilize to effectively manage people, overcome obstacles, and foster a positive work environment?

I believe in transparency, empowerment and empathy.

I always try to ensure my team understands the 'why' behind the 'what' and give them space to innovate and encourage continuous feedback. I never stop learning even if that's coming from my team. This not only makes them more confident but also empowers them for decision making and create the much need positive environment. To overcome obstacles, I try to adopt a solution-first mindset, where challenges are addressed collectively, not in silos.

How do you cope with the demands of the workplace, and what stands out as the most substantial obstacle you have faced in your professional path?

Time management and clarity of priorities help me stay focused.

The most substantial obstacle was during the pandemic, when footfalls vanished and leases needed urgent renegotiation. Navigating that period demanded agility, empathy, and deep tenant collaboratio lessons that still guide me.



How do you define success? What three fundamental habits should budding entrepreneurs develop to enhance their likelihood of achieving success?

Success according to me is the ability to consistently create value for customers, teams and stakeholders while staying true to your own values.

Three habits:

- Resilience: Bounce back stronger from setbacks.
- Curiosity: Stay hungry to learn.
- Discipline: Execution matters more than ideas.

How do you strike a balance between your professional responsibilities and personal commitments?

I try being fully present at work or at home and plan meticulously, set boundaries, and prioritize quality over quantity in personal time. For me family, health and mental space are non-negotiables for sustained professional performance.

What hobbies or sports are you involved with outside of work?

I'm not a sports person but off lately I am trying to build a regular fitness regime to help me stay mentally and physically agile. I am quite a homely person so I prefer to chill out with family whenever I get free time.

Name an individual whose life and accomplishments inspire you the most.

Mr. Ratan Tata - for his humility, foresight, and ability to lead with both heart and head. His focus on long-term value creation, ethics, and innovation is a guiding light for any leader.

What do you think young professionals need to know to succeed in today's job market?

Adaptability is the most important skill today. The market rewards those who are digitally fluent, emotionally intelligent and collaborative. Young professionals should also remember that depth trumps breadth—master something before you move on to the next.



MARKET WATCH

Food First: How F&B is Redefining the Future of Mall Leasing in India

India's retail real estate landscape is undergoing a transformation, with the Food & Beverage (F&B) sector emerging as a key driver in mall leasing dynamics. As consumer behavior pivots post-pandemic, malls are evolving from pure shopping destinations into lifestyle ecosystems—with dining at the heart of the experience.

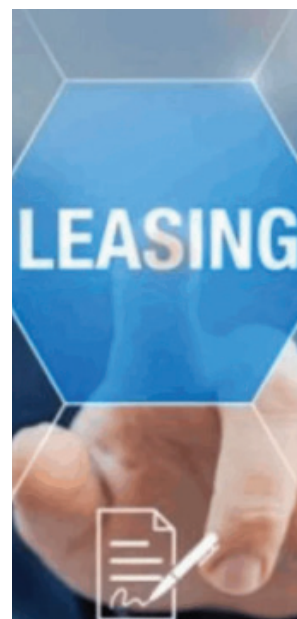
F&B's Expanding Footprint



Traditionally occupying a modest slice of mall space, F&B has seen a dramatic rise in prominence. Pre-COVID, F&B accounted for just 12–15% of total mall area. Today, that share has surged to 25–30%, with some new-age malls dedicating up to 40% to dining and entertainment.

The reason is clear: F&B increases footfall, extends dwell time, and boosts average spend per visitor. For developers, curating a compelling F&B mix has become essential to driving engagement and retention.

Leasing Trends Reflect the Shift



The growth of F&B is clearly visible in leasing activity. In H1 2024, F&B and entertainment jointly contributed nearly 30% of all retail leasing across India's major cities. The trend held steady into 2025, signaling long-term momentum.

In Mumbai, F&B accounted for 15% of total leasing in Q1 2025—second only to fashion. Bengaluru saw an even stronger contribution, with F&B making up 21% of leasing volumes during the same period.

City-Level Highlights



Mumbai: Retail leasing surged by 259% YoY in Q1 2025, with malls driving 55% of this growth. F&B accounted for 15% of leasing, supported by Grade A projects like Oberoi Sky City and Aurum Square.

(BW Retail World)



Delhi NCR: Capturing 17% of the national leasing share in Q1 2025, Delhi NCR saw high streets dominate, yet F&B emerged as a leading category—a sign of shifting consumer preferences.

(Cushman & Wakefield, BW Retail World)



Bengaluru: Leasing reached 0.19 million sq. ft. in Q1 2025, with F&B contributing 21%. Main streets led the charge, accounting for 75% of total volume.

(Hello Kotpad)

Strategic Imperatives for Developers & Brands

The rise of F&B is reshaping strategy on both sides of the leasing table:



For Developers:

Designing for experience is key. Malls must now prioritize spacious layouts for restaurants, integrate ambient zones for al fresco dining, and blend food with entertainment to stay competitive.



For Retailers:

F&B brands are innovating with food halls, themed concepts, and digital-first formats. Collaborations for flagship locations and curated dining precincts are becoming mainstream.

Outlook: A Tasty Future

With 6.4 million sq. ft. of new mall space expected by end-2025 across India's top cities, the F&B sector is well-positioned to cement its influence. As consumer demand tilts toward experiential and social experiences, dining will continue to be the anchor that draws people in—and keeps them coming back.

(Cushman & Wakefield)



We welcome your feedback at
editormt2008@gmail.com



Market99: Crafting India's Most Delightful Value Retail Experience

From Store99 to Market99: A Journey of Reinvention

The story of Market99 is one of evolution and aspiration. Founded by Mohammed Abdullah, the brand grew out of a family legacy that included Store99, Sabka Bazaar, and The Home Store. In 2017, the transformation into Market99 marked a new chapter—one that focused not just on affordability but also on creating joyful, design-forward retail experiences.

"Indian consumers were ready for a retail experience that didn't feel like a compromise," says Abdullah. "With Market99, we wanted to build something aspirational yet accessible."

The Market99 Experience

Step inside a Market99 store and you're met with curated chaos—the good kind. Lively displays, bright interiors, and seasonal product drops make shopping feel like a treasure hunt. The range spans home décor, kitchenware, personal care, stationery, gifting, confectionery, and more—frequently refreshed to keep customers coming back.

Behind this experience is a data-led, design-driven merchandising strategy that blends global sourcing with Indian sensibilities. Every product is chosen for its utility, design, and price appeal—striking the elusive balance between function and fun.

Serving the Aspirational Indian Consumer

Market99 has its finger firmly on the pulse of India's rising consumer class. Whether it's a student setting up a new apartment or a family decorating their home, the brand speaks to those who value good design at great prices. The brand has found strong traction in tier 2 and 3 cities, thanks to hyper-localization in merchandising and marketing. "We blend local tastes with global trends to ensure relevance," explains Abdullah.

Strength in Systems

Rapid scale brings operational challenges and Market99 has tackled them with foresight. The company has invested in backend infrastructure, including robust IT systems, warehousing, and logistics. "Our backend

operations are designed to be agile," Abdullah notes. "From procurement to point-of-sale, we've built systems that support both growth and consistency." With a manufacturing background in garments and handicrafts serving clients like Marks & Spencer, Next, and Sainsbury's, the family business brings deep supply chain muscle to the retail side.



Global Ambitions: Enter 'Something Ells'

In December 2024, the brand launched its first international concept store—Something Ells—in Melbourne, Australia. The store follows the same value-meets-design ethos that powers Market99, tailored to a global audience. "This was our way of testing how well our concept translates beyond India. The early signs are very promising."



Digital on the Horizon

While brick-and-mortar remains the core, Market99 is embracing digital transformation. The brand is enhancing its online presence and laying the groundwork for an omni-channel model. Efforts are underway in building a transactional website, driving social commerce, and integrating loyalty programs—making the customer journey seamless across touchpoints.

Looking Ahead

Market99's path forward is filled with innovation. Plans include deeper expansion in India, new store formats, seasonal and themed collections, and experiential retail elements.

"We're at an exciting point," concludes Abdullah. "Retail is no longer just about products—it's about experiences and relationships. That's the future we're building toward."



Aman Abdullah
Director - Market99

Aman Abdullah is the Director of Market99, a leading value retail chain in India. He studied Retail Management at Loughborough University, followed by International Finance.

Aman began his retail journey in 2007 by joining the family business, which then operated under the name Store99. In 2017, the brand was rebranded as Market99, which has since grown to over 90 company-owned stores nationwide.

At Market99, Aman oversees IT systems, business development, projects, logistics, warehousing, and front-end operations—spearheading operational efficiency and strategic growth.

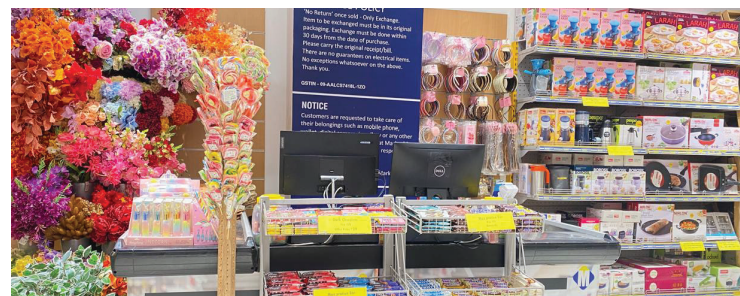
He hails from a family with a rich legacy in Indian retail, known for ventures like Sabka Bazaar and The Home Store (THS), launched in 1997. Beyond retail, the family also runs successful businesses in garment and handicraft manufacturing.

In 2024, Aman led Market99's international foray with the launch of a new brand, Something Ells, in Australia. The first store opened in Melbourne in December 2024, marking the brand's global debut.

From humble beginnings to a national footprint and a bold international debut, Market99 is redefining what value retail means in the modern Indian context. Rooted in legacy and driven by innovation, the brand has carved a distinct niche by merging affordability with an elevated shopping experience. In this conversation, Aman Abdullah, Director of Market99, takes us through the brand's journey, philosophies, and vision for the future.

Market99 has become a household name in value retail. Can you tell us about the journey so far and what the initial vision was when the brand was launched?

The journey of Market99 began with a simple yet powerful vision: to make quality lifestyle and utility products accessible at affordable prices for Indian consumers. Originating from our family's retail legacy—Store99, Sabka Bazaar, and The Home Store—we rebranded as Market99 in 2017. Since then, we've grown to over 90 company-owned outlets across India. Our expansion has been driven by a deep understanding of Indian shoppers, constant innovation, and an unwavering commitment to value-driven retail.



What makes Market99 stand out in India's highly competitive retail landscape?

Market99 stands out because we bridge the gap between affordability and premium in-store experience. Unlike conventional discount retailers, we place a strong emphasis on curated aesthetics, engaging displays, and an ever-evolving product range. Our stores deliver an element of surprise and delight while maintaining a strong price-value equation, which builds strong customer loyalty.

Your stores offer a diverse range of lifestyle and utility items. What is the strategy behind product selection and merchandising?

Our merchandising strategy is based on data-driven insights, seasonal trends, and consumer demand across demographics. We maintain a diverse yet tightly curated inventory—ranging from home décor and kitchenware to gifting, stationery, health and beauty, confectionary, and many more. The goal is to offer products that are practical, aspirational, and high on design value, often with a appeal that encourages repeat visits. We are an organised value treasure hunt store and we work towards catering to the customer which loves to hunt and is always looking for a bargain.

Indian shoppers are evolving rapidly. How is Market99 adapting to changing consumer expectations, especially in tier 2 and tier 3 cities?

We're seeing rapid urbanization and aspirational buying in tier 2 and 3 cities. Our store layouts, product selection, and marketing strategies are hyper-localized for these markets. We blend local tastes with global trends, ensuring every store feels relevant to its audience. Our value proposition and customer engagement models are also tailored to align with these evolving expectations.

How do you ensure that affordability does not come at the cost of quality and design?

We follow a rigorous sourcing and quality control process, working closely with manufacturers and suppliers both locally and globally. By streamlining our supply chain and leveraging scale, we reduce costs without compromising on quality or aesthetics. Design is a key differentiator for us, and we constantly innovate to bring fresh, well-designed products at competitive prices.



With retail expansion across India, what are the key factors you consider before entering a new city or location?

We look at several parameters: consumer demand, urban development, competition, rental dynamics, and access to logistics infrastructure. Each potential location undergoes a thorough feasibility study. Additionally, we focus high footfall areas like malls which guarantee walk-ins and we probably have the highest customer conversion rate in the industry.

With e-commerce transforming retail, how is Market99 integrating digital touchpoints into its customer journey? Are there plans for a more robust online presence?

Digital integration is a growing focus for us. While Market99 thrives as a brick-and-mortar brand, we are building a more robust online presence through our website and social media platforms. Omnichannel retail is part of our future roadmap, and we are exploring ways to blend in-store experiences with digital convenience, including click-and-collect and personalized digital promotions.

What are some of the biggest challenges you have faced in scaling Market99, and how have you addressed them?

One of the key challenges was building a scalable back-end infrastructure that could support our rapid growth. We addressed this by investing heavily in IT systems, logistics, and warehousing to enhance efficiency and visibility. Recruiting and training the right talent at scale has also been vital. Another challenge was maintaining consistency across stores, which we've managed through standardized processes and strong operational oversight.

How do you stay ahead of retail trends, and what is one emerging trend you believe will shape the future of value retail in India?

We stay ahead by continuously analysing global and local market trends, customer feedback, and technological advancements. One emerging trend we strongly believe in is "experiential retail"—where shopping becomes a sensory, immersive experience. Value retailers who can combine affordability with visual storytelling and interactivity will lead the next wave of consumer engagement.



As the MD, how would you describe your leadership style, and how has it evolved with the growth of the company?

I would describe my leadership style as collaborative and vision-driven. I believe in empowering teams, encouraging innovation, and leading by example. As we've scaled, I've learned to delegate more effectively, trust data-backed decision-making, and build a culture of accountability and creativity. I remain hands-on in areas like operations and expansion, which are close to my heart.

Can you share a glimpse of what is next for Market99? Are there any exciting launches or initiatives on the horizon?

We're currently focusing on deeper market penetration within India and strengthening our omnichannel presence. Internationally, we've just launched "Something Ells" in Australia, marking our foray into global retail. We're also piloting new store formats and themed collections, exploring collaborations, and investing in customer experience enhancement. The next few years will be transformational.

What motivates you on a daily basis? And what advice would you give to aspiring leaders in the retail space?

What motivates me is the tangible impact we create—providing employment, delighting customers, and shaping modern retail in India. My advice to aspiring leaders is: stay grounded, be customer obsessed, and never stop learning. Retail is dynamic; success comes from staying agile, embracing feedback, and having the courage to innovate.



POINT OF VIEW

Amplifying Human Intelligence in the Age of AI – A Retail HR Perspective

Puja Pradhan: Head – Learning & Talent Management (GM) Nexus Select Malls pvt. Ltd.

The retail sector today stands at the intersection of two powerful forces—technological advancement and human connection. Artificial Intelligence (AI), with its growing capabilities, is fundamentally reshaping how we manage operations, predict trends, and enhance efficiencies. From automating recruitment workflows to deploying intelligent chatbots for employee and customer support, AI is significantly elevating productivity and driving process excellence.

At Nexus Select Malls, we see AI as a strategic enabler. It allows us to streamline routine HR processes, deploy learning systems that adapt to user behaviour, and gain insights that support faster decision-making. However, as we increasingly automate the 'what' and 'how', we must be equally mindful of the 'why'—and that brings us to the irreplaceable role of Human Intelligence.

Retail has always been a deeply people-centric industry. It thrives not merely on transactions, but on meaningful interactions. While AI can help us optimize workflows, it cannot replicate the emotional quotient that drives exceptional customer experiences and builds cohesive workplace cultures.

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Retail HR

In customer-facing environments such as malls, where every interaction can shape a brand's perception, human qualities like empathy, compassion, and patience play a defining role. A store associate calming an irate customer, a mall manager motivating their team during peak footfall days, or a security officer assisting a differently-abled visitor—all these moments go beyond scripts and algorithms. They are driven by human sensitivity and emotional awareness, attributes that no machine can truly mimic.

As HR professionals, our focus must be on nurturing these qualities. At Nexus Select Malls, our learning interventions are designed to develop not just

technical competencies but also core human skills—resilience, emotional agility, inclusion, and customer sensitivity. These capabilities are deeply rooted in our values of Caring and Customer centricity, our pillars that help create memorable customer experiences.

Tech + Touch: A Balanced People Strategy

As we step into an era shaped by intelligent technologies, it is essential to move beyond the binary narrative of Human Intelligence (HI) versus Artificial Intelligence (AI). The future belongs to a model where HI and AI work in tandem, each amplifying the other.

At Nexus Select Malls, we view AI not as a replacement, but as a powerful enabler automating routine, transactional processes and unlocking capacity for HR to focus on what truly drives long-term value. As we deploy AI-driven platforms for talent acquisition, predictive analytics, and digital learning, we continue to prioritise the human interface especially in areas that require empathy and trust,

such as coaching dialogues, performance conversations, conflict mediation, and leadership development.

This balanced and intentional integration of technology with human insight defines our approach to future-ready HR—one that is digitally empowered, yet deeply human at its core.



The Human Edge in Customer Service

In today's digital-first and highly competitive retail landscape, where product offerings and pricing often reach parity, it is the quality of service and customer experience that truly sets a brand apart. At our malls, it is the frontline teams—whether it's housekeeping staff, security personnel, or retail associates—who represent the essence of our brand. Their ability to respond with empathy, attentiveness, and genuine care transforms routine interactions into lasting impressions.

While AI can efficiently direct customers to the right store or provide instant responses through chatbots, it is the human connection—a reassuring smile, a kind and thoughtful gesture, a patient listener—that fosters trust and emotional engagement. It is here that HR has a pivotal role: nurturing a workforce that is not only operationally efficient but also emotionally intelligent, culturally sensitive, and deeply customer-centric.

Conclusion: AI with a Human Core

As we embrace the possibilities of AI in the retail sector, we must also reaffirm our commitment to nurturing what makes us uniquely human. Emotional intelligence, empathy, kindness, and the ability to connect meaningfully will remain our greatest differentiators.

The future of work in retail will belong to organisations that strike the right balance between digital innovation and human-centric leadership. At Nexus Select Malls, we are committed to amplifying both—using AI as a lever for efficiency, while continuing to invest in the development of emotionally intelligent, purpose-driven talent.

As HR professionals and retail leaders, let us continue to champion a future where technology enhances, but never replaces, the power of human connection.



VISION

Aligning Employee Roles with Organisational Vision

In today's dynamic retail landscape, shopping malls have transformed from purely commercial spaces into lifestyle destinations. Their success increasingly hinges on providing memorable experiences rather than just facilitating transactions. Central to achieving this is a workforce that is fully aligned with the mall's organisational vision.

A vision gives a mall its identity and strategic direction—whether it's to become a community hub, a luxury destination, or a family-friendly experience center. But a vision alone is not enough. Unless every employee understands and reflects that vision in their daily work, it risks becoming an empty statement. True alignment turns individual roles into meaningful contributions toward a shared goal.

Turning Vision into Everyday Action

The process of aligning employees begins at the point of hiring. It's not just about filling a position with the right skills—it's about bringing on individuals who resonate with the mall's values. For instance, **Westfield London** looks for team members who are not only capable but passionate about delivering excellent customer service. Their recruitment messaging and interviews emphasize customer-centric thinking and emotional intelligence—both key traits for contributing to their “experience-first” strategy.

After hiring, onboarding becomes a critical touchpoint. **Mall of America** in the United States ensures new employees go through orientation sessions where the mall's mission and expectations are made clear. Employees learn how each department contributes to the broader vision of being a destination where entertainment, shopping, and family fun intersect. Such programs help employees grasp the ‘why’ behind their roles from the very beginning.

Vision must also be embedded in how departments function daily. Consider **Emporia Shopping Center** in Malmö, Sweden. As one of Scandinavia's most sustainable malls, it aligns roles by offering training in energy-efficient practices and customer interaction. Whether it's the security team or cleaning staff, everyone understands their part in upholding the mall's dual commitment to environmental responsibility and exceptional service.

Leadership plays a significant role in reinforcing alignment. At **Dubai Festival City Mall**, managers frequently engage with frontline teams through informal walkthroughs and team huddles. These conversations serve as opportunities to reconnect staff with the mall's goals—be it operational excellence, innovation, or guest satisfaction. It shows that leadership is not removed from the everyday experience but embedded in it.

A sense of ownership further deepens alignment. When employees are trusted to act independently within their role's scope, they feel more accountable. For example, **VivoCity in Singapore** empowers its staff to handle small customer complaints on the spot. Whether offering quick solutions or anticipating guest needs, this empowerment reflects VivoCity's brand promise of “hassle-free joy,” turning ordinary service interactions into moments of delight.

Recognising Alignment in Action

Celebrating employees who exemplify the mall's vision reinforces the importance of alignment. Mall of the Emirates in Dubai runs a program called “Vision Champion,” where employees are nominated for going above and beyond in ways that align with the mall's brand identity. Whether it's a security guard who helps a lost child or a technician who ensures all amenities work seamlessly during a major event, recognition is tied not just to performance—but to purpose. These small, consistent practices build a workforce that doesn't just “do the job” but lives the brand. When every employee—from the concierge desk to the back office—shares the same understanding of what the mall stands for, the entire customer experience becomes more cohesive, more memorable, and more impactful.

The Organisational Payoff

The benefits of alignment are tangible. Customers notice the difference in the energy and service levels. Tenants benefit from better-managed spaces and increased footfall. And employees themselves are more engaged and loyal, reducing turnover and enhancing operational stability.

More importantly, vision alignment ensures that strategic goals are reflected in day-to-day operations. For malls looking to evolve beyond traditional retail centers into immersive destinations, this alignment is not just helpful—it's essential.

Aligning employee roles with an organisational vision is an ongoing effort that demands intention and consistency. As seen in leading malls like Westfield London, Mall of America, and Mall of the Emirates, this alignment transforms routine tasks into purpose-driven contributions.

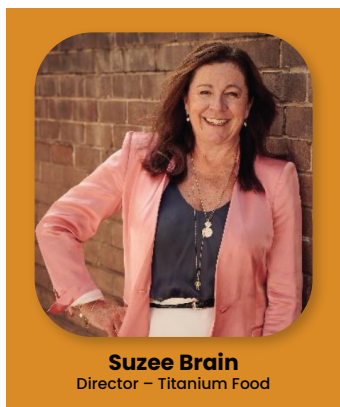
In a competitive global retail environment, malls that invest in this alignment create not just strong internal cultures—but unforgettable customer experiences. And in the end, that's what keeps people coming back.





FOOD TRENDS

Unlocking the Future of F&B in Indian Shopping Malls — Your Voice Matters!



Suzee Brain

Director – Titanium Food

The food and beverage (F&B) sector is no longer a supplementary offering in Indian shopping malls — it's fast becoming a cornerstone of commercial success. As the industry continues to evolve, we now face a pivotal moment: how do we harness data, insight, and strategy to future-proof our malls for changing consumer appetites?

To answer this question, a targeted new survey is calling on shopping mall professionals across India to weigh in on the real challenges and ambitions shaping F&B in retail spaces today. If you're a Mall Manager, Development Executive, or part of the leasing and marketing brains trust, your input is not only valued — it's essential.

From Strategy to Struggle: We're Listening

The survey explores your top strategic goals when it comes to F&B — whether it's increasing dwell time, driving footfall, or curating the right mix to stand out in a competitive landscape. But it doesn't stop at aspirations. It digs deep into the day-to-day hurdles we all know too well: high tenant turnover, lack of infrastructure, limited access to quality operators, and the ever-present struggle to match cuisine with catchment preferences.

Planning with Precision, Not Guesswork

How do you determine where and how much space F&B should take up? Are you relying on internal benchmarks, external consultants, or your gut? The survey seeks to map how Indian shopping malls are currently making these critical decisions — and where we can improve through better benchmarking, data, and global insight. Spoiler alert: international best practices can be a game changer.

Insights that Go Beyond the Surface

Respondents are also being asked about their confidence in their current F&B mix, the KPIs they use to measure success, and the types of expert support they believe would move the needle. From cuisine optimisation to space allocation, from design briefs to mentoring underperforming tenants — the options for support are rich and wide-ranging.

Trendspotting for Tomorrow's Tenants

Are you curious about food halls? Considering a shift to more experiential dining? Wondering how digital-first brands or cloud kitchens might fit into your next redevelopment? The survey taps into emerging trends that are not just shaping consumer behaviour but redefining what a shopping mall can be.

Be Heard — and Get Something in Return

This isn't just another industry poll. All survey respondents will receive a copy of the final report — a valuable benchmarking tool that could directly inform your next leasing strategy or redevelopment plan. And to sweeten the deal, every completed survey goes into the draw to win a ₹1,000 Amazon voucher.

Now's the Time

The future of F&B in Indian shopping malls is being written — and your voice should be part of the story. Whether your mall is thriving or seeking its next breakthrough, this is your chance to shape the dialogue, influence the benchmarks, and elevate your performance.

Take the Survey. Get the Report. Win the Voucher.

Because in this industry, those who eat last miss the best bites.

The survey runs until 30 June. We will be reporting through the SCAI newsletter on the results and advice around your top priorities. Hit the link below or scan the QR code

<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8302755/F-B-in-Indian-Shopping-Centres>



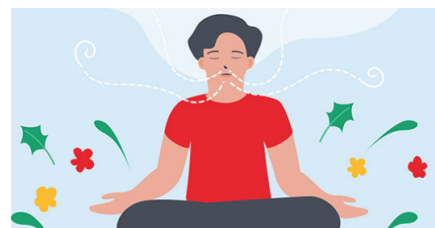


15 Relaxation Methods That Work Wonders

In today's hyperconnected, always-on world, relaxation can feel like a luxury. But science—and experience—tells us otherwise. Relaxation is essential to our mental, physical, and emotional well-being. It resets the nervous system, enhances our focus, supports better sleep, and even strengthens the immune system.

From ancient practices to modern rituals, there are countless ways to unwind. The key is finding the methods that truly work for you. Whether you have a full hour or just five spare minutes, these 15 proven techniques can help you decompress and restore balance.

1. Deep Breathing



When stress strikes, your breath is the first place to go for relief. Structured breathing techniques like box breathing or the 4-7-8 method can instantly activate the body's natural relaxation response. It's simple, effective, and always accessible.

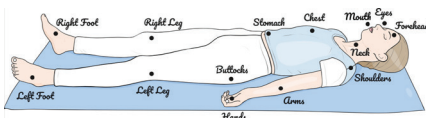
Try This: Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7, exhale for 8. Repeat for 2-4 cycles.

4. Yoga & Tai Chi



These ancient practices combine gentle movement, deep breathing, and mindfulness. Both are ideal for reducing stress, increasing flexibility, and enhancing inner peace. The rhythmic flow of tai chi or the grounding poses of yoga can calm both body and mind.

2. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)



This technique involves tensing and slowly releasing each muscle group from your toes to your forehead. PMR brings awareness to where tension hides and teaches your body how to let go of it. It's especially helpful before bed.

5. Forest Bathing (Shinrin-Yoku)



This Japanese-inspired practice is as simple as taking a slow, mindful walk through a natural space. The goal? Engage all your senses. Forest bathing has been linked to reduced cortisol levels, lower heart rate, and improved mood.

3. Meditation



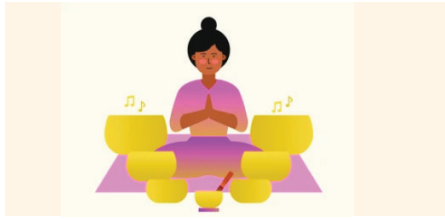
Meditation is more than just a buzzword. A consistent practice—even just 10 minutes a day—can lower anxiety, improve emotional regulation, and sharpen focus. Guided meditations, found on apps like Calm, Headspace, or Insight Timer, are a great place to start.

6. Aromatherapy



The power of scent can't be overstated. Essential oils like lavender, eucalyptus, chamomile, and sandalwood have calming properties. Use them in a diffuser, bath, or dabbed on your wrists for a quick emotional reset.

7. Sound Therapy



From ocean waves to ambient music and Tibetan singing bowls, sound has a profound effect on the nervous system. Binaural beats, in particular, can guide brainwaves into deeper states of relaxation.

10. Digital Detox



Unplugging from screens, especially social media and the news cycle, helps reduce mental clutter. Even a 30-minute break can recharge your brain and reconnect you with the present moment.

13. Herbal Tea Rituals



Sipping a warm cup of herbal tea—chamomile, lemon balm, or valerian root—can feel like a hug from the inside. The warmth, aroma, and soothing herbs offer both physical and emotional comfort.

Make Relaxation a Daily Ritual

Incorporating even one or two of these practices into your day can significantly improve your sense of well-being. The secret isn't doing everything—it's doing something consistently. Whether it's a 10-minute walk in nature, a quiet tea ritual, or a moment of stillness before bed, these moments add up. Because in the end, relaxation isn't a reward. It's a necessity.

8. Journaling



Sometimes the mind needs a place to unload. Journaling is a powerful tool for organizing thoughts, processing emotions, and expressing gratitude. Try starting or ending your day with a quick reflection.

11. Walking Meditation



A moving alternative to traditional meditation, walking meditation encourages mindful steps. Focus on the sensation of your feet meeting the ground, your breath, and your surroundings. Ideal for clearing your mind during a lunch break or evening stroll.

14. Warm Baths with Epsom Salt



A warm bath relaxes tight muscles and encourages the body to release tension. Add Epsom salts for a magnesium boost, light a candle, and create a spa-like atmosphere at home.

9. Guided Visualization



Picture yourself on a serene beach, under a canopy of trees, or in a cozy cabin by a fire. Visualization, especially when guided, can lower heart rate and transport your mind to a place of peace—even if just for a few minutes.

12. Creative Hobbies



Art, music, knitting, gardening—whatever your creative outlet is, it has therapeutic benefits. Engaging in a hobby can induce a “flow” state, where time slows down and stress melts away.

15. Cuddling with Pets



Never underestimate the healing power of touch. Time with a beloved pet can elevate mood, lower blood pressure, and release oxytocin—the “love hormone.” It's nature's built-in therapy.



NEWS WATCH

Universal Studios in Talks to Open First Indoor Theme Park in India as Part of Bharti's Mega Aerocity Project

In a move that could redefine the entertainment and retail landscape in India, Universal Studios is reportedly in advanced negotiations with Bharti Real Estate to launch its first-ever indoor amusement park in the country. The proposed attraction is expected to anchor a landmark 3-million-square-foot retail development near Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, with doors likely to open by mid-2027.

This would mark Universal Studios' debut in India—one of the world's fastest-growing consumer markets—and signal a significant leap in the evolution of large-format indoor entertainment in the region. The indoor park will occupy approximately 300,000 square feet, or 10% of the mall's leasable area, and is designed to bring an elevated level of experiential engagement to Indian audiences, combining immersive storytelling, high-tech attractions, and globally recognised IPs.

Part of India's Largest Mixed-Use Development

The entertainment destination will form a key part of Bharti Real Estate's flagship 17-million-square-foot Aerocity development, set to be the largest mixed-use project in India. Located adjacent to the airport and envisioned as a world-class urban hub, the development includes retail, hospitality, commercial, and entertainment zones. Of the total area, 6.5 million square feet are already under construction with an investment exceeding INR 6,595 crore. The project is expected to generate more than INR 5,000 crore in annual rental income, cementing its status as a prime destination for global brands.

Aerocity's strategic location, footfall potential, and integration with luxury retail and hospitality make it an ideal launchpad for a global attraction like Universal Studios. Though Bharti has not formally confirmed the brand, it has acknowledged active discussions with several international players. Industry insiders indicate Universal Studios is the frontrunner, and the deal is nearing closure.

Indoor Entertainment Gathers Momentum in India

India's indoor entertainment sector is witnessing exponential growth. As of 2024, the country boasts approximately 6.6 million square feet of operational indoor amusement and leisure spaces, spread across 523 centers nationwide. According to industry fore

However, consumer expectations are shifting. There's growing interest in high quality,

tech-forward formats such as virtual reality arenas, immersive ride simulators, interactive shows, and IP-led storytelling zones. Universal Studios—with its vast portfolio of entertainment franchises such as Jurassic Park, Minions, Fast & Furious, and Despicable Me—is uniquely positioned to lead this transformation.



Why India—and Why Now?

India's demographic advantages—a young population, rising disposable incomes, urban expansion, and an appetite for global entertainment—make it a compelling market for international theme park operators. The post-pandemic shift towards leisure and experiential spending has further accelerated the momentum. The indoor format, in particular, offers scalability and weather-proof operations—critical factors in urban India where real estate constraints and extreme climate conditions can limit outdoor amusement infrastructure.

By anchoring itself within a mixed-use destination like Aerocity, Universal Studios can tap into synergies with premium retail, hospitality, and F&B, driving longer dwell times and higher consumer spend.

What This Means for India's Entertainment Landscape

If finalised, this would be Universal Studios' first foray into the Indian subcontinent and its first indoor park of this scale in South Asia. Beyond being a marquee attraction, it could set new benchmarks for the sector in terms of design, safety, guest experience, and operational excellence.

Industry experts believe this move could open the floodgates for further global investment in India's entertainment and leisure infrastructure. It would also elevate India's appeal as a family tourism destination, drawing both domestic and international visitors. As anticipation builds for an official announcement, the potential entry of Universal Studios marks a pivotal moment for India's leisure economy—one where global entertainment finally meets the scale, ambition, and energy of the Indian market.



WARM WELCOME

Happily announcing the joining of Mall of Ranchi, Jharkhand as a SCAI Member.



Happily announcing the joining of Mall of Ranchi, Jharkhand as a SCAI Member. A very warm welcome to them.

Discover Ranchi's ultimate shopping and lifestyle destination. Experience a vibrant mix of retail, dining, and entertainment all in one place. Whether you're shopping, savouring delicious food, or simply enjoying a day out, Mall of Ranchi is the place for creating unforgettable memories

Warm Welcome to SCAI New Member– Secure Parking Solutions Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai



We are pleased to welcome Secure Parking Solutions Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai as the newest member of SCAI! Secure Parking is a global leader in car park management, offering end-to-end parking consultancy, operations, and smart system solutions across 16 countries and 40+ Indian cities.





PRC 2025

Phygital Retail Convention 2025 Unveiled 'Infinite India's' Mega Retail Potential

India's Largest Retail Intelligence Event Concluded Successfully on 7–8 May at Jio World Convention Centre, Mumbai

The **6th edition of the Phygital Retail Convention (PRC) 2025**, presented by **Inorbit Malls** and powered by **Mufti**, concluded on a high note at the **Jio World Convention Centre**, Mumbai on 7–8 May 2025. With the theme 'Infinite India – The World's Fastest Growing Retail Market,' the event showcased India's tremendous growth trajectory and untapped potential in the retail sector. Over 3,000 industry leaders, entrepreneurs, innovators, and decision-makers gathered across two days of engaging sessions, power-packed panels, and immersive showcases. More than 1,000 brands and companies participated, making PRC 2025 a landmark event for the retail community.

Speaking about the event, Bhavesh Pitroda, Group CEO & Director, IMAGES Group, said, "PRC 2025 truly captured the spirit of a rising India – bold, limitless, and

collaborative. The response from the industry was overwhelming, reaffirming that India is fast becoming the epicentre of global retail innovation."

PRC 2025 featured over 300 renowned speakers representing key sectors like fashion, F&B, lifestyle, real estate, retail tech, and more. Industry stalwarts who headlined the sessions included:

B S Nagesh, Chairman, Shoppers Stop; Damodar Mall, CEO – Grocery, Reliance Retail; Dr. Shiv Shivakumar, Management Guru; Mukesh Bansal, Founder, Myntra, cult.fit, Nurix AI; Pushpa Bector, Sr ED & Business Head – Retail, DLF; Rajneesh Mahajan, CEO, Inorbit Malls; Sandeep Varaganti, CEO, JioMart; Shriti Malhotra, Executive Chairperson, Quest Retail; Siddharth Dungarwal, Founder & CEO, Snitch; Harish Bhat, former TATA Sons Brand Custodian; Devang Sampat, MD & CEO, Cinepolis; Dipu Mehta, MD, Orra; Kabir Jeet Singh, Founder & CEO, Burger Singh; Kavindra Mishra, MD & CEO, Shoppers Stop; Kumar Nitesh, CEO, Ajio Business, Trends Footwear, Reliance Retail; Mohit Khattar, CEO, Graviss Foods; Pramod Arora, CEO, PVR Inox; Rahul Singh, Founder & CEO, The Beer Cafe; Rajesh Jain, MD, Lacoste; Ramprasad Sridharan, CEO & MD, Benetton India; Sagar J Daryani, Founder & CEO, Wow! Momo Foods; Sahil Malik, CEO, Da Milano; Sanjay Vakharia, Co Founder & CEO, Spykar; Shital Mehta, MD, Lifestyle International; Siddharth Dungarwal, Founder & CEO, Snitch; Udai Pinnali, CEO, Aditya Birla New Age Hospitality; Vishak Kumar, CEO, Madura Fashion & Lifestyle were among many other leading voices in Indian and global retail.

A crowd-favourite moment of the convention was the return of India's beloved quizmaster, Siddhartha Basu, who hosted the high-energy India Retail Brain Game, challenging and entertaining participants in equal measure. The concurrent Retail TechNXT 2025 exhibition added another layer of excitement, offering a dynamic showcase of future-ready retail technology. Exhibitors included global names like Salesforce and Diebold Nixdorf, who unveiled innovative tech solutions for the evolving needs of Indian retail.

Spanning over 1 lakh sq. ft., PRC 2025 proved once again why it is the most influential platform for India's retail stakeholders – not just to meet and network, but to shape the future of the industry together.

A glimpse of the key sessions from the event...

Frontlines of the Infinite: Steering the New Retail Order

The inaugural fireside chat opened PRC 2025 with a thought-provoking conversation featuring three of India's most respected voices in brand and retail leadership. As global attention focused on India's explosive growth trajectory and rapidly evolving consumption patterns, the dialogue delved into the defining forces that are reshaping the retail landscape—ranging from digital acceleration and shifting consumer behaviors to talent,



Grounded in long-term vision and purposeful innovation, the session set the tone for PRC 2025, offering a strategic compass for leaders navigating the infinite possibilities of India's retail future.

Speaking later in the session, Shiv Shivakumar, Thought Leader and Management Thinker pointed out that apparel segment is all about buy two, get one free and where retail approach in being profit making has failed due to absence of innovation. Drawing a parallel, Shivakumar said, unlike airlines where the revenue is in rupees and costs incurred in dollars unlike the IT services where it is the other way round, retail must look at the latter to manage their costs, de-risk their model and improve their bottom-line. Beyond fashion retail, experts at the conclave pointed out towards the changing retail universe led by experimental behavior among the new age consumers.

B S Nagesh, Chairman, Shoppers Stop Ltd. & Founder, TRRAIN, called upon the conventional retail grocery stores to adopt technology and scale up their operations as has been established by some of the old age retailers.

The Infinite Leap: Mapping India's Trillion-Dollar Retail Trajectory

As India continued to emerge as one of the most vibrant consumer markets in the world, this high-powered panel brought together industry frontrunners to chart the country's unprecedented retail expansion. From the sharp rise in digital-first consumption to the unlocking of Tier 2 and 3 markets, the session examined the new playbook for growth in an economy poised to cross the trillion-dollar retail threshold. Leaders dissected key trends driving omnichannel adoption, shifting consumer behavior, capital infusion, and the rise of homegrown brands—all while navigating the complexities of scaling in a market as diverse as it is dynamic. This conversation outlined the strategic imperatives for brands and investors pursuing India's next big leap.



Infinite Trends: Mapping What Moves The New Consumer

In a landscape defined by constant evolution, staying ahead of consumer preferences proved to be both a challenge and an opportunity. This session brought together retail trendsetters and format innovators to decode what was resonating with India's new generation of shoppers. From high-growth categories and emerging formats to unexpected shifts in how and where people chose to buy, the discussion highlighted what was rising, what was fading, and how retailers aligned with the pulse of an infinite, ever-curious market.

"Online is a matter of discount in India," said Kumar Nitesh, CEO - Ajio Business, Trend Footwear - Reliance Retail indicating that margins are much better offline. Average online business is 25%, experts at the panel discussion said beyond, which can drive valuations, but bottom-line bleeds and rest on the offline business.



Infinite Experience: Orchestrating Seamless Journeys Across Touchpoints

Customer experience was no longer defined by individual channels—it was shaped by how effortlessly they connected. As retail entered a new era of convergence, this opening session explored how leading brands reimagined the customer journey through advanced CX platforms, intelligent CRM systems, and real-time behavioral insights. From in-store interactions to digital engagements, the discussion revealed how technology enabled retailers to deliver truly unified, personalized experiences at every touchpoint—phygital and beyond.

Infinite Equilibrium: The CXO Blueprint For Growth Amid Chaos

In a retail landscape marked by infinite disruptions and equally infinite possibilities, the role of the CXO was being redefined. This session explored how India's retail leaders architected sustainable growth by balancing visionary innovation with operational pragmatism. From aligning talent and technology to fine-tuning strategy and execution, the conversation delved into how CXOs filtered the noise, prioritized what truly mattered, and built future-ready enterprises in a market where the only constant was change.

Earlier in the day, talking about profitability, P Senthilkumar, Senior Partner, Vector Consulting indicated that fast moving trends in fashions in India is leading to high gross working capital and in turn low inventory turnover. The long lead time to forecast a trend is leading to inaccuracy in predicting demand as product lifecycle is getting limited to four months, Senthilkumar said, "What was sold in the previous session is no more relevant in the next season in a fast paced industry with changing demand profile," he said.

Speaking on the changing consumer mindset from their study derived from over 700 voices, Nikhil Bhatia, Managing Director, Capital Markets & Land, CBRE India pointed out that entertainment is the new cornerstone of the experimental economy. According to their study, entertainment led segments had seen a 150% increase with family entertainment centers driving footfalls in metro cities like Pune, Bengaluru and Mumbai that include upscale bowling alleys and gourmet dining, Bhatia said.

The second day of PRC witnessed a crowd-favourite moment; the return of India's beloved quizmaster, Siddhartha Basu, who hosted the high-energy India Retail Brain Game, challenging and entertaining participants in equal measure.

Infinite Bharat: Redefining Retail With Reach, Relevance & Reliance

The first session of the second morning witnessed, Sandeep Varaganti, CEO of JioMart, sharing deep insights into how Reliance Retail is reshaping Indian commerce with one of the most inclusive, tech-driven, and customer-centric ecosystems in the world. In a compelling fireside chat with Samir Kuckreja, Founder & CEO, Tasanaya Hospitality, he highlighted how JioMart's omnichannel strategy is bridging the gap between digital and physical retail to better serve the diverse needs of shoppers across urban and rural India.

As JioMart continues expanding across 1,000 cities, Varaganti revealed that the company is evaluating a dark store model to address underserved areas where kirana networks are not yet fully effective. "An internal team is evaluating options for the dark stores foray," he noted, adding that while the kirana ecosystem is thriving, there are still gaps to be addressed.

Varaganti also emphasized that JioMart is actively pursuing Quick Commerce, but with a strong focus on sustainability. "We are pursuing that path hands down... We will not burn money... will make it profitable," he asserted.

Backed by technology, trust, and transformation, JioMart's strategy reflects a bold vision for scalable and sustainable retail growth in India's ever-evolving consumer landscape.

Infinite Operations: The COO Agenda In New Age Retail

In an era defined by relentless change—ranging from digital acceleration and supply chain disruptions to evolving consumer expectations and hybrid retail models—the role of the Chief Operating Officer emerged as more critical than ever. This session brought together some of India's leading COOs to unpack the operational imperatives shaping the future of Indian retail. The discussion delved into how COOs rethought cost-efficiency and scalability, while simultaneously managing the complexities of omnichannel integration and delivering consistent in-store experiences. The panelists shared insights on how they balanced agility with structure, innovation with execution, and speed with long-term sustainability—key pillars for navigating today's dynamic landscape. As "Infinite India" continued to reshape patterns of consumption and commerce, the session offered a powerful COO lens on what it takes to build resilient, responsive, and future-ready retail organizations. The conversation underscored the need for operational foresight, digital adaptability, and a human-centric approach to execution in driving scalable growth across India's diverse markets.

Infinite Commerce: How Smart Checkout And Integrated Retail Systems Drive Omnichannel Growth

As omnichannel retail became the norm rather than the exception, brands were compelled to rethink how they connected storefronts, digital platforms, inventory systems, and checkout experiences. This session brought together experts from commerce infrastructure and customer experience design to discuss how leading retailers achieved deep operational integration while delivering conversion-driven experiences. Panelists explored how a tightly connected backend and a smart, adaptive frontend reshaped the retail journey—from product discovery to fulfillment. The session highlighted how this alignment between systems and experience enabled modern retailers to operate more efficiently while meeting the evolving expectations of today's connected consumers.

The New Theatre Of Physical Retail

As physical retail staged a powerful comeback, the rules of in-store engagement were being rewritten to meet the expectations of digitally savvy shoppers. This session explored how technology transformed brick-and-mortar spaces into immersive, theatrical environments—where storytelling merged with smart functionality and every square foot became a platform for innovation. Panelists discussed the role of sensory design, phygital integration, and personalization in enhancing offline experiences. The conversation highlighted how retailers reimaged their stores as Infinite Stages—spaces of experience, expression, and emotional connection designed to captivate and convert the modern consumer.

IMAGES Retail Awards 2025

The Phygital Retail Convention concluded on a high note with the IMAGES Retail Awards celebrating the outstanding contributions of brands driving innovation in the retail sector.

Brands from across the industry submitted nominations in over 20 categories, all vying for top honors. An esteemed jury assessed the entries based on a comprehensive set of criteria, recognizing excellence, creativity, and impact.





INDUSTRY NEWS

Lulu Malls shine at the ICSC Global MAXI Awards 2025 with 3 Prestigious Wins for India

Las Vegas, USA / India – Lulu Malls have once again cemented its position on the global retail stage by winning three major honors at the ICSC Global MAXI Awards 2025, one of the world's most prestigious recognitions for marketing excellence in the shopping center industry.

Competing with top shopping centers from over 15 countries, Lulu Malls proudly brought home two Gold Awards and one Silver Award, a significant achievement for Indian retail and mall innovation.

Award Highlights:

- Gold Award – Lulu Mall Kochi for Lulu Flower Fest
A stunning floral celebration that redefined seasonal retail experiences and footfall engagement
- Gold Award – Lulu Mall Lucknow for Lulu Little Games
A heart-warming, large-scale toddler Olympics that combined community, and commerce.
- Silver Award – Lulu Mall Thiruvananthapuram for Freedom Fiesta
A powerful Independence Day campaign that paid tribute to the Indian Army and sparked emotional community participation.

"It is a moment of immense pride not just for Lulu Group, but for India," said Shibu Philips, Director – Lulu Shopping Malls India. "Winning three MAXI Awards on a global stage reinforces our belief in pushing boundaries, creating emotional connections with our audiences, and always delivering experiences that go beyond the ordinary."

"Each of these campaigns had a strong insight at its core – whether it was celebrating community, inspiring joy, or evoking national pride," said Aiswarya Babu, General Manager – Marketing, Lulu Malls India. "These wins are a tribute to fearless thinking, detailed execution, and the collective spirit of our teams and partners."

The awards were presented at the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) Global Conference in Las Vegas, where the world's most innovative and impactful campaigns were honored.



Lulu Malls won 2 Gold and 1 Silver awards for marketing excellence at the prestigious ICSC Global MAXI Awards 2025 held in Las Vegas. Aiswarya Babu, General Manager – Marketing, Lulu Malls India, and Shibu Philips, Director – Shopping Malls, Lulu Group India, received the honor from Nick Verreos, international fashion designer, educator, and author.



SHOPPING CENTRES
ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

For More Information, Please Contact:

Sachin Nakti : +91 9029643729, sachinnatki@scai.in

Follow us: [@scai08](#)

