

MALL TALK

September 2026

CELEBRATE GANESH CHATURTHI

FESTIVAL OF JOY,
BLESSINGS & NEW
BEGINNINGS

FESTIVE STYLE EDIT

ETHNIC LOOKS
THAT INSPIRE

MOMENTS THAT MATTER

FAMILY, TOGETHERNESS
& TRADITIONS

SHOP CELEBRATE SHINE

EXPERIENCE THE
FESTIVE SPIRIT
AT YOUR FAVOURITE
PLACE



SHOPPING CENTRES
ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

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Association of India, Mumbai
Issue 62, September 2026

EDITED & PUBLISHED BY:
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3/116, Pintoo House Marol
Co-Operative Industrial Estate,
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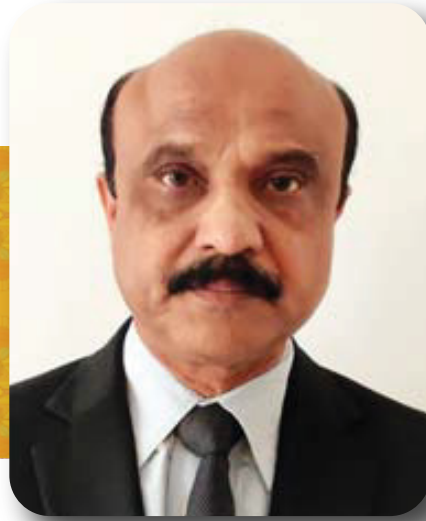
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Anjeev Kumar Srivastava
COO, SCAI

As we step into September, our shopping centre continues its journey of growth, renewal, and meaningful connections. This month brings with it a season of fresh beginnings from the back-to-school spirit to new lifestyle launches – and we are thrilled to share updates that reflect our promise of innovation and excellence.

At the core of our mission remains a focus on enhancing the visitor journey. Our teams have worked tirelessly to introduce a new mix of brands, seasonal activations, and engaging experiences that speak to the evolving needs of our patrons. September is also a time of inspiration, and through thoughtfully curated campaigns and trend highlights, we aim to deliver not just products, but memorable stories and moments. In keeping with our responsibility to the industry, we continue to drive knowledge-sharing initiatives and collaborative platforms. This month, our masterclasses and workshops are designed to empower both businesses and customers, ensuring that our mall ecosystem stays ahead of the curve in shaping sustainable, forward-thinking retail practices.

Community remains the heartbeat of everything we do. From family-centric events to cultural showcases, our September line-up is built to celebrate togetherness and foster connections that go beyond shopping. We are proud to be a space where diverse voices come together, creating a dynamic hub that reflects the spirit of our city.

As the year gathers momentum, we look forward with optimism and determination to deliver even greater value to you – our patrons, partners, and community. Thank you for continuing to walk this journey with us. The best is yet to come, and we are excited to unveil more in the months ahead.

Anjeev Kumar

How the Experience Economy Is Rewriting the Role of India's Shopping Centres

– R S Roy



For decades, the success of a shopping centre could be explained through a relatively familiar vocabulary: footfall, sales, occupancy, tenant mix and catchment. Marketing's role was to bring people in and retail's role was to convert them into shoppers. Experiences, when they existed, were often adjuncts to the commercial proposition—a festive decoration, a celebrity appearance, a weekend activity or a seasonal promotion designed primarily to create temporary excitement.

That equation, however, is being fundamentally rewritten. Today's shopping centres are competing not merely with the mall across town or the high street around the corner, but with streaming platforms, restaurants, concerts, social media, gaming, travel and an ever-expanding universe of ways in which consumers can spend their increasingly valuable leisure time.

The question confronting shopping centre leaders is therefore no longer simply how to get consumers to shop. Increasingly, it is **why consumers should choose to spend their time at a particular destination.**

That distinction formed an important undercurrent of a recent SCAI Masterclass on the Experience Economy, which brought together four leading shopping centre marketing professionals—**Amrith Gopinath**, Chief Marketing Officer, **DLF Malls**; **Nishank Joshi**, Chief Marketing Officer, **Nexus Select Malls**; **Rahul Malhotra**, Head Marketing – Retail, **Brigade Group**; and **Aditya Desai**, Vice President – Marketing, **Lakeshore India**.



The conversation was particularly interesting because the **four leaders represented different portfolios, markets and operating philosophies**, yet their collective insights pointed towards a remarkably similar conclusion.



The modern shopping centre is increasingly becoming a platform for experiences, and retail is no longer always the sole reason for the visit. In many cases, the experience itself creates the reason to come, while discovery and consumption become part of what follows.



The New Competition Is for Time, Not Just Money

One of the most compelling ideas emerging from the discussion was the **shift from competing for a share of wallet to competing for a share of time.**

It is an important distinction because while consumer spending has always been finite, time has become an equally contested resource.

In an earlier retail era, the principal competition may have been between two shopping destinations offering similar brands and merchandise.

Today, a family deciding what to do on a Saturday evening has a much wider universe of choices. It can watch content at home, attend a concert, dine at a standalone restaurant, visit an entertainment destination, travel, meet friends or spend the evening at a shopping centre.

The mall, therefore, can no longer assume that retail availability alone will earn the visit. It increasingly has to create a compelling proposition around **how consumers can spend their time.**





Transformation Beyond Transactions

This transformation is visible well beyond India. Research from major global retail property organisations increasingly points to the enduring importance of physical destinations at a time when digital commerce has made transactions easier than ever before. Westfield's consumer research on younger shoppers, for example, has highlighted the continuing importance of physical communities and discovery, with consumers demonstrating a willingness to encounter new brands and make unplanned purchases during visits to shopping destinations.

The commercial significance of this behaviour is substantial. A consumer who arrives with a defined shopping mission may complete a transaction efficiently and leave. A consumer who arrives to spend time is exposed to multiple possibilities—food, entertainment, new brands, social interaction and unplanned discovery.

The experience economy, therefore, should not be seen merely as an alternative to retail. It can create the conditions in which more meaningful retail engagement occurs.



From a Physical Asset to a Programmable Platform

Another powerful theme emerging from the Masterclass was the extraordinary flexibility that a shopping centre possesses as a physical platform. As Rahul Malhotra observed during the conversation, a mall can potentially become many different things without changing its fundamental infrastructure. At different points in time, the same physical space can host a sporting event, an art exhibition, a wellness programme, a pet community gathering, a book fair, a live performance, a food festival or a specialised workshop.

The building remains the same, but the reason to visit changes continuously. This adaptability may increasingly become one of the shopping centre industry's greatest strategic advantages at a time when consumers expect novelty but also seek familiarity and convenience.

“

The emerging consumer journey increasingly begins with a reason to spend time—entertainment, food, culture or community—and allows retail discovery and consumption to follow naturally.

”



However, flexibility can easily become randomness if it is not supported by a clear destination strategy. A calendar filled with events is not necessarily an experiential proposition, just as a crowded social media feed is not necessarily meaningful engagement.



Nishank Joshi's experience of managing extensive programming across a large shopping centre portfolio brought this challenge into focus during the discussion. As malls expand the number and variety of activities they organise, there is always the danger of creating what might be called an event treadmill, where the pressure to constantly do something new gradually becomes an end in itself.



Globally, the rapid expansion of experiential and entertainment-led retail has raised similar questions about sustainability. The most successful concepts are unlikely to be those that simply generate novelty for a weekend, but those that strengthen the destination's long-term relevance and give consumers a reason to return.



The challenge for mall marketers, therefore, is shifting from **event creation to destination programming**. An event is a moment. Programming is a strategy. It requires understanding what communities exist within a catchment, what interests bring them together, what gaps exist in the city's social and cultural infrastructure and what experiences a shopping centre can provide better than other alternatives. The strongest shopping centres of the future may not necessarily have the busiest calendars, but they are likely to have the clearest understanding of **why each activity belongs to their destination**.



One Mall Cannot Have One Definition of Experience

Perhaps the greatest danger in the experience economy is the assumption that all consumers seek the same kind of engagement.

Rahul Malhotra made an important point in the Masterclass when discussing the diverse nature of shopping centre audiences.



A mall is fundamentally a multi-generational and multi-interest community space. On any given day,

it may simultaneously serve teenagers seeking social interaction, young professionals meeting friends, families spending time together, parents entertaining children, affluent consumers shopping for premium products and senior citizens looking for a comfortable and secure environment. Their expectations from an experience are unlikely to be identical.



This is particularly relevant at a time when youth culture and Gen Z dominate marketing conversations.

Younger consumers are unquestionably reshaping expectations around participation, authenticity and social engagement, but designing an entire destination around one demographic would be as limiting as ignoring that demographic altogether.



The real opportunity lies in recognising that a successful shopping centre can accommodate multiple

communities without becoming fragmented. A food festival can attract families, while a fitness event may engage young professionals, an art programme can build cultural relevance and a children's activity can strengthen weekend visitation.



This also explains why copying successful formats from one city to another can be increasingly ineffective. India's shopping centre industry operates across extraordinarily diverse markets, shaped by differences in culture, climate, income, lifestyles, local festivals and the maturity of organised retail. An event that creates enormous engagement in Mumbai may not necessarily resonate in Bengaluru, Jaipur or Kochi. The next stage of experiential sophistication will therefore require something more demanding than simply replicating a successful idea. It will require **hyper-local intelligence**—the ability to understand what consumers in a particular catchment genuinely value and programme the destination accordingly.



When the Experience Creates the Visit

Aditya Desai raised perhaps the most commercially significant question of the Masterclass when the discussion turned towards the relationship between experience and retail: how can an experience become the reason to visit while retail becomes the outcome?

This proposition effectively reverses the traditional shopping centre journey. Historically, the consumer's journey was often defined by a need: a requirement for a product led to a visit, followed by shopping and perhaps an incidental entertainment or dining activity.

The emerging journey can begin differently. A consumer may arrive for a concert, a cultural programme, a children's event, a fitness initiative or simply to meet friends, and the visit can subsequently create opportunities for dining, discovery and shopping across multiple categories.



Children's
Activity



Live
Performance



Fitness
Programme



Retail
Discovery



Dining
Experience



Festivals &
Exhibitions

The commercial potential of this model lies in the interconnected nature of the shopping centre ecosystem. A family attending a children's activity may subsequently dine at the destination. A visitor attending a performance may explore stores before or after the event. A consumer participating in a fitness programme may discover an athleisure brand, while a wedding exhibition can potentially stimulate engagement across ethnic fashion, jewellery, beauty and gifting.

“

The emerging consumer journey increasingly begins with a reason to spend time—entertainment, food, culture or community—and allows retail discovery and consumption to follow naturally.

”

Globally, this convergence between retail, food, entertainment and experience is becoming increasingly visible. Food and beverage concepts, location-based entertainment, immersive attractions and temporary pop-ups are being integrated into shopping destinations because they perform different roles within the consumer journey. Some bring repeat visitation, others extend dwell time, some create social media visibility and others encourage consumers to explore parts of a destination they might otherwise never visit.

The future shopping centre ecosystem may therefore become less about assembling the largest possible collection of brands and more about understanding how different components interact to create a richer overall consumer journey.



The Most Difficult Question:

What Is the Return on Experience?

As experiences become more central to shopping centre strategy, the question of return on investment inevitably becomes more important—and more difficult to answer. Every major event eventually encounters the same management question: what did it deliver? Footfall can be counted, ticket sales measured and social media reach quantified. Participation can be tracked, and in some cases category performance before and after an event can be compared. Yet some of the most valuable outcomes of experiential programming are more difficult to isolate. What is the long-term value of becoming top-of-mind for a consumer? How should a destination calculate the commercial impact of a first-time visitor who subsequently develops a habit of returning? What proportion of sales generated during an event can genuinely be attributed to the event itself rather than to an ongoing consumer need or seasonal demand?

The discussion during the Masterclass reflected this complexity. Nishank Joshi spoke about examining relevant category performance around specific activations, such as assessing the potential impact of a wedding-focused programme on categories directly connected with that occasion. This approach is considerably more sophisticated than simply measuring the number of people present during an event. It attempts to understand whether the activity created **commercial engagement** within the ecosystem rather than merely generating a temporary footfall spike.

Perhaps the industry needs to move beyond the search for one universal **ROI** number. Experiential initiatives can create value across several dimensions, and not every programme should be expected to deliver the same outcome. Some may generate immediate commercial returns through participation and sales uplift. Others may influence consumer behaviour by increasing dwell time or encouraging **repeat visitation**. Some can create tenant engagement and category discovery, while others strengthen **destination awareness** and **long-term brand affinity**.

The critical discipline is to define the intended outcome before the event is conceived rather than searching for a justification after it has concluded.

“

Define the intended outcome before the event is conceived, not after it has concluded.

”



Immediate commercial returns



Increased dwell time & repeat visitation



Tenant engagement & category discovery



Destination awareness & brand affinity



Long-term customer relationships



Community connection & relevance

From Marketing Calendar to Community Calendar

The growing importance of experiences is also changing the role of shopping centre marketing itself. Traditionally, an annual marketing calendar could be organised around festivals, sale periods, school holidays and promotional campaigns. Those occasions remain commercially important, particularly in India, but destination programming now requires a broader understanding of the community. The questions are becoming more strategic: Who are the communities we serve? What are their interests and passions? What social infrastructure is missing from the city? What can happen at this destination that cannot be replicated on a screen or delivered to a consumer's home?

This represents a significant evolution in the role of the mall marketer. Marketing is no longer only about communicating what exists inside the shopping centre. Increasingly, it involves creating reasons for consumers to experience the destination itself.

Globally, leading retail destinations have experimented with art, culture, sport, wellness and immersive entertainment not simply as promotional devices but as elements of **placemaking and destination identity**. The underlying principle is straightforward: physical spaces become more valuable when consumers find reasons to inhabit them rather than simply transact within them.



For India, the opportunity may be particularly significant because rapidly growing cities often face a shortage of accessible, secure and well-managed public gathering spaces. Shopping centres are increasingly filling part of that gap, becoming places where families meet, young people socialise, communities participate and consumers spend leisure time. But this role also comes with responsibilities. A mall cannot become a genuine community destination through occasional spectacle alone. It requires **consistency, relevance and an understanding of the community relationship that extends beyond transactions**.





Repeat Visitation and the Economics of Habit

While attracting new visitors will always remain important, one of the deeper objectives emerging from the Masterclass discussion was the importance of repeat visitation. This may ultimately prove to be a more valuable measure of experiential success than a single-day footfall spike.

“

The ultimate measure of destination relevance is not a one-day footfall spike but habit.

Shopping centres become more valuable when consumers begin to see them as a natural place to meet, relax, socialise and return to—whether or not they arrive with a shopping list.

”



A spectacular event can attract thousands of people, generate impressive photographs and produce significant social media visibility. But the more important question is whether those consumers subsequently develop a relationship with the destination.



The true value of experience may therefore lie in habit formation. Consumers do not build emotional relationships with places through one extraordinary event. They do so through repeated positive interactions.



This is where the idea of the shopping centre as a “third place”—neither home nor workplace, but a place people naturally choose to spend time—becomes increasingly relevant. A well-managed destination can combine shopping, food, entertainment, social interaction and community activity in an environment that consumers perceive as convenient, safe and comfortable.

REPEAT VISITATION DEPENDS ON OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Yet repeat visitation also brings the conversation back to operational excellence. The most innovative event strategy cannot compensate for:



A frustrating parking experience



Poor washrooms



Inadequate navigation



Inconsistent housekeeping



Indifferent customer service

WHY REPEAT VISITATION MATTERS



Builds long-term relationships with consumers



Encourages word-of-mouth and recommendations



Increases dwell time and time spent



Drives higher lifetime value per visitor



Strengthens destination preference



Habit is not created by a single moment.
It is built by many moments done consistently well.

Experience Is Not an Add-On to Retail

“

Physical destinations have the opportunity to do both—create memories and emotional attachment.

”



The global evolution of retail destinations suggests that the experience economy is not simply a fashionable response to e-commerce. It represents a more fundamental expansion of what physical destinations are expected to do. As technology makes transactions increasingly frictionless, the distinctive advantage of physical spaces lies in the things that cannot be easily replicated through a digital interface: human interaction, social discovery, atmosphere, participation, serendipity and a sense of belonging.



This does not diminish the importance of retail. Instead, it potentially strengthens it by embedding commerce within a richer consumer journey.



Technology will continue to make shopping more convenient and digital platforms will become increasingly sophisticated in predicting and serving consumer needs.



But convenience alone does not necessarily create memories or emotional attachment. Physical destinations have the opportunity to do both, provided they understand that consumers are not simply looking for more things to do. They are looking for experiences that feel relevant to how they want to live and spend their time.

THE DISTINCTIVE ADVANTAGE OF PHYSICAL DESTINATIONS



HUMAN INTERACTION



SOCIAL DISCOVERY



ATMOSPHERE



PARTICIPATION



SERENDIPITY



A SENSE OF BELONGING

The New Discipline Behind the Experience Economy

The collective insights of Amrith Gopinath, Nishank Joshi, Rahul Malhotra and Aditya Desai point towards an important conclusion for India's shopping centre industry. The experience economy should not be interpreted as an invitation to spend more money on bigger events or create increasingly elaborate spectacles. If anything, it demands greater discipline.

It requires shopping centres to **understand their catchments** before programming activities, **define desired outcomes** before calculating ROI, **create relevance** before chasing reach and **build repeat visitation** rather than merely celebrating first-time footfall.

THE NEW DISCIPLINE



Understand catchments before programming activities



Define desired outcomes before calculating ROI



Create relevance before chasing reach



Build repeat visitation rather than merely celebrating first-time footfall

The greatest advantage of a shopping centre lies in its ability to continuously reinvent the reason to visit while retaining a coherent identity as a destination. That requires a combination of imagination and intelligence. The Indian shopping centre industry has travelled a considerable distance from the era when air-conditioning, escalators and a collection of national brands were themselves sufficient to create a differentiated experience. Today's consumer expects considerably more, but "more" does not necessarily mean louder, bigger or more expensive. It means **more relevant, more participative and more connected** to the way consumers increasingly want to spend their lives.



The future of shopping centres may still be measured through familiar indicators such as footfall, sales and occupancy. But the deeper competitive battle is increasingly being fought elsewhere—in the consumer's calendar. The destinations that succeed will be those that understand not merely how to attract consumers when they need to buy something, but how to become a natural choice when they decide how they want to spend their time. In that transition from **share of wallet to share of time** lies perhaps the most important opportunity—and the most demanding challenge—for the next generation of Indian shopping centres.



Where We Choose to Belong

The future of retail is no longer defined by what we buy. It's defined by where we choose to belong.

Walk into DLF Mall of India in Noida on a weekday evening and you'll find as many families posing for photos near the atrium as you'll find shoppers with bags. Step into Bengaluru's Phoenix Marketcity and the queue outside the food court on a Friday night rivals the queue at any anchor store. At Mumbai's Jio World Drive, people show up for the art installations and the promenade as much as for the boutiques.

None of this is an accident, and increasingly, none of it is really about shopping anymore.



The future of retail is about where we choose to belong.

That's the uncomfortable truth Indian retail has finally stopped resisting: the mall, as a machine for moving inventory, has lost the argument to e-commerce. Flipkart and Amazon deliver in hours in most metros now. Quick commerce has made even a trip to buy toothpaste feel unnecessary. Meesho and Myntra have turned discovery itself into a scroll.

Against that, no amount of square footage or brand count was ever going to keep people coming back. So the sharper developers — DLF, Phoenix Mills, Prestige Group, Nexus Malls — have quietly changed the question. They've stopped asking how to sell more, and started asking why anyone in Delhi, Mumbai, or Bengaluru should get into traffic and pay for parking at all.

The answer they've landed on isn't a product. It's a feeling, and increasingly, it's a very Indian one — the joy of stepping out with the whole family for an evening that has nothing to do with a shopping list.



India's best malls are stealing from the street, not from Dubai

For years, the aspiration in Indian retail real estate was to look like Dubai or Singapore — glass, marble, and imported luxury. That template is fading. The destinations winning today are the ones borrowing from something much closer: the Indian street itself, with its noise, food, and spontaneity, reorganised into air-conditioned comfort.



Select Citywalk, Delhi

Built its identity around a genuine mix of high street and mainstream brands rather than pure luxury.



Lulu Mall, Kochi

Leaned into its role as a Kerala gathering place, complete with an ice rink and a food court built to Gulf-returnee scale, because the developers understood that for a large NRI-influenced audience, the mall had to feel like an event, not an errand.



Phoenix Palladium, Mumbai

Runs art and design showcases alongside couture, treating culture as a tenant in its own right.

This isn't India copying the West or the Gulf anymore. It's India figuring out its own version of the same global correction happening from Bangkok's ICONSIAM to Istanbul's Zorlu Center — that people don't gather around commerce, they gather around each other, and commerce follows.

“People don't gather around commerce, they gather around each other, and commerce follows.”



“It's not just a mall. It's where we belong.”

Curation is a confession that abundance failed

Indian retail spent two decades chasing a very specific kind of abundance: more brands, more floors, more square feet under one roof, often with three malls doing exactly the same thing within a five-kilometre radius.

That approach is visibly running out of road, especially in oversaturated markets like Gurugram and Bengaluru, where footfall increasingly concentrates in a handful of destinations while the rest struggle.

The malls pulling ahead — a Nexus Elante in Chandigarh, an Ambience Mall in Gurugram, a UB City in Bengaluru — succeed because they've learned to say no. They'd rather anchor around one destination restaurant, one flagship cinema experience, one standout format like a Decathlon or an H&M home store, than fill every unit indiscriminately.

That's not a leasing insight. It's an admission that more choice was never the advantage the industry assumed it was.



*Less but better
will always create a
stronger destination.*



**Connectivity has quietly become
the new plumbing**

Nobody in India writes love letters to metro connectivity or app-based valet booking, but strip them out and the modern mall experience collapses fast.

The destinations built directly onto metro lines — Select Citywalk's link to Delhi Metro, Phoenix Marketcity's proximity to Bengaluru's transit corridors — are outperforming isolated highway-facing properties that depend entirely on private cars.

Digitally, loyalty apps, pre-booked movie and restaurant slots, and mall-wide Wi-Fi have moved from nice-to-have to baseline expectation, much like Lotte in Seoul or Westfield in London have made digital layers inseparable from the physical visit.

In a country where a shopping trip is still often a full-family outing planned around a Saturday, that infrastructure isn't decoration. It's what makes the outing frictionless enough to happen again next month.



**Metro
Connectivity**

Brings people
closer



**Digital
Convenience**

Apps, pre-bookings
and seamless
experiences



**Always
Connected**

Mall-wide Wi-Fi
is the new
baseline



**Easier
Access**

Parking, valet
and last-mile
options



What this really is

Strip away the language of "lifestyle destinations" and "experiential retail," and what's happening in Indian malls is simple and human: **they're competing with the city itself for a family's Sunday, not with each other for a customer's wallet.**

In a country where anything can be bought from a phone within the hour, the only genuinely scarce commodity left is a place worth actually dressing up and going to — somewhere that feels like it belongs to you, if only for an evening.

The developers who understand this — from DLF to Lulu to Phoenix — aren't building retail anymore. They're building the new Indian third place, standing in for the maidan, the chowk, and the mela in cities that have increasingly little public space left.

And that, quietly, is the most radical thing to happen to Indian retail in a generation.

“

*In a world where everything can be
bought from a phone, the real luxury
is a place worth showing up for.*

”

“

*Malls are no longer just about more brands.
They are about better reasons to belong.*

”

EXPERIENCE

Next-Gen Dining: Why Gen Z Wants to Eat, Experience and Belong

- By Anjiv Kumar

For Gen Z, going out for dinner is rarely just dinner. This is a generation that can discover a restaurant on TikTok, check the ambiance on Instagram, study the menu online, meet friends there, photograph the food, participate in an activity, post the experience and decide within minutes whether the place deserves a second visit.

That journey is changing what restaurants, malls and high streets need to deliver.

Gen Z is not simply buying food. It is buying an experience, a story and, increasingly, a reason to belong. Dining is becoming more social, participatory and culturally connected, with chef's tables, themed cafés, immersive environments and entertainment-led concepts gaining relevance.

The restaurant of the future, therefore, may look less like a conventional restaurant and more like a meeting point between food, entertainment, community, technology and culture.



Give Gen Z a World, Not Just a Burger

One of the more interesting lessons comes from McDonald's.

In 2024, the brand took McDonald's, its fictional anime-inspired alter ego, and brought it into the real world. Rather than simply introducing another promotional menu, McDonald's created an entire universe around it, complete with characters, manga-inspired packaging, a new sauce and an immersive dining experience where customers could eat, play and participate.



Reservations reportedly sold out in under 30 minutes



More than 90% of attendees rated the experience five out of five



The activation generated more than four billion impressions globally

The lesson goes beyond anime

Gen Z responds to brands that give them a culture to enter, rather than simply a product to consume.

For restaurants, the possibilities are enormous. Food can intersect with music, sport, gaming, fashion, film, local culture and digital communities. An Indian restaurant, for instance, could build experiences around Bollywood, cricket, regional food cultures or contemporary music rather than treating entertainment as something happening separately from the meal.



When the Restaurant Becomes the Entertainment

Experiential dining is redefining what a restaurant can be—where food, culture, entertainment and community come together to create moments worth remembering.



Alchemist, Copenhagen

At one end is Copenhagen's Alchemist, where gastronomy meets theatre, art, technology and storytelling. The meal unfolds more like a multi-act production than a traditional sequence of courses.

At the other are competitive-socialising concepts such as Puttshack and Flight Club, where eating and drinking sit alongside games and activities. Customers can eat, play, compete and socialise without changing venues.

For Gen Z, that combination has particular relevance because the activity itself becomes part of what they are paying for.

It also points to a wider change in the economics of dining. Restaurants are competing not only with other restaurants for a customer's discretionary spend. They are competing with entertainment, leisure and every other way a group of friends might choose to spend an evening.

“Food has to earn its place within that wider experience economy.”

The Unexpected Return of Social Dining

There is an interesting contradiction at the heart of Gen Z behaviour.

The generation most closely associated with digital life also appears hungry for physical connection.

Recent reporting cited in the source found that **90% of Gen Z** respondents viewed communal tables positively, compared with **60% of Baby Boomers**.

That has implications for restaurant design.

For years, operators have focused on table optimisation and covers. But long communal tables, shared counters, open kitchens and flexible seating can do something conventional layouts often cannot: make customers feel part of a larger social environment.

The restaurant becomes more than somewhere to sit and eat. It becomes a social space.

This does not mean every customer wants to dine with strangers. It does suggest, however, that restaurant design can create more opportunities for interaction, energy and community rather than simply dividing the floor into individual tables.

India Has a Head Start

For India, the opportunity is particularly interesting because eating has always been social.

Food sits at the centre of weddings, festivals, family celebrations, friendships and cultural identity. The challenge is not to invent social or experiential dining from scratch. It is to reinterpret an existing behaviour for a younger generation.

There are already signs of this evolution.



Different concepts, but a common shift:
the restaurant is increasingly becoming a stage.

Experience Cannot Become a Gimmick

There is a danger here.

A neon wall, a smoking cocktail and loud music do not automatically create an experience.

Gen Z spends enough time consuming content to recognise when something has been designed primarily for the camera. The experience needs a reason to exist.

There is a considerable difference between decorating a restaurant with generic Bollywood imagery and creating an experience built around Indian cinema through curated music, dishes inspired by films, storytelling, trivia, performances and other participatory elements.

“

One is decoration.
The other gives the customer something to enter and explore.”

And beneath all of it, food still matters.

Entertainment cannot compensate indefinitely for an average kitchen. The experience may generate discovery and the first visit, but food, hospitality and emotional connection determine whether there is a second.

That distinction is critical. Experiential dining should amplify the food, not distract customers from it.



The Bigger Opportunity for Malls

For mall operators, this shift raises an even bigger question.

Instead of asking “How many restaurants should we have?”, perhaps the question should become “What kind of social experiences can our F&B ecosystem create?”

That changes the role of F&B within the tenant mix.



Social dining zones can encourage communal experiences.



Eatertainment can combine food with gaming, sport or music.



Pop-up kitchens can continually introduce new concepts.



Creator collaborations can bring digital communities into physical spaces.



Food festivals can build programming around cultures and cuisines.



Night-time dining and entertainment districts can extend the relevance of a mall well beyond conventional shopping hours.

The opportunity is to move F&B from being a support category for shopping to becoming a destination creator in its own right.



It also introduces something particularly valuable to malls: change.

A permanent restaurant can host a Korean street-food weekend, a chef collaboration, an anime activation or a regional culinary festival. The physical space remains, but customers have a new reason to return.



In a business built around repeat visitation, freshness itself becomes an asset.



Technology Should Disappear Into the Experience

Technology will inevitably be part of this evolution, but it should not become the experience itself.

Gen Z is comfortable with digital menus, mobile ordering, loyalty platforms, AI recommendations and personalised offers. But a QR code isn't experiential simply because it is digital.

Technology works best when it removes friction or enables something more interesting: easier discovery, faster ordering, better personalisation or deeper participation.

“

The strongest concepts will combine digital convenience with human hospitality, rather than forcing customers to choose between them.



From Customers to Communities

Perhaps the bigger opportunity is what happens after the transaction.

Restaurants can build communities around interests that already bring people together: music, sport, gaming, fashion, comedy, art, regional identity or food culture.

A restaurant could become a weekly gathering place for anime fans. Another could build a gaming community. Another could host emerging musicians or local chefs. An Indian restaurant could use regional food, storytelling and performances to build a community around culture rather than merely serving a cuisine.

At that point, the restaurant has something far more valuable than footfall.

It has belonging.



The New Definition of Value

This also changes what “value” means.

For Gen Z, value does not necessarily mean the lowest bill. The more relevant question is: **what did I get for what I spent?**



A forgettable meal can feel expensive.



The same spend can feel worthwhile when it delivers good food, entertainment, social interaction and a memory worth sharing.



That distinction becomes increasingly important as consumers scrutinise discretionary spending.

“

The restaurants that win may not always be the cheapest. They may be the ones that give customers the strongest reason to believe their time and money were well spent.



Eat. Experience. Belong.



Traditional restaurants aren't disappearing. There will always be demand for the neighbourhood favourite, the quiet café and the serious fine-dining restaurant.



But another layer is being added to the market.



Gen Z wants reasons to come together, discover, participate and belong. From immersive global concepts to competitive socialising and India's emerging experiential restaurants, the definition of dining is expanding.



For restaurants, that means thinking beyond the menu.

For malls and retail destinations, it means recognising that F&B can generate culture, community and destination footfall rather than simply feed shoppers.



“

The future restaurant may ultimately be defined as much by the world it creates around the food as by the food itself.





WHAT INDIA'S SHOPPING CENTRES ARE TELLING US

R S Roy

Consumption is growing faster than traffic, experiences are becoming commercial drivers and a new leasing equation is taking shape. Insights from SCAI's industry-wide performance survey point to a more sophisticated future for India's shopping centres.

For years, footfall has been the shopping centre industry's most visible measure of success. More people walking through the doors meant a stronger destination, greater retailer confidence and, presumably, higher consumption. But the latest findings emerging from SCAI's survey of over 100 shopping centres suggest that India's mall industry may be entering a more nuanced phase—one where the number of visitors is becoming less important than the quality and economic value of each visit.

The numbers tell an interesting story. While footfall across participating centres grew **9.7%**, consumption grew faster at **12.1%**. The 2.4-percentage-point gap may appear modest, but it signals a potentially significant shift in mall economics. Growth is no longer dependent only on bringing more people into a shopping centre. Increasingly, it is about giving consumers more reasons to stay, engage and spend across multiple categories.

This changes the questions mall owners and operators need to ask. Footfall will always remain important, but what happens after a visitor enters may increasingly determine the true productivity of an asset. How long does the consumer stay? How many categories does the visit touch? Does an event translate into F&B consumption? Does entertainment encourage cross-shopping? How often does a consumer return? The industry is gradually moving from measuring traffic towards understanding the economic quality of consumer engagement.



FOOTFALL GROWTH

9.7%



CONSUMPTION GROWTH

12.1%



A GAP OF

2.4

PERCENTAGE POINTS

signals a shift in mall economics.





When Occasions Become Commercial Infrastructure

Another compelling finding is the growing importance of occasions. Festival days emerged as the strongest driver of consumption growth, cited by **75%** of participating centres, followed by special events at **68.8%**. Community activities and holiday periods also contributed significantly, while conventional call-to-action marketing ranked considerably lower.

The implication is important. **Consumers appear to respond more strongly to compelling reasons to visit than to straightforward reasons to transact.**

For shopping centres, this elevates the role of programming. The annual calendar can no longer be viewed simply as a succession of promotional campaigns. Festivals, cultural celebrations, entertainment, community initiatives and special experiences are increasingly becoming part of the commercial infrastructure of a destination.

The challenge, however, will be differentiation. If every mall celebrates every festival in the same way, occasions can quickly become visual clutter. The stronger destinations will be those capable of interpreting national occasions through the cultural character and aspirations of their own catchments. The next generation of successful mall programming may therefore combine national relevance with distinctly local intelligence.



THE POWER OF AN OCCASION:

Festivals, special events and community activities are increasingly becoming commercial catalysts, giving consumers a reason to visit while creating opportunities for longer dwell time and cross-category consumption.



The New Consumption Mix Is More Complex Than Premiumisation

Category-wise performance offers another window into the changing Indian consumer. Electronics led growth at **23%**, followed by F&B and Jewellery & Watches at **21%** each. Entertainment and Fashion & Lifestyle grew **10%**, while Beauty & Wellness and Home & Interiors continued to add momentum.



These numbers underline the fact that there is no longer one simple definition of the Indian mall consumer. Electronics reflects technology-led aspiration and premiumisation. F&B represents the growing importance of social and experience-led consumption. Jewellery remains a high-value, trust-driven category that continues to benefit from the physical environment.

What is emerging is **not uniform premiumisation but selective aspiration**. The same consumer can be highly price-conscious in one category and willing to spend generously in another. This makes conventional demographic segmentation increasingly inadequate. Shopping centres will need to understand not simply how affluent their catchment is, but where consumers choose to splurge, where they seek value and what occasions trigger each behaviour.



SELECTIVE ASPIRATION:

India's mall consumer is no longer defined by a single spending behaviour—willing to seek value in one category while spending selectively on technology, dining, beauty, jewellery and experiences in another.

F&B and D2C

The survey also points to a changing leasing equation.

F&B emerged as the strongest area of demand, cited by **56.3%** of participating centres, while D2C and new-age brands followed closely at **43.8%**.

The rise of F&B reflects its transformation from a supporting category into a destination driver. Restaurants and cafés increasingly influence evening traffic, dwell time and family visits, often bringing consumers to the mall even when shopping is not their primary objective.

Equally significant is the growing physical presence of digitally native brands. The paradox of modern retail is becoming increasingly evident: as commerce becomes more digital, physical stores are becoming more valuable for discovery, trust and immersive brand engagement.

For malls, this presents an opportunity to become platforms where emerging brands can test, learn and build offline relationships with consumers. Flexible formats, pop-ups and shorter-term concepts may therefore become increasingly important alongside conventional leasing models.



MORE THAN A MEAL:

F&B is increasingly evolving from an ancillary mall category into a destination driver—bringing consumers in during evenings and weekends, extending dwell time and creating opportunities for wider consumption.



One India, Many Retail Markets

Perhaps one of the most important messages emerging from the survey is that India cannot be understood as one homogeneous shopping centre market. Regional variations in consumption and footfall reinforce the need for local intelligence.

A successful strategy in Mumbai cannot simply be replicated in Jaipur, Kochi, Hyderabad or a fast-growing Tier 2 city. Consumer behaviour is influenced by local culture, climate, festivals, infrastructure, tourism, family structures and the maturity of organised retail.

This becomes particularly relevant as Tier 2 and emerging markets attract increasing attention from developers and brands. The opportunity is substantial, but the winning model may not be a smaller version of a metro mall. Success will depend on accurately understanding local consumption and creating a destination calibrated to the realities of that market.



THE DIGITAL BRAND GOES OFFLINE:

As digitally native brands build physical stores, shopping centres are becoming spaces for discovery, trust and immersive brand engagement—not merely points of transaction.

Beyond Building Bigger



Taken together, the findings suggest that India's shopping centre industry is becoming more sophisticated. The future will not be shaped merely by larger buildings, more brands or higher footfall. It will depend on how **intelligently destinations connect** consumer behaviour, tenant mix, experiences, technology and operational excellence.



A shopping centre is no longer simply a collection of leased spaces. It is an **interconnected ecosystem** where an event can influence F&B sales, entertainment can generate cross-shopping, programming can strengthen repeat visits and operational failures can undermine even the strongest brand mix.



The consumer, after all, does not see departments. They see **one destination**.



That may be the most important leadership challenge emerging from the SCAI findings. As the industry becomes increasingly complex behind the scenes, the **customer experience must become increasingly seamless** in front of them.



India's shopping centre industry is clearly moving beyond the era when success could be explained through a single number. Footfall brings consumers in, but **experiences make them stay**. Tenant mix shapes consumption, while **operational excellence sustains trust**. Data can improve decisions—but only when it is converted into intelligence.



The future, therefore, may not belong to the malls that simply attract the most visitors. It may belong to those that **understand most intelligently** what every visit means.



FROM ASSET TO ECOSYSTEM:

Tomorrow's successful shopping centres will be designed not simply as places to shop, but as adaptable ecosystems where retail, food, entertainment, community and technology continuously evolve around changing consumer behaviour



R S Roy, Retail Intelligence, Images Group

With over four decades of association with the Indian retail industry including 25+ years at the IMAGES Group-R. S. Roy has played a key role in the formation of the Shopping Centres Association of India.

He currently serves as Executive Director of the Trusted Board, leading the vision of the Trusted Mark Certification Scheme for retailers and shopping centres. A prolific industry chronicler, Roy has authored over 5,000 articles and reports documenting the evolution of Indian retail in India and globally.



A full-fledged **SCAI-IMAGES GROUP Retail Intelligence Report**, building on these findings with deeper research, analysis, market insights and industry perspectives, will be **released soon**.



Building the Next Generation of Shopping Centers in Central & Eastern India

– By Manoj Kumar

How emerging cities across Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand could shape the next phase of India's organised retail growth.

India's shopping-centre industry is entering an important new phase. For much of the past two decades, modern retail development was concentrated in the country's largest metropolitan markets. Today, however, the opportunity is increasingly extending beyond the traditional metros.

Rising aspirations, improving infrastructure, greater digital exposure, growing brand awareness and a younger consumer base are creating a new retail landscape across Tier-II and Tier-III India.



Within this transformation, **Central and Eastern India represent a particularly important opportunity.**



Markets across Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand—from established regional centres such as Indore, Bhopal, Raipur and Bhubaneswar to growing cities such as Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Bilaspur and the Bhilai-Durg region—are becoming increasingly relevant to national and regional retailers.

“*The question is therefore no longer simply whether organised retail will expand into these markets.*”

The more important question is:

What kind of shopping centres should we create for the next generation of consumers in these cities?

”



India's Retail Growth Enters a New Cycle

The fundamentals of India's physical retail market remain encouraging. According to CBRE, retail leasing across India reached approximately **3.9 million sq. ft. during H1 2026, representing 20% year-on-year growth.**



Domestic retailers accounted for more than **70%** of leasing activity,



while D2C brands represented approximately **28%—**

a strong indication that newer retail concepts increasingly see physical stores as an important part of their growth strategy.



Changing Consumer Expectations

More importantly, the nature of consumer demand is changing. The future shopping centre cannot depend only on traditional anchor stores. It must create multiple reasons for people to visit, return and spend time.



The emerging formula is increasingly:

Retail + Food & Beverage + Entertainment + Experience + Community + Convenience

Shopping centres are evolving from places designed primarily for transactions into destinations built around engagement, experience and time spent.

New cities.
New consumers.
New possibilities.

The next chapter of India's retail growth is taking shape beyond the metros.





The Opportunity Beyond the Metros

One of the most significant structural opportunities for India's shopping-centre industry lies in Tier-II and Tier-III markets.

Consumers in emerging cities today are exposed to many of the same brands, digital platforms, fashion trends and entertainment concepts as consumers in metropolitan India.



Their expectations are becoming increasingly national. Their cities, however, remain distinctly local.

This creates both an opportunity and a responsibility for developers.

The objective should not be to simply replicate metropolitan malls in smaller cities. It should be **to deliver metropolitan-quality retail experiences while remaining sensitive to local purchasing power, culture, consumption patterns and operating economics.**

That distinction will become increasingly important.



“*The future of retail in India will be written not just in metros, but in the aspirations of its emerging cities.*”



Why Central & Eastern India Deserve Attention

Central and Eastern India should not be viewed as one homogeneous retail market. Each state—and indeed each city—has its own economic base, consumer profile, catchment and development potential.



Madhya Pradesh

Indore has developed into one of the strongest non-metro consumption centres in the region, while Bhopal combines its administrative importance with a substantial urban consumer base.

These markets can increasingly support sophisticated combinations of fashion, lifestyle, entertainment, dining and family-oriented experiences.



The next opportunity is therefore not merely about adding more retail space. It is about creating **better-differentiated and more relevant retail destinations.**



Chhattisgarh

Raipur has emerged as Chhattisgarh's principal organised-retail market and serves a catchment extending well beyond the city's administrative boundaries.

Its next phase of opportunity lies in moving from conventional shopping towards stronger food and beverage, premium retail, entertainment, lifestyle and experience-led destinations.



Bilal-Durg and Bilaspur represent the next layer of opportunity, while cities such as Korba and Raigarh may require more compact, focused and economically calibrated retail formats.



Different cities.
Distinct opportunities.
A stronger tomorrow
for organised retail.



Odisha

Bhubaneswar has developed into an important regional retail destination, supported by its expanding urban economy, educational ecosystem and improving connectivity.

Together with Cuttack and other emerging urban centres, Odisha presents opportunities for shopping centres that successfully combine retail with food, entertainment and family experiences.



Opportunities for shopping centres that bring together retail, food, entertainment and family experiences.



Jharkhand

Ranchi and Jamshedpur have strong regional catchments but distinctly different economic characteristics. Ranchi's position as the state capital and Jamshedpur's industrial and corporate ecosystem provide both markets with meaningful consumer bases.



In such markets, the opportunity should not simply be measured by how many square feet can be developed. The more important question is:
How much quality retail can the catchment sustainably absorb?



Emerging cities.
Expanding horizons.
Stronger retail tomorrow.



From Shopping Mall to Social Destination

The conventional mall model was relatively straightforward:



Anchor

+



Fashion

+



Food Court

+



Multiplex

That formula, by itself, is no longer sufficient.

Today's consumer has numerous ways to purchase products. A smartphone can provide almost unlimited choice without requiring the consumer to leave home.

A physical shopping centre must therefore provide reasons to visit that cannot easily be replicated on a screen.

Those reasons increasingly include dining, entertainment, social interaction, events, discovery, family time, convenience and experience.



Food and beverage and entertainment should therefore no longer be treated merely as supporting categories. They are becoming **strategic drivers of footfall, dwell time and repeat visitation.**

Family entertainment centres, experiential concepts, cafés, restaurants, cinemas, gaming, children's activities, wellness and community events can significantly change the role a shopping centre plays within a city.

The strongest shopping centres of the future may become much more than retail properties. They can become **urban social destinations**—places where people shop, eat, meet, relax, participate, celebrate and spend time together.



“ Shopping centres of the future can become urban social destinations—places where people shop, eat, meet, relax, participate, celebrate and spend time together. ”



What Malls Can Learn from High Streets

High streets remain important competitors for organised shopping centres because they offer accessibility, visibility, familiarity and convenience.

The competitive balance is closer than many may assume. Cushman & Wakefield reported that malls accounted for approximately **51.3% of retail leasing across India's top eight cities in Q2 2026**, while main streets represented **48.7%**.

The lesson for the mall industry, however, is not that high streets will replace shopping centres.

The real lesson is that professionally managed malls must combine convenience with advantages that high streets often cannot provide at the same scale:



“*The future competition may therefore not simply be Mall versus High Street. It will increasingly be about which retail format understands its consumer better.*”

Different formats.
Same consumers.

Understanding the consumer makes the difference.



One Size Cannot Fit Every City

Perhaps one of the biggest mistakes in emerging retail markets is assuming that a successful metropolitan mall can simply be replicated in a smaller city.

It cannot.

A shopping centre must be designed around its **real catchment**—not around the maximum development potential of the land.

Before deciding the size and format of a project, developers need to understand:



A city capable of sustainably supporting a 300,000 sq. ft. shopping centre should not automatically receive a 700,000 sq. ft. development simply because additional FAR or land is available.

Oversizing creates pressure on occupancy, rentals, operating costs and ultimately asset performance.

At the same time, undersizing a strong market can prevent the creation of the critical mass required to establish a true destination.



*The challenge is not to build the biggest mall.
The challenge is to build the right mall.*



The Economics of the Mall Matter

The next generation of shopping centres must also be operationally efficient.

Developers naturally focus on construction cost and rental potential. However, the long-term success of a shopping centre is equally influenced by:



This becomes particularly important in Tier-II and Tier-III markets, where consumer spending and retailer economics need to remain carefully balanced.

A visually impressive property with an unsustainable operating structure will eventually create pressure on both retailers and owners.

Operational efficiency must therefore begin at the design stage—not after the mall opens.

“*Right cities. Right formats. Stronger, more sustainable retail destinations.*”





The Changing Tenant Mix

Another major transformation will be in the composition of the shopping centre itself.

The next generation of destinations will increasingly combine:



Not every successful shopping centre requires exactly the same collection of national or international brands.

A strong regional brand with deep consumer acceptance may sometimes generate greater productivity than a nationally recognised brand with limited local relevance.

“The art of mall leasing will therefore increasingly move from brand collection to tenant curation.”

The most effective tenant mix will reflect the aspirations of the city while remaining grounded in its actual consumption patterns.



*Curated brands.
Meaningful experiences.
Stronger cities.*

A more vibrant retail tomorrow.



The Road to 2030

By 2030, shopping centres in Central and Eastern India could occupy a much broader role within their cities. Their evolution can broadly be viewed as:



Phase I – Traditional Retail

Local markets and independent stores



Phase II – Organised Retail

Shopping centres and national brands



Phase III – Experience Retail

Shopping + Food & Beverage + Entertainment



Phase IV – Integrated Destination

Retail + Entertainment + Lifestyle + Digital Integration + Mixed Use



Phase V – Urban Social Destination

Shopping + Dining + Entertainment + Community + Hospitality + Work + Experiences

The most successful projects will not necessarily be the largest assets.

They will be the assets that best understand **why people should continue visiting them.**



The Future Retail Formula

For developers entering emerging markets across Central and Eastern India, the development philosophy can be summarised simply:



Right City

Choose markets with real demand and long-term potential.



Right Catchment

Understand the actual consumer base.



Right Format

Design for local needs, not just land potential.



Right Size

Build what the market can sustain.



Right Tenant Mix

Curate, don't just collect brands.



Right Experience

Create reasons to visit, stay and return.



Right Operating Cost

Ensure long-term viability for retailers and owners.

*“Different cities. Greater possibilities.
A stronger retail future for India.”*



Sustainable Shopping Centre

The opportunity across Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Jharkhand is significant.

However, the next phase of growth should not be measured only by the number of malls constructed or the number of square feet developed.

It should be measured by the quality, relevance, productivity and sustainability of the retail ecosystems we create.

The future of shopping centres in these markets will not simply be about building more space.

It will be about creating better places for people to **shop, eat, meet, experience, connect and spend time.**



“ Perhaps the most important development principle for the coming decade is:

“Do not build the largest shopping centre the land can accommodate. Build the most relevant shopping destination the city can economically sustain.”

”



Manoj Kumar

Mall Head - City Centre Mall, Raipur
RDB Group



Manoj Kumar is a seasoned professional with over 20 years of experience in mall management, real estate development, retail leasing, project execution, operations, marketing, and feasibility planning.

With an academic background in Electrical Engineering, he has worked across more than 15 states and contributed to the launch and development of approximately 32 malls, corporate offices, and theme parks across India.

His professional journey includes serving as Technical Manager for the North and East Zones at Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL).

Currently, he serves as Mall Head of Raipur City Centre Mall, RDB Group, where he focuses on creating sustainable, customer-centric, and financially successful retail destinations.



Shop



Eat



Meet



Experience



Connect



Spend Time



We welcome your feedback at
editormt2008@gmail.com



Sustainable
destinations
for stronger cities.

Retail Insights for Shopping Malls, Brands and Retail Leaders

- By Sadiq Kazi



“For nearly three decades, I have spent my professional life on the shop floor—observing customers, managing stores, working with frontline teams, interacting with mall managements and supporting retail businesses across India. In this monthly column, **From the Shop Floor**, I share practical observations, lessons and perspectives that connect the worlds of retailers, shopping malls and customers.”

Stop Measuring Events. Start Building Communities.

The future of mall events may lie not in attendance, but in belonging.

Every shopping mall loves a successful event.

The atrium is busy. The photographs look great. Social media engagement spikes. Footfalls increase. Everyone feels encouraged. And rightly so.

Creating experiences that attract people to a destination is no small achievement.

But after spending nearly three decades in retail, I find myself asking a different question.



What exactly are mall events supposed to achieve?

For years, the answer seemed obvious.

More visitors. More buzz. More visibility. More footfalls. Those objectives remain important. But perhaps they are no longer sufficient.

Because **attendance alone tells us very little** about what customers actually take away from the experience.



Did they discover something new?



Did they feel more connected to the destination?



Did they find a reason to return?



Did the event strengthen their relationship with the mall?

These questions may be far more important than attendance itself.

One reality of modern shopping malls is that many events are increasingly driven by sponsorship opportunities.

And that is perfectly understandable. Events cost money. Brands seek visibility. Malls seek partnerships. Everybody benefits.

Yet there is an interesting question worth asking.



What if we started designing events around customer communities rather than brand sponsorships?

Instead of beginning with: *“Which brand wants to sponsor an event?”* What if we began with: *“Which customer segment do we want to serve?”*

The difference may appear subtle. It is actually profound.

A sponsor-led event promotes a brand.

A community-led event strengthens a destination.

One creates attendance. The other creates affinity.

One fills an atrium. The other builds a relationship.

Imagine a shopping mall identifying young families as an important customer segment.

The resulting programming might include children’s creativity workshops, parenting sessions, educational experiences, family activity days and learning festivals.

Suddenly, multiple retailers can participate.



Children’s brands



Bookstores



Toy retailers



Food outlets



Education providers

The event belongs to the customer, not the sponsor.

The same principle can apply to other communities.



Food enthusiasts



Fitness enthusiasts



Pet owners



Readers



Senior citizens



Art lovers



Local cultural groups

The objective shifts from organizing events to nurturing communities.



And communities create something that events alone rarely achieve.

Repeat engagement.

This is where I believe the conversation around mall events needs to evolve. Not from event management to marketing. But from event management to destination building.

Because customers increasingly choose places that reflect their interests and lifestyles.



The strongest malls of the future may not necessarily be those with the biggest events calendar. They may be those that understand their communities best.

Interestingly, many of the most effective experiences may not even look like traditional events.



A weekend running club.



A regional food festival.



A local artists' showcase.



A photography community meet-up.



A senior citizens' wellness morning.



A children's discovery program.

These activities may attract smaller crowds than a celebrity appearance. But they often create something far more valuable.

Belonging.

And belonging is difficult to replicate.

This is also where retailers and mall operators have an opportunity to align more closely.

Retailers bring expertise, products and customer relationships. Malls bring scale, infrastructure and community reach.

Together, they can create experiences that extend beyond transactions and promotions.

Because customers do not build emotional relationships with sponsors. They build emotional relationships with places that become meaningful parts of their lives.



Which brings me to what I believe is the future of mall events.

The winners will not necessarily be those that generate the biggest crowds. They will be those that build the strongest communities.



Because footfalls are temporary. Communities endure.

And the shopping malls that understand this distinction will create more than successful events. They will create destinations that matter.

“

From the shop floor, one thing has become increasingly clear.

Customers may attend an event once. But they return to places where they feel they belong.

”

Inside Luxury Retail's *Music Strategy*



Step into a luxury boutique and it may be the music, rather than the merchandise, that first sets the tone.

As luxury retail becomes increasingly experience-led, sound is moving from background ambience to a deliberate part of brand identity. Carefully curated playlists can influence mood and pace, reinforce a brand's aesthetic and create emotional associations that make a store memorable.

For luxury retailers and designers, the soundtrack is increasingly being treated with the same consideration as interiors, lighting, fragrance and visual merchandising. The objective is simple: to create a space where **every sensory element speaks the same brand language.**

CREATING AN IDENTITY IN-STORE



KUNAL RAWAL

For designers such as Kunal Rawal, the connection between fashion and music runs directly through the creative process.

His collections balance traditional influences with a younger, contemporary sensibility, and the music developed around them follows the same direction.

Each collection now has its own soundtrack, creating continuity between the clothes, campaigns and physical retail environment.



ANITA DONGRE

Anita Dongre takes a similarly sensory approach.

Music sits alongside the brand's signature fragrance and store design, with playlists evolving periodically while maintaining a **consistent underlying mood.**



GALERIES LAFAYETTE PARIS HAUSSMANN

At Galeries Lafayette Paris Haussmann, music forms part of a wider experiential strategy, changing alongside seasonal campaigns, festive periods and cultural activations.

“The common thread is **consistency.** When the music feels naturally connected to the visual and creative identity of a brand, it strengthens the overall experience rather than simply filling silence.”



01:35 ————— 03:40

“

Music is not simply the soundtrack of a store. It is a silent ambassador of the brand.

”



01

SHAPING MOOD, PACE AND PURCHASE



Music can also influence how customers move through and respond to a store.

Upbeat soundtracks can create energy and momentum, while slower or more restrained music can encourage customers to linger. In luxury environments, where browsing and discovery are important parts of the purchase journey, controlling that pace can become part of experience design.

For highly considered categories such as fine watches, sound plays a different role. The purchase itself often carries considerable emotional significance, making the environment surrounding it part of the ritual.

The objective is not simply to make a store sound pleasant. It is to make merchandise, interiors, service, lighting and sound feel connected, creating a coherent world around the customer.

02

SELLING ASPIRATION THROUGH SOUND



Luxury has always sold aspiration, but increasingly that aspiration is communicated through experience rather than products alone.

Music can help consumers imagine themselves within the lifestyle represented by a brand. When the soundtrack and visual environment work together, the customer is not simply looking at a garment, watch or handbag. They are experiencing the world surrounding it.

This matters as luxury consumers increasingly expect stores to deliver something beyond a transaction. Emotional connection, discovery and memorable moments are becoming important parts of perceived value.

Technology is adding another dimension. AI can increasingly help retailers adapt in-store music according to factors such as location, time of day and customer behaviour, allowing the soundtrack to respond more intelligently to the retail environment.

The technology may be new, but the objective remains decidedly human: creating the right feeling at the right moment.



INFLUENCES EMOTION



ENHANCES EXPERIENCE



DRIVES CONNECTION

03

CURATING THE BRAND SOUNDTRACK

For some luxury designers, music has become part of the creative identity itself.

Anita Dongre's musical influences draw from two very different worlds: the cosmopolitan energy of Mumbai and the folk traditions she encountered through her family roots in Jaipur. That contrast continues to influence the brand's musical direction, bringing traditional sounds together with more global and contemporary textures.



The label has also developed original compositions for runway shows and campaigns, working with artists including Gaurav Raina of Midival Punditz, Mooralala, Karsh Kale, Raja Kumari and Monica Dogra.



“

The music heard inside the boutique becomes an audible extension of the same creative world expressed through the clothes.

”



01/

KUNAL RAWAL'S CREATIVE SOUND

Kunal Rawal takes an equally hands-on approach, with music and film closely connected to his fashion sensibility.

Punjabi folk forms an important foundation, layered with electronic sounds, digital textures and contemporary influences.

The relationship also works in both directions: sometimes music inspires the collection, while at other times the clothes inform the soundtrack.

The brand has taken that identity beyond its stores through original music projects, including an EP with Akshay & IP and Rawalgarh Ki Jugni.

The music heard inside the boutique therefore becomes an audible extension of the same creative world expressed through the clothes.



02/

BEYOND THE BOUTIQUE

Luxury soundtracks are also escaping the physical store.

During the pandemic, brands including Alexander McQueen and Dries Van Noten released Spotify playlists featuring music associated with their runway shows, while Gucci and The Row have also extended their presence onto the platform.

What makes this interesting is that the playlists are not directly selling products.

Instead, they allow consumers to engage with the brand outside the traditional retail environment.



A brand soundtrack can accompany a commute, dinner or evening at home.



Luxury therefore extends beyond something consumers wear or own into something they can listen to and experience.



For brands trying to build cultural ecosystems rather than simply drive transactions, that opens an entirely different relationship with the customer.



03/

CREATING EMOTIONAL MEMORY



Ultimately, the value of music in luxury retail comes down to memory.

Consumers may not consciously remember every element of a store environment, but sensory cues can influence how that environment made them feel.



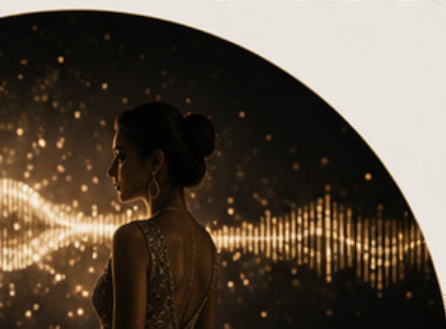
This matters particularly in luxury, where perceived value has never been created by the product alone.

Architecture, service, packaging, storytelling and presentation all contribute to the sense of exclusivity surrounding a purchase.



Sound is increasingly joining that list.

The luxury store is therefore being curated not only around what customers see on the racks, shelves and walls, but around what they hear as they move through the space.



“

And in an industry built on aspiration, the right soundtrack can help customers hear what the brand feels like.

”

THOUGHT STARTERS

THE RIGHT PLACE, THE RIGHT GROWTH

For decades, retailers relied on a familiar formula to attract customers: bigger discounts, festive offers, cashback schemes, and promotional sales. While these tactics continue to generate short-term spikes in footfall, they are no longer sufficient to sustain long-term growth. The Indian retail landscape is undergoing a fundamental transformation, where the right store location is proving to be a far more powerful driver of business success than the deepest discount.

India's Retail Growth Story

India is among the world's fastest-growing retail markets and is expected to exceed US\$2 trillion by 2032, fuelled by rapid urbanisation, rising disposable incomes, expanding middle-class consumption, and the growing economic importance of Tier II and Tier III cities.

Contrary to earlier predictions, physical retail continues to remain resilient despite the rapid growth of e-commerce. Apparel, lifestyle, food, beauty, and premium categories continue to witness healthy growth through brick-and-mortar stores because consumers increasingly prefer to



In today's experience-driven economy, consumers are not merely searching for the lowest price. They are looking for convenience, accessibility, trust, and a seamless shopping experience. As a result, retailers are increasingly realizing that where they open a store often matters more than how much they discount their products.

experience products before making purchase decisions.

“

This evolution has shifted retailers' focus from promotional pricing to strategic expansion.

”

The New Consumer: Buying Convenience Instead of Discounts

Modern consumers value time as much as money. A conveniently located store naturally becomes part of a customer's daily routine. Whether situated near a residential neighbourhood, office district, metro station, or popular high street, accessibility encourages repeat visits without requiring heavy promotional spending.

On the other hand, a store offering aggressive discounts but located in an inconvenient area often struggles to generate sustainable footfall.

Successful retail locations generally possess four characteristics:

- 01 | Easy accessibility
- 02 | High visibility from busy roads
- 03 | Proximity to complementary brands
- 04 | Presence near residential or commercial catchments

In effect, location functions as silent marketing, working every day without recurring advertising expenditure.



For nearly two decades, shopping malls dominated organised retail expansion. Today, however, high streets are witnessing renewed interest, particularly in India's emerging cities.

Cities such as Indore, Jaipur, Lucknow, Surat, Chandigarh and Coimbatore are witnessing significant investments in premium high-street developments.

Consumers increasingly prefer shopping destinations that are easy to access, require minimal travel time, and offer convenient parking.

Unlike destination malls, high streets encourage spontaneous purchases because they integrate naturally with daily life.

Many fashion brands today follow a balanced strategy—maintaining flagship stores in premium malls while simultaneously expanding through carefully selected high streets to maximise reach.

EMERGING HIGH-STREET CITIES



INDIAN SUCCESS STORIES

Westside: Building Presence Through Strategic Locations

Rather than competing solely on discounts, Tata's Westside has consistently focused on opening stores in affluent residential neighbourhoods and high-growth commercial zones. Many of its outlets become neighbourhood fashion destinations where customers shop regularly rather than only during sale periods.

“

Its expansion demonstrates how consistent accessibility builds customer loyalty more effectively than periodic promotional campaigns.

”



DMart: Convenience Over Promotions

Perhaps the best Indian example is DMart.

Although known for competitive pricing, the retailer's real competitive strength lies in its disciplined real estate strategy. DMart carefully selects locations with dense residential populations, excellent connectivity and long-term ownership of properties wherever possible.

Customers often choose DMart because it is nearby, easy to reach and reliable—not simply because it offers discounts. Its remarkable sales per square foot underline the importance of location as a business asset.

Reliance Trends and Shoppers Stop

Both retailers have accelerated expansion into Tier II and Tier III cities, focusing on neighbourhood markets with rising purchasing power. Instead of depending exclusively on festive sales, they are investing in stores that remain accessible throughout the year, thereby creating habitual shopping behaviour.

Global Lessons in Store Placement

Zara: Premium Locations, Minimal Advertising



Spanish fashion retailer Zara has become one of the world's most successful fashion brands despite spending relatively little on traditional advertising.

Its strategy revolves around opening stores only in the most prestigious retail districts and premium shopping centres worldwide. Locations such as Fifth Avenue in New York, Oxford Street in London and Ginza in Tokyo reinforce Zara's premium positioning.

The store itself becomes the advertisement.

Apple: Experience Through Iconic Locations



Apple Stores are rarely located by accident. Whether in New York, Singapore, Dubai or Shanghai, Apple chooses landmark locations with exceptional visibility and high pedestrian traffic. These stores function not merely as retail outlets but as experiential brand centres that strengthen customer engagement.

The location itself reinforces Apple's premium image before customers even step inside.

Starbucks: Winning Through Convenience



Starbucks transformed coffee retail by prioritising accessibility.

Rather than depending on discounts, the company places outlets near office districts, transportation hubs, universities and busy intersections. Frequent visibility encourages habitual visits, making convenience one of Starbucks' strongest competitive advantages.

Location as a Branding Strategy

In today's retail environment, every store communicates a message.

Consumers subconsciously judge a brand based on where it operates.

A flagship store inside a premium shopping mall signals aspiration and exclusivity.

A prominent high-street location communicates accessibility and everyday relevance.

A neighbourhood store builds familiarity, trust and repeat business.

For retailers, location therefore serves two strategic purposes simultaneously:

- It generates sales.
- It strengthens brand perception.

Increasingly, retailers use data analytics, mobility studies, demographic research and spending patterns to determine store locations rather than relying solely on intuition.

Why Discounts Alone Cannot Build Sustainable Growth

Discounting remains an effective tactical tool. End-of-season sales, festive campaigns and promotional offers continue to attract customers and clear inventory.

However, excessive dependence on discounts creates several long-term challenges:

- Customers postpone purchases while waiting for sales.
- Profit margins decline.
- Brand value weakens.
- Customer loyalty shifts from the brand to the discount.

Conversely, an excellent location creates lasting competitive advantages:

- Consistent footfall
- Higher repeat visits
- Lower customer acquisition costs

- Stronger brand recall
- Better profitability
- Greater resilience during economic slowdowns

Simply put, **discounts encourage the first purchase; location encourages the next hundred.**

The Future of Retail Expansion

The next decade of Indian retail growth will increasingly be driven by scientific location planning.

Retailers are already using artificial intelligence, GIS mapping, mobility data, demographic analytics and consumer movement patterns to identify high-potential micro-markets. Store placement decisions are becoming data-driven rather than instinct-driven.

This approach is particularly relevant as India's growth increasingly shifts beyond metropolitan cities into rapidly expanding urban centres.

Success will depend not merely on entering new cities, but on choosing the right street, the right neighbourhood and the right catchment within those cities.

Retail success is no longer determined solely by pricing strategies. As Indian consumers become more affluent, time-conscious and experience-oriented, convenience has emerged as a decisive competitive advantage.

Discounts will always remain an important marketing tool, but they are temporary. Strategic store placement delivers enduring value by increasing visibility, strengthening customer relationships and enhancing brand perception.

The most successful retailers of the future will not necessarily be those offering the biggest discounts. They will be those who understand where their customers live, work, travel and shop—and position themselves accordingly.

In the evolving landscape of Indian retail, visibility is becoming as valuable as value itself. The right location is no longer just a real estate decision; it is one of the most important strategic investments a retailer can make.



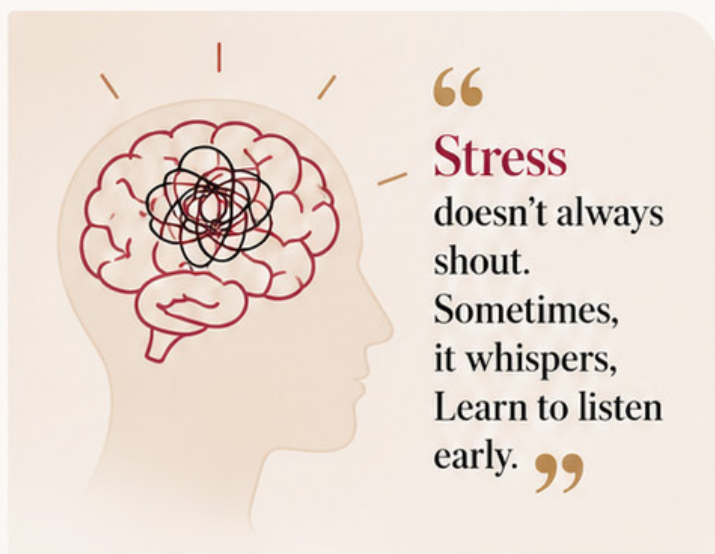
How to Check Your Mental Stress: A Guide for Professionals

For professionals, stress rarely announces itself. It does not always appear as a dramatic emotional breakdown or an obvious inability to work. More often, it arrives quietly—through poor sleep, impatience, constant mental fatigue, difficulty concentrating, loss of enthusiasm or the feeling that there is simply “too much on the mind.”

This makes one question particularly important:

How do you know when normal professional pressure has become unhealthy mental stress?

For senior professionals, the answer begins with regular self-checks.



Check your mind, not just your workload

A demanding schedule does not automatically mean you are under harmful stress. The more important question is how your mind is responding to that workload.

Ask yourself:

- ☒ Am I constantly thinking about work, even when I am not working?
- ☒ Do small problems irritate me more than they used to?
- ☒ Am I finding it difficult to switch off?
- ☒ Do I feel mentally tired even after completing relatively simple tasks?
- ☒ Am I losing interest in activities I normally enjoy?

If several answers are consistently “yes,” it may be time to examine your stress levels.



Watch your sleep

Sleep is one of the most useful indicators of mental well-being.

A senior executive may say, “I am sleeping six hours, so everything is fine.” But the quality of sleep matters too. Difficulty falling asleep because the mind keeps replaying meetings, waking up repeatedly or waking earlier than intended with work-related thoughts can indicate that the brain is struggling to switch off.



A useful self-check is simple:

“When I go to bed, can I mentally disconnect from work?”

If the answer is regularly no, don’t ignore it.



Poor Sleep



Constant Mental Fatigue



Difficulty Concentrating



Loss of Enthusiasm



Too Much on the Mind



Regular **self-checks** help you catch stress early—before it catches you.



Observe changes in behaviour

Stress often becomes visible through behaviour before we recognise it emotionally.

You may notice that you are becoming unusually impatient with colleagues, family members or service staff. You may interrupt people more often, become intolerant of mistakes or react strongly to relatively minor issues.



For example, a senior executive who normally handles a delayed meeting calmly may suddenly become extremely irritated by a five-minute delay. One isolated incident means little. But if such reactions become frequent, they deserve attention.



“Ask someone you trust:
“Have you noticed any change in my behaviour recently?””

Sometimes others see the change before we do.



Test your concentration

Senior professionals make decisions, solve problems and manage people. Mental stress can interfere with all three.

Check whether you are:

- ☒ Forgetting routine commitments
- ☒ Reading the same email several times
- ☒ Finding it difficult to concentrate on one task
- ☒ Frequently switching between tasks
- ☒ Making avoidable errors
- ☒ Struggling to make decisions that previously seemed straightforward



Constant multitasking can make this difficult to recognise. Try spending 20–30 minutes on one important task without checking your phone or email. If sustained concentration feels unusually difficult, it may be worth examining why.



Look for physical signals

Mental stress can also produce physical symptoms. These may include headaches, muscle tension, fatigue, digestive discomfort, changes in appetite, a racing heartbeat or persistent feelings of physical exhaustion.



Headaches



Muscle Tension



Fatigue



Digestive Discomfort



Changes in Appetite



Racing Heartbeat



Persistent Physical Exhaustion



However, these symptoms can have many medical causes.

Do not automatically assume that a physical symptom is caused by stress.

Persistent, severe or unusual symptoms should be discussed with an appropriate healthcare professional.





Measure your stress regularly

Instead of waiting for stress to become overwhelming, senior professionals can make a simple weekly assessment.

Rate each area from **1** to **5**:

 Sleep 1 2 3 4 5	 Energy 1 2 3 4 5	 Concentration 1 2 3 4 5
 Mood 1 2 3 4 5	 Irritability 1 2 3 4 5	 Ability to relax 1 2 3 4 5



A score that deteriorates consistently over several weeks is more meaningful than one difficult day.



There are also validated psychological screening questionnaires that can help identify symptoms of stress, anxiety or depression. These are screening tools—not diagnoses—and persistent concerns should be discussed with a qualified mental-health professional.



Ask the most important question

Perhaps the most useful question is:

“*Am I still in control of my life, or is my work controlling me?*”

If your phone is the first thing you check in the morning and the last thing you check at night, if every conversation revolves around work, or if you cannot enjoy time away from the office without feeling guilty, your stress may be affecting your overall quality of life.



Life is bigger than your inbox.

Focused ☒
Balanced ☒
Energised ☒
In Control ☒



Stress is not a weakness

For senior professionals, acknowledging stress should not be viewed as an admission of weakness. Leadership involves responsibility, uncertainty and pressure. The objective is not to eliminate stress completely but to **recognise it early and manage it intelligently.**



Greater
Performance



Better
Decision Making



Improved
Life Balance

A successful career should not come at the cost of permanent mental exhaustion.

The best professionals monitor their businesses, finances, performance indicators and physical health. They should also monitor something equally important: **their mental energy.**

Because the earlier you recognise excessive stress, the easier it generally becomes to make changes—before stress starts affecting your health, relationships, judgement and professional performance.

“*Your mind is one of your most important professional assets.*”



Check it
regularly.



Protect it
deliberately.



And don't wait
for a breakdown
before taking
stress seriously.



EVENT WATCH

VEGAS MALL

Event: Celebration of 150 Years of Vande Mataram

Location: Central Atrium, Vegas

Performance: 25-member Women's Brass Band from Delhi Police

Special Guest: APC Shri Kishore Kumar

The Delhi Police Women's Brass Band performed at the Central Atrium as part of the celebration, commemorating 150 years of Vande Mataram and its enduring spirit of patriotism and unity.



MGB FELICITY MALL



GRAND HIGH STREET MALL



Manoj K. Agarwal Honored with the Pride of Bharat Award for Excellence in Mall Management Consultancy



Manoj K. Agarwal, a veteran professional and respected voice in India's shopping mall industry, has been honoured with the **Pride of Bharat Award for Mall Management Consultancy** at the Pride of Bharat Leadership Summit 2026, held on **28 July 2026** at **Le Méridien, New Delhi**.

“A recognition that reaffirms the importance of professional expertise in shaping the future of India's retail real estate sector.”



A Career Dedicated to Malls

Through his consultancy, Manoj K. Agarwal Consultant Partner, Agarwal has dedicated years to advising and mentoring mall developers, owners, and retail stakeholders across India. His expertise encompasses **mall management, leasing strategy, tenant mix optimisation, operational efficiency, and strategic advisory**, helping shopping centres navigate an increasingly competitive and evolving retail environment.



Mall
Management



Leasing
Strategy



Tenant Mix
Optimisation



Operational
Efficiency



Strategic
Advisory



*Guiding malls.
Enabling growth.
Building stronger retail destinations
across India.*

“Experience. Insight. Commitment.
For stronger malls and a brighter retail future.”



The prestigious award was presented by **Shri Bhausaheb R. Wakchaure, Shri Bajrang M. Sonawane, Dr. Nilesh D. Lanke, H.E. Ms. Lalatiana Accouche, High Commissioner of Seychelles, and Mrs. Juhi Sabharwal, Founder & MD, Integrated Achievers**, along with other distinguished dignitaries.



About the Pride of Bharat Leadership Summit

Organised by **Integrated Achievers**, the Pride of Bharat Leadership Summit 2026 brought together policymakers, industry leaders, MSMEs, professionals, and changemakers to recognise individuals and organisations contributing to India's economic and social development, aligned with the vision of **Viksit Bharat**.



*Recognising
Changemakers
for a Stronger,
Brighter India.*



A Recognition with a Larger Meaning

The recognition of Manoj K. Agarwal highlights his sustained contribution to the shopping mall industry and reflects the growing importance of **professional mall management consultancy** in shaping the future of India's retail real estate sector.





SHOPPING CENTRES
ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

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