

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF FUTURISTIC SHOPPING MALLS AND SUSTAINABILITY

DR. SUDNYA MAHIMKAR, NIKITA NALAWADE

Abstract: Indian traditional shopping environments have evolved from varied forms such as weekly bazaars, street-side shopping, etc. Since 1990, India witnessed a revolution in shopping concepts in the form of 'shopping malls' that were environmentally controlled indoor spaces. This concept challenged Indian traditional shopping by controlling the types of users posing various environment related issues and their sustainability. Within span of twenty years, the mall culture faced its decline with various malls closed down or abandoned that are waiting to be revitalized. This paper attempts to identify the influencing factors and proposes guidelines futuristic malls to render them sustainable culturally, financially and environmentally. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry are applied thereby conducting two staged surveys that incorporated semi-structured interviews and questionnaire survey. The observation matrices were further analyzed with SPSS software. Evolved from the study are various factors responsible for success or failure of a shopping mall. It also suggests guidelines that may help designing the malls so as to render them sustainable in various terms. These guidelines may reduce the risk factors making the malls successful in all possible scenarios.

Keywords: Shopping Malls, Indian Traditional shopping, Environmental sustainability, Decline of mall culture

Introduction: As economy evolved, shopping typologies, environments and experiences also have evolved to a great extent throughout the world in various phases. These phases may be demarcated in evolution of typologies such as weekly bazaars in the form of barter exchanges, permanent bazaar streets [1] evolving further into built forms of shop lines, departmental stores and recently a quite contemporary form of 'Shopping Malls' [2]. Since 1990, urban India witnessed a revolution in shopping concepts in the form of 'Shopping Malls' that were environmentally controlled indoor spaces [3]. Yet it is quite interesting that such revolution did not erase the old shopping forms in its essence. Bazaars streets and shop lines kept flourishing due to the people's support thereby establishing them as the most self-sustainable typologies. On the other hand, within a span of twenty years, the mall culture started facing its decline with around 52 percent malls in Mumbai closed down or abandoned with the city ranking second highest in mall vacancy [4]. Investigations into the issue presented various reasons for this decline. The 'Shopping Mall' concept challenged Indian traditional shopping by controlling the types of users posing various environment related issues and their sustainability. Traditional Indian shopping typologies were of open environments that had truly 'public' character that is accessible to all irrespective of their social status or income. It was a kind of public gathering space that also imparted the sense of security to the spaces. The past research or inquiries in this field points finger to various possible rationale of decline of mall culture worldwide as well as in India. This study attempts to identify the

rationale in Indian context, within Mumbai Metropolitan Region. The research questions that are posed by this study are –

1. What are the motivations and constraints for people while visiting shopping malls?
2. What are the influencing factors that lead a shopping mall towards self-sustainability?

This paper also attempts to propose guidelines to render the malls sustainable culturally, financially and environmentally with a futuristic approach.

Theoretical Framework: The enclosed shopping mall was conceived by architect Victor Gruenin America [5].

With considerable percentage of failure of malls (Table 1) across metro cities of India, henceforth the futuristic approach will be needed while designing for shopping.

Source: (Renjhen, 2015)[7]

Understanding the reasons for the failures of malls becomes vital as in the present urban scenario, shopping malls aim to satisfy the need of public space and sustaining such environment becomes a need and challenge of the time [5].

The typology also has its negative side that, though they provide an environment of one-stop-shopping with the leisure and recreation, the typology poses various challenges such as high energy and water consumption and generation of large amount of waste. Use of air-conditioning gives rise to pollution & CO₂ emissions resulting in global warming and climate change [8]. Maintenance of malls requires huge amount of funds thereby challenging financial sustainability by making it unaffordable for shopkeepers as well as customers.



Fig 1 – Victor Gruen’s Southdale Mall[6]

Gruen’s concept of mall was an enclosed space accomodating retails shops and services with various amenities.

Table- 1: City-wise Comparison – Success of malls

City	Good Performing Malls	Average / Below average performing malls
Mumbai	10-15	25-31
Pune	5	3
Kolkata	6	9
Chennai	5	5
Hyderabad	4	2
Bangalore	7	27
Delhi	12-13	75-83

The cultural reasons such as people’s preferences for traditional shopping typologies may be responsible for such failure. Research has identified motivations for mall visits as – Aesthetics, Convenience, Escape, Exploration, Role enactment, Flow and Socialization[9]. Focusing the study further in the geographical context of Mumbai and identifying the influence factors for mall visits and people’s various needs within the mall will help to fetch a new life to the mall culture.

Research Methodology: The nature of this study required application of both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry. Grounded theory method is found suitable for qualitative inquiries that required semi-structured casual discussions with the random selected sample of twenty respondents. This survey led to the identification of frequently used terms by the users that were coded and used to design the questionnaire for the second stage inquiries for the sample of fifty respondents. Stratified sampling method is used by interviewing respondents at different locations in malls. The collected primary data was coded and matrices were built which was further analyzed using software SPSS (V-20) to enumerate the factors that influence the

success or failure of shopping malls. The paper concludes that giving careful thought to each of these influencing factors, the malls may be designed spatially so as to render them sustainable culturally, financially and environmentally.

Observations: Stage one survey respondents ranging from age 19 to 50 and was balanced in terms of gender. The respondents were requested to come up spontaneously with the terms for a particular aspect of a mall that was specified by the interviewer. The most frequently used terms are:

- Traffic – Volume, Management
- Entry and Exit Points – Signage, Management, Aesthetics, Grandeur, Main Road touch
- Parking – Basement, Difficult gradient, Insufficient, Security, Management
- Food Courts – Insufficient Space/furniture/outlets, Cleanliness, Maintenance, Affordability, Insufficient lighting/Air conditioning
- Brand Shops – Insufficient, Affordability, Indian Culture, Lighting
- Geographical Location – Easy Access/walkable, City Center, Near Railway/bus station

- Social Context – Market, Crowded, Unhygienic, Slums, Plush Locality
- Safety – Fire, Signage, CCTV, Lighting, Toilets, Management
- Maintenance – High energy consumption, Cleanliness, Insufficient Staff, Artificial Lighting, Air Conditioning, Escalators not working

The terms that evolved from this survey were coded and used to formulate the survey questionnaire. In the second stage, the larger survey was conducted with fifty respondents.

The composition of sample with respect to gender (Fig 1), income groups (Fig 2) and age (Fig 3) is as follows. Stratified sample is taken at different spots in the mall. As per fig 5, respondents provided equal and high importance to all the amenities. Quality of

toilets and drinking water were perceived as least maintained amenities. The main purpose of visiting malls is casual visits, eating and essential shopping and malls are least visited for the purpose of leisure shopping and games(Fig 7).

Results: With reference to first research question regarding people’s motivations for visiting malls it has been found that people assign importance to location of malls and expect to have all the possible amenities for the purpose of shopping, leisure and recreation whereby expecting natural elements included in the design of the mall. Second research question dealt with sustainability factors for a mall. Those were evolved from stage one survey where users expressed concerns regarding affordability, spatial requirements, maintenance and management.

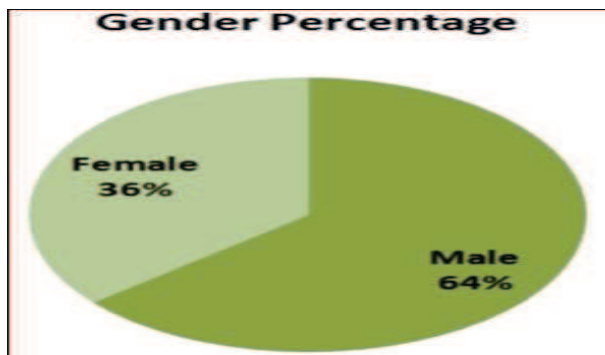


Fig 1 – Sample Composition – Gender

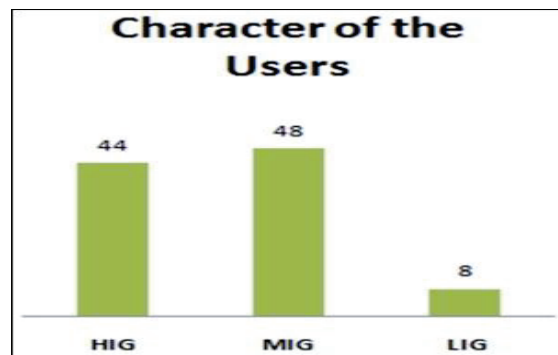


Fig 2 – Sample Composition – Income

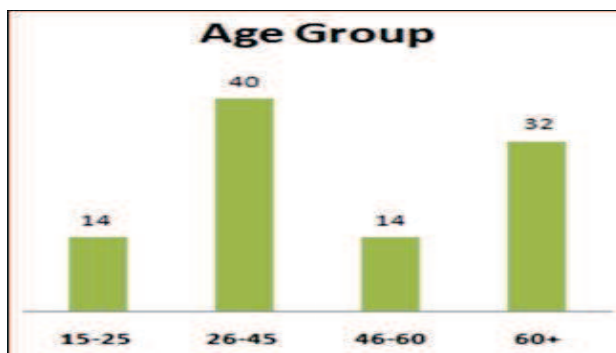


Fig 3 – Sample Composition – Age

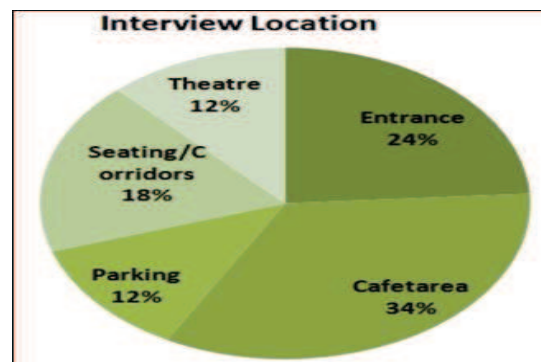


Fig 4 – Interview Locations in the mall

Respondents expected natural elements such as trees, shrubs and water as a part of the mall design (Fig 6).

Discussion: The term ‘sustenance’ in this study deals with cultural, financial and environmental aspects. The outcomes of the surveys in both the stages reflect a vicious circle that a large establishment such as mall needs a huge maintenance cost in terms of

building services (air-conditioning, fire safety, water supply), amenities (parking, food courts, seating, gaming, children’s play areas, etc.) as well as large number of staff. Such huge expenditures result into higher rent for shops thereby transferring the running cost of shops to the customers.

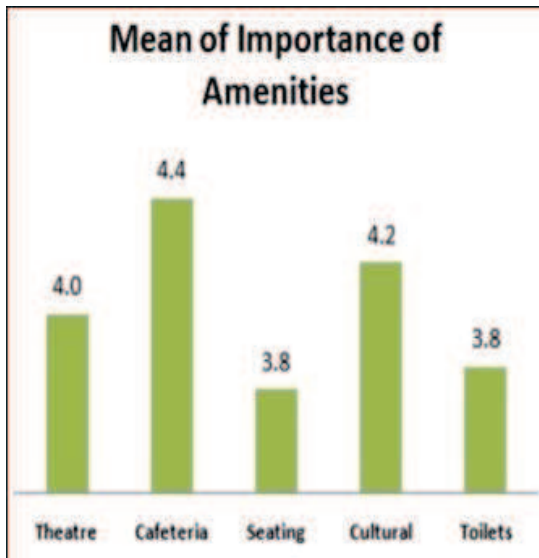


Fig 5 – Importance of Amenities

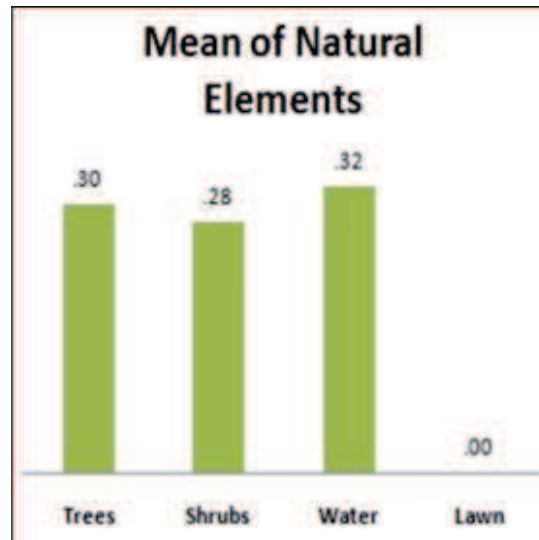


Fig 6 – Importance of Natural elements

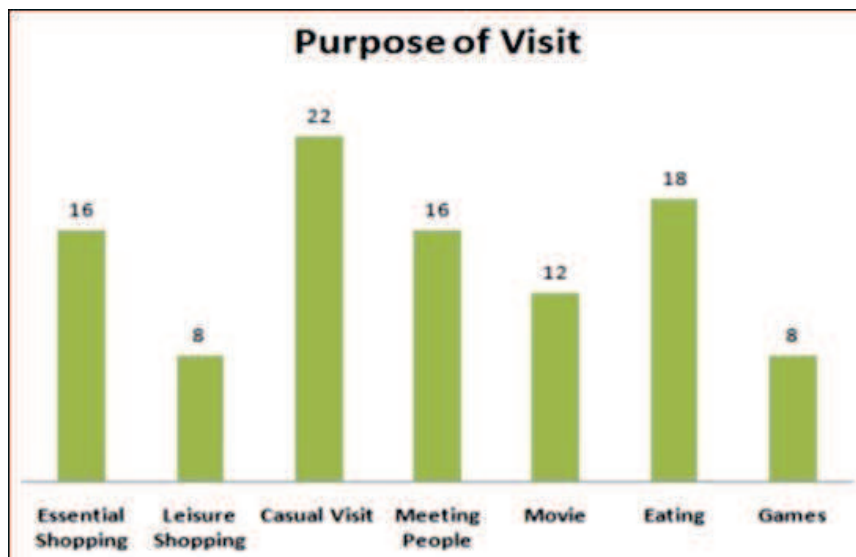


Fig 7 – Purpose of Visit

The high spending ability allows the customers mostly from high income groups and restrict access for lower ones ultimately resulting into failure of the malls. Also, high consumption of energy and water influences environment negatively. The maintenance costs as well as environmental pollution may be reduced by various approaches and suggesting such approaches was a part of the aim of this study. Indian customers find themselves comfortable in traditional shopping typologies for various reasons such as affordability, vast range of choices, social interactions, the satisfaction of bargaining and the environment that is open in nature – airy and lit. This study suggests that a balanced combination of Indian and Western shopping culture may attract more customers in the malls.

Conclusion: Within a small span of twenty years, mall culture in India has faced a great decline. It has been observed that in spite of availability of one-stop-

shopping in form of malls, people in India also prefer old traditional shopping options. Few malls those accepted and adapted to such traditional shopping by incorporating it and by providing the cultural comfort have sustained well thereby proving themselves financially sustainable too. Similarly, the malls with reduced energy consumption through good architectural design found providing enough natural light and ventilation.

The three pronged approach this study provides to render the malls successful is –

1. With all the comfort, leisure and other recreation the mall offers, it may be designed in such a way to provide a user the mixed feel of traditional as well as contemporary shopping. It also will provide the combination of branded and unbranded local shops that will lead to encourage social contacts, accommodate personalized shopping, credit and such cultural aspects.

2. The concept of buildings that accommodate malls may be designed architecturally such as to provide natural light and ventilation to most of the spaces within it. Efforts for such a combination are observed in few countries (Fig – 8).

Ramps instead of escalators will act as interesting features. Presence of natural elements and vegetation will reduce on electricity consumption, provide aesthetics as well as comfortable environment.

3. Using eco-friendly building materials along with latest technologies that help reduce energy

consumption. Following green building norms should be made mandatory for such large scale commercial establishments. Less energy consumption will encourage affordability percolating from shopkeepers to customers.

However, the analysis and recommendations of this study are based on the observations and survey in the city of Mumbai. The three pronged approach that is suggested in this study may help revitalize the abandoned malls as well as it also may be considered as guiding principles while designing new malls.



Fig – 8 Open Malls in Netherlands [5]

Source: Kocaili, 2010

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Dr. Sudnya Mahimkar, Professor, Pillai College of Architecture, New Panvel
Nikita Nalawade, Student, Pillai College of Architecture, New Panvel.