

Lifting Malls?..... IV



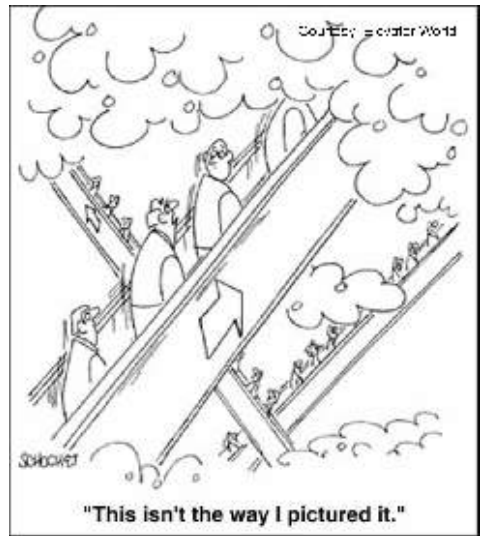
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One of my favorite restaurants looks as if it will soon give way to some other outlet. The problem is that you require exceptional navigational skills (or the latest Nokia N95 with GPS) to gain access to this fine dining restaurant. The most dependable access route involves walking 50 paces North past the restaurant, up an escalator, then another 10 paces further North to another escalator, 25 paces East, 40 paces South, 15 paces South East and a final 15 paces South (I don't know about you, but I am lost). As if this is not complicated in itself, during most of your journey, you can't even see the restaurant to establish your coordinates. Directions to some of my other favorite restaurants in Mumbai's busy Fort area or Delhi's Chandni Chowk area are probably simpler.

Probably the new outlet, unless it has all the marketing Ps and some more in place, would share the same fate.

I am not a mall expert. Neither would I claim to have mastered retail psychology. Yet in my capacity as a frequent mall / multiplex visitor (and not just as a vertical transportation expert), I find that the experts have got some practical



facts related to purchase dynamics horribly wrong.

The following sentence from an article in a prominent financial paper ".....the traffic flow & layout of the shopping center/mall is so defined as to ensure that the patrons reach the cinema after experiencing & exploring the retail, food and leisure facilities....." is the obvious approach to all the multiplexes that I have visited.

Unless it is very small item, what do I do with the merchandise that I might have bought? Sitting for around 2 hours on a cramped cinema seat, weighed down with shopping bags on your lap or between your feet is hardly an experience to look forward to. Further just imagine the crackle of the plastic bags as you shift your position – *the cinemas would have*

to issue a supplementary to the "mobiles off" notice. With the heightened security, there is a good likelihood that you will not even be allowed to carry the stuff inside the cinema – so better sense would tell you to limit your mall experience to just window-shopping. Neither will the food outlets do too well. Even without the security restrictions, food wouldn't be let in anyway. You are not even allowed to carry your own water into most cinemas let alone food from some other outlet.

Another aspect is that the start timings, other than the late night shows, are not tuned towards people eating a main meal before the show - *unlike in most other countries Indians eat late!* The main meal times invariably coincide with the end of the show, by which time you are unceremoniously dumped outside the multiplex. As a result the food outlets attached to multiplexes at best can be a snack outlet for the movie-goers. Considering the ban on letting in outside food, this too would be with limited success.

Yet another aspect revolves around the arrival patterns of movie-goers – how early would you arrive for a movie? (*This is a key requirement to set out assumptions for traffic analysis while establishing the vertical transportation system.*) This would normally be related to the probable availability of tickets – the more popular the movie, the earlier people would line up for tickets. This would then indicate some potential for impulse buying

out of the sheer boredom of waiting (as is the intention at many airports worldwide) and a justification to current multiplex designs. Even if we were assume that all movies are popular (*impossible situation - I was told box office success probability is less than 10%*), this potential is reduced with the availability of advance booking and the current trend of home delivery of tickets.

A divergent view to the same article referred earlier "*..... there aren't many instances where people go out with the intention of watching a movie and end up making major purchases...*" is the truth; a truth which in my opinion is not necessarily related to a behavior pattern, but forced upon the customer by the basic mall design through a faulty layout and circulation logic..

A certain multiplex mall that we visit often has a well stocked super market attached to it. Because of the faulty access logic our visits have to be either "shopping visits" or "cinema visits". Combining both

is difficult unless we decide that the shopping list does not include any frozen products and that I volunteer to the cumbersome task of dumping our shopping bags in our car parked a distance away (or couple of floors away) and then go through the security checks all over again to re-enter the mall. The net outcome is that the super market gets the dump and that our local kirana shop continues getting our business even though he charges a higher price.

On the other hand the latent potential is evident from another statement "*.....the last couple of years have witnessed the evolution of serious and planned shopping in India. The families plan their trip to a mall well in advance.....*" I would then assume that the success of a mall would be dependent on its ability to facilitate the seamless execution of the families' plan and then enhance these plans by pushing for impulse decisions. I should believe that this objective should be the sole guiding principle in designing the layout of the property and then establish and integrate the vertical transportation system. In "Lifting Malls?..... II", I had voiced my surprise that the vertical transportation system was being ignored. Yet the costly truth is that the problem starts much earlier with an inadequate (or missing) design brief related to the layout of the mall / multiplex and the circulation logic. 😊

