

Every weekend is now a time of festive spending and cheer

How urban India's booming weekend economy is a huge opportunity for marketers and city planners

THE CURIOUS MARKETER



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On a recent Saturday evening, I was at Church Street in central Bangalore. It was virtually impossible to walk on this road, because it was jam-packed with hundreds of shoppers and revellers. There were long queues to get into restaurants. The nearby metro station was teeming with people. It looked like a festival day, though it was just another weekend.

Then on Sunday afternoon I attended a talk on quantum physics, given by a friend. It was held at a pub in Koramangala, with entry priced above ₹1,000 per person, inclusive of snacks. I was surprised to see a full house — more than 120 people — all totally engaged, with intellect and food. The talk was fabulous. Once again, just another weekend in Bangalore.

A day later, the penny dropped when I read an excellent report, 'The many urban Indias', published

by PRICE and Tata Sons, and authored by Rajesh Shukla, Roopa Purushothaman and Vishal Vaibhaw. A key observation was the emergence of the 'weekend economy' in urban India.

The report highlighted how, on average, urban consumers spend ₹6,724 during weekdays and ₹10,732 each weekend. This implies that 61.5 per cent of weekly spending is concentrated on just Saturday and Sunday.

Spending on discretionary products — fashion and apparel, entertainment and electronics — virtually doubles during weekends. Spending on essential items — groceries and healthcare — also moves higher during weekends, though moderately. This weekend splurge is seen across the top 100 cities, not just metros.

Why are weekends so big?

What has driven this big shift to the urban weekend economy? My hypothesis is there are three key reasons for it.

■ First, with dual-income households far more common in Indian cities, families have little or no time to spend money meaningfully on weekdays, because of long hours at work and travel. Similar



LISTEN UP. A live music show keeps weekend crowds engaged at a pedestrian-first space in Chennai. VELANKANNI RAJ B

arly, children are tied up with school, tuitions and other activities. This leaves only weekends for shopping, family outings or other leisure experiences.

■ Second, there is a distinct mindset change when people enter weekends — we want to let our hair down, and spend on experiences that recharge our physical and emotional batteries. This contrasts with the hectic weekday, where productivity is the key goal. In short, the weekday urbanite is

psychographically different from the weekend urbanite.

■ Third, in today's digital-fuelled world, people are constantly seeking hits of adrenaline. On weekdays, they get these hits from work, and interactions with colleagues. Come weekend, they need to escape to nearby resorts, or eat fancy meals, or indulge in shopping therapy to obtain their shots of pleasure.

So, what can marketers and cities do to ride this weekend wave?

Here are some thoughts.

Retail stores can stay open longer on weekends, and cities can facilitate this. Recently I saw a store turn away a customer who came in at around 9 pm on Sunday evening. Retail stores can also design special experiences for customers over the weekends — such as nail art or *mehendi* or Mediterranean cooking classes — which can prove very engaging. Brands can also create customised weekend engagement programmes.

Cities can demarcate weekend zones, with permission for activities such as busking, food vending, street theatre, book readings, and art displays. Public transport, sanitation, road lighting and safety can be stepped up to ensure people have access to reliable, cost-effective travel and feel safe on roads, particularly during late hours.

With imagination, city planners and marketers can transform each of the 52 weekends during the year into win-win festivals that engage people beautifully and also generate significant incremental economic activity.

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