



Explaining the Selection and Investment Model in Mixed-Use Commercial Complexes with Emphasis on Urban Sustainability

Mohammad Mahdi Manaie¹, Ali Badizadeh^{2*}, Kambiz Heidarzadeh Hanzaee³

1. PhD student, Department of Entrepreneurship Management, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Qazvin Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qazvin, Iran. (Corresponding Author) Email: Ali.badiezadeh@iau.ir

3. Associate Professor, Business Management Department, Science and Research branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

Received: 03 Sep 2025

Revised: 28 Sep 2025

Accepted: 08 Oct 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop a comprehensive model that explains the selection process of mixed-use commercial complexes by retailers and consumers, while addressing the challenges encountered by property developers, urban planners, and shopping center managers. Employing a qualitative research design grounded in the grounded theory methodology, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 17 experts, entrepreneurs, and investors engaged in mixed-use commercial developments in Tehran. The collected data were systematically analyzed using a three-phase coding process that comprised open, axial, and selective coding. Through iterative examination and methodical coding of the interview transcripts, 147 distinct concepts were identified and subsequently categorized into 14 components distributed across three overarching thematic categories. The first category, “drivers influencing the selection of mixed-use commercial centers,” consists of seven components: commercial location, tenant mix, structural attributes, facility management, collective marketing, financial and accounting management, and alignment with consumer lifestyle preferences. The second category, “investment motivation,” encompasses three components: a long-term value creation strategy, a market-oriented strategy, and an efficiency-driven strategy. The third category, “urban sustainable development,” encompasses four key components: enhancing social responsibility, promoting socio-cultural development, stimulating economic growth, and advancing entrepreneurial activities. The findings derived from theoretical coding indicate that the investment motivations of entrepreneurs and investors serve as a mediating mechanism linking the inherent attributes of mixed-use commercial complexes with the broader goals of urban sustainability. The insights gained from this study offer valuable practical implications for urban policymakers and commercial property managers seeking to optimize investment strategies and foster sustainable urban growth.

KEYWORDS: Mixed-use commercial complexes, urban sustainability, shopping center attributes, investment motivation

How to Cite This Article: Manaie, M.M.; Badizadeh, A., Heidarzadeh Hanzaee, A.(2025).“ Explaining the Selection and Investment Model in Mixed-Use Commercial Complexes with Emphasis on Urban Sustainability”. *The Open Access Journal of Resisitive Economics*, 13(4): 71-92.

1. Introduction

Urban sustainable development has garnered increasing attention because of its long-term benefits, including income growth, improved quality of life, and the mitigation of environmental impacts. Sustainable urban infrastructure is carefully designed, implemented, and maintained to meet the expanding demands of urbanization without imposing adverse economic, environmental, or social impacts. Well-conceived sustainable urban initiatives also have the potential to generate employment, stimulate economic growth, enhance living conditions, and promote the social inclusion of diverse population groups (Padmapriya and Sujatha, 2021). As cities continue to grow and become more densely populated, the demand for robust urban infrastructure increases. When effectively managed, such infrastructure reduces living costs, increases access to employment opportunities, and elevates individuals' social status. The overarching goal of sustainable urban design is to foster the balanced and coordinated development of an interconnected human–environment–society–economy–culture ecosystem through meticulous planning (Gao et al., 2023).

Within the academic literature, economic sustainability is frequently defined as the capacity of an economic system to satisfy current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Achieving this requires maintaining equilibrium among the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development to support resilient and sustainable growth. Economic sustainability further encompasses market development, which involves creating favorable conditions for economic activities, entrepreneurship, and innovation. The emphasis is on promoting inclusive, balanced, and sustainable economic growth that benefits both individuals and society as a whole (Samadkulov, 2024).

Urban populations have steadily increased over the past decades. Currently, more than half (55%) of the global population resides in urban areas, and this proportion is expected to rise to 68% by 2050. Cities act as the primary engines of global economic growth, generating over 75% of national GDPs despite occupying only 3% of the Earth's surface (Monteiro et al., 2024).

In an era characterized by intensified consumerism, retail spaces have emerged as integral and defining features of the urban landscapes. The widespread adoption of consumer culture has triggered a rapid increase in the number of shopping centers, significantly shaping urban morphology. Nonetheless, the strategic locations of these centers have profound implications for the social and economic sustainability of urban settlements. Given the accelerated pace of urbanization and rising consumer demand, the importance of shopping centers cannot be underestimated (Alinizzi et al., 2022).

Shopping centers constitute one of the most vital components of real estate infrastructure in urban contexts and are closely intertwined with broader socio-economic discourses. Their

distinctive characteristics have rendered them attractive venues for investment and commercial activities among entrepreneurs, investors, and business owners. These centers function as both concentrated retail environments and platforms for value creation for owners, tenants, and consumers alike (Jajuga & Ronka-Chmielowiec, 2015).

From a marketing perspective, shopping centers facilitate business expansion by lowering sales costs and increasing product demand through advertising and promotional campaigns. In such locations, rental prices tend to be higher, and property owners typically hold greater bargaining power in lease negotiations than tenants (Wang, 2016). These unique attributes make shopping centers particularly appealing as investment opportunities.

However, the majority of existing research on shopping centers has predominantly concentrated on consumer behavior and shopping preferences, with a comparatively limited focus on the investor perspective. This gap is especially notable considering the critical role of investors in shaping the financial viability, design, and long-term sustainability of shopping centers. Investment decisions not only influence the scale and scope of development but also determine the strategic positioning of these centers within the urban economy. Overlooking the investor viewpoint risks an incomplete understanding of the retail infrastructure ecosystem, as consumer demand alone is insufficient to sustain such large-scale projects without strong capital inflows and strategic investment planning. Moreover, within the context of urban sustainability, investor priorities -including return on investment, risk assessment, and alignment with socio-economic trends- directly impact the resilience and adaptability of shopping malls. While consumer-focused studies provide valuable insights into market demand, they fail to address the structural and financial foundations that investors contribute to. Bridging this gap is essential for developing comprehensive theoretical frameworks and practical strategies that integrate investment motivations with sustainable urban development objectives.

This study aims to identify both intrinsic motivations and external drivers influencing investment decisions in shopping centers. Through a qualitative inquiry, this study explores the underlying factors shaping investor choices, thereby addressing existing gaps in the literature and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics. The findings are also expected to offer practical implications for the strategic planning and development of future shopping centers. Accordingly, this study seeks to elucidate the criteria that investors consider when selecting specific shopping centers as investment targets.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Research Background

This study explores the selection of shopping centers as investment venues by entrepreneurs and investors. This section reviews the pertinent literature and previous research, culminating in a synthesized framework that underpins the study's objectives.

Investor Motivation in Shopping Centers

Investment decisions are critical for investors because they influence financial stability, economic conditions, and ethical investment practices. Real estate is widely acknowledged as a core asset class in diversified investment portfolios (Aziz et al., 2024). Newell (2021) highlights the dynamism and distinct characteristics of Asia's real estate markets, warranting focused academic attention. Real estate investment decisions are inherently complex and capital-intensive (Bolomope et al., 2020) and are influenced by both internal and external factors. Key determinants include market fundamentals such as rental rates, net absorption, yields, lease terms, and demand and supply forecasts. Macroeconomic indicators, such as inflation, unemployment, interest rates, gross domestic product (GDP), consumer prices, and demographic trends, also substantially influence these decisions (Aziz et al., 2024). Retail real estate offers stable and predictable cash flows coupled with the potential for capital appreciation. Long-term leases with rent escalations tied to inflation provide investors with a steady income stream. Particularly in densely populated urban areas, the high demand for retail spaces drives attractive investment returns.

Shopping Centers

Shopping centers function as global, multifunctional spaces where consumers engage in shopping, socializing, and experiential activities. They integrate retail, entertainment, and service components into a mixed-use environment (Kunc et al., 2022). Although definitions vary, a shopping center typically comprises a property housing multiple retail outlets managed as a cohesive entity, often combining retail, food and beverage, leisure, and other commercial activities (Shi et al., 2015). The International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC, USA) defines a shopping center as a planned retail and commercial facility under unified ownership, with a minimum gross leasable area of 5,000 square meters, and typically includes parking provisions (Križan et al., 2021). Consumers frequently prefer shopping centers for both consumption and leisure purposes, while tenants value the strategic access that these centers provide to critical customer mass. Despite being privately owned, shopping centers increasingly function as de facto public spaces that are deeply embedded in social life (Gonçalves et al., 2020).

These centers attract interdisciplinary studies across architecture, management, economics, sociology, psychology, political science, and socio-economic geography (Krowicki & Maciejewski, 2024). Their design substantially influences urban economic development, resource allocation, and consumer satisfaction. Well-located centers effectively serve residents while enabling operators to target broader markets, thereby sustaining their competitive advantage (Zhou et al., 2024).

Shopping Centre Management

Effective management is pivotal to the success of shopping centers and distinguishes them from other business units. Managers must address the needs of customers, employees, and

tenants (Matthysen et al., 2019). The core managerial functions include planning, organizing, leading, coordinating, and monitoring. When integrated with marketing strategies, these activities underpin sustainable competitive advantages. In this context, management merges marketing and innovation, embodying a business philosophy focused on meeting customer needs and delivering value to individuals, organizations, and society. This comprehensive approach aligns with the center's strategic vision and developmental objectives (Kunc et al., 2022).

Facilities Management in Shopping Centers

Well-executed facility management is essential for providing comfortable environments and ensuring smooth operations. It significantly impacts employee well-being, organizational performance, workforce productivity, cost efficiency, and brand reputation (Zhenjing et al., 2022). Physical elements, such as cleanliness, spatial layout, and design, directly shape consumer perceptions and attitudes. Facilities management is a multidisciplinary function that balances operational efficiency with sustainable resource utilization and requires expertise in infrastructure management and governance (Yusuf et al., 2022).

Service quality and customer satisfaction are foundational marketing concepts. Service quality reflects an overall evaluation, whereas customer satisfaction pertains to specific transactions. High-quality facility management attracts tenants and promotes consumer satisfaction, fostering prolonged engagement and loyalty (Riaz et al., 2024).

Marketing and Communication Strategies for Shopping Centers

In a competitive marketplace, tenant mix alone is insufficient for achieving success. A contemporary, visually appealing environment that resonates with prevailing social trends is essential to attract customers. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) increasingly shapes stakeholder perceptions, with shopping centers leveraging diverse marketing tools to communicate their CSR initiatives (Navas et al., 2021). Attractiveness, although a subjective concept, plays a strategic role in enhancing customer acquisition and enriching the shopping experience (Ortegón-Cortázar and Royo-Vela, 2017). A center's image -including commerce, accessibility, service quality, and ambiance- is central to its perceived attractiveness.

Entertainment has become integral to sustainable marketing efforts, differentiating between centers while advancing social and environmental objectives. Initiatives supporting customers, tenants, employees, and communities improve both operational performance and profitability. Sustainability and competitiveness depend on continuous dialogue between customers, tenants, and staff. Managers cultivate open communication to build trust and maintain strong relationships. Integrated communication strategies shape stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, thereby strengthening loyalty. Public relations facilitates both external communication (e.g., social media) and internal communication (staff and tenants), supporting event marketing as a tool for stakeholder engagement (Mishra et al., 2014). Public relations is acknowledged as an effective instrument for promoting and highlighting specific events. In

this regard, event marketing has emerged as a contemporary and increasingly employed approach to sustainable communication. This strategy enables organizations to directly engage diverse target audiences through organized events and convey intended messages in tangible and impactful ways. By creating shared and memorable experiences for audiences, event marketing significantly bolsters brand image, enhances public awareness, and deepens organizational relationships with stakeholders (Durán et al., 2017).

Tenant-Centric Management Perspectives

Tenant mix, a diverse assortment of retail formats, is fundamental to a shopping center's success (Marona & Wilk, 2016). Although retailers operate independently, they function within management policies that encourage a degree of operational interdependence. The tenant mix operates as an interconnected network that fosters overall efficiency. However, limited collaboration sometimes arises because tenants may perceive themselves as autonomous entities, potentially undermining their collective success (Matthysen et al., 2019). Tenant feedback, derived from direct customer interactions, informs strategies related to center strengths, tenant composition, sustainability efforts, spatial layout, and marketing effectiveness, including considerations such as operating hours and parking availability (Teller and Alexander, 2014). Maximizing profitability involves minimizing vacancy rates and optimizing the rental income per tenant (Garg & Steyn, 2015).

Urban Sustainable Development

Retail environments contribute significantly to urban vibrancy and resilience by aligning investor returns with socioeconomic sustainability goals. New shopping centers often symbolize societal transformation and economic readiness (Medić et al., 2024). Sustainable development encompasses environmental, social, and economic dimensions and provides a comprehensive framework for assessing urban impacts. Thoughtful design can embed sustainability principles throughout the production, marketing, distribution, and consumption processes. An appropriate design and strategic location foster innovation and social change, supporting models of shared ownership and economic adaptability (Han et al., 2019).

Environmental sustainability emphasizes resource conservation, recycling, and pollution control, necessitating interdisciplinary collaborations. Social sustainability involves preserving cultural heritage and addressing fundamental human needs through robust social infrastructure, including improvements in health and education. Economic sustainability focuses on equitable income distribution, cost efficiency, and market creation (Mendilcioğlu & Goudarzi, 2019). Sustainability underpins numerous contemporary urban development strategies.

Literature Review

This section presents a review of selected studies pertinent to this research topic. Notably, no prior investigation in Iran has addressed this specific issue from the perspective of investors.

Existing domestic literature predominantly focuses on consumers and visitors to shopping centers, mainly examining their purchasing motivation. Even at the international level, few studies have adopted an investor-centric viewpoint. Accordingly, this review highlights the most closely related research that provides contextual insights relevant to the present study.

Medić et al. (2024) examined the social and economic sustainability of urban areas through the architectural planning of shopping centers. Their findings suggest that well-designed architectural schemes can contribute to a more equitable distribution of economic resources within cities, enhance social and cultural interactions, and support the viability of shopping centers by providing investors with robust feasibility assessments of shopping centers. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating urban planning within social sustainability frameworks, underscoring its dual role in fostering socioeconomic dynamism and ensuring financial profitability.

Yusuf et al. (2022) investigated the role of facilities management in enhancing consumer satisfaction, focusing particularly on the physical infrastructure of shopping centers. Their results indicated that factors such as cleanliness, spatial layout, and maintenance significantly influenced consumer preferences. Satisfaction with these elements critically affects consumers' choices between competing shopping centers, highlighting the importance of operational excellence in facilities management in influencing consumer behavior.

In a related study, Han et al. (2019) explored the features of sustainable urban forms and the key drivers attracting consumers to shopping centers. Their research revealed that the built environment and entertainment components act as full mediators between physical space and consumer engagement in restaurants. These factors positively impact both environmental sustainability and consumer behavior, positioning the built environment and entertainment as essential elements of physical and social sustainability in retail spaces.

Wang (2016) developed a regression model to identify the determinants of rental prices in shopping centers. Empirical results indicate that factors such as ceiling height, proximity to metro stations, location within central business districts, vacancy rates, and local income levels significantly affect rental values. Interestingly, commonly cited variables in Western contexts, such as property size, age, parking availability, and the presence of anchor tenants, did not exhibit a significant impact in this analysis, suggesting contextual or market-specific differences.

Waszak (2015) examined the key success factors in shopping center investments, aiming to identify the criteria investors consider when selecting investment targets. Using a case study methodology, this research analyzes the strategic positioning of shopping centers through an integrated assessment of economic, marketing, and retail factors. This study confirmed strong correlations among these dimensions, highlighting the multidimensional nature of investment evaluation in commercial real estate.

Vass (2012) analyzed commercial property investment through the lens of purchasing power dynamics within retail zones. The study emphasizes that commercial property investment differs significantly from other asset classes because of characteristics such as asset longevity,

spatial constraints, and legal frameworks. Therefore, effective investment decision-making thus requires a comprehensive understanding of both intrinsic property features and external influencing factors.

This research also underscored the complexity of market analysis in this sector, noting the necessity of systematically filtering and evaluating extensive data. Investors must focus exclusively on variables that directly impact the demand for a specific property and, by extension, its ability to generate returns. Consequently, precise and context-sensitive market analyses serve as critical decision-making tools that provide actionable insights that guide investor strategies and risk assessments.

A sustainable city facilitates high levels of mobility and accessibility, promotes social interaction, encourages self-sufficiency, and fosters highly legible and innovative urban settlements. A substantial body of literature supports the significance of compact, pedestrian-friendly urban forms as key enablers of sustainability. The spatial characteristics of urban environments are widely recognized as critical drivers of sustainable growth. For example, Ng (2003) developed a conceptual framework exploring the relationship between consumers and the built environment, positing that shopping centers play a meaningful role because of their utility-driven infrastructure and potential to provide pleasurable experiences (Han et al., 2019).

Social spaces are inherently shaped by political, communicative, and cultural discourses, transforming them into “public spaces” that reflect and influence societal economic, social, and cultural structures. Shopping centers, in this regard, can profoundly impact the form and function of such spaces (Mendilcioğlu & Goudarzi, 2019).

Although prior studies have examined the retail potential of shopping centers from the consumer perspective, a notably underexplored dimension remains: the motivations of investors and entrepreneurs and the specific attributes of shopping centers that persuade them to pursue economic activity in these environments. Accordingly, this study focuses on identifying and conceptualizing the economic motivational parameters and characteristics of shopping centers that influence investment decisions.

Given the absence of a comprehensive theoretical framework and a consistent body of prior research on this topic, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate. This study investigates the internal motivational drivers (endogenous factors) related to investors' economic incentives alongside external stimuli (exogenous factors) arising from the intrinsic features of shopping centers. The interactions between these variables were examined through semi-structured interviews to understand the outcomes these interactions generate for commercial centers.

Accordingly, this study is structured to address the following research questions:

1. What are the internal motivational dimensions that drive investors and entrepreneurs to select shopping centers as investment sites?
2. Which shopping center attributes most significantly influence entrepreneurs' and investors' investment decisions?

3. What are the consequences of the interplay between the internal motivations and external characteristics of shopping centers?
4. What conceptual model can explain the selection of shopping centers by investors and entrepreneurs?

3. Methodology

This study aimed to identify the patterns and determinants influencing the selection of multifunctional commercial complexes by retailers and consumers. Given the exploratory nature of the research objectives, an inductive qualitative approach was used. Qualitative research provides a valuable means of obtaining nuanced insights into human behavior and economic activities, offering rich and detailed descriptions of individual experiences and perspectives (Walker et al., 2024).

Participants were purposively selected during the winter of 2023 using a maximum variation sampling strategy. The sample comprised retailers, entrepreneurs, investors, marketing specialists, and managers of commercial complexes, all of whom met the predetermined criteria related to professional experience, academic qualifications, and relevant expertise. The maximum variation approach was adopted to enhance the richness and depth of the findings by capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives grounded in both scientific and practical considerations pertinent to the research topic.

The final sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation, which was achieved after conducting interviews with 17 participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews guided by a pre-developed protocol. Semi-structured interviews balance consistency and flexibility, enabling an in-depth exploration of key themes (Shoozan & Mohamad, 2024). Each interview was conducted individually and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently analyzed using Glaser's (1978) coding methodology, which involves three stages: open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding. The coding and analysis processes were facilitated using MAXQDA software. During the open coding phase, the transcripts were systematically reviewed and coded; the codes were then compared, refined, renamed, merged, and organized as needed. Upon identifying the emerging central themes, selective coding was conducted, culminating in the development of a theoretical framework that integrated the established categories (Qureshi & Ünlü, 2020).

Established validation techniques in qualitative research were employed to ensure the study's trustworthiness and rigor. Member checking was conducted to enhance credibility by allowing the participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the codes assigned to their meaningful statements. To assess reliability, four interview transcripts were independently coded by a second researcher. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa coefficient, yielding a satisfactory agreement level of 0.74, thereby confirming the robustness of the coding process.

4. Findings

The data collected in this study were analyzed using grounded theory coding techniques and interpreted through a descriptive analysis. The primary data source consisted of interviews with 17 knowledgeable participants, each possessing substantial expertise and practical experience. A summary of the participants' demographic and professional characteristics is presented in Table 1 below. The majority of participants were male, predominantly middle-aged, and held university-level qualifications.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Subgroup	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	13	76
	Female	4	24
Age	-40	4	24
	40–50	7	41
	50+	6	35
Education	Bachelor's	3	18
	Master's	8	47
	PhD	6	35
Participants' Position	Shopping Center Managers	3	18
	Entrepreneurs	8	47
	Retailer & Lessor	6	35

4.1. Results of Open and Selective Coding

The data analysis and coding process adhered to Glaser's grounded theory methodology, which involves three sequential stages: open, selective, and theoretical coding. Initially, the data were condensed iteratively until theoretical saturation was reached, at which point the level of abstraction was increased. Through the generation and comparison of concepts, broader categories were identified, ultimately leading to the emergence of overarching themes. From the interview transcripts, 1,589 data excerpts were extracted, resulting in the coding of 147 distinct concepts. These concepts were organized into 14 categories or subcomponents, which collectively coalesced into three primary themes: motivations for selecting mixed-use commercial complexes, key drivers influencing selection patterns, and the resultant outcomes associated with these complexes. The findings about each theme are detailed and analyzed in the following sections.

4.1.1. Investment Motivation

Understanding the motivations of stakeholders in commerce, investment, and consumption is essential, as these motivations are the primary drivers of purchasing and investment decisions. Entrepreneurs and marketers must thoroughly comprehend these decision-making processes to devise effective strategies. Through open coding and clustering of similar codes, three main

motivational categories were identified: long-term value creation strategy, market-oriented strategy, and efficiency-driven strategy. These categories are summarized in Table 2 below.

- Long-term Value-Creation Strategy:** This category emphasizes investments aimed at acquiring strategic assets, commercial intelligence, proprietary technologies, and brands. Within this theme, 149 meaningful statements were coded into 11 distinct concepts: asset acquisition, gaining commercial information, access to proprietary technologies, brand growth, long-term popularity, value addition, ease of leasing and selling, return on investment, risk mitigation, portfolio diversification, and asset protection. For instance, one participant noted, "Selling or leasing commercial and retail properties in mixed-use shopping centers is very straightforward and can be completed quickly. Since commercial properties are in higher demand, their sale is also easier." (Ease of leasing and selling).
- Market-oriented Strategy:** Investments within this category are motivated by the potential to provide goods and services to customers or regional markets, depending on market size and characteristics. These investments also contribute to job creation, offering skilled employment opportunities with improved income prospects and stimulating entrepreneurship. From 254 statements, 19 concepts emerged, including market potential, job creation, supplier quality improvement, competitive enhancement, price reduction, customer attraction to new products, financial forecasting, facility aggregation, and alignment with consumer lifestyles. A representative excerpt states: "The facilities inside a shopping Centre significantly increase the commercial value and business potential." (Aggregation of all facilities under a single roof).
- Efficiency-Driven Strategy:** Motivations in this category focus on enhancing cost efficiency through competitive advantages, such as reducing labor costs, increasing productivity, easier market access, shared facilities, and professional networking. From 152 statements, 12 concepts were identified, including efficiency enhancement, financial control, business focus, and institutional time savings. For example: "Owners of commercial properties are typically business owners who value professional business relationships founded on goodwill, which itself constitutes a valuable asset." (Professional relationships with like-minded individuals).

Table 2. Results of Open and Selective Coding: Motivations for Choosing Mixed-Use Commercial Complexes

Theme	Component	Concepts
Motivation	Long-Term Value-Creation	Acquisition of strategic assets; commercial intelligence gathering; proprietary technologies; brand expansion; sustained brand popularity; value addition; ease of leasing and resale; return on investment (ROI); risk mitigation; portfolio diversification; asset protection
	Market-Oriented Strategy	Provision of goods and services; regional market potential; market size; creation of skilled employment; income generation; service sector jobs; linkages to the local economy; supplier quality improvement; enhanced competition; price reduction; customer attraction; market appeal; scalability; financial forecasting; facility aggregation; investment attractiveness; diversification; alignment with lifestyle trends

Theme	Component	Concepts
	Efficiency-Oriented Strategy	Enhancement of operational efficiency; reduction of labor costs; increased workforce productivity; improved customer access; cost-effective market penetration; availability of market components; potential for business transformation; focus on core business; achievement of financial goals; shared facilities; professional networking; minimization of bureaucratic obstacles

4.1.2. Drivers Behind the Selection of Mixed-Use Commercial Complexes

Investment decisions are influenced by external stimuli that affect internal cognitive and emotional states, ultimately shaping the behavioral responses. Through open coding and thematic categorization, seven primary driver categories were identified: (1) collective marketing, (2) tenant mix, (3) lifestyle alignment, (4) facilities management, (5) financial and accounting management, (6) location, and (7) structural attributes. These categories are summarized in Table 3.

- **Collective Marketing:** The agglomeration of businesses within retail centers generates synergies that enhance operational efficiency and market outcomes. From 143 coded statements, 11 key concepts emerged, including joint promotions, collaborative branding, centralized market research, shared communications, umbrella advertising, center image, interior aesthetics, coordinated pricing, targeted marketing, ambiance enhancement, and retail architecture.

Example: “Smart spatial design and infrastructure enable seamless transactions and enhance commercial efficiency. An appealing façade and interior layout significantly increase foot traffic and customer engagement.” (Shopping Centre Architecture).
- **Tenant Mix:** Shopping centers strategically combine retail, services, leisure, and cultural amenities to ensure sustainable customer attraction. Analysis of 99 statements revealed eight core concepts, such as diverse dining options, entertainment venues, service-oriented stores, retail diversity, anchor tenants, efficient space utilization, and cultural and artistic facilities.

Example: “Shopping centers serve as lifestyle destinations offering a complete experience in one location. For food enthusiasts, they provide a wide variety of dining choices.” (Combination of Dining Facilities).
- **Lifestyle Alignment:** Retail centers evolve in tandem with consumer lifestyle trends, emphasizing experiential engagement, convenience, and identity expression. From 62 statements, six key concepts were identified, including consumer affinity, economic relevance, preference for centralized shopping, experiential shopping, diversity, and consistent foot traffic.

Example: “A wide variety of businesses in a shopping center ensures high daily foot traffic—even passive browsing often leads to store visits.” (Sufficient Foot Traffic).

- Facilities Management:** Integral to daily operations, facilities management encompasses infrastructure maintenance, safety, and customer comfort. Ten concepts emerged from 143 statements, including cleanliness, security, public health, signage, infrastructure upkeep, renovations, leisure areas, store layout, and safety protocols.
Example: “Security is most effective when integrated from the design phase. In shopping centers, it is implemented discreetly to minimize disruption for customers.” (Security Services).
- Financial and Accounting Management:** Critical for long-term sustainability, this category involves budgeting, risk management, and resource allocation. Eight concepts arose from 100 statements, including debt tracking, invoicing, revenue management, budgeting, capital sourcing, asset management, and risk mitigation strategies.
Example: “Commercial centers must continuously evaluate and finance operational costs. Robust accounting systems are necessary to detect and mitigate risks, preventing financial crises.” (Risk Identification and Management).
- Location:** Recognized as the paramount factor influencing success, location impacts brand perception, customer loyalty, and market share. From 162 statements, twelve concepts were identified, including customer loyalty, brand appeal, competition, zoning regulations, word-of-mouth, customer acquisition, brand image, and public relations efforts. *Example:* “One way to increase mall foot traffic is by cultivating a strong brand image that shoppers associate with a unique bundle of benefits.” (Creating a Strong Mental Image for Visitors).
- Structural Attributes:** The design and accessibility of shopping centers directly affect their usability and inclusiveness. Ten concepts emerged from 140 statements, such as accessibility, parking availability, connectivity, public transportation access, operating hours, and intelligent architectural design.
Example: “Shopping center visitors include the elderly, individuals with disabilities, children, and those with cognitive challenges, yet infrastructural accommodations for these groups are often insufficient.” (Accessibility for Customers).

Table 3. Results of Open and Selective Coding: Drivers for Choosing Mixed-Use Commercial Complexes

Theme	Component	Concepts
Selection Drivers	Collective Marketing	Joint promotions; collaborative branding; shared market research; coordinated communications; umbrella advertising; center image; interior aesthetics; joint pricing strategies; centralized marketing efforts; ambiance enhancement; retail architecture
	Tenant Mix	Dining options; leisure facilities; service-oriented shops; retail diversity; anchor tenants; optimal space utilization; cultural elements; artistic venues
	Lifestyle Fit	Foot traffic; economic relevance; customer engagement; centralized shopping experience; experiential shopping; diverse customer base
	Facilities Management	Cleaning services; security measures; public sanitation; signage and wayfinding; infrastructure maintenance; renovations; leisure zones;

		store layout optimization; safety protocols
	Financial Management	Debt and invoice tracking; revenue management; budgeting processes; capital acquisition; asset management; financial oversight; risk mitigation strategies
	Location	Customer loyalty; brand attraction; competitive positioning; zoning regulations; word-of-mouth influence; customer base expansion; image development
	Structural Features	Customer accessibility; parking availability; transportation connectivity; public transit access; affordable parking; geographic location; fixed operating hours; parking guidance systems; construction expertise; operational design considerations

4.1.3. Outcomes of Mixed-Use Commercial Complexes

Well-planned and effectively managed mixed-use commercial complexes make significant contributions to urban development, yielding outcomes across four principal domains: social responsibility development, socio-cultural advancement, urban economic growth, and entrepreneurial development.

- Social Responsibility Development:** Corporate social responsibility (CSR) encompasses organizational commitments related to economic, environmental, and social issues, including sustainable resource use and active community engagement. This study identified 120 statements that were categorized into 11 concepts, such as environmental protection, support for public amenities, recreational needs, community initiatives, energy optimization, noise control, waste management, promotion of cultural and religious lifestyles, diversity and inclusion, and positive economic participation.

Example: “Waste separation at the source and effective grease management in food outlets are standard practices to ensure proper waste handling.” (Waste Management).
- Socio-Cultural Development:** Essential for national stability, socio-cultural development necessitates transformations in social structures and relationships. Historically, markets in Iran have served multifaceted roles encompassing economic, cultural, religious, and social functions. Contemporary shopping centers foster local engagement, promote urban tourism, and help establish new consumer culture norms. From 132 statements, 11 socio-cultural concepts emerged, including civic participation, tourism enhancement, urban strengthening, multifunctionality, modernization, reinforcement of citizenship, service rights, provision of safe entertainment, and improvements to urban furniture.

Example: “Modern shopping centers not only fulfill economic functions but also establish new consumer culture norms.” (Introduction of New Consumer Culture Norms).
- Urban Economic Development:** Closely intertwined with national growth, urban economic development involves production, income generation, and the shaping of social and institutional structures. Shopping centers act as economic hubs, attracting diverse activities. Analysis of 115 statements yielded nine economic concepts, such as taxation, poverty alleviation, wealth creation, investment expansion, employment generation,

financial turnover, business diversification, consumer purchasing power, and security provision.

Example: “Mixed-use shopping centers generate both direct and indirect employment opportunities, a major focus of policy initiatives.” (Employment Growth).

- **Entrepreneurial Development:** Entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth and job creation, influenced by technological advancements and market dynamics. The study identified 134 statements grouped into ten concepts, including sales performance, profitability, service adaptation, financial performance, benefit optimization, shared customer bases, agglomeration effects, revenue generation, growth of commercial entrepreneurship, and expansion of media entrepreneurship.

Example: “Start-ups located near shopping centers experience greater success opportunities while attracting customers to existing tenants.” (Increased Sales Due to Agglomeration).

Table 4. Results of Open and Selective Coding: Outcomes of Mixed-Use Commercial Complexes

Theme	Component	Concepts
Outcomes	Social Responsibility	Environmental protection; support for public welfare; addressing recreational needs; community engagement initiatives; energy optimization; noise control and management; waste management; promotion of cultural lifestyles; promotion of religious lifestyles; inclusion of social diversity; positive economic participation.
	Socio-Cultural Development	Local community participation; intra-city tourism; urban strengthening; establishment of new consumer culture norms; multifunctionality; urban modernization; reinforcement of citizenship; empowerment of service rights; provision of safe entertainment; improvement of urban furniture and amenities.
	Urban Economic Development	Taxation; poverty alleviation; wealth creation; investment growth; employment expansion; increased financial turnover; business diversification; enhancement of enhancement of consumer purchasing power; availability of security and facilities.
	Entrepreneurial Development	Improved sales performance; increased profitability; adaptation of services; strengthened financial performance; optimization of economic benefits; shared customer bases; sales growth driven by business agglomeration; revenue generation and entrepreneurship creation; growth of commercial entrepreneurship; expansion of media entrepreneurship.

4.2. Theoretical Coding

The theoretical coding phase seeks to identify plausible explanations for the relationships among the key themes and their associated attributes, to develop hypotheses that support theory construction. The results of this phase are depicted in Figure 1.

Based on the analyzed data, it can be concluded that three primary investment motivation strategies underpin multi-functional commercial complexes: long-term value-creation strategy, market-oriented strategy, and efficiency-driven strategy. These motivational strategies are shaped by several foundational factors related to the selection of such complexes. These factors encompass collective marketing efforts, tenant mix, alignment with consumer lifestyles, facilities management, financial and accounting administration, location of the commercial center, and structural characteristics.

Moreover, the outcomes resulting from the establishment of multi-functional commercial centers are categorized into four main domains: the advancement of corporate social responsibility (CSR), socio-cultural development, urban economic growth, and entrepreneurial progress.

Consequently, the proposed conceptual model integrates fourteen sub-components organized into three overarching categories. The relationships among these components and core categories are articulated, thereby providing a comprehensive theoretical framework firmly grounded in the empirical findings.

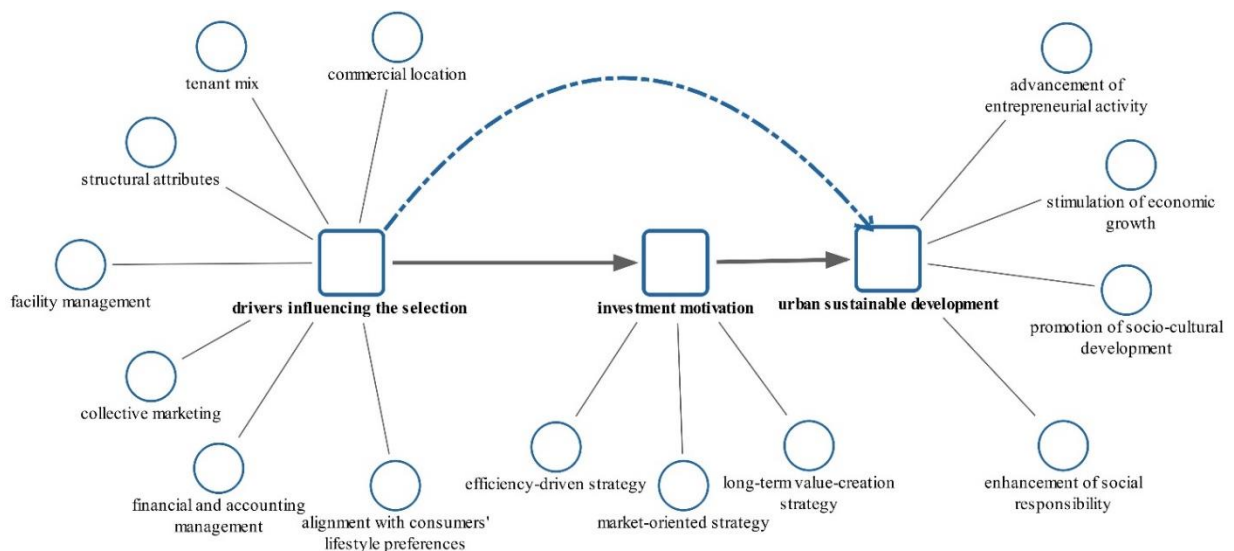


Figure 1. Theoretical Coding Results and Schematic Representation of the Extracted Model

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to develop a conceptual model for the selection of mixed-use commercial complexes by entrepreneurs and investors as investment venues. Employing a grounded theory methodology, the research utilized in-depth analyses of interviews to construct an appropriate theoretical framework. Grounded theory involves inductively generating a model based on direct observations of the study population and systematically comparing their discourse and behaviors. The primary purpose of this approach is to explain how and why specific events occur or why individuals behave in particular ways (Cleland, 2017).

The resulting model identifies three primary motivational strategies driving the selection of commercial complexes for investment: long-term value-creation strategy, efficiency-driven strategy, and market-oriented strategy.

Different forms of investment are propelled by diverse factors and characterized by unique benefits, opportunities, and challenges within the national economic context. One motivation focuses on leveraging market capacity to support business growth. Another centers on efficiency enhancement, aiming to improve cost-effectiveness in production by utilizing factors that increase competitiveness and reduce expenses—such as lowering labor costs, boosting productivity, facilitating easier access to labor, streamlining connections to suppliers and customers, and enabling smoother product transfers. A further motivation involves acquiring strategic assets, including business intelligence, valuable properties, and brand equity. These findings align with self-determination theory, which conceptualizes investor motivation as the capacity for flexible behavioral choice; intrinsically motivated behaviors seek inherent satisfaction, while extrinsically motivated actions are instrumental for value attainment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The results also correspond with traditional economic theory, which posits that investor decisions are primarily driven by wealth maximization. These conclusions reinforce previous research by Waszak (2015) and Vass (2012).

The drivers behind investment motivation and selection criteria include commercial center location, tenant mix, structural attributes, facilities management, collective marketing, financial and accounting management, and alignment with consumer lifestyles. Shopping centers possess a suite of features that enhance their attractiveness for investment or business establishment. Site selection remains a critical determinant, significantly influencing the long-term performance of enterprises. Entrepreneurial and investor motivations for investing in shopping centers are shaped by their perceptions of these centers' attributes within economic activities, which subsequently produce outcomes spanning economic, social, environmental, and corporate responsibility dimensions—further reinforcing the incentives for investment. These findings resonate with management perspectives emphasizing the role of shopping centers within broader social and economic frameworks. To sustain competitive advantage, shopping centers adopt and implement frameworks aligned with both economic and social objectives. These results are consistent with those reported by Yusuf et al. (2022) and Wang (2016).

Shopping centers contribute to sustainable urban development when appropriately planned, constructed, and operated. Their impacts manifest in four primary domains: socio-cultural development, urban economic growth, social responsibility advancement, and entrepreneurial development. The concept of sustainable development aims to balance current human needs with the protection of future generations' interests, serving as a cornerstone in urban planning. Shopping centers reflect emerging economic opportunities within cities and facilitate social interactions linked to tourism, culture, and community activities—some of which yield positive economic effects. These outcomes can be understood through sustainable urban development theory, which integrates economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

Moreover, they align with growth pole theory, which posits that geographic clustering of economic units stimulates broader economic activity, becoming catalysts for development. These findings corroborate studies by Medić et al. (2024) and Han et al. (2019).

In light of the role of external drivers in entrepreneurs' and investors' decisions to invest in shopping centers, efficient management is recommended in key areas: commercial center location, tenant mix, structural characteristics, facilities management, collective marketing, financial and accounting administration, and lifestyle alignment. The growth and success of shopping centers depend on effective management practices that remain adaptive to evolving trends and market shifts. Therefore, efficient management is critical for investors, and center managers are encouraged to implement appropriate governance structures and adhere to industry standards to foster and stimulate investment. Maintaining open communication channels to build mutual trust and promote sustainable relationships with all stakeholders is essential. Managers should utilize integrated internal and external communication strategies, capitalizing on the shopping center environment, available products and services, and particularly public relations as a tool for ongoing engagement with investors.

Given the significance of intrinsic motivations in selecting shopping centers and their influence on sustainable urban development, managers should focus on strengthening the motivational climate for investors. Emphasis should be placed on facilitating operational efficiency, market success, and property value preservation, alongside strategic planning aimed at expanding the customer base and increasing market share. Additionally, transforming the shopping experience through technological integration and multichannel retail strategies is advised to unlock new growth opportunities for shopping centers.

Regarding the influence of shopping center characteristics and investor motivations on sustainable urban development, urban planners, economists, and cultural policymakers are advised to prioritize the development of shopping centers based on thorough feasibility studies. Furthermore, mechanisms should be established to grant investors and entrepreneurs autonomy in determining their business trajectories. Licensing processes must explicitly incorporate obligations toward community responsibilities to ensure social accountability.

Future research is recommended to employ systematic methodologies, such as the Strauss and Corbin approach, explore differentiated perspectives among investors and tenants, investigate various types of commercial complexes, and extend the inquiry beyond Tehran to other provincial capitals. Limitations of the present study include its cross-sectional design and exclusive focus on Tehran's market.

References

- Alinizzi, M., Haider, H., & Alresheedi, M. (2022). Assessing the traffic congestion hazard period due to commuters' home-to-shopping center departures after COVID-19 curfew timings. *Computation*, *10*(8), 132.
- Aziz, F., Adnan, Y. M., Baharum, Z. A., & Foudzy, N. M. (2024). Critical Review of Institutional Real Estate Investment Decision-Making Models. *Journal of Surveying, Construction and Property*, *15*(1), 15-28.
- Bolomope, M., Amidu, A.-R., Filippova, O., & Levy, D. (2021). Property investment decision-making behaviour amidst market disruptions: an institutional perspective. *Property Management*, *39*(1), 1-21.
- Cleland, J. A. (2017). The qualitative orientation in medical education research. *Korean journal of medical education*, *29*(2), 61.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). The general causality orientations scale: Self-determination in personality. *Journal of research in personality*, *19*(2), 109-134.
- Gao, C., Wang, F., Hu, X., & Martinez, J. (2023). Research on sustainable design of smart cities based on the Internet of Things and ecosystems. *Sustainability*, *15*(8), 6546.
- Garg, A. K., & Steyn, S. (2015). The ideal tenant mix and shopping centre size for the proposed Thatchfield convenience centre. *International Journal of Business and Management*, *10*(1), 243.
- Gonçalves, T. E., Guimarães, P., & Cachinho, H. (2020). The role of shopping centres in the metropolization process in Fortaleza (Brazil) and Lisbon (Portugal). *Human Geographies- Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geography*, *14*(2), 198-214.
- Han, H., Sahito, N., Thi Nguyen, T. V., Hwang, J., & Asif, M. (2019). Exploring the features of sustainable urban form and the factors that provoke shoppers towards shopping malls. *Sustainability*, *11*(17), 4798.
- Jajuga, K., & Ronka-Chmielowiec, W. (2015). *Financial Investments and Insurance-Global Trends and the Polish Market*: Publishing House of Wrocław University of Economics.
- Križan, F., Kunc, J., Bilková, K., & Novotná, M. (2021). Transformation and Sustainable Development of Shopping Centers: Case of Czech and Slovak Cities. *Sustainability*, *14*(1), 62.
- Krowicki, P., & Maciejewski, G. (2024). Shopping centres as a retail format. In *Shopping Centre Marketing*: Taylor & Francis.

- Kunc, J., Križan, F., Novotná, M., & Bilková, K. (2022). Social dimension of shopping centers' operation: Managerial perspectives. *Sustainability*, 14(2), 709.
- María Durán, A., Mosquera, P., & Vega, M. (2017). Analysis of Public Relations Management as a Sustainable Pillar in Ecuadorian Organizations in Different Contexts. In *Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Governance: Concepts, Perspectives and Emerging Trends in Ibero-America* (pp. 199-222): Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Marona, B., & Wilk, A. (2016). Tenant mix structure in shopping centres: some empirical analyses from Poland. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, 4(2), 51-65.
- Matthysen, A., Pelsler, T., & Prinsloo, J. (2019). Key relationship principles for retail tenants and shopping centre management. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 16(1), 73-105.
- Medić, S., Atanacković Jeličić, J., & Rapaić, M. (2024). Advancing Social and Economic Sustainability in Urban Areas: A Methodology for Determining Architectural Programs of Shopping Centers. *Sustainability*, 16(8), 3264.
- Mendilcioğlu, R. F., & Goudarzi, S. M. (2019). A sustainable solution of urban revitalization: Transformations of shopping malls.
- Mishra, K., Boynton, L., & Mishra, A. (2014). Driving employee engagement: The expanded role of internal communications. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 51(2), 183-202.
- Monteiro, J., Sousa, N., Coutinho-Rodrigues, J., & Natividade-Jesus, E. (2024). Challenges ahead for sustainable cities: An urban form and transport system review. *Energies*, 17(2), 409.
- Navas, R., Chang, H. J., Khan, S., & Chong, J. W. (2021). Sustainability transparency, and trustworthiness of traditional and blockchain ecolabels: A comparison of generations X and Y consumers. *Sustainability*, 13(15), 8469.
- Newell, G. (2021). There is a need for more research on the Asian real estate markets. *Journal of Property Investment & Finance*, 39(1), 3-8.
- Ng, C. F. (2003). Satisfying shoppers' psychological needs: From public market to cyber-mall. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23(4), 439-455.
- Ortegón-Cortázar, L., & Royo-Vela, M. (2017). Attraction factors of shopping centers: Effects of design and eco-natural environment on intention to visit. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, 26(2), 199-219.

Padmapriya, V., & Sujatha, D. (2021). Future of sustainable smart cities: An insight. In *Blockchain for Smart Cities* (pp. 17-34): Elsevier.

Qureshi, H. A., & Ünlü, Z. (2020). Beyond the paradigm conflicts: A four-step coding instrument for grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1609406920928188.

Riaz, H., Amina, N., Khan, M. A., Iqbal, A., Irfan, A., Ishitaq, H., . . . Shahbaz, I. (2024). Role of spatial efficiency, layout planning, and sustainability in the success of shopping malls. *Advances in Civil and Architectural Engineering*, 15(28), 58-75.

Samadkulov, M. (2024). The Urbanization Economy: Difficulties And Approaches For Sustainable Growth. *International journal of artificial intelligence*, 4(03), 258-263.

Shi, Y.-s., Wu, J., & Wang, S.-y. (2015). Spatio-temporal features and the dynamic mechanism of shopping center expansion in Shanghai. *Applied Geography*, 65, 93-108.

Shoozan, A., & Mohamad, M. (2024). *Application of Interview Protocol Refinement Framework in Systematically Developing and Refining a Semi-structured Interview Protocol*. Paper presented at the SHS Web of Conferences.

Teller, C., & Alexander, A. (2014). Store managers—the seismographs in shopping centres. *European journal of marketing*, 48(11/12), 2127-2152.

Vass, S. (2012). Investing in commercial real estate: An analysis of the purchasing power in Stockholm's retail areas.

Walker, H., Pope, J., Morrison-Saunders, A., Bond, A., Diduck, A. P., Sinclair, A. J., Retief, F. (2024). Identifying and promoting qualitative methods for impact assessment. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 1-12.

Wang, Q. (2016). The factors that determine shopping centre rent in Wuhan, China. *Journal of Property Investment & Finance*, 34(2), 172-185.

Waszak, K. (2015). The key success factors of investing in shopping malls, based on the example of the Polish commercial real estate market. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*(381), 455-468.

Yusuf, A., Rahman, K. A. A. A., Omar, W. N. F. W., Yusuf, N., Zaini, F., Utaberta, N., & Mohammed, A. A. (2022). *Measuring Facilities Management Practice and Consumers' Satisfaction: A Case Study of Shopping Malls in Sarawak*. Paper presented at the Design-Decoded 2021: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Design Industries & Creative Culture, Design Decoded 2021, 24-25 August 2021, Kedah, Malaysia.

Explaining the Selection and Investment Model in Mixed-Use Commercial Complexes with Emphasis on Urban Sustainability

Zhenjing, G., Chupradit, S., Ku, K. Y., Nassani, A. A., & Haffar, M. (2022). Impact of employees' workplace environment on employees' performance: a multi-mediation model. *Frontiers in public health, 10*, 890400.

Zhou, R., Wang, C., Bao, D., & Xu, X. (2024). Shopping Mall Site Selection Based on Consumer Behavior Changes in the New Retail Era. *Land, 13*(6), 855.

COPYRIGHTS

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, as long as the original authors and source are cited. No permission is required from the authors or the publishers.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The current study has not received any grant, fund or contribution from private or government institutions. Also, the authors declare that there is no conflict of interests

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Authenticity of the texts, honesty and fidelity has been observed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author/s confirmed no conflict of interest.