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## Commentary: It's time to get shoppers excited again about the Great Singapore Sale

Is the Great Singapore Sale on right now? Once hotly anticipated, GSS needs to find fresh ways of exciting shoppers beyond giving them the best deals for their inflation-shrunk dollar, say Nanyang Business School's Charlene Chen, Elison Lim, and Kuangjie Zhang.



People walk inside a shopping mall in Singapore. (File photo: AFP/Roslan Rahman)



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SINGAPORE: Did you know we're currently in the middle of the Great Singapore Sale? Some of us may not have noticed a particular buzz around this [extensive sales event running from Sep 9 to Oct 10](#).

The Great Singapore Sale (GSS) has been touted as the major shopping spree of the year since its inception in 1994. For more than a month, [retail prices](#) - from fashion and



purchases to enjoy the huge savings. According to the Singapore Tourism Board, in June and July 2005 when the GSS took place, retail sales increased by about 10 per cent and visitor arrivals by 9 per cent (compared to the year before).

The earlier generations may fondly recall the glory days of the GSS, which included fashion shows, performances by regional artistes, exhibitions and sales of limited-edition items. But for years now, people have bemoaned the lacklustre quality of the GSS.

## **IS GREAT SINGAPORE SALE STILL RELEVANT?**

One of the biggest changes in the past 10 years is clearly the seismic shift in the retail landscape brought by e-commerce. Online shopping giants like Lazada launched in Singapore a decade ago, with Shopee and Amazon Prime following a few years after.

Increasingly tech-savvy shoppers are comfortable with scrolling for the best online deals offered on global websites. Sales events are now a dime a dozen – from Black Friday that originated from the United States and Singles' Day from China (which in turn led to the rise of the monthly “double digit sales day”), to specialised fairs like the Singapore Baby Fair or consumer electronics exhibition COMEX.

The fact is, consumers no longer have to wait till the GSS to get good deals. All year round, consumers are inundated with sales messages, receive discounts and special promotions, or collect vouchers through in-app games. Shoppers make good use of opportunities to save whenever they can, especially as everyone's wallet shrinks with rising inflation.

It is increasingly difficult to get consumers excited about the GSS, if it no longer feels as special as before.

That said, it would be a pity to do away with the GSS. Generations of shoppers who grew up with it still hold nostalgic feelings towards it. And as a way to continue helping the economy, it still has potential to help locals spend without breaking the bank and to attract tourist dollars.

## TAPPING ON EXCITEMENT AROUND FORMULA ONE

In recent years, the GSS has made considerable effort to stay attractive. The Singapore Retailers Association launched the GoSpree app to offer coupons for redemption instore in 2017.

In the 2018 edition, the GSS enticed shoppers with two days when the Goods and Services Tax was absorbed. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the GSS made its online debut in 2020 and joined forces with Lazada in 2021 to boost online sales.

There are signs that excitement for the GSS can still be revived, with the spotlight on it being a unique experience – not just another sale - for locals and tourists alike.

Moving the GSS from its usual June and July period to encompass the Formula One weekend for this year's edition rides on the path of post-pandemic recovery.

There are opportunities aplenty to capitalise on the excitement and tourist arrivals around F1's spectacular night race to create an atmosphere of celebration, fun and indulgence. Organisers and retailers could offer flash sales and events around the racing theme, including promotional games to make "deal-hunting" pitstops across participating businesses through the GSS month.

The contract for Singapore to host the Formula One Grand Prix has been renewed till 2028. But whether future GSS events are held around the F1 races or at the mid-year – the historical GSS timing which fits well with local shopper behaviour due to mid-year bonuses, school holidays and high tourist arrival volumes – it should ideally be held in the same period every year for greater memorability and anticipation among shoppers.

### HOW TO REVIVE THE GSS

Despite the attractiveness of e-commerce, the pandemic kept consumers away from physical stores for the past two years and more. Measures like checking in at every store with SafeEntry or TraceTogether deterred some shoppers from casually entering a shop to browse.

Now that almost all COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, consumers may yearn to visit brick-and-mortar stores once more - to try on shoes, touch the material of clothing or feel how the latest mobile phone sits in their hands, before finalising a purchase.

While online shopping engages us through sight and sound, retailers can seek to engage the other senses: Smell, taste and touch. Pop-up food stalls, restaurant weeks and carnivals can entice customers back to the malls.

It might be challenging to compete with online shopping platforms solely on discounts and deals. Instead, retailers could look beyond that to consider how to create an integrated retail experience, such as issuing e-vouchers for redemption at physical stores, or collaborating with F&B establishments to promote cross-category consumption, such as offering dining vouchers with a minimum in-store retail spending.

Younger consumers who consider online shopping a way of life could be drawn in by novel retail experiences that could include augmented reality, art installations or livestreaming. Experiences that entertain them and provide shareable content lean into the habits of the digital natives.

The GSS doesn't have to slide into irrelevance. Concerted efforts are needed to re-establish the uniqueness and vibrancy of this national shopping event. It is high time to put the great back into the GSS again.

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