

Brand Consciousness among Young Indian Consumers

Ved Agrawal

Vasant Valley School

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ABSTRACT

Today, brand consciousness is becoming a defining feature of contemporary consumer behaviour, particularly among adolescents and young adults in emerging economies. For a country like India, rising incomes, rapid digitalisation and increasing exposure to global brands have transformed how young consumers perceive and engage with branded products.

This study examines the role that brand awareness, perception and value considerations play in shaping consumer choice among Indian adolescents and young adults. Using a primary survey of 85 respondents across different age and gender groups, the study analyses purchasing behaviour, brand preferences, willingness to pay and the influence of advertising and social media on brand consciousness.

The findings from the study are interesting. They reveal that brand consciousness develops early, is strongly driven by perceived quality and trust and not blindly driven by brand loyalty; rather it is balanced by price sensitivity rather than blind brand loyalty. The paper contributes to marketing and consumer research by highlighting the evolving nature of brand equity among young consumers in emerging markets and its implications for firms, policymakers and educators.

1. Introduction

Brands are crucial in today's markets because they convey quality, reduce information asymmetry and influence consumer preferences,. According to traditional economic theory, consumers make logical decisions based on utility and price. However, behavioural and marketing research has shown that psychological, social and emotional elements have a major impact on purchasing decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Therefore, in consumer marketplaces, branding functions both as a symbolic as well as an economic mechanism.

An especially intriguing country for researching brand consciousness is India. At almost 29% of its total population, the nation boasts the biggest youth population in the world. Digital media is widely available and there is a tendency toward rising disposable income. Social media exposes teenagers and young adults to international companies and influencer marketing, resulting in aspirational lives at a young age. Younger consumers are also affected by price sensitivity and financial limitations. Because of this, brand-driven decision-creation becomes more nuanced than simple brand loyalty.

This study investigates how Indian teenagers and young adults' brand awareness and perception affect their purchasing decisions. It investigates if perceived quality, value for money and trust still influence young customers' purchasing decisions, or if branding and image are their main motivators. The study provides information pertinent to price decisions, marketing strategy and customer welfare by fusing primary survey data with well-established branding theory.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Consciousness and Brand Equity

Brand consciousness refers to the degree to which consumers are aware of, appreciate and favour branded products while making purchases. According to Aaker (1991), brand recognition, perceived quality, brand loyalty and brand associations are among the assets associated with a brand's name and symbol. These resources increase value for businesses and consumers alike.

When consumers have positive, distinctive and strong associations with a brand, there is substantial brand equity (Keller, 2013). Brands facilitate decision-making, lower perceived risk and foster emotional bonds. Branding has changed over time, particularly with younger consumers, from simple identification to the development of identity signals and lifestyle connotations.

2.2 Brand Awareness, Perception and Consumer Choice

Brand awareness affects customer choice by raising the possibility that a brand will be remembered when making a purchase (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Even when there are only slight objective differences, well-known brands are frequently thought to be more dependable and of higher quality. This impression boosts trust and lessens uncertainty.

Consumer behaviour research indicates that brand attachment is significantly influenced by emotional and symbolic connotations, particularly in young adults and adolescents (Belk, 1988). Brands are especially important during early life stages because they serve as indicators of identity, prestige and social affiliation.

2.3 Willingness to Pay and Price Sensitivity

The highest price a customer is willing to pay for a good or service is referred to as willingness to pay. Because consumers connect strong brands with superior quality, dependability and status, they frequently fetch higher prices (Aaker, 1991). Since brand loyalty and emotional attachment outweigh price disparities, brand-conscious consumers are typically less price sensitive (Keller, 2013).

Recent research, however, indicates that younger customers are increasingly weighing value for money against brand preference, particularly in emerging nations where financial limitations are still significant (Kapferer, 2012).

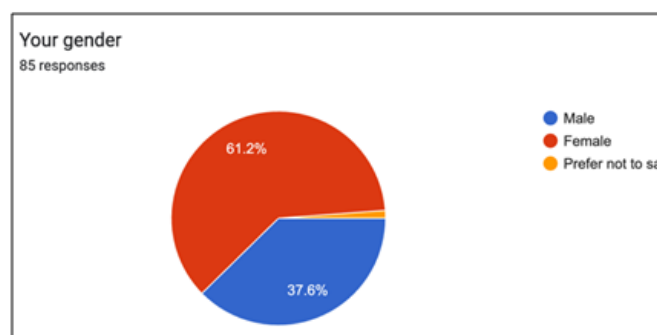
2.4 Advertising, Social Media and Influencers

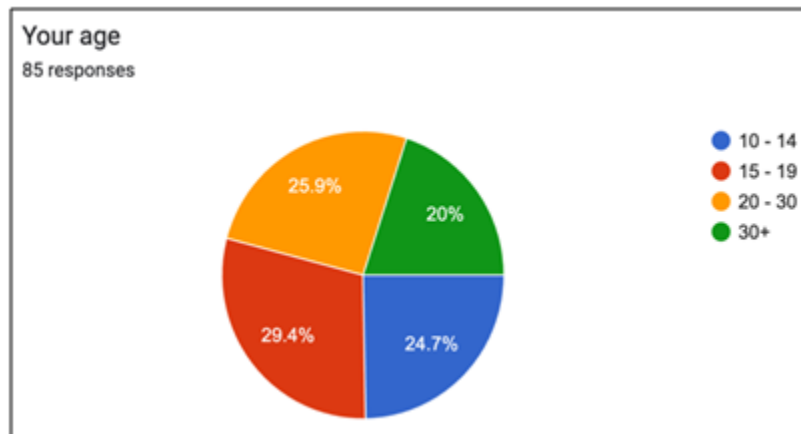
Building brand recognition and influencing perception are two important functions of advertising. Brand recall and aspiration are strengthened by emotional and lifestyle-based advertising (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This effect is further enhanced by social media and influencer marketing, which offer social proof through user-generated content, peer validation and endorsements.

Influencers also have a greater influence on brand attitudes and purchase intentions among teenagers and young adults because they are seen as relevant and trustworthy (Keller, 2013). However, if the brand consistently provides quality and value will determine how effective these techniques are in the long run.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design using a primary survey-based approach. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 85 respondents across three age groups: early adolescents (10-14 years), teenagers (15-19 years) and young adults (20-30 years). Both male and female respondents participated.



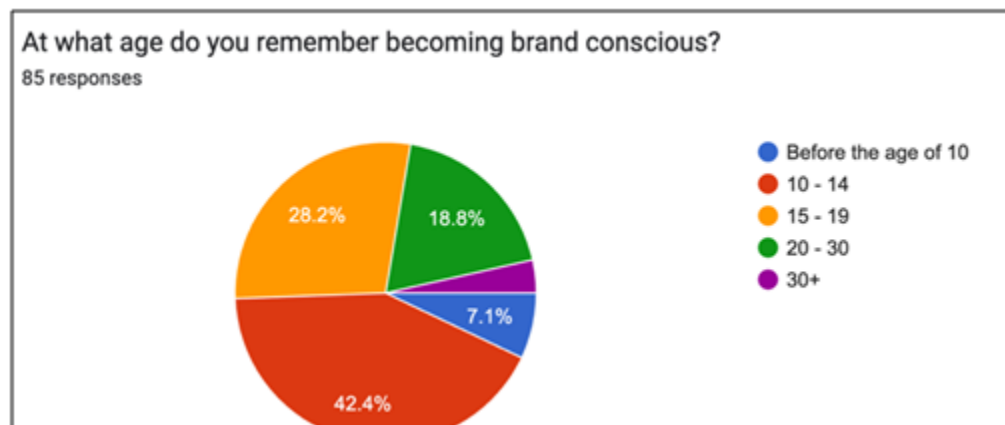


The questionnaire captured information on demographic characteristics, frequency of purchasing branded products, preferred product categories, brand preferences, perceived quality, willingness to pay, price sensitivity and the influence of advertising and social media. Responses were analysed using percentage-based analysis and simple comparative interpretation to identify patterns across age and gender groups.

4. Empirical Findings

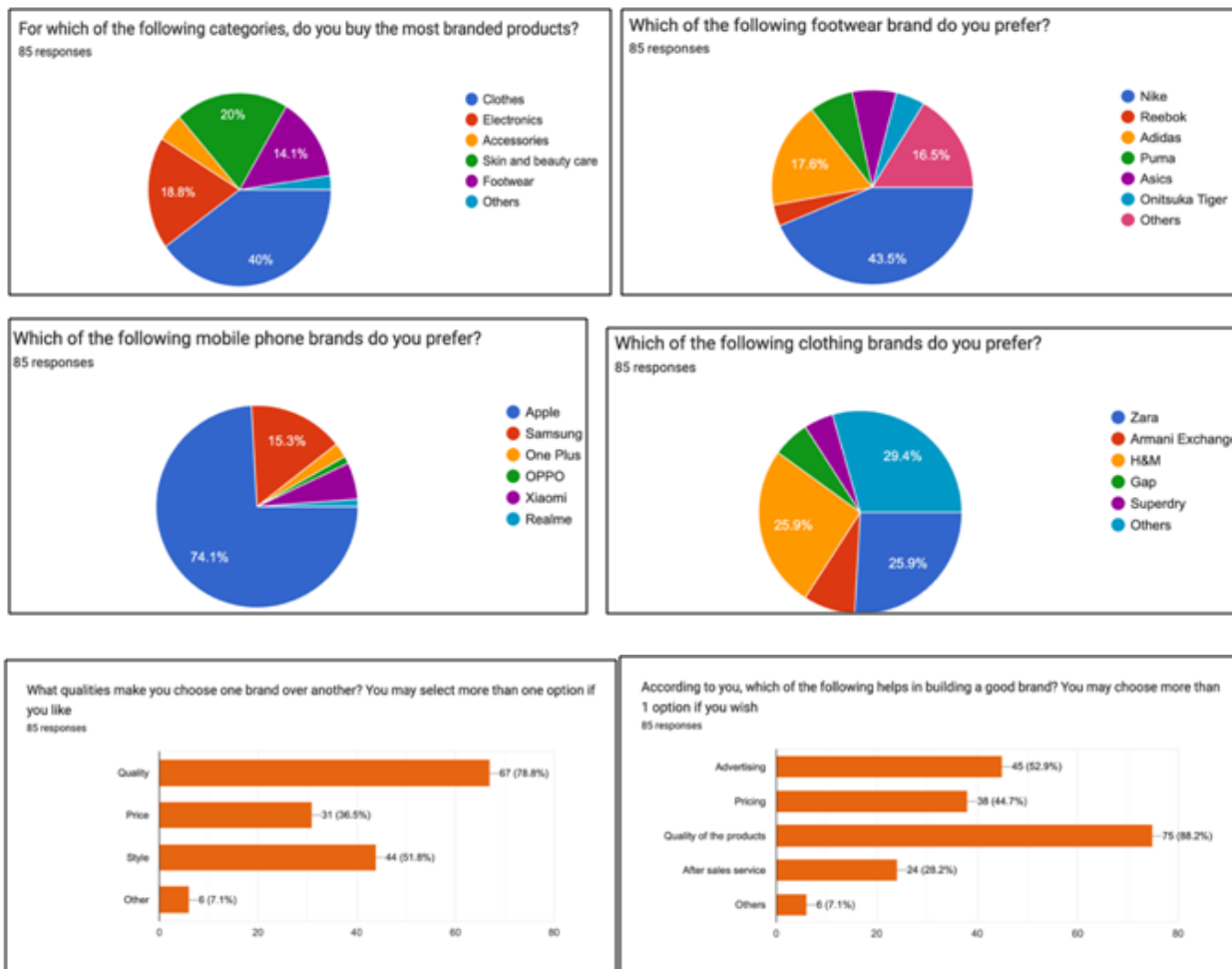
4.1 Early Development of Brand Consciousness

The findings indicate that brand consciousness emerges at a relatively young age in India. A significant proportion of respondents reported becoming brand aware during early adolescence, highlighting the role of early exposure to advertising, social media and peer influence. Brand awareness strengthens further with age and income, suggesting that purchasing power reinforces brand-driven behaviour.



4.2 Product Categories and Brand Preferences

Branded clothing, footwear and mobile phones emerged as the most preferred categories among the Indian respondents. Global brands such as Nike and Reebok for footwear, Zara and H&M for clothing and Apple for mobile phones demonstrated particularly high brand equity, reflecting strong associations with quality, performance and status. These categories are closely linked to identity expression, making them central to brand-conscious consumption.



4.3 Perceived Quality as the Primary Driver

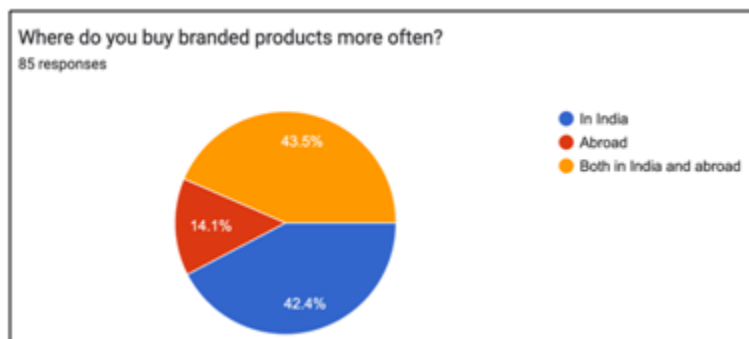
Across all categories, perceived quality emerged as the most important factor influencing brand preference and brand building among the Indian audience. Respondents consistently associated branded products with superior quality and reliability, reinforcing the idea that trust remains central to brand equity.

4.4 Balanced Brand and Price Consciousness

Contrary to the notion of blind brand loyalty, a majority of respondents in India identified as both brand conscious and price conscious. This suggests that young consumers actively evaluate trade-offs between brand appeal and affordability. While they value brands, they remain sensitive to price and are willing to switch if perceived value is insufficient.

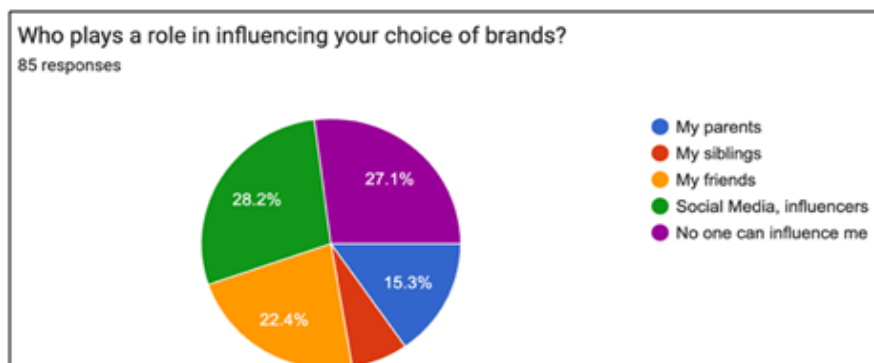
4.5 Brand Origin and Global Exposure

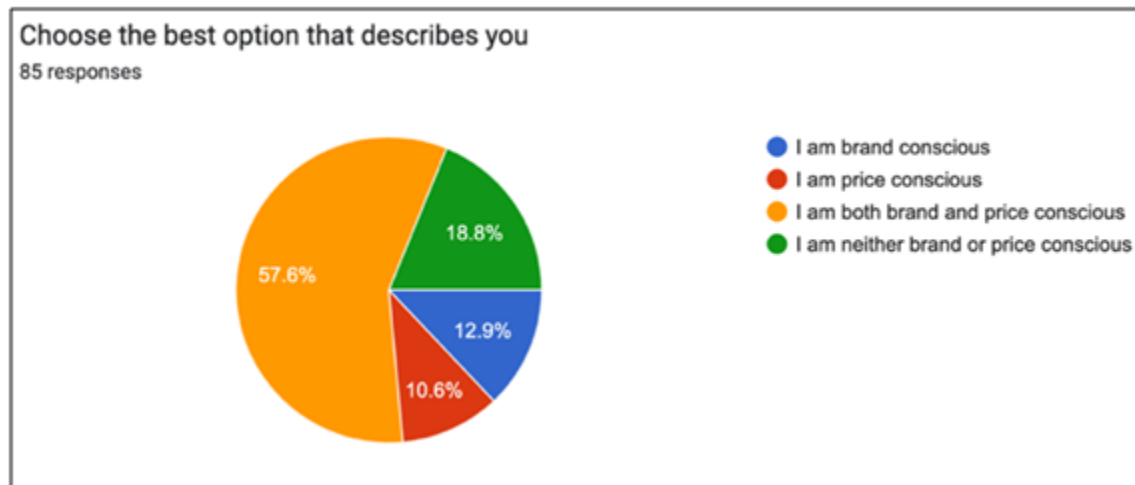
Purchasing behaviour showed that 42% of respondents in India bought branded products primarily in India, while 44% purchased both in India and abroad. This indicates significant global exposure and openness, but also suggests that brand origin is less important than perceived value, quality and relevance.



4.6 Role of Advertising and Social Media

Advertising, social media and influencers play a meaningful role in shaping awareness and aspiration among the Indian respondents. However, their influence appears to be supporting rather than decisive. Long-term preference is driven more by product experience, perceived quality and trust than by promotion alone.





5. Discussion

5.1 Marketing Implications

The findings indicate that in the Indian market, branding strategies targeting adolescents and young adults must move beyond visibility and aspirational positioning. While advertising and influencer marketing play an important role in building awareness, Indian consumers, especially the younger segments, demonstrate a strong tendency to evaluate brands on perceived value and quality.

This is especially relevant in India, where a **“value-for-money” mindset coexists with aspirational consumption**. Even among brand-conscious youth, purchasing decisions are rarely driven by brand image alone. Instead, consumers actively compare alternatives across price points, particularly in categories such as apparel, electronics and personal care.

Additionally, the rise of **digitally native Indian brands** (such as boAt, Nykaa and Mamaearth) highlights a shift in brand-building dynamics. These brands have successfully competed with global players by combining **competitive pricing, strong digital engagement and perceived quality**, reinforcing the study’s finding that trust and value outweigh brand origin.

For marketers, this implies that:

- **Product performance must consistently match brand promise**
- **Pricing strategies should reflect perceived value, not just positioning**
- **Digital engagement must translate into real product satisfaction**, not just awareness

5.2 Economic Implications

From an economic perspective, brand consciousness among young Indian consumers creates both opportunities and constraints for firms. In the short run, strong brands can command price premiums due to perceived quality and trust. However, the observed price sensitivity suggests that such premiums are not absolute and are constantly tested against alternatives.

India's highly competitive and fragmented market structure further intensifies this dynamic. The presence of both global brands and strong domestic competitors ensures that consumers have access to a wide range of price-quality combinations. As a result, **brand equity in India is more contestable and dynamic compared to developed markets.**

Moreover, the rapid expansion of **e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart and Myntra** has increased price transparency and comparison, further reinforcing rational decision-making among young consumers. Discounting strategies, seasonal sales and online reviews play a significant role in shaping perceived value.

Thus, while branding remains a source of competitive advantage, firms in India must continuously:

- Justify price premiums through **consistent quality and innovation**
- Adapt to **high price transparency and competitive pressure**
- Recognize that **brand loyalty is conditional rather than absolute**

5.3 Consumer Welfare and Policy Implications

The early emergence of brand consciousness in India raises important concerns regarding consumer welfare, particularly given the country's large adolescent population and increasing digital exposure.

With the rapid growth of **social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and short-video apps**, young consumers are increasingly influenced by influencer marketing and peer-driven content. While such exposure enhances awareness, it also raises concerns about **misleading endorsements, unrealistic lifestyle portrayals and impulse-driven consumption.**

In this context, regulatory frameworks such as the **Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) guidelines on influencer advertising** and provisions under the **Consumer Protection Act (2019)** play a critical role. These frameworks mandate disclosure of paid promotions and aim to ensure transparency in advertising.

However, regulation alone may not be sufficient. There is a strong need to promote:

- **Financial literacy among adolescents**, particularly around spending and saving decisions
- **Critical evaluation of digital content**, including influencer endorsements
- Awareness of **value-for-money and opportunity cost**

Educational institutions and policymakers can also play a key role by integrating **consumer education into school curricula**, helping young individuals become more informed and rational decision-makers.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that brand consciousness among Indian adolescents and young adults is both early-forming and value-driven. While branding has evolved into a powerful tool of identity and aspiration, young consumers are not passive recipients of marketing influence. Instead, they balance brand preference with price sensitivity and remain open to both domestic and global brands that deliver value.

Perceived quality and trust emerge as the strongest foundations of brand equity, outweighing advertising and promotional appeal in the long run. For marketers, the findings underscore the importance of aligning brand promises with actual performance. For policymakers and educators, they highlight the need to strengthen consumer awareness and financial literacy. Overall, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of brand-driven consumer behaviour in emerging markets.

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