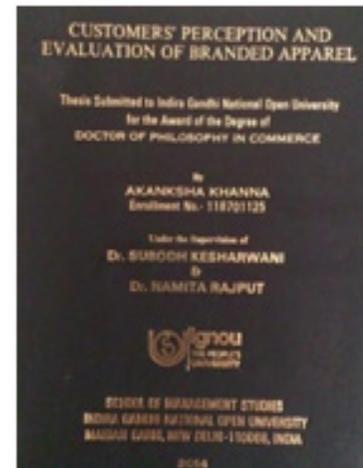


Customers' Perception and Evaluation of Branded Apparel

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Abstract

The present study titled "Customers' perception and evaluation of branded apparel" focusses on the behavior and attitude of young Indian customers in the age group of 18-25 years towards branded apparels. The present study aims at increasing understanding of Indian Customers' brand choice for global and domestic brands. Customers' perception and evaluation is an integral part of Consumer buying behaviour. India is an emerging consumer market. With the advent of various national and international brands being available in the Indian market for several decades, research in the area of branded apparel becomes imperative to understand consumer buying behaviour. It has been observed that customers have a wide range of choices for purchasing apparels and they have no clear vision to what they buy and when to buy. Today's consumption in young Indian customers has no confines - they work and splurge money for more non-essential products and this has perhaps been an important driving factor and evolution in the Indian Apparel Retail sector. Statistical tools and models used for analysis include Structural Equation Modelling, Mean and Rank, Independent sample student t- test and one-way ANOVA. A sample of 2000 respondents of Delhi/NCR, Bangalore and Chandigarh was considered for the study. These insights of young consumer behavior will be imperative in strategy formulation and facilitate to gain from the situation which is instrumental in increasing the turnover. This segment of society i.e. young customers is very important group amongst all the groups in the society because major purchases in the family, is done for this segment and revolves around this segment. This makes it all the more important to understand the psychology, mindset, motivators, satisfiers and dissatisfiers. In the present study, Parameters such as their shopping habits, gender differences while shopping, and important factors that influence their purchase decision have been studied. This study developed apparel buying behaviour model on the basis of 5 dimensions namely Store attributes, Product attributes, Reference Groups, Promotional factors and Consumer characteristics. The study suggests causal linkages among these dimensions, they are correlated with each other at a statistically significant level and influence the buyers purchase behavior. This study contributes to academia by providing a conceptual framework to understand apparel buying behaviour of young Indian customers which can be used by practioners to improve their retail strategies and increase their retail sales.

Keywords: ANOVA, Customer, Mean, Retail, Structural Equation Modeling

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1. Introduction

In the present study, Customers' perception and evaluation towards branded apparels has been analysed. Buying behaviour of young Indian customers in the age group of 18-25 years has been examined. Parameters such as their shopping habits, gender differences while shopping, and important factors that

influence their purchase decision have been studied. The need for this research is due to the multifaceted and complex nature of the shopping habits with regards to these customers, especially within a multicultural society such as India.

Young customers are more vulnerable to the changes in the fashion industry are easy to be influenced by fashion. Likewise, they are very concern about their looks and appearances.

University students nowadays often gain money from their parents which mean they are less concerned about their spending. During their leisure, the top rated activities they will go for are socializing with friends and shopping. India has become an attractive and striking market for many foreign companies. Considering its large population and emerging young professional middle class, many apparel brand companies have begun to compete for the Indian customer's attention. However, little is known about what this customer looks for when considering apparel brands. An attempt has been made to gain insights of young customers' buying behaviour towards branded apparels, by setting appropriate objectives for the present study.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the different factors influencing young consumers buying behaviour in apparel retail segment.
2. To empirically investigate the cause-and-effect relationship among Consumer buying behavior dimension (namely Store Attributes, Product Attributes, Reference Groups, Consumer Characteristics and Promotional Factors)
3. To investigate the buying behaviour which constitutes: Brand Awareness, Brand Preference, shopping habits, shopping expenditure and shopping frequency giving a gender perspective view.
4. To assess the changing trends of fashion and branded apparels in India
5. To examine the issues, perspectives and policies with respect to Apparel industry in India

3. Hypotheses of the Study

3.1 Cause-and-effect Relationship among the Dimensions of Consumer Buying Behaviour

H₁: The Promotional factors affect positively the Reference Groups.

H₂: The Reference Groups affects positively the Store Attributes.

H₃: The Promotional factors affect positively the Store Attributes.

H₄: The Store Attributes affects positively the Product Attractiveness.

H₅: The Product Attractiveness affects positively the Consumer Characteristics and hence the buying behaviour towards branded Apparels.

3.2 Buying Behaviour Giving a Gender Perspective View

H₁: Males and females carry out differences in their buying behaviour dimensions.

H₂: Males and females carry out differences in their shopping expenditure

H₃: Males and females carry out differences in their shopping frequency

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

To evaluate the buying behaviour of young Indian customers towards branded apparels, a questionnaire has been developed to seek information on various issues related with apparel buying behaviour such as relative importance of various dimensions of apparel buying behaviour and their key variables, shopping expenditure, shopping frequency and brand awareness. The questions pertaining to different dimensions of apparel buying behaviour and their key variables have been used to investigate the cause-and-effect relationship between these dimensions. The shopping habits of young customers have also been analysed from gender perspective to examine the dynamics of consumer buying behaviour. The questionnaires have been filled up by students and working professionals in Delhi/NCR, Bangalore and Chandigarh region, in the age group of 18-25 years. Secondary data has been collected from journals, corporate annual reports, management reports, and periodicals other publications. To satisfy these objectives of the study, the tools used include Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), Mean and Rank, Independent Sample student *t*-test and One-way ANOVA.

5. Major Findings of the Study

The study of apparel buying behaviour of young Indian customers is designed into three parts. In the first part of the study causality relationship among the dimensions of apparel buying behaviour has been investigated. In the second part of the study, dynamics of consumer buying behaviour from gender perspective has been analyzed along with the different dimensions of apparel buying behaviour and the third part of the study, evaluates the Changing fashion trends in India and apparel industry analysis. The changing consumer trends, market dynamics and policy initiatives taken by the Government of India are also assessed in this part.

5.1 Analysis of Cause-and-Effect Relationship between Apparel Buying Behaviour Dimensions

5.1.1 Important Dimensions of Consumer buying Behaviour and their Causal Linkages

Consumer market for branded apparel has become varied by store preferences, product preferences, personalisation, Reference Groups and promotional factors in the global market place. This study developed apparel buying behaviour model on the basis of 5 dimensions namely Store attributes, Product attributes, Reference Groups, Promotional factors and Consumer characteristics. These dimensions have been identified from previous literature on consumer behaviour.

The proponents of Consumer apparel buying behavior claim that there are causal linkages among Promotional factors, reference groups, Store Attributes, Product attributes and Consumer characteristics. That is, an outcome measure of a lower-level promotional factor dimension (leading indicator) may be an indicator or predictor of an outcome measure of a higher-level Consumer characteristics dimension (lagging indicator). This theoretically grounded relationship is examined with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and graphically presented with the help of path diagram. SEM estimates unknown coefficients in the set of linear structural by the maximum likelihood method using the correlation /variance-covariance matrix of observed variance.

5.2 Dynamics of Consumer Buying Behaviour towards Branded Apparels

In this competitive era marketer must be fully aware about the customer needs distinctly and separately as two groups males and females as regards what are they expecting from a brand, how they differ in their buying behaviour, factors which push them to purchase a particular brand, their total outlay, shopping frequency etc. to attain a competitive edge. This vital information can help the companies to formulate the strategies as per the customer needs & deliver them the products which customer want from the company which will be profitable for the company embedding gender perspective. Retailers and marketers should understand the immense diversity among consumers if they are to market apparel accurately and successfully.

5.2.1 Brand Awareness and Shopping Habits

The empirical findings reveal that customers in India are aware of most of the national and International brands and the prevalent brand culture omnipresent in the country.

Also the increase purchasing power of many urban Indians has led to more people being able to afford branded apparels. When respondents were asked that where they go for shopping for apparels, a major segment responded that they prefer mall over traditional shops and e-shopping.

Given the inflationary pressures on the household budget, Indian customers have become all the more value conscious. The access to both modern and traditional trade formats coupled with an awareness of various deals being offered in the market, allows the customer to make a more informed, value-for-money shopping decision.

5.2.2 Buying Behaviour Dimensions: Gender Perspective

The study has investigated whether buying behaviour of branded apparels differs between the genders. The independent samples t- test was used to find a difference between the means of two independent samples, which in this study refers to females and males with respect to the attributes applied while choosing branded apparel.

5.2.3 Key Measures under Different Dimensions of Apparel Buying Behaviour

5.2.3.1 Store Attributes Dimension

Store attributes are the store atmospherics and characteristics like facilities in the store, services provided by the store, store format etc. which influence the customer preferences regarding apparel purchase behaviour. In today's dynamic apparel market, Customers must be given a good reason to shop with one retailer than the other. Thus all the store attributes that are perceived as important by the market must be prioritised by the retailers to enhance customer satisfaction. Respondents have given their opinion on key measures under store attributes dimension and it has been found from the mean values of the variables Variety, Post transaction services and services by staff are still considered as the most influential factors favoring the customers' buying decisions. Results revealed that significant differences were found in the level of importance attributed by female and male respondents to the attributes of Physical facilities in a store and Variety. Female customers are more concerned about the physical facilities in a store in terms of spaciousness, adequate and convenient number of trial rooms to the customers with sufficient lighting and mirrors. It is also important for them that the store they go to shop for apparel has wide assortment of stock so that it facilitates them to make an easier choice

5.2.3.2 Product Attributes Dimension

Product attributes are the product features like style/design, quality, price, brand, fit, colour, newness, Public image driving,

accessories etc. In the clothing industry in particular, information on product attributes from a consumer perspective is extremely useful for marketers as it would help them to formulate effective product development and marketing strategies. Fit, Price, Quality and style are considered to be important factors taken into consideration by customers, while choosing the branded apparel product. Significant differences were found in the level of importance attributed by female and male respondents to the attributes of Style of apparels. It is revealed by the survey that 81 percent of the female respondents responded that while buying apparel, it is of utmost importance that they should be stylish and suit to their personality, whereas only 56 percent of their male counterparts favoured in favour of this variable. Style is a form of Self Expression that help the youngsters to cope with social situations. The right style provides them with acceptance and identity among peers and makes them feel trendy.

5.2.3.3 Reference Group Dimension

Customers buying intentions for branded apparel is strongly driven by reference groups. Reference groups are the external influencers like television programmes, magazines, consumers' favourite celebrities or stars, friends, family members, other persons etc. who influence the apparel buying behaviour of the consumers. The survey results revealed that 63 percent of females strongly agree that family and friends hold a strong opinion for them while they are shopping for apparels. For males, 51 percent strongly agreed regarding the importance of this variable. Thus females place more importance in building and maintain relationships and are more likely to be influenced by family members and peers while making their purchase decisions as compared to the opposite gender.

5.2.3.4 Consumer Characteristics Dimension

Consumer characteristics are the consumer attributes like involvement, fashion & brand consciousness, loyalty, emotion etc. which differs from customer to customer and also have effect on apparel buying behaviour. The most influential variables considered in this study under this dimension include: Fashion consciousness, preference to wear and try before purchase, Impulse buying behaviour, store image and brand loyalty. Significant differences were found in the level of importance attributed by female and male respondents to the attributes of Preference to wear and try before purchase, Store image and Brand Loyalty. 73 percent females strongly agreed that store image is important for them and 69 percent of them said they tend to visit the same shop for buying a particular brand and hence are more store loyal and brand loyal as compared to their male counterparts.

5.2.3.5 Promotional Factors Dimension

Promotion is the various promotional techniques adopted by the retail stores to attract and persuade customers. Today's youth is growing up in a more media fragmented and brand conscious environment than their elders. The idiosyncrasies they exhibit in their buying behavior today will very likely follow them as they enter the later years of adulthood. Therefore, Marketers should continue to reach out to these power spenders by pushing their products through various promotional offers such as discounts, coupons, visual displays, better packaging. Significant differences were found in the level of importance attributed by female and male respondents to the attributes of In-store promotions, Pricing techniques and visual displays. Female customers tend to be more influenced by various promotional techniques such as discounts, coupons, etc. when making decisions relating to apparel brands as they are more concerned with self-expression and gaining social approval as compared to males who are more rational in their approach. Visual displays act as a powerful stimulant for a female shopper and drives them to enter a store as compared to male shoppers who don't as such bother about the outside appearance of a store.

5.2.4 Shopping Expenditure and Shopping Frequency between Males and Females

In order to identify the dynamics of male and female buying behaviour with respect to Shopping Expenditure and shopping frequency, one - way ANOVA test has been used. However it is pertinent to mention that no statistical differences were found in the shopping expenditure and shopping frequency of the two genders and similar behavioral pattern was exhibited between the two groups. Males and females today have an equal level of exposure with respect to every little aspects of life. Be it education, career, work-life, extra -curricular activities etc. women are increasingly focussed and goal- oriented. Both the genders extensively make use of the information and communication technology and don't hold any gender differences attributable to shopping expenditure and shopping frequency. Younger males do not consider shopping as a feminine activity and are increasingly eager to shop for apparels as much as their counterparts.

5.3 Changing Fashion Trends in India and Apparel Industry

Customer market for fashion apparel has become more varied by in surge of designer brands, store brands, personalization and advertisements in the global market place of today. There is an increase in positive attitude towards western brands. In the present study, aspects pertaining to young customers' buying behaviour towards branded apparels have been examined. It is

observed that The Indian fashion industry has come at par with international standards. It has become one of the most happening and revenue generating industries of India.

The consumer wardrobe has changed from only 'need-based clothing' to 'occasion specific dressing' and is gradually becoming more 'detail oriented'.

6. Policy Implications and Suggestions for the Marketer

1. This study reveals that the five dimensions of apparel purchase behaviour i.e. Store attributes, product attributes, reference groups, Consumer characteristics and promotional factors, are the main dimensions that strongly influence the consumer buying behaviour. Thus the marketers must give due consideration to these attributes to attract and appeal the customers. As the study suggests, there are causal linkages among these dimensions. This strategic linkage process is the essence of the Consumer apparel buying behavior.
2. Under the store attributes dimension, it is revealed that variety, post- transaction services and services by staff are more relevant for store attributes. This shows that the apparel stores should have ample of variety to offer, suiting to the different demographic profiles. Merchandise should be easy to return, refund or adequate credit facilities should be available. The apparel store must provide free alteration facility to the customers. They should have trained and courteous staff who have adequate knowledge about apparel needs and provide focused attention to consumers.
3. Under the product attribute dimension, the customers prefer branded products and the apparel, which have good fit. Also affordability is an important criterion as many young college students depend on their parents for their monthly allowance. Though while buying branded products they do want quality assurance but spending on apparel beyond their budget often becomes a limitation for this group as they have budgetary constraints. Marketers should thus focus on delivering products and services which will meet the economic requirements of these customers by coming up with eco – range of branded apparels.
4. The study shows that in the reference group dimensions, family influence, friends favoring purchase and preference of parents are more relevant for reference groups. The marketer should consider all these factors while planning their strategies and promotional programs. The stores can also come up with reward programs for the customers who refer and recommend their friends to the store. The marketer may sponsor a reality show or any other programs of that kind in a TV channel or endorse a familiar celebrity for their stores. They could even sponsor various college fests in order to generate customers' interest which could act as a powerful stimulant to drive them to the apparel store
5. Under consumer characteristics dimensions, it is revealed that the items fashion consciousness, preference to wear and try before purchase, Impulse buying behaviour and brand loyalty are more relevant for consumer characteristics. So the marketers should develop strategies to be abreast with the changing trends in fashion and consumer tastes and keep wide assortment of stocks that display the latest fashion styles and trends. There should be adequate facilities available for the customer to wear and try the product before purchase. Retailers should focus on long term and profitable approach i.e. customer loyalty than merely focusing on gaining market share.
6. In the promotion dimension, it is inferred that all the items social media, pricing and visual displays are relevant. So the apparel store should do promotions aggressively, appropriately and attractively which are very much appeal to the customers. Marketers should even increase their visibility on social networking sites as this is the favorite pastime of youngsters who are hyper- active in the digital world. They can use social media as a platform to spread awareness about their brands, scheme and other discounts. Mobile marketing has now become a rage as many youngsters today prefer to receive updates about latest arrivals, sales and discounts through their mobiles which can serve as a promotional platform for the marketers.
7. Marketer must do away with unnecessary increase in overhead expenses and offer variety of products at cheaper prices. They must come up with good business models and have a whole new orientation to meet customer demands. The study represents the young consumers in the age group of 18-25years also called a 'Twixter'. For this group, marketers should focus on and emphasize the attributes that have been considered to be the most influential in buying decisions.
8. The study revealed the growth drivers and factors nurturing the Apparel Industry of India. These drivers can act as a push strategy for marketers to enhance their sales and tap the potential of the market. The marketers must play a decisive role to understand the Consumer buying behaviour for branded apparels and cater to this younger segment more profitably.
9. The study revealed the mall mania amongst the youth and the craze for shopping there. This has a very important implication for the marketer as they must take effective

steps to ensure that they create an entertaining shopping environment cognisant of the fact that the longer the shoppers' stay in a store and more goods they are exposed to.

10. For Indian shoppers, Consumers' wardrobe is shifting from need- based clothing to occasion specific dressing and is gradually becoming more detail- oriented. The types of apparels and availability for special occasions is making the consumer preferential. Consumers are willing to pay more to look trendy as per the theme of the occasion. Taking the gender perspective into consideration, it was revealed that female respondents place greater importance to attributes such as Physical facilities, Variety, Style, Family and friends, store image, Brand Loyalty, Preference to wear and try before purchase, and promotional factors as compared to their male counterparts. Female shoppers tend to be bargain seekers when it comes to apparels and their purchase decisions are significantly influenced by discount schemes.

Thus marketers must embed this in their strategies by coming up with appealing advertising, convenient locations, low prices for their female shoppers. Also, no significant differences were found in the habits of male and female buyers with respect to shopping expenditure and shopping frequency. Thus marketers must embed the same while setting prices for menswear and women swear apparels. Today's young male shoppers no longer consider shopping to be a feminine activity and are equally conscious of their looks and appearances. As the study revealed that males are increasingly becoming fashion conscious, marketers must come up with new kinds of styles, trendy colours and designs in the menswear apparel segment as well. Since the customers are becoming experimental in their approach, it is important that the marketers should also be innovative in the designs they come up with for the target group they are catering to.

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