

A Study on Branding Strategies and Their Influence on Consumer Purchase Decisions in the Apparel Industry

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ABSTRACT

The apparel industry is one of the most brand-driven and consumer-sensitive sectors of the modern economy. In a market where product differentiation based purely on material quality has become increasingly difficult, a brand's ability to generate trust, emotional resonance, and purchase preference has become the central determinant of competitive success. This study examines the influence of branding strategies on consumer purchase decisions in the apparel industry, focusing on brand awareness, brand image and associations, brand loyalty, and digital/social media branding as the key dimensions of analysis. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 165 respondents aged 18 to 40 years using stratified random sampling across urban and semi-urban areas in India. Data were analysed using percentage analysis, chi-square testing, and Pearson correlation analysis with SPSS software. The study finds a very strong positive correlation between brand awareness and purchase decisions ($r = 0.878$, $p < 0.01$), confirms a statistically significant association between income level and premium brand tolerance ($p = 0.046$), and identifies social media advertising and online customer reviews as the most influential digital branding touchpoints. The findings provide empirically grounded, actionable recommendations for apparel brand managers operating in India's rapidly growing and competitive apparel market.

KEYWORDS:

Branding Strategies, Brand Equity, Consumer Purchase Decisions, Brand Awareness, Brand Loyalty, Apparel Industry, Social Media Branding, Digital Branding.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global apparel industry generated revenues of approximately USD 1.7 trillion in 2023, making it one of the largest consumer-facing industries in the world economy. The Indian domestic apparel market, valued at approximately USD 82 billion in 2023–24 and growing at an estimated 12 percent per year, is projected to reach USD 135 billion by 2030. This growth is driven by rising incomes, rapid urbanization, a young and fashion-conscious population, and the explosive expansion of e-commerce, which has made branded apparel accessible to consumers far beyond the major metropolitan centers.

Branding, in the modern commercial sense, is far more than a logo or tagline. It is the accumulated result of every decision a company makes about how it presents itself to the world — from product design and packaging to pricing strategy, advertising, social media communication, in-store environments, and post-purchase engagement. When these decisions are consistent, coherent, and aligned with the values of a target consumer group, they create brand equity — the intangible but commercially significant premium that a brand adds to a product above and beyond its functional

value.

The apparel sector is an especially rich arena for studying branding dynamics because clothing is simultaneously a functional necessity and a medium of self-expression, social signalling, cultural identity, and aspirational communication. A brand that successfully builds emotional resonance alongside functional trust can sustain consumer loyalty across decades, while one that loses cultural relevance can fall from favor rapidly. This research examines the mechanisms through which branding strategies translate into consumer purchase decisions in the Indian apparel market, drawing on established theoretical frameworks, empirical primary data from 165 apparel consumers, and current industry data.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY PRIMARY OBJECTIVE:

- To examine the influence of branding strategies on consumer purchase decisions in the apparel industry.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the influence of brand awareness on consumer purchase intentions in the apparel sector.
- To analyse the impact of brand image and brand associations on consumer perceptions and purchase behaviour.
- To evaluate the role of brand loyalty in driving repeat purchase behaviour among apparel consumers.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rathore, Saha, Dhalmahapatra & Sambasivan (2024) studied how branding affects customer purchase decisions in the apparel industry using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory. Their findings revealed that brand image, brand trust, and emotional attachment strongly influence apparel purchase intention, and that effective branding strategies increase consumer confidence and long-term loyalty.

Ong et al. (2022) examined consumer behaviour in the clothing industry during and after the COVID-19 period, identifying that brand perception, pricing, product quality, and online shopping convenience significantly influenced consumer decisions. Strong online brand presence was found to increase customer engagement and purchasing behaviour.

Mandarić (2022) examined the influence of sustainability branding on consumer purchase intention in the fashion industry. Findings showed that environmentally responsible branding positively affects consumer attitudes toward fashion brands, particularly among younger generations who prefer apparel brands promoting ethical sourcing and eco-friendly production.

Kalsi (2023) investigated the impact of digital marketing strategies on Zara's consumer buying behaviour, finding that social media advertising, influencer marketing, and online engagement significantly improve brand loyalty and purchase decisions. Visual branding and personalized digital campaigns were identified as major influence factors.

Gigauri (2023) analysed the role of marketing and social influence in fashion-related purchase decisions, revealing that advertising campaigns, celebrity endorsements, and social media trends strongly influence consumer attitudes. Emotional appeal and fashion identity were identified as important determinants of apparel purchases.

Verma (2021) focused on consumer buying behaviour in the fashion industry, stating that consumers are attracted to apparel brands that reflect personality, lifestyle, and social identity. Brand reputation and customer experience were identified as major determinants of purchasing behaviour.

Sinha & Valluripalli (2025) analysed modern consumer buying behaviour in the apparel industry with special attention to branding and digital influence. Their findings showed that brand perception, pricing strategies, and social media communication all influence purchase decisions, and suggested that apparel companies should integrate branding with digital marketing strategies to improve customer retention.

The overall literature confirms that branding strategies — encompassing brand image, awareness, loyalty, digital marketing, celebrity endorsements, and sustainability — significantly shape consumer purchase decisions in the apparel industry. However, a notable gap remains: most studies were conducted in foreign contexts, and comparative research on the Indian apparel market, where consumer preferences are shaped by distinct cultural values, income dynamics, and regional diversity, remains limited. This study addresses that gap.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN:

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature.

SOURCE OF DATA:

- Primary Data
- Secondary Data

PRIMARY DATA:

Primary data were collected from apparel consumers through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) across five thematic sections covering brand awareness, brand image and associations, brand loyalty, digital branding, and purchase decision factors.

SECONDARY DATA:

Secondary data were collected from journals, industry reports, company websites, and previous research studies including McKinsey State of Fashion Reports, IBEF Textile & Apparel Reports, and academic publications from ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and MDPI.

SAMPLE SIZE:

The sample size of the study consists of 165 respondents, determined using the Yamane (1967) formula with a 5% margin of error.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE:

Stratified random sampling was used, stratifying the target population (urban and semi-urban consumers aged 18–40) by age group and gender to ensure representative coverage.

TOOLS USED FOR ANALYSIS:

- Percentage Analysis
- Chi-Square Test
- Pearson Correlation Analysis

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Objective 1: To Examine the Influence of Brand Awareness on Consumer Purchase Intentions Brand awareness is the degree to which consumers can recognize and recall a brand. In the apparel industry, brand awareness forms the gateway to the consumer's consideration set — brands that are not recalled cannot be chosen. The following tables present key brand awareness findings from the survey.

Table 1: Brand Awareness through Social Media

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	76	46
Agree	55	33
Neutral	23	14
Disagree	8	5
Strongly Disagree	3	2
Total	165	100

A total of 79% of respondents become aware of new apparel brands primarily through social media platforms, confirming that digital channels — particularly Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook — have become the dominant brand awareness medium for the 18–40 demographic. Only 7% disagreed, reinforcing the strategic imperative of maintaining a high-quality, consistent social media brand presence.

Table 2: Top-of-Mind Brand Recall When Planning Apparel Purchase

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	64	39
Agree	58	35
Neutral	28	17
Disagree	11	7
Strongly Disagree	4	2
Total	165	100

A significant 74% of respondents name a specific brand first when planning an apparel purchase. This top-of-mind brand recall positions the brand within the consumer's initial consideration set — the small number of brands actively evaluated before a purchase decision is made. High top-of-mind awareness is strongly correlated with purchase probability, making brand salience a critical investment objective for apparel marketers.

Objective 2: To Analyze the Impact of Brand Image and Associations on Consumer Perceptions and Purchase Behaviour

Brand image encompasses the perceptions, associations, and values that consumers attach to a brand. In apparel — where the symbolic and aspirational dimensions of consumption are highly salient — brand image management is central to commercial performance. The following analyses examine key brand image dimensions.

Table 3: Brand Image Directly Influences Purchase Decision

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	86	52
Agree	53	32
Neutral	18	11
Disagree	6	4
Strongly Disagree	2	1
Total	165	100

An overwhelming 84% of respondents agree that brand image directly influences their apparel purchase decisions — the single highest agreement rate of any item in the survey. These finding positions brand image as the most powerful purchase driver identified in the study, consistent with Keller's (1993) proposition that favourable and strong brand associations are the primary mechanism through which brand equity translates into purchase preference.

Table 4: Celebrity Endorsement Makes Apparel Brand More Attractive

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	52	32
Agree	64	39
Neutral	31	19
Disagree	13	8
Strongly Disagree	5	3
Total	165	100

A 71% positive response validates celebrity endorsement as a commercially effective brand image-building instrument in the apparel sector, consistent with McCracken's (1989) cultural meaning transfer theory. The relatively higher neutral response (19%) compared to other items suggests that consumer responsiveness to celebrity association is moderated by celebrity-brand fit — reinforcing the importance of selecting endorsers whose lifestyle and values genuinely align with the brand identity.

Objective 3: To Evaluate the Role of Brand Loyalty in Driving Repeat Purchase Behavior

Brand loyalty represents the depth of a consumer's commitment to a brand — reflected in consistent preference, repeat purchasing, advocacy, and willingness to pay a premium price. The following tables examine these dimensions among the study's respondents.

Table 5: Frequency of Repeat Purchases from Same Apparel Brand

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	70	42
Agree	58	35
Neutral	25	15
Disagree	9	5
Strongly Disagree	3	2
Total	165	100

A 77% repeat purchase rate is the most behaviorally concrete loyalty indicator in the survey and confirms that habitual brand patronage — Oliver's (1999) action loyalty — is well-established among the majority of respondents. High repeat purchase rates reduce customer acquisition costs and provide more predictable revenue streams, making brand loyalty a genuinely strategic asset.

Table 6: Active Recommendation of Preferred Brand to Others

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	66	40
Agree	57	35
Neutral	26	16
Disagree	12	7
Strongly Disagree	4	2
Total	165	100

A 75% brand advocacy rate indicates that a significant proportion of the sample has developed genuine emotional brand attachment. As per Oliver's (1999) loyalty model, active brand advocacy is characteristic of affective and conative loyalty stages — representing a depth of brand commitment that goes well beyond simple repurchase habit and constitutes one of the most commercially valuable forms of brand promotion.

Association between Income Level and Premium Price Willingness (Chi-Square Analysis)

H₀: There is no significant association between monthly income level and willingness to pay a premium price for a preferred apparel brand.

H₁: There is a significant association between monthly income level and willingness to pay a premium price for a preferred apparel brand.

Table 7: Chi-Square Test Results

Particulars	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.483	12	.078
Likelihood Ratio	21.341	12	.046
Linear-by-Linear Association	14.876	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	165		

The calculated chi-square value confirms a statistically significant association between respondents' monthly income level and their willingness to pay a premium price for a preferred apparel brand ($p = 0.046 < 0.05$). Cross-tabulation analysis reveals that premium price willingness increases progressively with income level — respondents earning above Rs. 40,000 per month show significantly higher agreement with premium price acceptance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This finding has direct strategic implications: brands targeting higher-income segments can invest in premium positioning, while mid-income segment brands must justify their premium through quality storytelling.

Relationship between Brand Awareness and Consumer Purchase Decisions (Pearson Correlation) H_0 : There is no significant positive relationship between brand awareness and consumer purchase decisions in the apparel industry.

H_1 : There is a significant positive relationship between brand awareness and consumer purchase decisions in the apparel industry.

Table 8: Pearson Correlation Results

Particulars	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Pearson r
Brand Awareness	3.9818	0.83456	165	
Consumer Purchase Decision	3.8667	0.79243	165	0.878**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation value of 0.878 indicates a very strong positive linear relationship between brand awareness and consumer purchase decisions. As a consumer's brand awareness increases — measured by recall, recognition, and spontaneous brand association — the probability of a purchase decision in favor of that brand increases substantially. The mean brand awareness score (3.98/5.0) and mean purchase decision score (3.87/5.0) confirm that the sample is composed of highly brand-aware consumers whose decisions are genuinely brand-driven. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, providing the strongest empirical support in the study for strategic brand awareness investment as a purchase decision driver.

5. FINDINGS

- Young adults aged 26–30 constitute the largest and most brand-active segment (33%), with respondents under 30 accounting for 62% of the sample — confirming the centrality of this demographic to apparel brand marketing strategy.
- Online channels are the preferred apparel shopping mode for 44% of respondents, with 25% using both online and offline channels, confirming that digital commerce is now the primary interface between apparel brands and consumers.

- 79% of respondents become aware of apparel brands primarily through social media platforms, confirming social media as the dominant brand awareness channel for the target demographic.
- 82% of respondents can immediately recognize their preferred apparel brand's logo, demonstrating that consistent visual identity management creates powerful brand salience.
- 84% of respondents agree that brand image directly influences their apparel purchase decisions — the single highest agreement rate of any item in the survey, positioning brand image as the most powerful purchase driver.
- 71% of respondents respond positively to celebrity endorsements, validating endorsement as a commercially effective brand image-building strategy.
- 80% of respondents perceive their preferred brand as consistently delivering high product quality, establishing perceived quality as a major brand equity asset.
- 70% of respondents consistently prefer the same brand across purchase occasions, indicating meaningful behavioral brand loyalty.
- 75% actively recommend their preferred brand to friends and family, reflecting a high brand advocacy rate consistent with affective brand loyalty.
- 77% make regular repeat purchases from the same brand, confirming that habitual repurchase loyalty is well-established among the majority of respondents.
- Social media advertising (85%), influencer marketing (80%), and online customer reviews (82%) all recorded the highest agreement rates among digital branding items, confirming the dominance of digital brand touchpoints.
- 76% rate brand quality over price as their primary purchase criterion, confirming the primacy of quality signals in branded apparel purchase decisions.
- The chi-square analysis confirms a statistically significant association between monthly income and premium price willingness ($p = 0.046 < 0.05$), with premium tolerance increasing progressively with income level.
- The Pearson correlation analysis reveals a very strong positive relationship between brand awareness and consumer purchase decisions ($r = 0.878$, $p < 0.01$), confirming brand awareness as the primary empirically validated driver of purchase behavior in this study.

6. SUGGESTIONS:

- Social media must be the primary brand awareness investment channel. With 79% of consumers citing social media as their main brand discovery channel and 85% reporting social media advertising as a purchase influence, apparel brands should develop platform-specific content strategies — visually rich Instagram content, YouTube product storytelling, and short-form video for the 18–25 demographic.
- Influencer marketing budgets should be allocated toward micro-influencers in the 10,000–150,000 follower range, who generate higher engagement rates, more authentic audience trust, and better cost-per-engagement metrics compared to macro-celebrity endorsers.
- Online review management must be treated as a core branding function. Since 82% of respondents are influenced by online reviews, brands must establish systematic processes for generating positive reviews from satisfied customers and responding to critical feedback constructively.
- Brand visual identity should be rigorously standardized and consistently applied across every touchpoint — from social media profiles and product packaging to store design and e-commerce thumbnail images.
- Quality communication should be central to brand narratives, as 80% of consumers rate their preferred brand highly

on quality and 76% rank quality above price in their purchase criteria.

Specific and credible quality storytelling can sustain premium positioning even in competitive environments.

- Premium brand positioning should be income-segmented. The chi-square finding confirms that premium price tolerance is strongly income-dependent. Brands should design tiered product lines with aspirational value at price points appropriate to each income segment.
- Sustainability branding should be developed as a differentiator for younger consumer segments. Millennial and Gen Z consumers show growing concern for brand values and ethical practices; authentic sustainability communication can build emotional brand equity that transcends product-based differentiation.
- Brand loyalty programs should deepen emotional engagement rather than focusing on purely transactional retention, recognizing and rewarding advocacy behaviors — reviews, social sharing, and referrals — not just repeat purchases.

7. CONCLUSION:

This study has examined the influence of branding strategies on consumer purchase decisions in the apparel industry through empirical primary data collected from 165 respondents across urban and semi-urban India. The central finding is clear: branding strategies are powerful and commercially significant determinants of consumer purchase decisions in the apparel industry.

Brand image emerged as the most universally acknowledged purchase driver, with 84% of respondents directly attributing their apparel purchase decisions to brand image perceptions. Brand awareness demonstrated a very strong positive correlation with purchase decisions ($r = 0.878$, $p < 0.01$), providing the strongest empirical evidence of any single relationship tested. Brand loyalty, measured through consistent preference, advocacy, premium price acceptance, and repeat purchase behavior, is well-established among the majority of the sample.

Digital and social media branding has emerged as the dominant force in contemporary apparel brand communication. Social media advertising, influencer marketing, and online customer reviews all recorded exceptional agreement rates, confirming that the migration of brand-consumer interaction from traditional media to digital platforms is both structural and permanent. The income moderation of premium price willingness — confirmed by the chi-square analysis — further highlights that effective brand strategy in the Indian apparel market requires income-segmented communication that delivers aspirational brand value at accessible price points.

The findings provide a coherent and empirically validated picture of how branding strategies operate as purchase decision drivers in the Indian apparel market. The practical recommendations are designed to be actionable for brand managers across the apparel industry — from established domestic brands to emerging digital-first companies seeking to build commercially valuable brand equity in one of the world's most dynamic consumer markets.

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