

Consumer Behaviour and Brand Loyalty in the Fast Fashion Sector

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Abstract- This essay investigates the inter connection between consumer behaviour and brand loyalty in the fast fashion industry and the role of branding in the buying behaviour in the competitive market. The study uses an extensive survey-based approach to analyze the determinants that make consumers favor some fast fashion brands, such as social, psychological, and personal factors. The outcomes indicate that although price and quality are still significant factors, brand image and loyalty influence the consumer decisions to a great extent, and lots of customers perceive brands as status and identity markers. The paper also illustrates the differences in demographics in brand consciousness and concludes that fast fashion businesses must find a way of optimally engaging and building brand loyalty to remain on a competitive edge. These implications help in further comprehending the consumer behaviour in the fast fashion industry and gives practical solutions to marketers who wish to establish a better brand-consumer relationship.

Keywords- consumer behaviour, brand loyalty, fast fashion, brand image, purchasing decisions, marketing strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: Introduction

3.1 Study background

The fast fashion industry has become one of the most powerful segments of the modern retail market, changing the ways of consumer interaction with the clothing companies and the ways of buying clothes. Fast fashion companies are also distinguished by speed in adopting the recent fashion trends and rendering them into low-priced and broadly accessible goods, which attract a wide consumer audience focused on following the trends. The industry is a dynamic industry that lives by consumer behaviour knowledge and the ability to affect the behaviour in order to generate brand-loyalty that is sustainable in the stiff competition. Consumer behaviour defines the psychological, social and individual influences behind the buying decisions such as preferences, purchasing motivations, perceptions and attitudes on brands.

In this regard, brand loyalty constitutes one of the aspects that fast fashion retailers should consider to enable them to have a competitive advantage. It is more than repeat purchase behaviour, it is an emotional and psychological investment the consumers make with regard to specific brands. As the fast fashion brands are spreading intensively and their market strategies are becoming more aggressive, the relationships between brand loyalty and consumer behaviour are urgently vital to be learned by the marketer and researcher. The effect of branding on consumer behavior is strong in emergent markets such as India where the level of fashion awareness is growing at a very high rate. The current study aims at analysing the impact of brand qualities, awareness, and loyalty on the purchasing behaviour in the context of the Indian fast fashion industry and presents an important contribution to the understanding of the relationships between consumers and the brand.

3.2 Statement of Problem

Regardless of the expansion and recognition of the fast fashion sector, numerous brands have problems when it comes to consumer retention and sustainable loyalty. The gap in

knowledge that is being filled with the present study consists of the deficiency of detailed information regarding what factors affect consumer behaviour and brand loyalty in fast fashion. Although consumers tend to flash in and out of brands based on price sensitivity, change in trends or promotions, this instability bodes ill on brand equity and profitability in the long run. Furthermore, little has been done on the contribution of the brand perception, emotional relationship and consumer attitudes towards the loyalty in the fast fashion industry and more so in the Indian environment due to the diversity in culture and demography that further complicates the consumer preference. Consequently, the proposed study would fill this gap in knowledge by evaluating the determinants of consumer behaviour in a systematic way on how it affects brand loyalty and this might inform brands to design effective marketing strategies.

3.3 Study Purposes.

The main aims of the given research are:

To investigate the main factors that affect consumer purchasing behaviour in fast fashion industry.

To investigate how branding influences the perceptions and buying behaviour of the consumers.

To evaluate the brand loyalty degree and its motivators among fast fashion buyers.

To examine demographical difference in consumer behaviour and brands preferred.

To make recommendations that the fast fashion companies can use to boost consumer interactivity and devotion.

The goals will allow the presentation of the entire picture regarding the interaction of consumers with fast fashion brands and the reasons why people remain their clients.

3.4 Research Questions

The research questions that the study is aimed at answering are the following ones:

Which are the key social, psychological and personal influences on consumer buying behaviour regarding fast fashion sector?

What effect does brand image have on purchase decision in fast fashion?

How exactly is brand loyalty connected with repeat purchase behaviour in the sector?

What effect do demographic elements, age, gender, and income have on brand loyalty?

Which solutions may fast fashion companies use to increase consumer loyalty and brand equity?

These questions will be answered to bring about a subtle realization of consumer-brand relationship in this competitive market.

3.5 Significance of the Study

The research is valuable to various parties such as fast fashion marketers, retailers as well as academic researchers. To marketers, the implications of the consumer behaviour analysis would help them to develop specific branding and promotion programmes that would appeal to different consumer groups, thus creating brand loyalty and improving the customer lifetime value. The findings can be used by the retailers to enhance customer experience and loyalty programs to address the major consumer motivation and hindrances. On the academic front, the study fills the gap in the scanty literature on brand loyalty in the fast fashion industry especially in the Indian market to serve as a basis of future investigations. Also, the patterns of consumer behaviour may help policymakers encourage a sustainable fashion practice, as they will identify the consumer attitude regarding the environmental and social consequences of fast fashion.

3.6 Scope and Limits

This research is restricted to fast fashion industry in India, and specifically targets the urban customers who wear and use branded clothes and accessories. It explores and examines the brand loyalty and consumer behaviour in a systematic survey methodology focusing on brand awareness, brand perception, purchase motivation and its relationship with demographics. Even though the study tries to be as all inclusive as possible in the chosen context, there are some limitations. First, the research is based on self-reported measures of the consumers, prone to the bias in responding or social desirability. Secondly, fast fashion industry is dynamic, and the trends as well consumer preferences shifts fast; therefore, the results are a product of a given time and are subject to changes. Third, the sample of the study is geographically constrained to choosing the urban centres and might not entirely represent the rural or semi-urban consumer behaviour. Lastly, the impact of external forces that could possibly affect the consumer behaviour like economic changes or even international fashion trends is not comprehensively studied in this study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The fast fashion industry has been widely understood in terms of consumer behaviour because it is one of the key determinants of the success of any brand in this competitive industry. The concept of consumer behaviour implies how individuals or groups of people choose, buy, consume, and discard products or services to meet their needs and want (Solomon, 2017). This behaviour is determined by a number of factors which are social, psychological and personal factors. Social factors consist of culture, family, reference groups, social roles, which influence the preferences and choices of the consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). There are the psychological factors, which are motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes that motivate the internal consumer reaction to marketing stimuli. Consumer decision in the market is further varied by personal reasons like age, income, occupation, and lifestyle (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). These factors are unique in the fast fashion context as customers demand fashionable and low-priced clothes that would express their social identity and personal values. There have been past research contributions which emphasise the importance of consumers being not just rational decision-makers but being emotionally and socially influenced, more so when it comes to areas such as the fashion industry where aspects of self-expression and social acceptance are paramount (Kahle & Kim, 2006; Marciniak & Bruce, 2004).

Special characteristics of fashion trends changeability and fast fashion product turnover force consumers to interact with brand on a regular basis, which often results in the complicated decision-making process that is being driven by both intrinsic motivations and extrinsic social pressures (Moore, 1995; Siddiqui et al., 2003).

The aspect of branding is quite effective in consumer behaviour in terms of creating perceptions, attitudes, and loyalty in the market of fast fashion. Brand is not only a name or a symbol but it is quality, style, and identity promise to consumers relating with their purchase decision (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998). Such added value of a brand on a product makes brand equity very important to achieve differentiation in markets where products with similar attributes are sold (Yasin et al., 2007). Strong brand equity builds trust and emotional relations and persuades customers to make repeat-purchases and long-term commitments (Atilgan et al., 2005). Brand loyalty, especially, cushions competitive threats and price sensitivity to create a lasting preference to a brand (Keller, 1998). Research indicates that customers of the fast fashion industry are beginning to use the brands as a way of displaying their status and also as a part of their social identity (Roman et al., 2005; Berry, 2000). The given perception is supported with the help of efficient marketing communications, such as advertising, endorsement by celebrities, etc., that raise the level of brand awareness and enthusiasm (Mackenzie et al., 1986; Tsai et al., 2007). Psychological attachment of brands is also described by the consumer learning theories and models of perception that accentuate the unconscious effects of branding on the purchasing behaviour (Foxall, 1980; Freud, 1917). Also the demographic factors of age, gender and income levels have been discovered to moderate the intensity and type of brand loyalty and that a different approach to branding is required to meet the needs of different consumer groups (Park et al., 1986; Netemeyer et al., 2004). Fast fashion businesses that basically get brand equity and loyalty right are, therefore, likely to maintain competitive advantage and experience higher market penetration (Birtwhistle & Freathy, 1998; Aaker, 1996). Nonetheless, though the body of knowledge on brand loyalty and its formation is quite substantial, there are still white spots as far as the formation of brand loyalty among fast fashion consumers in such emerging economies as India, where culture and economic drivers interact in a unique way (Keller, 2003; Kahle & Kim, 2006). The proposed research intends to fill these gaps by introducing empirical evidence that would be useful in understanding consumer-brand relationship in the Indian fast fashion industry.

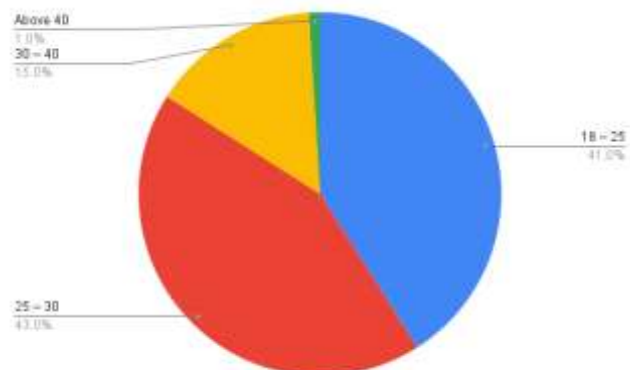
III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is conducted through the descriptive research design that helps to conduct a systematic investigation of consumer behaviour and brand loyalty in the fast fashion industry with references to urban consumers in India. The descriptive research is suitable because it helps to gain a deep comprehension of current phenomena because the information obtained during such a study describes qualities, behaviours, and attitudes of the focus population (Kothari, 2014). The study mostly incorporates the use of quantitative research design by use of administration of structured questionnaires, which will help in gathering measurable data that can be used to evaluate variables of brand awareness, consumer preferences, frequency of purchase and purchase loyalty measures. The questionnaire was constructed upon the thorough consideration of related literature, and the instrument is designed to measure social,

psychological, and personal elements of the consumer choice properly (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). The questionnaires are closed ended questions that make use of Likert scales and multiple choices to ensure objectivity and easy analysis of data by the use of statistics. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used to sample the respondents (n=150) based in major metropolitan cities, such as Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore, to obtain a varied demographic profile, in terms of age, income and occupation. Although convenience sampling leads to lack of generalizability, it is defended by the fact that it is an exploratory study and because of time and resource availability (Malhotra, 2010). The data collection process was carried out face-to-face and online within a duration of one month, which ensured the greater scope of coverage and the increased response rates. Reports by industry, academic journals and Government publications were also utilized as a source of secondary data in order to offer some background information and help triangulate the results (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998). The descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic data and consumer responses, and then, the inferential statistical methods, such as the correlation and regression analysis were applied to determine the relationships between the variables of brand loyalty and consumer behaviour (Hair et al., 2014). To prove the existence of the proposed relationships, as an impact of income on the brand preference and the involvement of gender in the process of purchase, hypothesis testing was performed. In order to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the pilot testing stage was carried out before the actual survey in which 20 respondents were selected, after which the ambiguous items were refined, and the clarity was enhanced (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The ethical aspects were followed closely; that is, informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation in line with institutional research requirements. The drawbacks of the methodology, including the bias of responses and the narrow geographic scale are noted, and the ways of improving the study in future, as well as suggestions in the methods of sampling and qualitative methods to supplement the quantitative data are provided. On the whole, the research approach will help to produce strong, practical knowledge on the patterns of consumer behaviour and brand loyalty in the fast fashion industry in India that could be used to enrich the theoretical knowledge and effective marketing practices.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18 – 25	41	41%
25 – 30	43	43%
30 – 40	15	15%
Above 40	1	1%
Total	100	100%



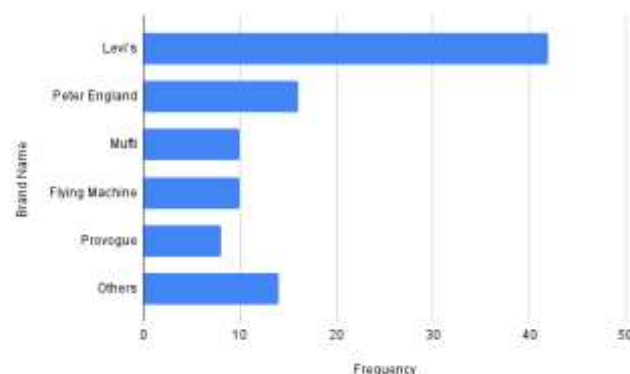
Graph 1: Age Group Distribution of Respondents (Pie Chart)

Interpretation: The younger age groups that are within the brackets of 18 to 30 years old are the majority of the respondents with 84 percent of the sample size. It means that in this research, fast fashion customers are mainly consumers belonging to the young adult group, which is traditionally linked to a greater level of fashion awareness and trends following. The low percentage of respondents over 40 years old indicates that older customers might be less interested in fast fashion companies, which could be explained by their altered lifestyle choices or shopping habits.

4.2 Brand Awareness Among Consumers

Table 2: Brand Awareness of Popular Fast Fashion Brands

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Levi's	42	42%
Peter England	16	16%
Mufti	10	10%
Flying Machine	10	10%
Provogue	8	8%
Others	14	14%
Total	100	100%



Graph 2: Brand Awareness of Fast Fashion Brands (Bar Chart)

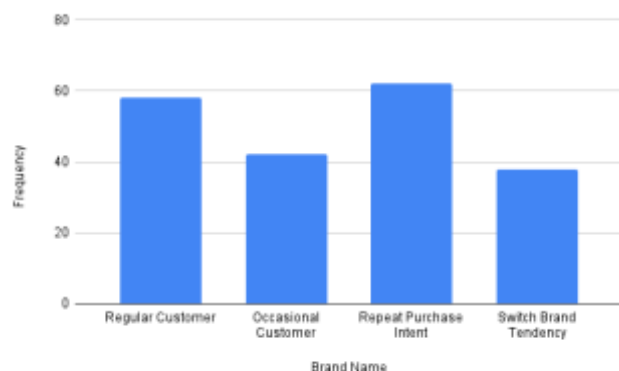
Interpretation: Levi's comes out as the most well known brand to the respondents with an awareness of 42 percent, Peter England follows with 16 percent. Such leadership implies good brand equity and market penetration of the Levi brand in the fast fashion industry. The existence of other several brands with less awareness indicate the nature of competition where customers are presented with numerous options yet express definite preferences. Such awareness levels form important

metrics to be used by marketers who would want to establish their brands in this segment on a good note.

4.3 Consumer Purchase Behaviour and Brand Loyalty

Table 3: Frequency of Purchase and Loyalty Indicators

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Regular Customer	58	58%
Occasional Customer	42	42%
Repeat Purchase Intent	62	62%
Switch Brand Tendency	38	38%
Total Respondents	100	100%



Graph 3: Purchase Frequency and Loyalty Indicators (Stacked Column Chart)

Interpretation: Most (58%) of the respondents describe themselves as frequent shoppers of their favorite fast fashion brands, which evidences the moderate brand loyalty among this consumer group. Moreover, 62 percent demonstrate the definite intention to repeat purchases, which confirm the emotional and functional loyalty to the chosen brands. Nevertheless, the presence of 38% towards tendencies to change the brand indicates that although there is brand loyalty, it is notHungry enough, and it may change due to price sensitivity, change of trends, or special offers. Such ambivalent behaviour emphasises the significance of fast fashion companies to constantly communicate with consumers and remind them of the brand loyalty through specific marketing and product development.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of the present research serve as valuable data on the mechanisms of consumer behaviour and brand loyalty in the fast fashion industry and especially in Indian urban environment. The demographic report shows that the young consumers of age 18-30 dominate the target market, which corresponds to the available literature stating that youth is the major force behind the fast fashion consumption because they are more fashion-conscious and wish to express themselves through fashion (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Marciniak & Bruce, 2004). This demographic tendency implies that fast fashion companies should constantly evolve and keep up with quickly shifting interests of young customers to remain relevant. The data related to brand awareness also show that well-established brand names like Levi and Peter England enjoy quite remarkable recognition, thus, demonstrating the importance of brand equity and marketing efficiency in shaping the perceptions of consumers (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998). The strength of these brands highlights the value and relevance of adopting a high degree of consistency in quality, proper brand positioning, and high levels of promotion in developing a sense of consumer familiarity and yet trust. Notably, although most consumers can demonstrate brand loyalty through their repeated purchase intentions and consistent buying behaviour,

there is still a significant proportion of consumers who are susceptible to brand switching behaviour that is typical of the fast fashion market owing to the sensitivity of price changes, ever-shifting trends, and promotional events (Siddiqui et al., 2003; Kahle & Kim, 2006). These two faces of consumer loyalty remind us that the emotional connection to brands is an important but fragile thing unless it is routinely supported by product innovation, customer experience and personal marketing programs. Also, the paper gives importance to the social and psychological aspects in making the buying decision such as the need to represent status and express the identity with the help of branded clothes which support the past research about the symbolic meaning of fashion brands (Roman et al., 2005; Berry, 2000). The insights allow highlighting that fast fashion marketers are recommended to take a more holistic approach, meaning to combine the functional characteristics of products with the emotional branding to establish more meaningful relationships between consumers and a brand. Nevertheless, the geographical concentration of the sample and the use of self-reported information are some of the limitations, which indicate that the study could be elaborated in the future by including various segments of the demographics and using the longitudinal designs to record the changing consumer behaviours. Altogether, this paper confirms that the success of the fast fashion industry is determined not only by the affordable prices of the products and their adherence to the trends but, more importantly, by the establishment and maintenance of the high brand loyalty by means of the strategic brand management effectively responding to the demands and peculiarities of the target consumer audience.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study comes to a conclusion that the aspects of consumer behaviour and brand loyalty in the fast fashion segment are very closely linked and highly affected by the demographic, psychological, and social factors, especially in the case of young urban consumers in India. The high proportion of consumers between the age of 18 to 30 years supports the essentiality of the focus on the youth segments whose fashion choices and purchasing behaviors are determined by the trend sensitivity in combination with the social identity and the emotional brand attachment. The evident success of old brands like Levi and Peter England in terms of consumer awareness and loyalty index reveals the importance of strong brand equity, assurance of quality and appropriate marketing communication in ensuring competitive advantage in this rapid industry. Nevertheless, the clear propensity of a significant part of consumers to change brands highlights the unstable fast fashion consumption, where the price- Promotion-conscious customer behavior, changing fashion trends put brand loyalty into constant test. As such, fast fashion businesses should not only focus on the sustenance of affordability and responsiveness to trends but should also consider long-term investment in customized engagement activities, customer loyalty schemes, and never-ending innovation in an attempt to build further trust and emotion inside consumers. Marketers must take advantage of digital space and social media to create brand communities, user-generated content, influencer collaboration to increase brand exposure and relatability. Moreover, the psychological insight into the fashion preferences of consumers, including the need to gain status and the need to express oneself, can be used to tailor the brand positioning strategies that will articulate with the target groups in a more meaningful way. Strategically, the fast fashion retailers have been advised to implement a multi-branding

strategy which incorporates high-quality products, environmental sustainability, and cultural appeal to messages in order to create loyalty in the long term and reduce the threats of brand-switching. Also, research should be extended to cover wider geographical and demographical coverage and mixed-method techniques will deepen the insight on changing consumer behaviours and make marketing interventions more customised. Overall, the future of the fast fashion industry and its sustainability will be defined by how well it can balance the needs of quick trends adaptation with long-term brand loyalty building so that the consumers could stay not only customers but also its promoters. The conclusions have been used to guide industry practitioners to maximum marketing effectiveness and establishment of a long lasting relations with the consumers in a marketplace which is getting more competitive and dynamic.

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