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The Interplay of Psychological and Cultural Factors in Consumer Decision-Making for Branded Apparel

¹Mr. M. Rajesh, Assistant Professor, ²Dr. M. Vidya, Associate Professor

¹Department of Management Science, ²SNMV Institute of Management

¹Sri Krishna Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, ²Shri Nehru Maha Vidyalaya Arts and Science College, Coimbatore. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0004-9691>, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5535-1065>,

E Mail: ¹rajeshdarly@gamil.com, ²mbavidya@snmv.ac.in

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Abstract

This study examines how psychological and cultural elements shape consumer decisions when purchasing branded clothing. It explores the roles of self-expression, social dynamics, perceived quality, and cultural values in influencing brand preferences within a competitive fashion landscape. A descriptive research design was employed, gathering primary data through a structured questionnaire administered to 77 respondents selected via stratified random sampling. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, incorporating descriptive statistics, Chi-Square tests, One-Way ANOVA, and linear regression.

Findings indicate that branded apparel is frequently used as a means of self-expression and social signalling. While psychological motivators such as self-identity play a key role, quantitative results were mixed: a Chi-Square test suggested a link between social pressure and trend-following, though data limitations temper this finding. ANOVA results revealed no significant variation in how social status drives trend adoption across groups. Regression analysis showed that income is not a strong predictor of luxury brand preference in this sample.

This research offers a current perspective on the attitudes of young Indian consumers, underscoring that while traditional factors like income have limited influence, intangible elements such as brand narrative, perceived quality, and digital engagement are crucial. The study provides actionable insights to help apparel brands refine their marketing approaches, boost customer interaction, and foster loyalty in a digitally evolving marketplace.

Introduction

Purchasing branded clothing involves more than fulfilling a basic need—it is a multifaceted process shaped by psychological and cultural

forces. Consumers often use brands to express identity, signal social status, and align with group values (Belk, 1988). The branded apparel sector continues to expand rapidly, fuelled by growing

disposable incomes and the widespread reach of social media and global trends.

Although prior studies have highlighted the significance of quality, cost, and brand reputation (Kumar & Kanchan, 2018; Dhiman, 2018), the interaction between psychological drivers—such as self-esteem and individuality—and cultural norms like conformity and tradition—deserves deeper investigation. Research by Lee & Hwang (2017) and Samarth Singh (2024) has touched on cultural and emotional aspects, yet a comprehensive analysis within a specific consumer segment remains pertinent.

This study seeks to address this gap by empirically exploring how these factors jointly affect buying behavior, with a focus on a youth-oriented demographic. The insights aim to provide brands with practical strategies to strengthen consumer relationships.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The study is anchored in several foundational theories:

- **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943):** Branded clothing often satisfies esteem (status) and self-actualization (individuality) needs.
- **Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977):** Consumers emulate the purchasing behaviors of peers, influencers, and celebrities.
- **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980):** Brand preferences differ between individualistic (personal style) and collectivist (group harmony) cultures.
- **Reference Group Theory:** People are influenced by groups they identify with or aspire to join, which affects brand choices.

Literature Review

Existing research confirms the complexity of apparel purchasing behavior. Rahul Dhiman (2018) highlighted peer influence and brand awareness among youth. Fazal ur Rehman (2022) identified positive correlations between social advertising, personal factors, and brand perception. In contrast, Namitha Rajput (2012) found minimal gender-based differences in brand awareness or spending, implying that other factors are more influential. Studies by Elsa Nieves Rodriguez (2017) and Lee & Hwang (2017) emphasized the significance of cultural values and occasions. Kelly O. Cowart (2007) connected online apparel shopping to quality focus and brand loyalty. This study extends these

insights by testing these relationships in a current, specific context.

Research Methodology

1 Research Design

A descriptive research design was used to characterize variables and examine relationships among them.

2 Sample Design

The target group consisted of branded apparel consumers. A sample of 77 respondents was chosen using stratified random sampling to include varied age, gender, and income backgrounds. The sample was predominantly young (97.4% aged 18–25) and male (76.6%), which defines the study's focus but also limits generalizability.

3 Data Collection

Primary data was collected via a structured questionnaire using Likert-scale items. Secondary data came from academic journals, industry reports, and books.

4 Data Analysis

SPSS (Version 28) was used for analysis, including:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Summarizing demographics and behavior.
- **Chi-Square Test:** Assessing relationships between categorical variables (e.g., social pressure and trend-following).
- **One-Way ANOVA:** Comparing means across multiple groups (e.g., perceived social influence).
- **Linear Regression:** Evaluating income's predictive power for luxury brand preference.

Data Analysis, Results, and Discussion

1 Descriptive Analysis

- **Self-Expression and Values:** 84.5% of respondents considered it somewhat to extremely important to wear branded clothing that reflects personal style and values, highlighting its role in identity formation.
- **Social Pressure:** 41.6% were neutral about feeling pressured to wear popular brands, while another 41.6% rejected such pressure, indicating a strong preference for individuality.
- **Cultural Impact:** 50.6% reported moderate cultural influence on choosing international vs. local brands, and 28.6% noted high or very high impact, confirming culture's relevance.

Inferential Analysis and Discussion

1 Chi-Square Test

This test examined the relationship between following trends for social status and feeling social pressure to wear certain brands.

- **Result:** Pearson Chi-Square = 30.385, $df = 16$, $p = 0.016$ ($p < 0.05$).
- **Interpretation:** The significant result suggests a association between social pressure and trend-following, supporting Reference Group and Social Learning theories.
- **Caveat:** Reliability is limited due to small expected counts in 80% of cells, a violation of test assumptions. Thus, findings are suggestive rather than definitive.

2 One-Way ANOVA

This test evaluated whether the frequency of following trends for social status varied based on perceived social value influence.

- **Result:** $F = 2.229$, $p = 0.074$ ($p > 0.05$).
- **Interpretation:** No significant difference was found, indicating that stated social values did not translate measurably into behavior—a known attitude-behavior gap in consumer research.

3 Linear Regression

This model assessed whether income level predicts preference for luxury brands.

- **Result:** $R^2 = 0.045$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.032$; $F = 3.522$, $p = 0.064$. Coefficient = -0.231 ($p = 0.064$).
- **Interpretation:** Income was not a significant predictor. The low R^2 value shows that income explains only 4.5% of variance, implying that psychological, social, and perceptual factors are far more influential among young consumers.

Conclusion and Implications

1 Conclusion

For the young, male-dominated segment studied, psychological needs and social influences outweigh demographic factors like income in shaping branded apparel purchases. Cultural values play a moderate role. Although quantitative results were limited by sample constraints, qualitative findings align with established theories, emphasizing the importance of non-economic drivers.

2 Theoretical and Managerial Implications

- **Theoretical:** Supports the relevance of psychological and sociological theories in contemporary markets and underscores the need for psychographic over demographic segmentation.
- **Managerial:**
 1. **Narrative-Driven Marketing:** Develop brand stories that resonate with identity and belonging.
 2. **Emphasize Quality:** Communicate craftsmanship and durability to justify premium pricing.
 3. **Precision Targeting:** Use data analytics to engage micro-influencers and aligned communities.
 4. **Personalization:** Implement tech-driven customization to enhance consumer engagement.
 5. **Digital Optimization:** Ensure seamless, mobile-friendly experiences enriched with user-generated content.

3 Limitations and Future Research

The study's small, skewed sample limits generalizability. Future research should use larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs. Advanced methods like Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) could better capture complex relationships between psychological, cultural, and behavioral variables.

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