

HOW BRANDS INFLUENCE YOUR SHOPPING DECISIONS: THE HIDDEN PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND YOUR PURCHASES

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how different marketing strategies influence the buying decisions of Indian shoppers. A Google Form survey was conducted to examine how people respond to tactics like loyalty programs, limited-time discounts, and celebrity endorsements. Most respondents considered product quality to be the most important factor. However, the data revealed that many are still impacted by the psychological strategies brands use. For example, over half of the participants were members of loyalty programs, and they said that they were more likely to make a purchase when familiar or enjoyable music was playing. On the other hand, celebrity endorsements seemed to have less impact, as many respondents are becoming more aware of paid promotions. Overall, the findings suggest that while consumers value quality and believe their decisions are rational, brands still manage to influence them on both conscious and subconscious levels. This emphasizes the need for companies to strike a balance between persuasive marketing and genuine, ethical engagement if they want to build lasting customer loyalty.

Keywords: Neuromarketing, Sales Promotion Strategy, Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Decision-making, Brand Loyalty.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced world, marketing activities are one of the main ways, brands get in touch with their customers and provide them with information about their products. Nowadays, it's not just about the quality of a product— it's about how a brand positions itself in the minds of its customers (Keller, 2003). Marketing psychology or neuromarketing refers to the use of various psychological tricks to influence the way humans experience a brand and what drives them to buy something. One can improve their customers' experience simply by taking into account their day-to-day habits, fears, desires, etc.

There's also been a shift in how people make purchasing decisions. Where quality used to be the top priority, now it's often about getting the best deal for the lowest amount of money. A 2021 study found that consumers ranked value-for-money even higher than product quality. Now, along with selling high-quality products, marketers face another challenge- convincing people that it's worth their time and money. This has led to more subtle strategies where marketers attempt to influence people's shopping decisions by the use of various psychological techniques, often without their conscious awareness.

This topic integrates two fields that I'm interested in: Business Management and Psychology. I've always been curious to know what drives individuals to perform a certain way, i.e., the subjectivity of how different people in the same situation could act in polar opposite ways. It's especially

interesting in everyday decisions like what we buy. Consumers like to think that the decisions made by them are under their control, but the choices we make are not always conscious ones. Many researchers argue that unconscious influences play a big role in the way a consumer behaves. Marketers use this to increase sales by employing different marketing techniques that manipulate the consumer into buying the product. This research is important because most people don't realize how much their buying decisions are being influenced without them even noticing. In a world full of ads, discounts, influencer marketing, and personalized recommendations, it's easy to think we're making our own choices.

Taking into consideration the above issues, the study reported in this article investigated how the different marketing tactics employed by major brands influence the decision-making of various shoppers of Indian origin. Next, the layout of the study is as follows: first, we have a brief overview of relevant literature, then, the research description, which includes the questions that were asked from the participants, the method of data collection and the various tools used for it.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A brand's identity is comprised of several elements. These can include everything from the way a store looks to its celebrity endorsements. One way to promote customer retention is through Loyalty programs. These programs offer special discounts, coupons, and points to their members. The more you shop, the more points you gain and the better deals, discount coupons and rewards you earn. This works well for them to increase long-term engagement. A recent study was done by Zhang & Wang (2023) on Loyalty programs in the Chinese market. This study examines how different reward types and characteristics impact customer preferences in loyalty programs. Another study, which was performed by Business Wire Report (2024), highlights that consumers derive satisfaction from loyalty programs only when they perceive the rewards as valuable and personalized.

Celebrity endorsements also play a big role in shaping consumer preferences. Many people are attracted to a particular brand just because they like or admire the celebrities who are working with them (endorsements). Knoll and Matthes (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 46 studies which included the participation of more than 10,000 people. It revealed that celebrity endorsements generally have a positive effect on consumer attitudes and purchase decisions.

Lastly, promotions like "Buy 1 Get 1 Free" or limited-time discounts are commonly used to drive quick sales. A study done by Abude & Ebizie (2024) examined the influence of sales promotion strategies, such as contests and price-offs, on consumers' intention to purchase products from Nigerian Breweries. It found that these promotions significantly affect consumer purchase intentions.

Researchers began to explore the concept of Brand Psychology in the 1970s. Michael Bird, Colin Channon, and Andrew S. C. Ehrenberg conducted a study titled "Brand Image and Brand Usage". The research was aimed at exploring the relationship between consumers' brand usage and their attitudes toward those brands. The study examined the proportion of consumers expressing certain attitudes about a brand with respect to their recent usage of that brand. The researchers found that the likelihood of a consumer holding a particular attitude about a brand was generally dependent on how recently they had used the brand. A significant correlation exists between brand usage and brand image; consumers who recently used a brand were more likely to express specific attitudes about it. This relationship suggests that brand perceptions are closely tied to personal experience with the brand.

Another pivotal study titled “Brand awareness and Consumer Choice” was performed by Hoyer and Brown (1990). A controlled experiment involving a common, repeat-purchase product. The study revealed that participants showcased a strong preference for well-known brands despite variations in quality and price. Additionally, those with brand awareness made quicker decisions and sampled fewer brands compared to participants without such awareness. Consumer behaviour refers to the process individuals go through when selecting, purchasing, and evaluating products or services. It is influenced by both internal and external factors, including personal values, cultural background, social context, and psychological motivations.

Modern branding strategies often aim to go beyond functional attributes, focusing on creating emotional value for the consumer. As Kavartzis & Hatch (2013) argue, effective branding is about aligning a company’s identity with the values of its target audience. This helps brands stand out in crowded markets and build long-term loyalty. Madhavaram et al. (2005) highlighted that instead of relying solely on product features, brands are now developing experiences that reflect authenticity and purpose. Emotional branding and storytelling are some of the ways brands attempt to connect with consumers at a personal level.

3. METHODOLOGY

A survey was created using Google Forms, it was designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data about how various marketing techniques affect their shopping behaviour. The questions included things like store music, loyalty programs, promotional offers, celebrity endorsements, and brand perception. The questionnaire included both open-ended and multiple-choice questions to ensure that responses could be easily quantified while also capturing patterns in behaviour for e.g.- whether music in stores influences their mood or how often they use coupon codes while shopping online.

The questions asked in the research paper are as follows:

1. *Does the music played in a store influence your shopping experience? Are you more inclined to make purchases or buy more from a store that plays your favourite songs?*
2. *Are you a member of any store’s rewards or loyalty program?*
3. *What kind of rewards or special offers have you received as part of a loyalty program? (Select all that apply)*
4. *Do rewards or special deals encourage you to visit the store more often?*
5. *Would you prefer shopping at a store where you are a member, or at a regular store?*
6. *How likely are you to make a purchase when you hear about a sale or limited-time offer?*
7. *When promotions like sales or discounts happen, do you tend to spend more than usual?*
8. *Do you notice when a product has a high “original price” next to a “discounted price”? Which of the following would make you more likely to buy?*
9. *Do you think the store layout influences how you shop? Would you be willing to spend the same amount in a store with different layouts?*
10. *Have you ever regretted a purchase because you didn’t actually need the item but bought it anyway?*
11. *Do you prefer stores where staff are readily available to assist you throughout your shopping experience?*
12. *Does the variety of products available affect your preference for one store over another?*
13. *Do you prefer shopping at stores that have a convenient return policy?*

14. *When shopping in-store, how important is it for you to try on the items before making a purchase?*
15. *Do you prefer shopping at stores with eco-friendly or sustainable products?*
16. *When making a purchase, do you consider the brand reputation or customer reviews?*
17. *Do you prefer shopping at local, independent stores or large chain stores? And why?*
18. *When shopping for a specific item, do you usually compare prices across different stores or websites?*
19. *How do you feel about receiving promotional emails or notifications about sales, new arrivals, and discounts?*
20. *Does seeing a bundle pricing offer (e.g., Buy 2, Get 2 Free) influence your decision to make a purchase?*
21. *Have you ever purchased a product because it was endorsed by a celebrity or influencer?*
22. *Do you believe that higher-priced products are generally of better quality?*
23. *Which of the following factors most influences your purchasing decisions?*
24. *When shopping online, do you often take advantage of coupon codes or promotional codes?*
25. *How important is the colour of a product in your purchasing decision?*

The survey was distributed via social media platforms and messaging apps, making it accessible and easy for participants to complete. No personal information was collected, so everyone's answers stayed anonymous. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the survey before they started.

A total of 91 responses were received.

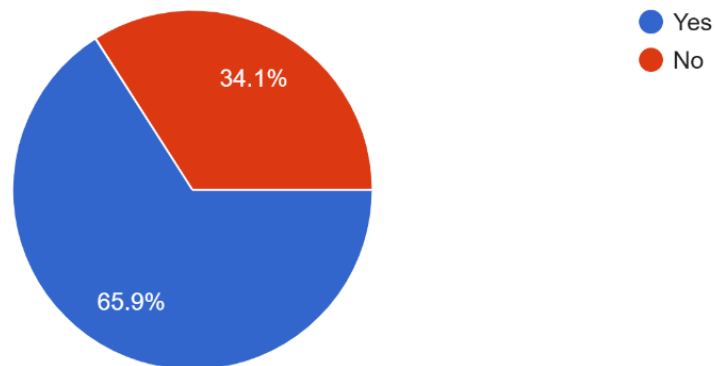
While the results may not represent the entire population but they do provide real insights into how Indian consumers respond to different branding strategies.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The survey results offer insights about the current consumer behaviour and the psychological factors that influence today's customer decisions. When asked about music in stores, responses were nearly half for each: about 48.4% of people said they are more likely to buy something if their favourite song is playing, while 51.6% said it doesn't matter. This shows that music can affect some shoppers. Past research also supports this idea—Milliman (1982) found that music can influence how long customers stay in a store, and Garlin & Owen (2006) found that music that matches customers' preferences can make them more likely to buy. Another significant finding was about loyalty programs. Around 65.9% of participants said they are part of some kind of loyalty or reward system. This shows that people like to feel rewarded for shopping, and it also helps companies keep customers coming back. According to Dorotic et al. (2012), this is because people are more likely to repeat behaviours when they know they'll get something in return, like points or discounts.

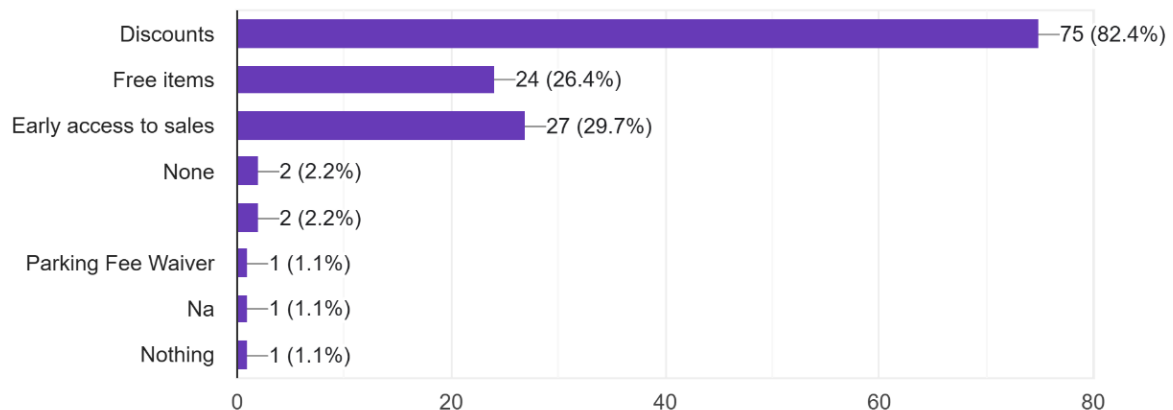
Are you a member of any store's rewards or loyalty program?

91 responses



What kind of rewards or special offers have you received as part of a loyalty program? (Select all that apply)

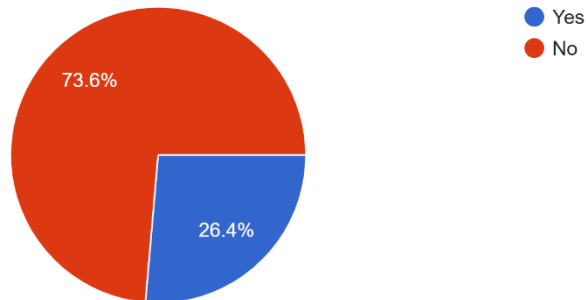
91 responses



73.6% of participants denied ever purchasing products endorsed by celebrities or influencers, suggesting a growing consumer scepticism toward influencer marketing. This might be surprising because older studies like Erdogan (1999) said that celebrities used to have a strong impact on consumers. But now, people may be getting tired of ads or finding them less trustworthy, especially with so many influencers promoting products online.

Have you ever purchased a product because it was endorsed by a celebrity or influencer?

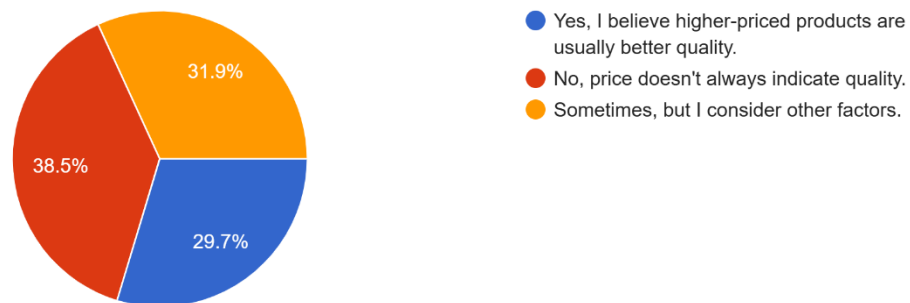
91 responses



As for price and quality, only 29.7% of people believed that higher prices always mean better quality. Most were either unsure or didn't agree. This means that while price can sometimes be a clue about how good a product is, many consumers now look at the full picture, like reviews, durability, and how well the product meets their needs (Rao & Monroe, 1989).

Do you believe that higher-priced products are generally of better quality?

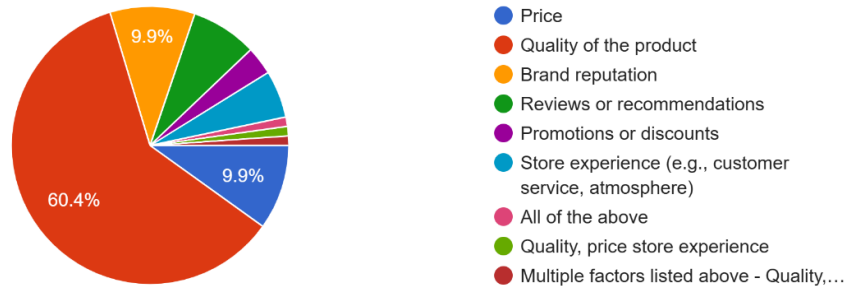
91 responses



The most important finding was what influences people's purchases the most. 60.4% of the respondents said that product quality is what matters to them most. Only 9.8% chose price, and just 3.3% chose promotions or discounts. This shows that most shoppers care more about buying something that lasts and works well rather than something cheap or on sale. This also fits with recent trends, especially after COVID-19, where people have started thinking more carefully about what they buy and why (Accenture, 2020).

Which of the following factors most influences your purchasing decisions?

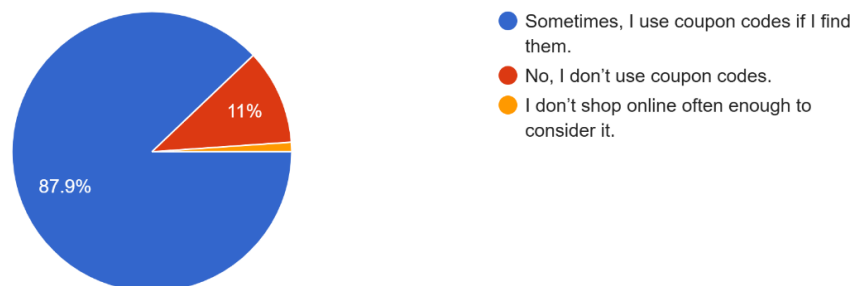
91 responses



In analysing the responses regarding the use of coupon codes or promotional codes during online shopping, it is evident that a significant majority of participants, specifically 85%, reported occasionally using coupon codes when they find them (Cuponation, 2013). This suggests that while consumers are aware of the potential savings offered by these codes, their use is not guaranteed and depends on the availability and relevance of the coupons at the time of purchase. A notable 11% of respondents indicated that they look for discounts and coupons before purchasing, which may reflect either a lack of awareness or interest in actively searching for promotional deals. Furthermore, a small percentage mentioned that they do not shop online enough to consider the use of coupon codes. This group may be excluded from the trend of coupon usage due to infrequent online shopping behaviour, which limits their exposure to promotional offers.

When shopping online, do you often take advantage of coupon codes or promotional codes?

91 responses



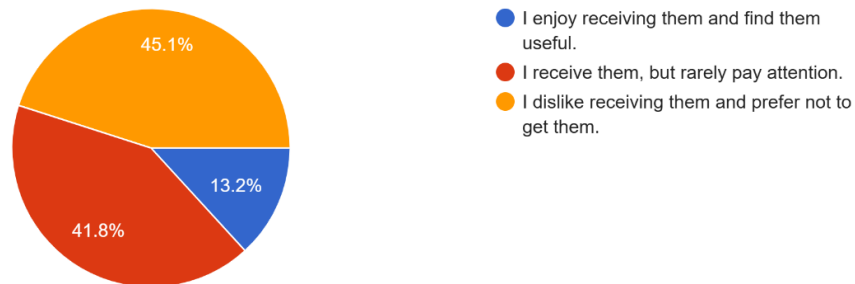
In response to the question, “Would you prefer shopping at a store where you are a member or at a regular store?” the results show a slight preference for membership-based shopping. According to the data, 52.7% of respondents said they preferred shopping at a store where they are a member, while 47.3% stated that it doesn’t matter to them. This indicates that while many people enjoy the added benefits and exclusive offers that often come with membership programs, such as discounts, points, or early access to products, these perks may influence their shopping behaviour (Berry, 1995; Liu, 2007). However, a large portion of consumers remain neutral and do not base their shopping choices on membership status. The narrow difference between the two percentages suggests that loyalty programs may influence consumer preferences, but they are not the only factor driving purchase decisions (Dowling & Uncles, 1997). This could mean that other factors

like price, convenience, and product variety may matter more than membership itself for almost half of the participants (Solomon, 2017).

For the question related to email marketing, the responses showed a generally negative or indifferent attitude towards such marketing messages. A significant portion of participants, 45%, said that they dislike receiving these messages or prefer not to get them at all. This suggests that many consumers may feel annoyed by frequent promotional content, which aligns with studies that show email fatigue can lead to decreased engagement with brands (Baek & Morimoto, 2012).

How do you feel about receiving promotional emails or notifications about sales, new arrivals, and discounts?

91 responses

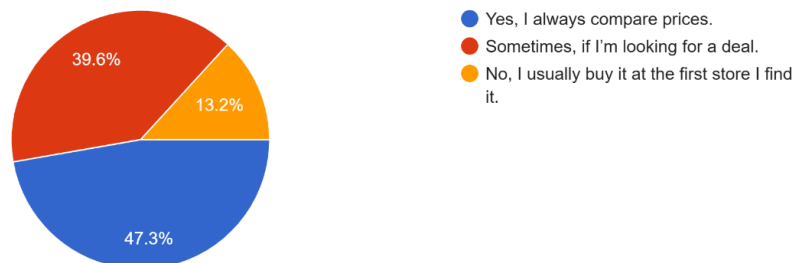


Additionally, 41.8% of respondents said they do receive these emails or notifications but rarely pay attention to them. This reflects a broader trend where promotional content is often ignored or filtered out by consumers, possibly due to overexposure or lack of personalization (Phelps et al., 2004). Only 13.2% of respondents reported enjoying such messages and finding them useful. These results imply that brands need to rethink their digital marketing strategies, focusing more on personalization, relevance, and timing to capture attention in a cluttered digital environment (Godin, 1999).

The survey asked participants whether they usually compare prices when shopping for a specific item, and the results show that most people do take time to consider their options. About 47.3% of respondents said they compare prices across different stores or websites, which shows that price comparison is a common habit among consumers who want to make smart and informed choices.

When shopping for a specific item, do you usually compare prices across different stores or websites?

91 responses

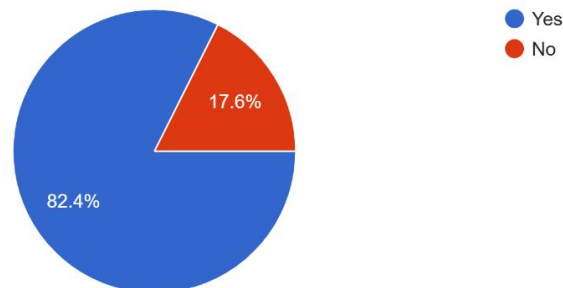


Another 39.6% shared that they compare prices only sometimes, especially when they are looking for a good deal. This suggests that while they may not always search for the best price, saving money still matters to them in certain situations. According to Solomon (2017), this type of behaviour is common when consumers weigh the effort of searching against the possible savings. Only 13.2% said they usually buy the item in the first store they find it, without comparing prices. This smaller group may value convenience over cost or might trust certain brands or stores enough to not feel the need to look elsewhere. As Kotler and Armstrong (2018) explain, some consumers rely more on habit or brand loyalty when making purchases.

Most participants in the survey said they prefer shopping at stores that offer eco-friendly or sustainable products, with 82.4% answering yes and only 17.6% saying no. This shows that most consumers (who were surveyed) today are aware of environmental issues and they know they should make more responsible choices when shopping. The high percentage suggests that people value sustainability and prefer supporting brands that care about the planet. This aligns with recent studies that say modern consumers, especially younger generations, are more likely to choose environmentally friendly products, even if they cost more (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). The small percentage who answered no could be influenced by other factors like price or lack of awareness about sustainability.

Do you prefer shopping at stores with eco-friendly or sustainable products?

91 responses



Overall, the data suggests that eco-conscious shopping is becoming a strong trend, and stores offering sustainable products may attract more customers. (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

In conclusion, marketing is crucial for brands to stand out in the fierce competition and shape the way people make purchasing decisions. Techniques such as loyalty programs, celebrity endorsements and time-limited discounts are frequently used to influence consumer behaviour—sometimes without it being consciously noticed by them. Moreover, many people today care about the environment and prefer buying eco-friendly products. These products are becoming more popular and are often chosen over traditional ones, even if they come at a higher cost.

So, it means that companies can't keep using the same old marketing tricks. People aren't just looking at price tags or catchy ads anymore—they want brands to stand for something. If a company wants to stay relevant, it has to go beyond the conventional style of marketing. They need to come up with unique ideas that set them apart from the crowd. They need to be extremely innovative and come up with creative ideas to show that they understand what matters to their customers. Real brand loyalty starts only when the brand is able to share the values, quality expectations and ethics of its customers, that is something which can make all the difference.

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