

## The Impact of Subconscious Cues and Brand Identity on Offline Consumers' Behaviour Among Indian Youth

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### ABSTRACT

In this research, the authors examine the impact of elements of brand identity and subliminal environmental cues on the purchasing behaviour of young consumers in the urban Indian malls. The research particularly focuses on the impact of such ambient factors as lighting, music, aroma, product arrangement, and minor design features on impulsive buying and emotional response in a quantitative and structured survey targeting individuals aged 18-30. The questionnaire addresses the extent to which impulse, atmosphere, intuit, and other subconscious motivations overrule rational decision making in retail stores and the other section of the questionnaire considers the impact of brand visual image on the perceived brand trust, quality and emotional attachment of the brand. This involves the influence of logos, colours, fonts, symbols and promotional materials on these aspects. The findings indicate that a large percentage of the surveyed respondents are driven by unconscious aspects of the store, and these aspects often override conscious thought in making decision regarding what to purchase. Another key point that is highlighted in the study is that visual components of brand recognition, including packaging and minor design hints, are necessary in generating trust and long-lasting loyalty besides being perceived unconsciously on the part of consumers. The synergy between subconscious drivers and explicit branding tactics is what makes the combination of sensory marketing and the strong and consistent visual narrative the best effect of retail experiences. The conclusions indicate that visual brand recognition and the environmental signals can be greatly enhanced to enhance customer experience and business retention that have far reaching implications on the marketing managers, brand formulators and retail designers. Another important ethical aspect of the study, however, concerns the independence of the buyer and openness in the environments where marketing strategy depends on subconscious persuasion to a considerable degree...

**Keywords:** Subliminal Messaging, Consumer Behaviour, Visual Branding, Emotional Branding, Subconscious Influence...

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

The retail landscape of metropolitan India has been altered drastically in the recent years due to the development of large, upscale shopping malls, which are used as places of social gathering and business hub. Science and art of customer behaviour influence in such cases has grown complicated with them. Today, malls are no longer mere aggregations of shops; they are well-developed environments in which all senses, including the background music and digital displays, dim lighting and smell, and so forth, are employed to provide a greater customer-interest and have a say in the buying process (Krishna, 2012). This move towards experiential marketing is particularly significant among the young, urban Indian population who consider malls as recreational, social and self-expressionist locations in addition to shopping areas.

In such cases, innuendoes, sub conscious messages that operate at a level below the radar of visible perception of the consumer are becoming more and more a commerce driver. Behavioural economics and cognitive psychology argue that a large proportion of consumer behaviour is not

the result of decision-making that is as rational and well-considered but as a result of emotional decision-making that is often known as System 1 thinking (Kahneman, 2011). This can be in the form of impulse purchase, trial of brands unplanned and a shift of preference based on environmental stimuli rather than comparison of products. These are lavish lighting designs, vibrant music which is inspiring, scent marketing which is relaxing or stimulating and product display which guides the eye and movement through the store (Bell et al., 2004; Spence, 2012).

Marketing academics believe that the silent persuasion that these design and environmental signalings can exert can be effective as well as more effective than direct commercials or sales tries (Krishna, 2012). The rapid implementation of these in Indian malls is an indication of a paradigm shift in the organisational approach of businesses and traders towards building a favourable customer experience. Experiential marketing has a more pronounced impact on Gen Z and millennial customers as they are more likely to be particularly sensitive to design and how things smell. Research by young consumers often claims that they enjoy shopping, and remain to shop and buy the place due to the atmosphere, store design and a feel of a place, both in qualitative research and

quantitative survey data (including the current study in its Subliminal Influence on consumer behaviour and subconscious Decision making).

These subconscious are complemented by environmental factors that are obvious indicators of brand identity e.g. logos, packaging design, visual theme, colour palette, typographic selection and application of symbols with emotional or cultural meaning (Aaker, 1991). According to semiotics, design theory, and consumer psychology, marketers are not new to the realization that visual identity of a brand is a premeditated code of association, prestige, trust, and aspiration to a certain degree, and not just a mark of origin (Kapferer, 2012). The positioning, heritage and quality of product can be communicated subtly and immediately by use of unique brand symbols, vivid colours or culturally relevant themes through packaging, design of the store and advertising (Fournier, 1998). Proper visual branding may be used as a cognitive shortcut in malls, where companies are competing in a highly visualized world. That is an opportunity to receive instant recognition and can evoke emotional or nostalgic responses which influences decision making before a buyer even thinks about features or prices.

Also, as recent research shows, young and urban Indian customers are especially sensitive to this branding-surrounds interaction. Mall travellers report both identifying (and being attracted) by outlets with interesting atmospherics and being attracted to brands through intelligent, covert symbols, or culturally specific colors and designs. Emotional ties form the basis of long term brand loyalty, and can be built through even a simple logo, a repeated trademark colour, or even with the look and feel of a display. The customers do not know often the mechanics of such attachments (Zaltman, 2003; Fournier, 1998).

Noteworthy, the emergence of the so-called design-led branding and experience malls in India can be viewed as a manifestation of a greater marketing trend in the world, where psychology, culture, and aesthetics are combined to shape customer behaviour (Krishna, 2012; Spence, 2012). Subconscious influence on consumers, the visual cues, and the symbolic design are compelled to come up with new approaches since direct marketing no longer work and competition intensifies.

In this research, it is hoped to systematically examine these processes in the context of Indian youth based on the survey data which is present in the questionnaire Sections: Subliminal Influence on Consumer Behaviour and Subliminal Decision-Making and Section: Subliminal Influence on Brand Identity and Perception. How do non-conscious and surrounding stimuli in shopping centres affect the customer behaviour and stimulate purchasing? What is the effect of visual identity of a brand on preference, trust, and continued loyalty? And what can the retail managers, designers and marketers learn out of the largely unspoken determinants of the existing mall-based consumption?

By providing responses to these questions, the research work can add to the theoretical understanding of consumer behaviour in high-context retail stores and provide some real-world recommendations to operate and design

branded space that will attract the younger generation of Indian customers.

### **1.1-Research Objective:**

The purpose of this study is to:

Examine how mall subconscious signals affect teenage shoppers' decisions to buy.

Examine how perceptions of quality and trust are affected by a brand's visual identity.

Understand how branding and subliminal cues interact to influence loyalty.

### **1.2-Research Question:**

The following are the primary research questions:

How do mall sensory inputs impact customer behaviour?

Which aspects of a brand's identity have the biggest impact on consumer choice and trust?

What is the combined effect of brand components and subconscious cues on loyalty?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Psychological and marketing research has been interested in consumer behaviour for a long time and specific emphasis has been placed on the intricate interaction between internal processes and external signals that affect decision-making. Academics have increasingly over the past few decades underlined the role of subconscious influences, such as sensory marketing, atmospheric design and environmental cues, in affecting not only purchase behaviors, but also long-term brand loyalty (Krishna, 2012).

### **2.1-Subconscious Cues and Sensory Stimuli**

The classical and modern models hold that a large part of consumer decisions happens in haste, or even near instability, without any serious attention to features or cost-benefit analysis (Kahneman, 2011). Dual-process theories hold the view that cognition is categorized into two systems: System 1 (quick, instinctive and emotion-driven) and System 2 (slow, logical and rational). The latter is also sensitive to the subtle environmental signals. It has also been shown over and over again that factors such as lighting, background music, smell, and positioning of products in actual shopping environments can arouse emotional response, create thoughts about value, and results in impulse buying even when customers believe they are not victims (Spence, 2012).

Krishna (2012) provides detailed evidence of the effect of sensory marketing (using sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) on the memory and feelings of customers, increasing their level of engagement and willingness to buy. That is, pleasant scents, such as the long duration of a visit to the store and sales have been linked to pleasant smells, and personalised music choices can alter the perception of the character of the company and the mood of a shop. These effects are more intensive in the case of immersive environment, i.e., in malls, where the consumer mind is flooded with multisensory messages that support each other.

### **2.2-Brand Identity, Visual Symbolism, and Meaning**

Together with the advent of sensory marketing, the literature of brand management has widely written on how the strategic development of the brand identity can be realized by using visual symbolism. Aaker (1991) confirms that visual codes, which are represented by logos, colour schemes, typographic schemes, and packaging, are always used by powerful companies to signify status, dependability, and trustworthiness. These visual aids are what we call in our mental system of shortcut evaluations of quality and desire, and are often made before any rational examination has been made.

Furthermore, Kapferer (2012) asserts that as much as recognition is crucial in an effective brand identification, emotional and cultural symbolism which may be used to stir feelings of memory or belonging is equally vital. In globalised and saturated retail environments such as Indian malls, the brands employ localised colours, symbols, even regional language signals as the tools of differentiation and identification and trigger different emotional responses in the target market (Fournier, 1998). Recent empirical studies validate the instinctive perceptions of fit or authenticity of the branding by consumers, and these perceptions influence the positive word-of-mouth and repeat business to a large extent.

### **2.3-Interplay between Environment and Branding**

The interaction between visual branding and environmental setting to stimulate customer behaviour and attitudes is also discussed in the literature. Bell et al. (2004) and Spence (2012) believe that brand touch points and retail space design (sightlines, thematic decoration, even temperature) react, shaping integrated, although not always conscious brand stories. The cumulative psychological effect affects all three cognitive, affective and behavioural responses, on a largely intuitive level, and is known as immersive atmospherics.

The dynamic of interaction is very pronounced among the Gen Z and millennial consumers, who are more persuaded by branding techniques and more aware of such techniques in complex retailing settings (Zaltman, 2003; Krishna, 2012). There is an increasing recognition that emotional involvement, which is a product of the intersection of resonant branding and sensory shop design is a precursor to long term customer loyalty.

### **2.4-Gaps and Current Directions**

Even though extensive studies are available regarding brand identity and subconscious persuasion in a Western setting, there is little information on the specific application of these psychological processes in a mall about India, where regional diversity and cultural symbolism and rapid urban transformations create a unique environment in which they can manifest. With their original survey basis, your new work is a direct contribution to this literature, as it gives empirical support on how these pressures influence the attitudes and decisions of young Indian consumers.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1-Research Design**

This paper used a quantitative research design that was descriptive to examine how environmental cues and brand

identity of young consumers in Indian malls affect their behaviour. The systematic data collection allowed collecting the data in a systematic manner in terms of sensory perceptions, emotional reactions, and brand engagement.

### **3.2-Sampling**

The participants of the study were young adults aged between 18 and 30 years and had a frequent habit of visiting shopping centres in Pune, Maharashtra. They were the most exposed to the colourful retail environments and branding strategies. In order to ensure a diverse and relevant sample size, convenience sampling method was employed that involved not only face-to-face recruitment of participants at malls and shopping centres but also through online recruitment targeting urban youth groups through email lists, social media, and WhatsApp (university) email lists. This hybrid approach allowed a comprehensive visualization of the mall customers today because such a technique allowed the inclusion of respondents of different backgrounds and with different purchasing behaviours.

The target sample size was 500- 600 completed surveys, which was according to quantitative research rules to yield statistically significant results and allow such analysis as correlation and subgroup comparisons. In order to ensure coherence and focus, there were some eligibility criteria: the participants were to be in the specified age range, have a regular shopping experience at the mall, and be willing to spend 10 to 15 minutes on completing a self-administered survey. The approach ensured ethical research methods such as high levels of confidentiality and voluntary participation at the expense of maximising the contextual validity and reliability of the findings.

### **3.3-Research Instrument**

The research tool used in this study was a structured questionnaire which was rigorously adapted using already validated scales to ensure that it was relevant and reliable to the context of Indian mall shoppers. Section 2 which dealt with consumer behaviour and subconscious decision-making contained the two key components of the questionnaire: Items that examined the impact of environmental and sensory promotions like music, lighting, scent, intuitive impulse and product packaging on purchasing decisions. Section 3 containing questions revolving around brand identification and perception was aimed at measuring the reaction of the participants to various categories of the brand, including logos, colour schemes, design motifs, and promotional materials.

To enable the measurement of the attitudes, tendencies, and perceptions of the participants in the quantitative way, most of the questions were stated in the form of Likert scale, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. The tool also had questions that measured the capacity to recognize concealed signs in branding and tested the level of confidence and affection that emerge when some scenery of a brand identity is introduced in a shopping mall. This entire approach enabled the systematic study of conscious and subconscious factors, affecting the selection and behaviour of customers.

### **3.4-Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection towards this research involved both the online and in-person data collection to enable the researcher to reach a wider and more reliable response sample of the respondents in Pune who belong to the urban youth population. Surveyors supported potential participants by providing an informed consent and fully elaborating the purpose of the study before the questionnaire was distributed. They were placed in places that were strategically selected, and high traffic areas of the shopping malls. This simple, personalised approach encouraged immediate engagement as well as assisting in ensuring authenticity of responses by exposing the participants to the mall environment, where relevant sensory cues and brand experiences could be experienced.

Besides using the face-to-face method, the survey was distributed online, using Google Forms. It was shared in special youth email lists and WhatsApp groups. This also increased the variety of opinions gathered by providing the study with diverse sample of respondents living in various neighbourhoods and mall catchment areas. Ethics were also considered during the whole process: informed consent was carefully recorded, and no one was forced to participate in it. All the respondents were also assured of complete secrecy with the understanding that their answers would only be used in academic research.

### 3.5-Analysis and Result

The survey responses of 676 young adults who frequented malls in the city of Pune, India were also analysed in this research. This was to investigate the influence of brand identity and subliminal environmental cue on their brand loyalty and buying behaviour.

#### 3.5.1-Descriptive Statistics

Concerning the influence of both subconscious cues and brand identification factors of the customer behaviour, the respondents largely agreed, based on the descriptive statistics of the critical variables. The average score of 4.19 was obtained in the five-point circle, thus suggesting that product design and packaging influence the participants greatly. The effect of minor elements at the store which influence shopping decisions was also recognized with a mean score of 4.11 including product placement, lighting, background music and scent. On the same note, the respondents whose mean score stood at 4.09 affirmed intuitive and subconscious emotional mental processes.

The visual impression of a brand including its logo and packaging had an average score of 4.46, which means that the brand identity perceptions were a bit higher. There was also high agreement of the contribution of brand design elements, use of colours, font, and symbols (mean = 4.40). Having the largest mean score of 4.64, promotions and discounts were defined as an important factor influencing emotional ties with brands, and the importance of marketing methods cannot be overemphasized. Moreover, the significance of the subliminal visual stimuli in the retail store was proved by the mean of 4.26 recorded over subliminal noticing of the brand logo and commercials.

These means are high and always demonstrate that the participants concur with statements regarding effective

brand strategies and influence on the consumer subconsciously.

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Noticing Product Packaging	4.19	0.78	1	5
Influence of Store Elements	4.11	0.80	1	5
Subconscious Thoughts Influence	4.09	0.79	1	5
Visual Identity Trust	4.46	0.70	1	5
Design Elements Trustworthiness	4.40	0.73	1	5
Promotion Impact	4.64	0.64	2	5
Logo/Advertisement Attention	4.26	0.70	2	5

Table. no. 1

The mean scores of the agreement of all these variables are presented in the following bar chart:

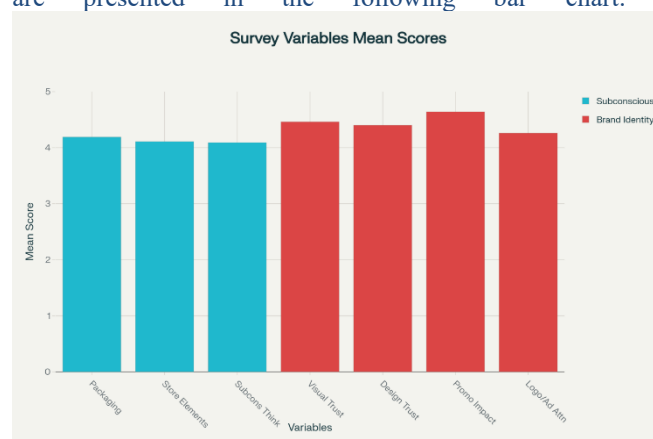


Fig. no. 1- Bar graph of average results of the survey variables of brand identity and subconscious consumer behaviour.

The environmental effects and brand identification determinants are interdependent hence the high and statistically significant positive correlation between the key variables identified through Pearson correlation analysis. There were strong positive correlations between observing product packaging ( $r = 0.69$ ), sensitivity to ambient store components. Similarly, the positive correlation between brand visual identity and design features ( $r = 0.65$ ) and subconscious logo recognition ( $r = 0.59$ ) was found. The importance of promotional influence in reinforcing emotional connection between



consumers and the brands was pointed out by moderate correlation (between 0.45 and 0.49) with brand identity and unconscious logo attention.

### 3.5.2-Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis allowed gaining deeper insight into the relations between various subconscious consumer and brand identification variables. The correlation coefficient of  $r=0.69r = 0.69r=0.69$  showed that the correlation between seeing product packaging and the impact of store aspects was exceptionally high with the help of the heatmap correlation chart. Equally, judgements of the design element trustworthiness and trust in a brand visual identity had a significant correlation ( $r=0.65r = 0.65r = 0.65$ ) which shows the role consistency in visual branding has in consumer attitudinal perception. As a result of the high level of persuasion of the visual and subconscious aids across the retail experience, the concern with brand logos and advertisements demonstrated strong positive relationships with several variables, to the extent of  $r=0.60r = 0.60r=0.60$ . It has been also proven that the synergistic combination of layers of influence of both environmental and brand identity leads to successful in-mall sensory branding, which is reaffirmed by the moderate to strong correlation between influence of emotional elements i.e. promotions and other branding elements.

The relationships are represented as the correlation coefficients and graphed in the heatmap below:

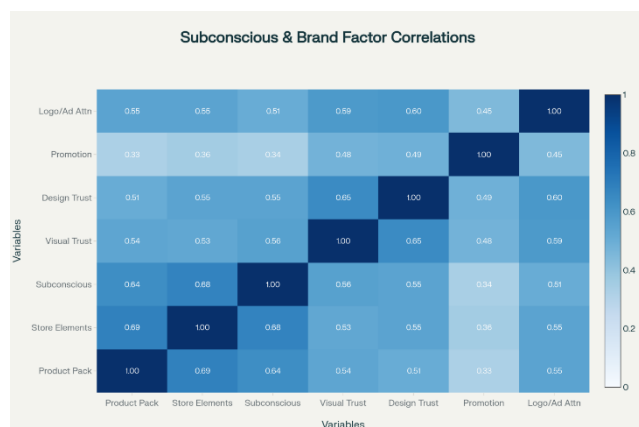


Fig. no. 2- The heatmap below shows Pearson correlation coefficients of variables of the survey in terms of brand identity and the subconscious environment.

### 3.5.3-Analysis of the Findings

The review has clearly indicated that a mix of well thought-out brand identity elements, including the visual designs, promotions, and advertisements, and subconscious environmental elements, including ambiance, packaging, and impulse tendencies, significantly affect the young consumer in a mall. Examples of this dual impact are both short-term buying decisions and the expansion of more long-term brand loyalty. Good statistical associations between these points reinforce the notion that the integration of marketing tactics that combine fascinating and culturally-aware branding with immersive shopping experiences should be a concept.

### 3.6-Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of the study instrument were ensured in a multi-step method. The questionnaire was carefully scrutinized by academic supervisors who analyzed the questionnaire based on face validity and individual appropriateness and intelligibility of each item in relation to the aims of the study. Before the main analysis, the internal consistency of the core sections was evaluated with the help of Cronbachs alpha in order to make sure that the items within the section were measuring the constructs that were intended.

Pilot testing was also done on a sub-sample of 40 participants who were identified among the target population. This step played an important role of ensuring overall reliability and clarity of the questionnaire. To improve validity and reliability of the tool to the full-scale study, there were minor changes to wording which were informed by the feedback provided in the pilot phase to ensure that the tool was better understood and that all items were read as intended.

### Discussion

The findings of the study provide good evidence that under conditions of the retail malls frequented by young Indian consumers, subconscious environmental cues and elements of brand recognition interact to create an impact on the off-line consumer behaviour. The high sensitivity to multisensory stimuli, such as packaging, store image, and emotional trigger, and unique brand visual cues, such as logos, advertisement materials and design aesthetics, are also indicated by the permanent high level of agreement on the survey questions. These results are relevant and expand previous research that involves the significance of sensory marketing and brand image in retail.

The correlations between product packaging and ambient store factors are highly associated meaning that the two variables collaborate in attracting customers and persuading them to buy the product and not to act individually. This confirms the hypothesis that retail environments that are immersive may enhance product attractiveness even inconspicuously and lead to the desire to make an impulse buy and enhance the shopping experience. Moreover, the high correlation rates between credibility of design features and brand visual identity shows the importance of the consistent, culturally specific branding strategies in developing customer trust and their perceived quality.

In an Indian environment where the price sensitivity of young customers is still extremely high, promotions and discounts proved to be the most important factor of emotional brand attachment. This shows the powerful nature of value-based marketing. Promotions are effective in strengthening brand image and sustaining long-term loyalty in case of well designed promotional activities as reported in the moderate correlations between promotions and other brand identification features.

Interestingly enough, the correlation between the subconscious attention to logos and various brand perception factors is high, which means that a deliberate visual cue has an impact both on the deeper engagement of the emotions and the immediate recognition. This contributes to new theories in consumer psychology that

much of retail influence is unconscious and comes about because of repetitive exposure to store atmospheres and brand images.

Subconscious and brand identity effects transcend the normal socioeconomic stratifications among urban adolescents as observed in the reduced differences in demographics observed, particularly at education levels implying their applicability throughout. The differences in the reaction of people to promotions and ambiance factors according to their age, however, show that the lifecycle stages have to be considered by the marketers when designing specific interventions.

In the totality of everything, this research contributes to the growing body of information demonstrating the necessity to integrate strategic visual identity design and sensory brand experiences to enhance customer interaction in the physical retail premises. Culturally sensitive branding and marketing coupled with investment in ambient sensory perceptions to the practitioners offer robust mechanisms of differentiating mall retailing as well as development of enduring connections between consumers and brands amid youths.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study focuses on consumer behaviour in the context of mall settings that target young Indians and highlights how subliminal signatures of the environment and the homogeneous aspect of brand identity have a strong influence on the consumer behaviour. As the research indicates, ambient store features, packaging design and subliminal visual cues are sensory inputs that are consistently a strong stimulant of the process of subliminal stimuli, and this is what drives consumer decisions and generates brand loyalty. The close links between these factors indicate the overall approach to retail branding, in which immersive environments and visual consistency cooperate to increase customer confidence and emotional engagement. It is encouraging

the marketing professionals to utilize these insights by developing multimodal shop fronts and culturally sensitive brand images that will attract a young customer covertly and retain them. Future research must reinforce this base by analyzing additional demographic diversities and the effects of sensory branding in the long term in different retail environments. On the whole, this research provides valuable empirical results in support of the strategic use of visual branding and subliminal clues as effective tools in the urban retail marketing approach, with the competitive advantages in the long-run in the India volatile retail market..

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