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## **Influence of Brand Image on Consumer Purchase Behavior: A Comparison of Northern and Southern foot wear markets in India**

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### **Abstract**

*Nowadays brand image is a powerful tool to entice new customers by influencing their behavior with various strategies that would make them loyal to one brand. The demand for footwear products in India is expected to register a retail value CAGR of 8% at constant 2015 prices to reach sales of Rs1.1 trillion by 2020. The rising health and wellness trend in the country is expected to drive increased participation in activities. This indicates that competition would become fiercer among footwear manufactures and retailers. In this paper the effect of brand image on consumer purchase behavior is examined. Two regions, namely Northern India and Southern India are selected to investigate brand equity and customer consumption values in order to compare different purchase behaviors. Here in this paper investigation's methodological process is explained and the description of data collection and expected process of investigation with reasoning of techniques used in the investigation is presented. In the review of literature a Brand Equity of D. Aaker, 1991, and K. Keller, 2003 is introduced in order to elaborate upon four elements brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, brand loyalty which contributes in brand image creation, the Theory of Consumption Values of J. Sheth et al., 1991 is used to collect meaningful findings and solve risen assumptions. In the Results of Empirical Investigation part of the thesis the assumptions about the effect of brand image on consumer purchase behavior are analyzed, the interviews were conducted with eight respondents who have experience and knowledge about footwear purchase activities, during the information collection process some meaniniful findinas are discovered*

## **1. Introduction**

The footwear market during the early centuries has been constantly evolving while adapting consumers' needs, shoes were used for functional purposes but their purpose in the modern society has changed as the esthetical style of shoes has taken the equal share of consumer interest as functionality that was a predominant factor for the choice of shoes. The main buyers in the footwear market are the teens, young people and young professionals/graduates both men and women. Consumers are more aware of the brand image the producers create in these segments as shoes became self-identification tool that helps individuals to distinguish themselves from the masses and they can represent an individual's lifestyle, habits or profession.

## **2. Objective of the Paper**

The aim of this paper is to investigate and analyze the impact of brand image on consumer purchasing behavior in footwear market. The analysis takes to compare two major regions in Indian markets – Northern India and Southern India and trying to explore the relation between brand image and consumer behavior in purchasing the product.

## **3. Methodology**

In this paper, the consumer behavior research is chosen to investigate the effect of brand image on consumer purchase behavior, regarding the study area the main focus is being put on the effect of brand image on consumer purchase behavior while buying footwear. In this paper the descriptive research type has been chosen. The primary data in this investigation has been gathered from interviews with customers from two different regions – Southern India and Northern India, to investigate from deeper perspective the assumptions risen, secondary information is collected from books and scientific papers to prove or disprove findings which have been gathered. To have a broader view and maintain deeper knowledge about the effect of brand image on consumer purchase behavior, some articles as secondary data were chosen as well.

There were eight interviews conducted to collect and investigate individuals' comprehension about the effect of brand image on their purchase behavior. There are two types of interviews focused on Southern and Northern Indian consumers. Important to mention, due to having geographical distance with the research was held via Skype conference call in English language, the non-probability sampling is chosen for this investigation because this type of sampling seeks participants on purpose to extract more accurate. The interviewees will be from the young professionals or graduates group in the interval of 24 to 29 years old and to avoid misunderstanding in the data analysis process, the same questions are asked to the individuals. The questionnaire consists of the questions which uncover the information about brand equity and the consumption values. In the first stage of the questionnaire, the interviewees are asked general questions related to their spending habits on shoes. In the second stage of the interview, the individuals are asked about their purchasing behavior and consumption values. In the third stage, the questions are provided to the interviewees about their perception about footwear brand image.

## 4. Limitations of the study

During this study some limitations have occurred as well. The qualitative method which has been chosen in the thesis cannot provide representative data from the target group which has been interviewed. Qualitative data represents minor problems and subjective opinions of the customer where the general tendency is hard to explore, furthermore, the focus group represented only the certain age group with, as expected, to have different ideas, perceptions, and buying cultures than other age groups and there is not equal gender distribution as well. Due to time frame and geographical distance with some interviewees from north interviews were held by Skype call.

## 5. Theories

Consumer behavior is based on the activities which are included in product or service consumption or deposition<sup>1</sup>. During the decades, more researchers investigate this question in order to conduct information about customer purchase behavior affected by the brand image. However, the cross-region comparison is not considered to be included in researches. This innovative idea brought to the investigation development and implementation to get a deeper comprehension about fast-changing consumer behavior and habits towards footwear brands in two different regions.

### 5.1 Brand Equity

Brand is the main differentiating point for products. The most outstanding feature of a professional marketer is to create a brand, protect it, and support it, the consumers consider the brand as an important part of every product and determining the brand can increase the value of every product<sup>2</sup>. The attempt to define the relationship between customers and brands created "Brand Equity" in marketing literature Keller is among the first scholars who proposed hypotheses on conceptualizing from consumer's perspective. Aaker tried to mix perceptive and behavioral dimensions and defined customer equity as the value customers associate with the brand in which brand awareness, brand associations, brand perceived quality and brand loyalty are reflected. Aaker considered the first three dimensions as perceptive and the fourth one as behavioral-attitude<sup>3</sup> which also provides a place for growth through generalization of brands and creates competitive advantage to put real obstacles to competitive brands<sup>4</sup>. According to D. Aaker<sup>5</sup> and K. Keller<sup>6</sup>, brand equity is a broad term and a concept, thus, four main sections-**brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty**.

#### 5.1.1 Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the ability of a potential customer to recognize the brand while categorizing the brand to a specific class<sup>7</sup>. From the consumer's point, a brand has no equity unless customer is at least aware of the brand<sup>8</sup>. The recall of brand awareness is based on a continuum where the brand recognition is in the lowest level and the highest level where the named brand is going along

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<sup>1</sup> Blackwell et al.2001

<sup>2</sup> Kotler & Armstrong, 2013

<sup>3</sup> Pradhan & Prasad Misra, 2014

<sup>4</sup> Mohamed Riaz et al., 2014

<sup>5</sup> 1991

<sup>6</sup> 2003

<sup>7</sup> D. Aaker, 1991

<sup>8</sup> T. Shimp 2010

with unaided cancellation. The level of brand awareness can be affected by some factors, taking the chosen regions, Southern India and Northern India as geographical location is an influential indicator for consumer brand awareness. To maximize the distinction of brand awareness through repeated exposition<sup>9</sup> is to identify and attribute to certain class company which may succeed in achieving brand awareness in the market. Creating advertisements and including celebrities' performance are believed to be useful strategies for increasing brand awareness as it is assumed that celebrity reinforcement could give great input into the creation of product attractiveness to customers and increasing brand awareness.

### **5.1.2 Brand Loyalty**

The concept of brand loyalty is defined as the individual's positive attitude that is repeated over a period towards the product of a brand<sup>10</sup>. Brand loyalty has been considered as both behavioral and attitudinal dimension in its conceptual development process as behavioral dimension refers to outcome of repeat purchase behavior and attitudinal dimension refers to consequence of multi-dimensional cognitive attitudes towards a specific brand<sup>11</sup>. The origins of brand loyalty are one of the main concerns for brand management due to it enhances long term financial performance of firms and shows the long term relationship between consumers and brands<sup>12</sup> but according to D. Aaker<sup>13</sup> consumers tend to continue to purchase the same brand despite the demonstrated benefits (including better features, lower price or convenience) by competitors' products. Brand loyalty is believed to be one of the main components of brand equity. However, K. Keller<sup>14</sup> highlights the fact that repeated purchase does not signalize brand loyalty itself. From this discussion we can understand brand loyalty is directly connected with client satisfaction which could be maintained by collecting information through customer researches. Companies creating the loyalty system for the brand attract more clients with long-term collaboration and the loyalty system is relatively unknown in Southern India and the loyalty systems in Northern India are developed by foreign footwear companies.

### **5.1.3 Perceived Quality**

Marketers have experienced for past few years that differentiating superior quality services like solving clients problems, treating client's complaints, customers request handling and delivery process of services<sup>15</sup>. Perceived quality have three quality dimensions as functional quality, technical quality, and reputational quality<sup>16</sup>; five dimensions level of customer satisfaction, staff/customer interaction, physical support of the service producing system, internal organization and corporate image<sup>17</sup>, perceived quality can be counted as a determinant for brand loyalty and repeatedly made purchases<sup>18</sup>, the perceived quality is defined as the customer's overall evaluation of the utility of a product combining perception what is received (e.g. satisfaction, etc.) and what is given (e.g. costs, price, etc.)<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> K. Keller 2003

<sup>10</sup> Baig et al., 2015, pp.01

<sup>11</sup> Audi et al., 2015, pp. 279; Baig et al., 2015, pp. 03; Zhang et al., 2015, pp. 15

<sup>12</sup> Brexendorf et al, 2009, pp. 1148; Jones and Sasser, 1995, pp. 11; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, pp. 82

<sup>13</sup> 1991

<sup>14</sup> 2003

<sup>15</sup> Zeithaml & bitner, 2003

<sup>16</sup> Gronros, 2000

<sup>17</sup> Brady and Cronin., 2001

<sup>18</sup> M. DeLong et al. 2004

<sup>19</sup> A. Kirmani and V. Zeithaml 1993

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#### **5.1.4. Brand Association**

The fourth dimension of brand equity is association of the brand and through exposure to a brand, consumers build brand knowledge, consisting of a set of associations regarding the brand. The total amount of associations a consumer links to a brand depends on the knowledge and experience a consumer has with a certain brand<sup>20</sup>, with an increasing number of brand associations the memory structure that represents a brand becomes richer<sup>21</sup>, which “makes it easier to access the particular brand node from memory (...) since these associations offer multiple pathways to the same brand node”<sup>22</sup> and in turn which identifies the number of associations linked to the brand as an indicator for brand strength<sup>23</sup>. The favorability of a brand association indicates how negatively/positively a consumer evaluates an association<sup>24</sup>. Brand managers recognize that creating favorable brand associations is an important driver of brand equity<sup>25</sup> and they even state that “the favorability of consumers’ predispositions toward a brand is perhaps the most basic of all brand associations and is at the core of many conceptualizations of brand strength/equity<sup>26</sup> and there is a conformity from the previous empirical research that there exists a positive link between the favorability of brand associations and brand strength<sup>27</sup>. So we can conclude that when associations about the brand are combined in a pleasant manner to the customer, the right and strong image can be created and the brand image has an effect on customers’ perception and purchasing behavior. As in this study the Southern India brands are more well-known in the market rather than the Northern Indian brands in their respective market as the associations by Northern Indian footwear producers are not created by any media, social or promotional tools.

#### **5.2 Theory of Consumption Values**

The broadening of the “value” concept was most notably formalized into the theory of consumption values by Sheth et al. in 1991. According to this theory, consumers are motivated by five independent dimensions of value in a specific choice situation, including functional (utilitarian), social, emotional, epistemic and conditional sources of value. The theory of consumption values proposed by Sheth is one of the most significant contributions to the study of perceived value. It covers a complex multidimensional structure for defining this concept and includes both utilitarian and hedonic values; and has strong theoretical and empirical evidence across many disciplines such as economics, sociology, and psychology and consumer behavior.

### **6. Analysis**

#### **6.1 Consumption Values and Customer Approaches**

All respondents were asked about what attributes of footwear they notice and would be encouraged to purchase a pair of shoe. The answers are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

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<sup>20</sup> Romaniuk and Neyncz-Thiel 2013

<sup>21</sup> Krishnan, 1996

<sup>22</sup> Krishnan, 1996, p. 392

<sup>23</sup> Krishnan, 1996

<sup>24</sup> Keller, 1993

<sup>25</sup> Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010

<sup>26</sup> Dacin and Smith 1994, p. 230

<sup>27</sup> Krishnan, 1996; Koll & von Wallpach, 2014

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**Table 1**

**The attributes for footwear purchase (Southern Indian respondents' opinion)**

Reason	Brand	Origin	Quality	Style, Colors	Price	Other
Names						
<i>Kishore</i>	-	-	-	+	-	Comfort
<i>Nagaraj</i>	-	-	-	+	+	Comfort
<i>Vijay</i>	+	-	+	+	+	Functionality, Brand image
<i>Suresh</i>	-	+	-	+	+	Different than other shoes

**Table 2**

**The attributes for footwear purchase (Northern Indian respondents' opinion)**

Reason	Brand	Origin	Quality	Style, Colors	Price	Other
Names						
<i>Rohan</i>	-/+	-	-	+	+	Comfort
<i>Rachith</i>	-	+	-	+	-	Different than other shoes, Comfort
<i>Veda</i>	-	-	+	-	+	Comfort
<i>Krishna</i>	-	-	+	+	+	Convenience

As can be seen from Table 1 and Table 2, all respondents agree that the colors and style of the footwear are factors which attract respondents and encourage the purchase decision making. Additionally, most of the respondents agree that affordable price for the pair of shoe does attract them. Many of the respondents do not have very high incomes, and as result, both regional respondents agree looking at the price despite the fact that most of the purchases are made spontaneously or based on emotions (see discussion later Table 3 and Table 4). From the above tables one can notice that the origin is not the factor which influences consumer preference. Some inconsistency is found with some Southern Indian respondents, who claim that they do not look at the origin, but regional footwear brand is considered as unacceptable for them and their perception about quality of footwear is affected by origin as well.

**Table 3**

**Consumer purchase behavior in decision making (Southern Indian respondents' opinion)**

Values	Functional	Conditional-Functional	Social	Conditional-Social	Emotional	Epistemic
Names						
<i>Kishore</i>	+	+	-	+	+	-
<i>Nagaraj</i>	+	+	-	-	-	-
<i>Vijay</i>	-	+	+	-	+	+
<i>Suresh</i>	+	-	-	-	-	+

**Table 4**

**Consumer purchase behavior in decision making (Northern Indian respondents' opinion)**

Values	Functional	Conditional-Functional	Social	Conditional-Social	Emotional	Epistemic
Names						
<i>Rohan</i>	+	+	-	+	+	+
<i>Rachith</i>	+	-	+	+	+	-
<i>Veda</i>	+	-	-	-	+	-
<i>Krishna</i>	+	-	+	+	-	-

Firstly, the majority of respondents, both Northern and Southern, indicate that their purchase behavior is based on Functional Value, the footwear purchase is based on perceived utility and

acceptable physical attributes for the customer. It can be argued that the majority of customers take the criterion of footwear price, durability, and reliability<sup>28</sup>. Both Northern and Southern respondents indicate the fact that while the quality and physical attributes fit the requirements of their needs, price plays a main role in making purchases. The majority of interviewees claim that they purchase footwear not only having the need for new shoes but also to satisfy their spontaneous impulses and according to J. N. Sheth et al 1991, “more tangible and seemingly utilitarian products also have emotional value”<sup>29</sup>. However, Southern Indians tend to purchase shoes more accordingly to specific conditions. The reasons vary from seasoning to particular situation – work, leisure, sport activities etc. The majority of Southern Indian respondents indicated that they have footwear adapted to their lifestyle.

**6.2 International Customer Perception about Brand Image**

**Table 5**  
**Effective determinants for Southern Indian customers**

Values	Celebrity performance	Discount cards	Advertising	Other
Names				
<i>Kishore</i>	-	-	+	Social group
<i>Nagaraj</i>	-	-	+	Browsing on web
<i>Vijay</i>	-	-	-	
<i>Suresh</i>	-	-	-	

**Table 6**  
**Effective determinants for Northern Indian customers**

Reason	Celebrity performance	Discount cards	Advertising	Other
Values				
<i>Rohan</i>	-	+	-	Social group
<i>Rachith</i>	-	+	+	Environmentally-friendly, socially responsible
<i>Veda</i>	+/-	+	-	
<i>Krishna</i>	+	-	-	Environmentally-friendly

From tables shown above, it is indicated that a celebrity advertising the brand does not affect purchase decision making and consumer behavior; however, many footwear companies are using celebrity footwear performance in public services to increase customer awareness. Southern Indian respondents strongly disagreed to be affected by celebrities associated with their favorite footwear brand. It is disappointing not to find out what more could increase their awareness towards a brand. One Southern Indian interviewee claims that he collects information mostly on the Internet; this shows that instead of following trends presented by celebrities, people search for information on websites.

**7. General insights about Northern and Southern Indian customers**

Several implications for brand image development and consumer purchase behavior are being presented.

The factors for buying footwear and purchasing habits of both Northern and Southern customers are being examined, the findings show that the majority of respondents purchase footwear

<sup>28</sup> J. N. Sheth et al, 1991

<sup>29</sup> J. N. Sheth et al 1991, p. 161



every quarter of the year depending on the need of new pair of shoe and It has been revealed that Northern respondents tend to purchase footwear based more on emotional factor rather than functional here the financial capacity of respondents is to be similar. However, South Indians tend to choose shoes which are semi-formal style suitable for more multiple purposes and the comprehension about brands is significantly different between south and north Indians, the respondents reveal that brand as a determinant factor for purchasing is not so important.

### **7.1 Brand awareness**

The findings show that south Indians tend to be affected by traditional advertisements more than north Indian interviewees as celebrity advertising is more influential on north Indians, the celebrity performance in the public with sport, leisure, official and etc. style shoes can affect customers more but among south Indians websites are effective in increasing brand awareness. To summarize, advertising methods influence brand image through a customer's perspective equally in both regions and it is important that north consumers are more interested if footwear brands are portrayed as a socially responsible brand as they claim that if a brand increases its awareness as socially responsible and/or "green" footwear brand, then they are more likely to purchase environmentally/socially-friendly. In comparison to this, south interviewees do not indicate CSR important.

### **7.2 Perceived quality**

The findings reveal that customers tend to judge footwear quality according to origin and if the brand is well-known, at first, both respondents claimed that origin is not but later asking a provoking question, both regions claim that the origin is a determinant factor to indicate the footwear quality and mostly if it is well-known brand. Also, one south Indian respondent claims that quality is being perceived what raw-materials have been used to make footwear.

### **7.3 Brand loyalty**

The majority of North Indian respondents claim that repeated purchases are dependent on positive past experiences as they are brand likers and they are willing to buy the same footwear brand again. In comparison to this, south Indians are less keen on to purchase the same brand so they are assumed to be brand switchers – customers who do not question the brand loyalty. One south Indian respondent reveals that he would buy the same brand if the style and materials of shoes would be different than the pair of shoes he has already. Regarding the discount cards and loyalty programmes the majority of North respondents are more positive about using discount cards on footwear brands or shoe stores than South. One important factor which unites both south and north is the social environment which influences the possible repeated purchase action.

### **7.4 Brand association**

In connection with the investigation, the majority of respondents, both North and South indicated "Nike" brand as suitable for doing sports and a few interviewees indicated their loyalty to this brand. In comparison from south interviewees, north respondents easily recall brands as good quality and comfortable footwear, this indicates the lack of southern footwear brand appearance in media and low performance in loyalty programmes.

### **7.5 North and South consumption values**

During the investigation, the consumption values of north and south have a lot of similarities and significant differences found, both their purchase behavior is being formed by utility and biological 'instincts' or needs the product provokes as the majority of respondents indicated that price and comfort are the determinant indicators which finalize the purchasing decision making. Due to maturity of the North market and consumption traditions, they revealed that social acceptance is an important factor forming purchase behavior. According to the findings during investigation, Social and Conditional-Social values are more common among north respondents.



In comparison to this, south interviewees claim that Functional and Conditional-Functional values are more common among recent respondents and they revealed that the utility function of the footwear is a major reason to purchase shoes. The majority of respondents revealed that each pair of shoes they buy has a different purpose of wearing, despite the fact that southern interviewees tend to be more practical, they do not refuse opportunities to try new brands and footwear styles. Epistemic value dominates among half of the southern interviewees, curiosity and the desire to be individualistic among southern interviewees is expressed stronger than among north respondents.

## 8. Conclusions

This study attempts to investigate consumer purchase behavior affected by footwear brand image, there are an infinite number of footwear brands in India and around the world which are considered as well-known and unknown. The four different areas of brand image are investigated and consumer purchase values analyzed by understanding how brand image components (brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand associations) connected together marketers are able to create strategies affecting consumer's purchase behavior more efficiently. Majority of respondents are satisfied buyers with switching costs, as findings show, customers perceive quality through origin and materials that shoes are made from thus, improving brand image by increasing elements of footwear and highlighting advantageous of manufacturer, customers will perceive exact footwear brand as sign of quality. Brand loyalty can be increased by various loyalty programmes and discounts cards in as findings show, southern Indians are brand switchers. by doing this, brand switchers will be retained for one brand. Increasing brand awareness and improving customers' perception of quality, the repeated purchase activities will be maintained as well. In this study it was noticed that southern respondents tend to purchase footwear more on functional purposes whereas north tend to purchase footwear pushed by social acceptance or emotional needs. However, the utilization of this work depends on managers' efforts and customer' perception whether the brand is influential or not on clients' purchase decision making. The analysis made in this paper will provide an insight for managers to develop brand image and positively influence customers' behavior.

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