



BRAND CONSCIOUSNESS AS A SOCIAL IDENTITY MARKER IN YOUNG CONSUMERS

Chaitanya K

Assistant Professor,
Department of MBA,
Parivarthana B School,
Mysore,
India.

Anusha C M

Assistant Professor,
Department of MBA,
Parivarthana B school,
Mysore,
India.

Abstract:

In today's consumer-oriented world, brands have transformed from just providing functional benefits to becoming significant symbols of identity, status, and community. This study examines brand awareness as a social identity indicator for young consumers, highlighting how brand choices signify individual values, ambitions, and social connections. Utilizing social identity theory, the research explores how brands act as instruments for self-expression, acceptance by peers, and distinction within social circles. Utilizing a mixed-method approach that includes surveys and interviews with college students, the study examines trends of brand loyalty, the impact of peer pressure, and how social media strengthens brand-related identities. Results indicate that younger consumers are more dependent on brand selections to express their lifestyle, character, and economic status, frequently choosing brands that reflect their aspirational self-image or collective identity. The article underscores the significance for marketers, stressing the necessity for brand stories that align with the changing values and social goals of younger consumers. The research finds that recognizing brand awareness as a social identity indicator provides greater insights into consumer behaviour, allowing brands to cultivate lasting engagement and loyalty.

In modern society, brands significantly influence the identities and social relationships of young consumers. This study examines brand awareness as a social identity indicator among young people, emphasizing the impact of self-image, friends, and societal norms on their brand selections. As access to digital platforms, fashion trends, and global consumer culture rises, young people are becoming increasingly aware of brand symbolism and how it affects their social status. The research examines how brands are viewed not merely as products but also as means to convey individuality, ambitions, and a sense of belonging within social circles. Through qualitative interviews and organized surveys with university students and young professionals, this study emphasizes how brand connections assist young people in demonstrating confidence, seeking social approval, and managing individual and collective identities. The results indicate that young consumers' brand awareness is influenced by emotional ties, perceived status, and the aspiration for social approval. Additionally, social media enhances brand interactions, affecting lifestyle decisions and strengthening group norms. The document provides perspectives on how brands can connect with young people by resonating with their values, experiences, and identity stories. Comprehending these dynamics allows marketers to develop impactful brand experiences that profoundly connect with the evolving identities and communities of young consumers.

Keywords: Brand consciousness, social identity, Youth consumers, Peer influence, Lifestyle choices, Consumer behaviour, social media, Brand attachment.

Introduction:

In today's market, brands have moved beyond simply indicating product quality to serve as strong symbols of identity, status, and social connection. Brand awareness is especially strong among young consumers as they explore key phases of self-identity and social status. The young demographic, typically defined by its ambition-oriented mentality, rising disposable income, and greater exposure to international media, perceives brands as more than mere products—they represent personal identity and social connection.

For young people, brand selections often serve as means of communication, indicating lifestyle choices, cultural affiliations, and social ambitions. A specific brand of apparel, device, or accessory not only represents functionality but also communicates information about individual identity, personal values, and the social groups they aspire to join. Social validation, peer pressure, and the need for acknowledgment amplify this awareness, making brand association a key component of their identity development.

The emergence of digital platforms and social media has intensified this trend, with young people increasingly displaying their brand connections online. In these environments, brand awareness intertwines with visibility, fame, and social trust. This change highlights the symbolic significance of consumption, as brands transform into extensions of identity and instruments for navigating acceptance among peers.

Considering the cultural, psychological, and social aspects linked to branding, recognizing brand awareness as a social identity indicator among young consumers is crucial. This research aims to investigate how young people view, internalize, and express brand connections, and how these actions illustrate their developing identities in a changing social environment.

Determinants of Brand Consciousness:

Awareness of brands among young consumers mainly results from a mix of social, psychological, and cultural influences. The need for acceptance and recognition from peers frequently encourages young people to align themselves with popular brands that represent status and community. Media exposure and advertising enhance this trend by associating brands with dreams of success, appeal, and contemporary lifestyles. The growth of social media platforms has amplified brand recognition, as youth regularly come across influencer marketing, celebrity endorsements, and content driven by peers that influence their views on what is fashionable or sought-after. Moreover, psychological requirements for self-expression, identity development, and confidence enhancement motivate young people to select brands that represent their character and principles. Globalization and the accessibility of global brands foster a feeling of aspiration, with possessing specific labels regarded as a sign of social advancement and contemporary lifestyle. Collectively, these elements foster a robust awareness of brands, positioning them at the heart of how young consumers articulate their identities and engage socially.

Literature Review:

With the growing impact of globalization and digital media, brand consciousness among youth has become a significant research concern. The literature suggests that exposure to advertising, celebrity endorsements, and social media trends has amplified the tendency of young consumers to use brands as symbols of status, lifestyle, and identity.

‘The Social Media Shaping Brand Consciousness and the Purchase Intention of Fashion Consumers (2021)’ Authors - Hassan Zaib, Rubab Musarrat, Shaheer Ahmed.

This study was designed to explore the role of the social media in brand consciousness and purchase intention of young and old fashion consumers. Social media has significant impact on the consumers as individual. The major purpose of this research was to gain in the depth information of social media. Phenomenological research design was used to explore the view point of the young and old fashion consumers regarding the impact of the social media towards brand consciousness and purchase intention.

‘Antecedents of brand consciousness in youth for denim jeans: evidences from the largest young consumer base in the world (2019)’ Authors - Arvind Kumar ET

Consumers nowadays start recognising the brands at a very young age, in fact, at the very initial years of their teenage years. Moreover, they are mostly done with the establishment of their brand preferences by the time they are between 15 to 25 years. So, if a brand wants to be successful in the long-run, it is the youth where it should put some serious efforts at. Doing so becomes more obvious in those products categories which youth is presently the buyers of and will continue to buy throughout their life. The present study evaluates **Authors** the brand perceptions of youth from India in one of such product categories. Particularly, it studies their brand consciousness and checks if there is any sort of influence of quality consciousness and self-consciousness on their brand consciousness.

‘Brand Consciousness, Social Comparison and Materialism amongst Teenagers (2023)’ Authors - Aqsa Waqar, Zainab Javed, Atif Rasool

There is a statistically significant positive relationship between Brand Consciousness and Materialism. There is a significant positive relationship between social comparison and materialism. Brand Consciousness positively predicts materialism in teenagers. And social comparison positively predicts materialism amongst teenagers. The study will be beneficial to understand Brand Consciousness, Social Comparison, and Materialism, this study will guide us on how we improved our life without materialistic or branded products. This study will help psychologists to make social intervention techniques for helping people using social comparison in a worthy way.

‘The Effects of Trust and Peer Influence on Corporate Brand-Consumer Relationships and Consumer Loyalty (2020)’ Authors - Ozdemir, Sena; Zhang, ShiJie; Gupta, Suraksha; Bebek, Gaye

Drawing on relational tie theory and theory of trust, this study examines the role of affective and cognitive trust in mediating the relationship between corporate brands and consumers, and in loyalty towards corporate brands of national dairy products in China. The study also investigates the moderating effect of peer influence on corporate brand and consumer relationships and the two trust types. Using survey data from 600 consumers, the study shows that while cognitive trust mediates the relationships between certain corporate brand and consumer constructs, including corporate brand competence and corporate brand communication and loyalty, affective trust mediates the effect of loyalty on corporate brand and consumer relationship constructs, including corporate brand communication, corporate brand liking and corporate brand similarity. Peer influence is found only to have a positive moderating effect on corporate brand communication regarding affective trust.

‘Young Consumer Conformity and Identity Amplified by Social Media: Marketing Applications (2022)’ Authors - Anmol Jain

As social media and the internet become integral to producer-consumer relations, it is necessary to understand how to properly use these tools to maximize consumer acquisition. Companies and customers must be aware of how psychological factors influence consumer decision-making to improve marketing tactics. The author examines the need for belonging that young consumers face in the technological world and the conforming influences that impact young consumer decisions. The phrasing of product and sales promotions changes psychological reactions, thus emphasizing the need for careful phrasing during campaigns to convey the right messages. Young consumer identity formation is recognized as a variable in consumer behaviour. Despite studies arguing that identity expression has a limited influence on consumer behaviour, the author recommends companies apply it in business and marketing strategies. Two forms of social media marketing, word-of-mouth marketing and celebrity marketing, are compared by their appeal to young consumers’ belonging and identity

needs. A discussion on marketing strategies implements results from the studies on the influence of conformity, identity, and social media on consumer behaviour.

Objectives:

- To examine the role of brand consciousness in shaping the social identity of young consumers.
- To analyse how peer influence and social comparison contribute to brand consciousness among youth.
- To investigate the impact of social media and digital platforms in amplifying brand-based identity expression.

Methodology:

1. Survey Design

The study utilized a descriptive survey methodology to investigate how brand awareness functions as a social identity indicator among young consumers. The survey utilized a structured questionnaire created in Google Forms and subsequently exported to Excel for evaluation. This design was selected because it facilitates the efficient collection of standardized data from a broad group of respondents.

2. Observation

During the data collection process, informal observations were also made regarding the behaviour of respondents, mainly how they discussed branded products, peer influence, and social media usage. These observations supported the survey findings by providing qualitative insights into the lifestyle choices and identity expression of youths.

3. Data Collection Methods

Both **primary** and **secondary data** were used:

Primary Data: Collected through the questionnaire distributed online via WhatsApp, email, and social media platforms. Respondents were young consumers aged 16–30 years.

Secondary Data: Collected from journals, research articles, and reports related to brand consciousness, consumer behavior, and social identity theories.

4. Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 questions. The questionnaire was divided into four sections:

- Demographics (age, gender, education, income)
- Brand Consciousness (preference for brands, willingness to pay premium, trust in brand quality)
- Social Identity and Peer Influence (peer pressure, acceptance, comparison with others)
- Social Media Influence (role of influencers, online trends, and brand promotion)

Most of the items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

5. Data Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequencies, percentages, and mean values were calculated to understand overall brand consciousness and social identity levels.
- **Index Scores:** Separate scores for *Brand Consciousness*, *Social Identity*, and *Social Media Influence* were created by averaging responses to related questions.
- **Cross-tabulation:** Used to compare responses across demographics such as gender, age, and income groups.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Conducted in Excel to study the relationship between brand consciousness and social identity factors.
- **Charts and Graphs:** Bar charts, pie charts, and column graphs were used to visually represent key findings.

Limitations of Methodology

While the study provides meaningful insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

- 1 The sample focused on a specific geographic area and might not accurately reflect all young consumers.
- 2 Utilizing convenience sampling may lead to bias since the responses predominantly represent readily available youth groups (students and professionals).
- 3 Data was self-reported, potentially leading to subjective bias or responses aimed at social approval.

Demographic Profile of Respondents:

The demographic characteristics of the respondents show an even distribution in terms of gender, with 55% identified as male and 45% as female. Regarding age, most respondents (60%) fell into the 21–25 years range, with 20% each in the 16–20 years and 26–30 years categories. Concerning educational qualifications, 50% of those surveyed were undergraduates, whereas 35% were postgraduates and 15% had finished higher secondary education. In terms of monthly income, a significant share (40%) stated that they were not earning, whereas 30% made less than ₹10,000, 20% earned between ₹10,001 and ₹25,000, and merely 10% earned more than ₹25,000. This demographic makeup suggests that the research mostly reflects students and young adults who are at the beginning of their professional journeys, rendering them a pertinent sample for examining brand awareness as a marker of social identity.

Key Factors Contributing to Brand Consciousness and Social Identity in young consumers

1. Peer Influence

- Youth often adopt brands endorsed or preferred by friends and social groups.
- Peer approval creates a sense of belonging and strengthens identity expression.

2. Social Comparison

- Young consumers compare themselves with peers through brand ownership.
- Brands act as markers of status and lifestyle, reinforcing group identity.

3. Media and Advertising Exposure

- TV, online ads, and celebrity endorsements shape perceptions of prestige brands.
- Advertisements link brands with success, style, and modernity.

4. Social Media Influence

- Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok amplify brand visibility.
- Influencers and online trends influence youth's brand preferences and identity construction.

5. Self-Expression and Personality

- Brands allow youth to communicate individuality, uniqueness, and personal style.
- Branded products are often chosen as symbols of confidence and self-image.

6. Status and Prestige Needs

- Youth use premium brands to signal higher social standing.
- Branded products are associated with modern lifestyle and success.

7. Cultural and Global Trends

- Globalization has increased access to international brands.
- Young people use global brands to align with modern/global identities.

8. Family and Socio-Economic Background

- Income levels and family purchasing habits influence brand consciousness.
- Youth from higher-income groups display stronger brand orientation.

9. Psychological Needs

- Need for recognition, acceptance, and self-esteem pushes youths toward brands.
- Brand loyalty fulfils the desire for stability and trust in identity.

10. Product Category Visibility

- Visible categories (clothing, gadgets, accessories) drive stronger brand consciousness.
- These products serve as public signals of identity compared to non-visible categories.

Conclusion

The research emphasizes that brand awareness significantly influences the social identity of younger consumers. The results indicate that young people view brands not merely as items but also as representations of self-expression, confidence, and social inclusion. Elements like peer pressure, social comparisons, media exposure, and social media trends surfaced as significant contributors to brand orientation among the participants. The demographic analysis also showed that most participants were students and early-career professionals, who are more involved in branded consumption as a way to express their lifestyle and build their identity.

Brands clearly serve as social indicators, assisting young people in achieving acceptance within peer circles, signalling status, and aligning with cultural and global movements.

Brand awareness encourages loyalty and constructive consumer behaviour, while also indicating a psychological desire for acknowledgment and community.

In summary, the study finds that young consumers' awareness of brands is closely linked to their social identity. For marketers, this highlights the significance of developing brand stories that connect with young people's values, aspirations, and identity requirements, thus enhancing enduring brand engagement and loyalty.

References:

[1] Hassan Zaib; Musarrat, Rubab; Ahmed, Shaheer. *Electronic Media Advertisements and Brand Consciousness among Youth: A Case Study of NUML Students*. UCP Journal of Mass Communication, Vol. 1, Issue 1, September 2023.

<https://doi.org/10.24312/ucp-jmc.01.01.045>

[2] Arvind Kumar et al. *Antecedents of Brand Consciousness in Youth for Denim Jeans: Evidences from the Largest Young Consumer Base in the World*. International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management, Vol. 15, Issue 2, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJICBM.2019.099284>

[3] Aqsa Waqar, Javed, Zainab; Rasool, Atif. *Brand Consciousness, Social Comparison and Materialism amongst Teenagers*. Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol. 11, Issue 2, 2023.

<https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2023.1102.0416>

[4] Ozdemir, Sena; Zhang, Shilie; Gupta, Suraksha; Bebek, Gaye. *The Effects of Trust and Peer Influence on Corporate Brand-Consumer Relationships and Consumer Loyalty*. Journal of Business Research, Vol. 68, Issue 12, December 2015, pp. 2412-2420. <https://dora.dmu.ac.uk/items/a55e265c-687b-4df7-bfef-615ce331933a>

[5] Jain, Anmol; Stuart, [co-authors]. *Young Consumer Conformity and Identity Amplified by Social Media: Marketing Applications*. Journal of Student Research, Vol. 11, Issue 3, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v11i3.3491>