# Brand Consciousness Among Young Office Goers

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**Abstract**

*Brands are often a ruse to define a person. The younger generation often thinks that their fashion choices define them. Well, other than the fact that you have a good or a bad dressing sense, it doesn't tell anything about a person. And to be able to judge a person, you would still have to know how they talk, what they talk about, what they believe in and what they don't believe in. The youth of today can easily be categorized into two groups-*

*1. The group which is brand conscious   2. The group which isn't.*

***Brand conscious*** *– People who are essentially quite conscious of what they wear and how they wear it are usually the ones who go after quality more than the quantity. They prefer their clothes to be unique and perfect and they do prefer looking classy over boho. There is however, absolutely nothing wrong about being brand conscious, you want something you go get it but just make sure you're not spending way too much for a cloth which could have been bought at a much lesser price. All you need to do is keep your eyes open be sure that you are not being fooled.*

***Not so brand conscious*** *– People who are not conscious about brands prefer to be able to pick up whatever comes their way. Sometimes the coolest things that they own are picked up from a flea market and that is what is best about such clothes. They can be styled anyway and can be worn to anywhere. As long as the person knows how to carry it, they will rock the look no matter what. Such people often go to shopping trips which are comparatively pocket friendly. Even after all these differences, there are so many things which unite the youth and make them exactly similar!*

*Keywords: younger generation, fashion choices, unique, boho, coolest, styled, shopping trips*

## Introduction

They act like they own the world, behave like they don't owe any explanation to anyone and talk like the leaders of tomorrow. The new generation are here to take the world by storm. Their actions echo their thinking and for once we have people which can be taken on face value. They are passionate, they are fighters and their clothes may differ but the substance they all are made of is just the same.

Indian Teenagers may be conscious about brands but that is not something that can ever be taken as their identity. Their identity is way different from what you take them to be and the day the world stops stereotyping the youth, they will see the metal the youth has within and respect them for just that. The youth which is changing the world and self, the youth which is a believer and a doer and the youth which thinks smartly and looks even smarter.

Adoption of new technology, availability of resources, and nuclear family structure have increased the importance of teenagers in the family purchase behaviour. There are many factors that design the minds of these teenagers to become more and more brand conscious. Some of the pertinent ones are:

 i. **Peer Pressure:** This is the biggest factor where a teenager is in a pressure of competing with their peers. Also, they want to be a 'discussed' person in their group, thus they becomes more and more brand conscious to achieve this pleasure.

 ii. **Media Rush:** This is the techno centric era where the media is spelling unprecedented magic. The rush for gaining the TRPs becomes possible with the teenage minds more than any other social entity. Thus, they create a competition kind of environment where the teenage minds are made to become brand conscious.

iii. **Social Networking:** With the advent of Internet, the status of media has gained new heights. Now the brands are no more limited to the 'idiot box' but is available on a mere tip of fingers and thus the great competition among the manufacturers has risen where they sell their product by applying their old but most promising trick of gaining the teenage minds in their favour.

iv. **Failing Parenthood:** It is one of vital factors of the growing teenage brand consciousness. The age old acceptable cultural values have become a matter of the past where the parents used to instill the worth of things and not the worth of names or brand in their kid's minds. Nowadays, a lot of parents are those who themselves have witnessed and experienced this brand consciousness; the sense of 'showing rich' is another factor where the parents and families themselves make their teenagers to become brand conscious so to successfully pretend their family as higher than others in their social set up.

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**Brand Conscious Youth as an Upcoming Fashion Trend?**
The kinds of brands people select define their societal, personal, and professional approach and status. The reason behind the brand consciousness of teenagers can be cited as everyone wants to look trendy, stylish and have a big name. The other reasons can be brand promotion, attractive offers and discounts, lucrative schemes, EMI, online shopping etc. which make the teenagers more brand consciousness. Branded clothes are loved by people who want to look attractive and different. For these people, price doesn't make a big difference, uniqueness is the main concern for them (Hassan, Hurrah, & Lanja, 2014). There was a significant impact of public self-consciousness and self-esteem on teenager's brand consciousness, which in turn affected their luxury utilisation motivations and brand loyalty (Giovannini, Xu, & Thomas, 2014).

Brand consciousness is different for males and females. Mohtar and Abbas (2014) discussed that female teenager is more influenced by social culture, fashion choices, freedom and confused over-choice as compared to male. Whereas male teenager are spontaneous customer, use the media sources while selecting the products and are more brand conscious. Female teenagers generally buy the western ready to wear clothes from the shopping mall rather than through e-commerce (Bhanot, 2015).

Luxury fashion brands should focus on the low price range to inspire the consumers. Teenagers discuss with their friends, family, about the various brands which they purchased. If branded products will be in every price range, this will increases the brand turnover inviting more loyal customers (Giovannini et al., 2014).
The persons using the branded products are perceived differently by the society. They are perceived as arrogant, lavish, ineffective, and superficial. A person without much branded goods is perceived as relaxed, sociable, and down-to-earth (Chan, 2006). Young adults using branded products are considered to be opinion leaders and fashion oriented, who usually have high budget so as to buy the branded products (Hsu and Chang, 2008).
Higher income younger immigrants purchase high-priced branded products for status purpose. There is no impact of the education, culture, origin on their high-priced branded products (Kwak & Sojka, 2010).
Personally, liked attributes are the most important factor as it explains the 17.842 % variance, followed by other factors viz. influence by reference group, attributes for final purchase, society related attributes, performance related attributes, parameter for brand switching, status symbol, attribute for knowing the brand, product quality, attributes related to non-acceptance for non- branded and price.
The demographics also have strong effect on the selection parameter for the branded clothes. Therefore, in order to measure the effect of demographic chi square test was applied. The result stated that gender and age have zero effect on the selection of the branded clothes.

Fashion clothing is a product category of considerable research interest to marketing scholars (Bakewell et al., 2006; O'Cass, 2000; Auty and Elliott, 1998). Fashion clothing has been described as possessing something approximating a code (O'Cass, 2004; Auty and Elliott, 1998), and according to Davis (1994), it is ever shifting and changing. The ephemeral nature of fashion emphasizes behavior approved by members of social groups (Mandhachitara and Piamphongsan, 2011), and epitomizes a key characteristic of contemporary societies which hold strong desires for status. Fashion clothing and evolving consumption practices in many societies seem inextricably linked (Bakewell et al., 2006; Tungate, 2005; Auty and Elliott, 1998).

Over the past decade in China we have seen the spending patterns and the behavior of Chinese consumers increasingly focus on products. and brands that convey status (Tungate, 2005; O'Cass and Choy, 2008). Due to changes in spending and consumption patterns, internationally known fashion brands such as Armani, Prada, Chanel and many others have moved into China (Tungate, 2005). Many firms marketing luxury brands see China as a major market of increasingly wealthy, status-conscious consumers, with positive perceptions of western brands (O'Cass and Choy, 2008). The spread of status consciousness (SC) and a significant fixation on the consumption of brands place China in a key position both commercially and theoretically in relation to fashion clothing and status branding. The emotional attachment and sense of status strongly affect the buying decisions of many Chinese consumers, especially the younger generation. This young adult cohort (aged between 18 and 24) is impacting economic and public policy, as well as the nation's movement toward a consumer society through their purchase behavior. This group of approximately 240 million people is highly active information seekers and strongly oriented toward western brands (O'Cass and Choy,2008). This generation seeks better education, and higher levels of education provide the chance to obtain a better job with higher income (McKinsey Global Institute, 2006).

Fashion clothing is considered a highly expressive product (O'Cass and McEwan, 2004) and one that is often used to communicate one's image and social position (Han et al.,2010; O'Cass, 2000). The consumption of fashion clothing is in fact a sign of a society that focusses on status and is evidence of movement toward a heightened consciousness of the role of consumption and the value clothes play in communication status.
Fashion clothing is used to bridge differences in social status (Flugel, 1966) and enhance self-image and even one's self esteem (Kahle, 1995). As such, fashion clothing not only occupies a focal position in the lives of individuals, but is also

socially and economically important in many societies (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006; O'Cass, 2004; Auty and Elliott, 1998).

Brand preference refers to consumers' brand choice in relation to a specific product category. Specifically, BPs pertain to the congruency between customer values and the value that the brand delivers (Dibley and Baker, 2001) and can be underpinned by intrinsic (e.g. self-esteem and personality) and extrinsic (e.g. wealth and image) (Truong et al., 2010) motivations. Status conscious consumers appear to prefer branded products that are perceived as higher quality products (Phau and Leng, 2008) and are congruent with their own self-image and goal of wealth-displaying (Truong et al., 2010). Preference for a brand is based on consumers' perception of brand information (Rajagopal, 2010) or related stimuli which will subsequently develop into beliefs about the brand. In fact, the symbolic beliefs consumers have about brands are a significant phenomenon in a consumer culture, as status is expressed more through possession of status products (i.e. brands) than through personal achievement (Eastman et al., 1997). Status is particularly more important as a justifier for acquiring products visible to others, such as clothes (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998).

**Brand status and Feeling of Attainment:** Brand status refers to the level of prestige a brand is perceived to hold, and its ability to symbolize success (O'Cass and Frost, 2002). Gardner and Levy (1955) argue that apart from product functionality, consumers also look for BS, the symbolic meaning or property of the brand. Therefore, BS largely depends on consumers' perception of a brand's associations in relation to it conveying symbolism and prestige (Bhat and Reddy, 1998).

The status of a brand is impacted by a range of social as well as marketing factors. For example, brands sold in department or specialty stores will be perceived by many consumers to have a higher status than brands within the same product class sold in discount stores (Chen-Yu and Kincade, 2001). Consumer perceptions of a specific brand are affected by their level of SC. Consumers see clothing as a means of self-expression (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006) and in this sense clothing brands will vary in their ability to enhance/support the ability to portray status.

Researchers have devoted a great deal of attention to studying the characteristics of fashion clothing buyers because this sector is so large and competitive. Moreover, the fashion clothing market is characterized by frequent style changes and rapidly changing consumer tastes, making the task of understanding what drives purchase behaviors particularly challenging. Given the cyclical nature of fashion, two important consumer issues that deserve attention are the overwhelming preference for specific brands' and WTP a premium to buy them.

With the growth in individuals and family disposable income in many transition economies, middle and lower-class consumers who seek lifestyles reminiscent of the affluent have become valuable target markets for luxury goods firms (Goldsmith et al.,2010). Economic growth in China and positive attitudes held toward western brands by Chinese young adults have created market opportunities for luxury brands in product categories such as clothing brands.

Chinese consumers as a big part of emerging market are willing to pay more for well-known brands or brands with status (see Goldsmith et al., 2010) and in the eyes of status conscious consumers, the purchase price buys more than quality and functionality. Interestingly, the effect of SC on BS was comparatively smaller than it was on BP.

Brand image refers to the perception of a certain brand in the mind of the consumer when a brand name is mentioned (Keller, 1993), whereas brand awareness measures the customer's ability to recognize the brand when seeing the brand name, logo, symbol etc. (Aaker, 1991)

Building up a strong brand is not easy but if a brand could build a better image than its competitors', then it would enjoy a degree of protection (Cheverton, 2002). With high brand image, a business can gain greater perception of the brand among customers, customer loyalty, high profit margins, less negative attitude to price fluctuations and less vulnerability compared to competitors (F. Arslan, Altuna, 2010).

**Characteristics of brands in terms of Consumers and Producers:** In order to understand how brands work and create value, we have to take a look at the different levels of which they have been conducted. De Chernatony and McDonald (1992) noted that brands can be viewed in four levels. On the first level, buyer's or user's basic needs are met. Second level is called the expected level. On the second level more and more buyers enter the market, and as repeat buying occurs, the brand keeps on developing because there are better chances to match resources to meet customers' needs, via enhanced customer service, for example. Consequently, the product or service is meant to create extra value to satisfy purchase conditions of a certain target group, availability, pricing, for instance. On the third level, as firms gain more experience, buyers and users become more aware of products and services. This means that the brand should try to become augmented in new better ways. Way to do this is to make added values satisfy non-functional, such as emotional needs, as well as functional needs.

Customers, who have the most experience of the brand, tend to be more critical than the other customers. As De Chernatony and McDonald argue in their book "Creating Powerful Brands", creativity is the only aspect that limits the extent to which the brand can mature to the fourth; the potential level. This can happen by pointing out the potential level of brands through promotion of more intangible, emotional factors, for instance. In order to succeed in the long run, it is vital for a brand to offer added values to the characteristics of the basic product. The main aim of adding values is to prevent competitors copying the functional characteristics of the company. (De Chernatony, McDonald, 1992)

**Building Successful Brands through Knowledge, Expertise and Image:** Since every company assumably wants to succeed in their field of business it is therefore beneficial to distinguish a brand from a successful brand. According to De Chernatony and McDonald (1992), a successful brand is defined as a recognizable, identified product, service, person or place. It is augmented in a way that the buyer or consumer receives great added value which answers to their needs. Success of the brand results from sustaining these added values when facing competition. A business that is capable of building a strong, successful brand is able to generate stable, long-term demand and hold better margins than an unsuccessful brand. In conclusion, by adding values that make customers buy products or services, company can become more profitable. At last, brand building helps an organization to create a face for it and this way make it more attractive to work for and deal with.

To justify the commonness of branding, Kotler and Armstrong (2009) state that "Branding has become so strong that today hardly anything goes unbranded." According to the United Kingdom's governmental online resource for businesses [5], branding is a way of distinctly highlighting what makes one producer's product or service different to, and more attractive than, the ones of competitors. Moreover, branding is a terminal phase of a process that involves the company's resources and all of its functions, as well as focusing them on a strategic intent which creates the difference compared to the other companies and their brands. (Kapferer, 1997) Kapferer (1997) also points out that branding means way more than only giving a name to a brand and signaling to the world that such a product has been established with a certain imprint of an organization in it.

Brand knowledge consists of brand awareness and brand image. Awareness is connected to consumers' ability to recognize or recall a brand, in turn, brand image consists of consumers' perceptions and associations for the brand. (Keller, 1998). Brand knowledge consists of mutually related information to a brand, such as awareness, attributes, benefits, images, thoughts, feelings attitudes and experiences. All these information characteristics of brand knowledge become integrated in constant interaction with customers that brings out forth the real understanding of the product or service. (Richards et al., 1998)
Uniqueness of brand associations signifies that consumers consider one specific brand to be somehow special; superior. Secondly, strength of brand associations stands for strongly implanted associations in the minds of consumers. Thirdly, favourability of brand associations implies that consumers favor one specific brand. (Keller, 1993) Lastly, Keller classifies types of brand associations into three categories: attitudes, benefits and attributes (product related/ non-product related).

Brand image is what people believe is true about a brand; their feelings, expectations or thoughts, for instance. (Keller, 1993) Another definition of brand image originates from Keller (1993): Brand image is an insight of a brand that is reflected by the brand associations in customers' memory. Keller states that brand associations are formed by brand attributes, brand benefits and brand attitudes. In addition, Aaker describes brand image as "—a set of associations, usually organized in some meaningful way" (1991, p. 109). In conclusion, a brand image is the understanding of consumers, originated from brand- related activities performed in by the firm. (Aaker, 1991) Thus, it should not be perceived alone as a perceptual phenomenon affected by the company's activities. (Aaker, 1991)
The other part of brand knowledge, which is brand awareness, is the ability of potential customers to recognize or to recall a brand when deciding in a specific product category whether to buy the product or service, or not. (Aaker, 1991) In other words, brand awareness relates to the ability of a customer to identify the brand, link the brand to the brand name, logo, or symbol. (Keller, 2003) De Chernatony (1998) agrees that brand awareness is in connection to the importance of a brand and makes it easier for consumers to identify the brand in a specific product category.

**The Value of Brand Awareness:** Brand awareness works as an anchor to which other associations can be attached. Associations of the firm are linked to the company's name via chains, which represent links in customer's memory. Brand awareness is essential in order to form brand image, because when a brand is well established in the memory it is easier for associations to be created and attached. Due to this, we can state that building a strong brand image depends on possessing high brand awareness.
As Aaker (1991) stated, there are few guidelines to improve brand awareness, such as being different or memorable, creating a slogan or jingle, symbol exposure, publicity, event sponsorship, considering brand extensions, using cues, recall requires repetition and the recall bonus. Nowadays, brands need to build a strong image and possess high awareness in order to succeed in highly competitive environments. A brand with higher awareness compared to competitors is able to gain higher brand equity. In other words, the brand is able to generate more profit.

**Conclusion**

As an important agent of such changes, the role of media is paramount. The analysis and interpretation of the data collected from Delhi and NCR on brand awareness reveal that media plays a significant role in developing perception and personality among urban youth.
The study establishes the fact that Media in its various forms, i.e. print, electronic, web, outdoor among others, have pivotal role in dispense updated information on brands. The contents of media in the form of advertisement, news,

feature, advertorial, contest, etc. of the different vehicles of media act as essential source to develop brand consciousness and brand loyal among the target audience.

In India, the apparel and textile industry is second after IT industry (Bhanot, 2015). The Indian markets are changing with the dynamic world. Indian customers are also adopting the global trends in their lifestyle. The reason for such taste and preference is awareness about the world wide famous brands, consciousness, self-interest, and easy availability. More passionate for branded apparels is the youth of the country. According to United Nations Report 2014, with 356 million 10-24 year-olds, India has the world's largest youth population. Therefore, in such a country where the population of youth is very high, it is important to study the effect of brand consciousness on teenagers.

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