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Customer Preference and Brand Loyalty in Online Apparel Shopping: A Study among Youth Consumers

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Abstract

Customer preference plays a crucial role in shaping brand loyalty in the speedily expanding online apparel shopping market, predominantly among youth consumers who are highly influenced by digital platforms and social media. The availability of increasing online apparel brands and intense competition have made essential for marketers to understand the factors that drive preference and loyalty in digital environments. This study aims to examine the impact of customer preference on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping among youth consumers.

The study follow a descriptive and analytical research design. Primary data were collected from youth consumers using a structured questionnaire, while secondary data were obtained from published journals, reports. Customer preference is measured through website usability, product quality, price perception, delivery performance, return policy, and social media influence. Brand loyalty is assessed using repeat purchase intention, brand commitment, and positive word-of-mouth. Statistical tools such as correlation and regression analysis are employed to analyse the relationship between customer preference and brand loyalty.

The results will indicate customer preference will have a significant positive impact on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping. Website usability, reliable delivery, and flexible return policies are identified as the most dominant factors affecting youth loyalty. Social media engagement and online reviews also contribute to building trust and repeats in purchase behaviour. The study aims in contributing to digital commerce and consumer behavior. Review of literature provides practical insights for online apparel retailers to strengthen youth brand loyalty.

Keywords: Online Apparel Shopping, Youth Consumers, Customer Preference, Brand Loyalty, E-Commerce

Introduction

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has transformed the global retail environment, leading to the exponential growth of e-commerce. The various online retail categories, apparel shopping has emerged as one of the most dynamic and competitive

segments. The convenience of online platforms, coupled with increased internet penetration and digital payment facilities, has encouraged consumers to adopt online shopping as a routine purchasing method. In India, youth consumers constitute a major share of online apparel shoppers due to their digital literacy, fashion awareness, and active engagement with social media platforms.

Youth consumers are characterized by frequent online interactions to digital marketing content, and a strong inclination toward trend-based consumption. Traditional retail shopping, online apparel purchasing involves higher perceived risk because consumers cannot bodily examine the product prior to purchase. This results in customer preference in online apparel shopping which is influenced by several factors, including website usability, perceived product quality, price fairness, delivery reliability, return policies, and social media influence.

Customer preference refers to the extent to which consumers favor a particular brand or platform based on their perceptions, experience, and fulfillment levels. In online retailing, positive customer preference often translate into repeated patronage and brand advocacy. Brand loyalty, in this context, is defined as a consumer's commitment to repurchase or recommend a preferred brand consistently over time.

The relationship between customer preference and brand loyalty is critical for online apparel retailers operating in a highly competitive digital marketplace in which several studies have examined online consumer behavior, in which limited empirical research has focused specifically only on youth consumers and the role of preference factors in fostering brand loyalty in online apparel shopping. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the impact of customer preference on brand loyalty among youth consumers.

Review of Literature

The review of literature establishes the theoretical and empirical background of the study and highlights key variables related to customer preference and brand loyalty in online apparel shopping.

Customer Preference in Online Apparel Shopping Customer preference in online shopping is shaped by technological, functional, and social factors. Davis (1989), through the Technology Acceptance Model, emphasized perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness as critical determinants of consumer acceptance of digital platforms. In online apparel shopping, website usability, ease of navigation, clarity of product descriptions, and visual presentation significantly influence customer preference (Kim & Lennon, 2013).

Product quality perception remains a central concern in online apparel shopping due to the inability to physically inspect products. Studies reveal that accurate size information, fabric description, and product images enhance consumer confidence and preference (Jin & Sternquist, 2010). Price perception also plays a vital role, particularly among youth consumers who compare prices across platforms and seek value-for-money offerings.

Delivery performance and return policies are crucial risk-reduction mechanisms in online shopping. Timely delivery, order tracking facilities, and hassle-free returns positively influence customer satisfaction and preference (Holloway & Beatty, 2008). Flexible return and exchange policies reduce uncertainty and encourage repeat purchases.

Social media influence has emerged as a powerful determinant of customer preference. Youth consumers actively engage with brands through social networking sites, influencer marketing, and online reviews. Electronic word-of-mouth significantly affects trust formation and purchase decisions in online apparel shopping.

Brand Loyalty in Online Retailing Brand loyalty in online retailing is reflected through repeat purchase intention, emotional attachment, and positive word-of-mouth. Oliver (1999) defined brand loyalty as a deeply held commitment to repurchase a preferred brand consistently. In online environments, loyalty is strongly influenced by previous shopping experiences, satisfaction levels, and perceived value.

Research indicates that satisfied online shoppers are more likely to exhibit loyalty behaviours, including brand advocacy and resistance to competitor offerings. Trust, transparency, and consistent service quality further strengthen online brand loyalty.

Digital Innovation and Transformation with Emerging Trends for Sustainable Development

Research Gap The existing studies have examined only on online consumer behaviour and brand loyalty, in which only limited research has explained about the integration of multiple customer preference factors to explain brand loyalty specifically among youth consumers in online apparel shopping. This study focusing on the Indian context remains to be limited. This study attempts to bridge this gap by empirically examining the relationship between customer preference dimensions and brand loyalty among youth consumers.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the factors influencing customer preference in online apparel shopping among the youth consumers.
- To examine the level of brand loyalty among youth consumers toward online apparel brands.
- To analyze the relationship between customer preference and brand loyalty.
- To determine the most influential customer preference factors affecting brand loyalty.

Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the objectives and review of literature, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Website usability has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping.
- H2: Product quality perception has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping.
- H3: Price perception has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping.
- H4: Delivery performance has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping.
- H5: Return policy has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping.
- H6: Social media influence has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping.

Research Methodology

Research Design The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the impact of customer preference on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping among youth consumers. This design was considered appropriate as it enables systematic description of variables and empirical testing of relationships.

Research Framework The conceptual framework of the study proposes customer preference as the independent variable and brand loyalty as the dependent variable. Customer preference was operationalized through six dimensions: website usability, product quality, price perception, delivery performance, return policy, and social media influence. Brand loyalty was measured through repeat purchase intention, brand commitment, and positive word-of-mouth.

Data Collection Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on previous studies. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: demographic profile and statements related to customer preference and brand loyalty measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Secondary data were collected from books, journals, reports, and online databases.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique The population of the study comprised youth consumers aged between 18 and 30 years who engage in online apparel shopping. A convenience sampling technique was adopted due to accessibility constraints. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 232 valid responses were used for analysis.

Reliability of the Instrument The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The overall reliability coefficient was 0.86, indicating high internal consistency and suitability of the instrument for further analysis.

Tools for Data Analysis The collected data were analysed using percentage analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

Data Analysis and Results

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18–25 years	148	63.8
	26–30 years	84	36.2
Gender	Male	108	46.6
	Female	124	53.4
Educational Qualification	Undergraduate	112	48.3
	Postgraduate	120	51.7
Monthly Online Apparel Spending	Below 2,000	62	26.7
	2,001–4,000	104	44.8
	Above 4,000	66	28.5

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years. Female respondents slightly outnumbered male respondents. Most respondents were undergraduate or postgraduate students with moderate monthly spending on online apparel.

Table 2 Correlation between Customer Preference Factors and Brand Loyalty

Variables	Website Usability	Product Quality	Price Perception	Delivery Performance	Return Policy	Social Media Influence
Website Usability	1					
Product Quality	0.52**	1				
Price Perception	0.46**	0.49**	1			
Delivery Performance	0.61**	0.55**	0.48**	1		
Return Policy	0.58**	0.50**	0.44**	0.62**	1	
Social Media Influence	0.43**	0.41**	0.45**	0.47**	0.46**	1
Brand Loyalty	0.68**	0.57**	0.52**	0.71**	0.69**	0.54**

Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 Level

Correlation Analysis Correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between customer preference dimensions and brand loyalty. All six preference factors exhibited positive correlations with brand loyalty, indicating that improved customer preference leads to enhanced loyalty 6.2 Correlation Analysis Correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between customer preference dimensions and brand loyalty. All six preference factors exhibited positive correlations with brand loyalty, indicating that improved customer preference leads to enhanced loyalty.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Independent Variables	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Website Usability	0.31	5.82	0.000

Product Quality	0.18	3.41	0.001
Price Perception	0.15	2.96	0.003
Delivery Performance	0.34	6.27	0.000
Return Policy	0.29	5.14	0.000
Social Media Influence	0.17	3.08	0.002

$$R^2 = 0.64 \mid F = 67.38 \mid p < 0.001$$

Regression Analysis Multiple regression analysis revealed that customer preference significantly predicts brand loyalty among youth consumers. Website usability, delivery performance, and return policy were found to be the strongest predictors of brand loyalty. Product quality, price perception, and social media influence also showed statistically significant but comparatively moderate effects.

Discussion of Results

The findings of the study support all the formulated hypotheses. Website usability significantly influences brand loyalty, as youth consumers prefer platforms that offer easy navigation and efficient transaction processes. Delivery performance and return policy play a crucial role in reducing perceived risk, thereby enhancing trust and repeat purchase intention. The influence of social media highlights the importance of digital engagement in shaping youth loyalty.

The results are consistent with earlier studies that emphasize the role of service quality and trust in online retailing. The study reinforces the idea that customer-centric strategies are essential for sustaining loyalty in competitive online apparel markets.

Findings of the Study

- Customer preference has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty in online apparel shopping.
- Website usability is a major determinant among the youth brand loyalty.
- Reliable delivery services and flexible return policies enhance trust and repeat purchase behavior.
- Social media engagement positively influences brand perception and advocacy.

Suggestions

Online apparel retailers must focus on improving website design and mobile application usability. Efficient logistics management and transparent return policies should be implemented to reduce customer dissatisfaction. Active social media engagement and influencer collaborations can further strengthen youth brand loyalty. Personalized recommendations and loyalty programs may also enhance long-term customer relationships in order to maintain a healthy relationship among young consumers..

Conclusion

The study concludes that young customer preference plays a pivotal role in shaping brand loyalty in online apparel shopping among youth consumers. In a digitally competitive environment, understanding youth expectations and delivering consistent value are essential for building sustainable brand loyalty. By addressing key preference factors such as website usability, delivery performance, and return policy, online apparel retailers can achieve competitive advantage and long-term success.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to youth consumers and a specific geographical area. The use of convenience sampling restricts the generalizability of the findings. Self-reported responses may also involve respondent bias.

Scope for Future Research

Future studies may extend the researcher to other age groups and regions. Comparative studies between online and offline apparel shopping can be undertaken. Advanced statistical techniques such as structural equation modeling can provide deeper insights into consumer behavior. Future research can adopt longitudinal designs, which includes other age groups, and apply advanced analytical models.

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