

# Customer progression and perception about premium men's apparel brands: A case of Indian male professionals

**Supriti Agarwal** (1)

**Sonia Singh** (2)

(1) Assistant Professor,  
Amity University, Noida, India

(2) Assistant Professor  
Al Dar University College  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

## Correspondence:

Dr Supriti Agarwal  
Assistant Professor,  
Amity University, Noida, India  
**Email:** [sagrawal2@amity.edu](mailto:sagrawal2@amity.edu)

## Abstract

A major challenge before companies today is to understand the hybrid behavior of the customer. On one side customers are becoming price sensitive for bargains and on the other they want to enjoy world class brands and luxury goods. Literature also shows that in recent time there is a considerably huge economic rise of disposable income within the middle class which is leading to consumption of branded products in masses. Today luxury brand have changed to affordable luxury brand and will change to premium brands in the near future. This study explores the variables influencing consumer progression and perception towards premium brands. This study also explores the relationship between demographics and the brand preference. To accomplish this task a questionnaire was prepared and a total of 190 respondents who have earned a professional degree like engineering or management or some higher educations like Ph.D were interviewed. We have considered those respondents who are employed in private or government sectors only. It was found that most consumers associated greater accessibility of premium brands in the Indian market with better quality, though at higher price as they evaluate them higher on quality, status and esteem. This paper tries to segment the market on the basis of different clusters and also tries to find factors affecting the perception of customers for the buying of apparel.

Key words: Customer perception, men's apparel brands, Indian professionals

## Introduction

With every passing year, intensity of competition is becoming fiercer due to globalization. Competition is rising not only in differentiating one product and service from another but also in logistics, access to information and so on. Now-a-days customers are becoming more hybrid as they are not only better informed but also they have wider choices of less distinguishable products due to easy access to internet and online shopping trend. Across the world customers are aware of their increasing power due to which there is a sharp increase in customers' expectations from the companies in terms of their basket of offerings has been noticed. After New Economy Policy 1991, the Indian economy noticed a remarkable increase in the investment by MNC's which in turn increases the living standard of Indians, especially the middle class who have the highest marginal propensity to consume. Due to all this in India high end luxury, high value services, high information access and high technology are increasing. India is moving fast in each spectrum be it retail, services, real estate, hospitality on the consumer front or value added B2B services or even our capabilities in out sourcing at company front. All these have given a sharp increase in both income and mindset of the middle class income group, for them luxury is now a life style not only a fashion statement. Luxury items may be automobiles to clothing, accessories, perfumes, all are beating sales target in India.

## 2. Research Purpose

Now in India with the advent of MNC's and subsequent rise in white collar jobs, the apparel industry, especially in the men's segment, is increasing. The young generation, especially in management positions, are cognitively orienting towards brands and trying to find psychological identity by grooming personality and self concept. So in this paper we try to find the factors affecting perception for buying the premium brands and we also try to segment the market for branded apparels.

## 3. Literature Review

Alden, D.I., Steenkamp, J.B. and Batra, R., (1999), proposed, operationalized and tested a new construct, GCCP-Global Consumer Culture Position. This construct associates the brand with a widely understood and recognized set of symbols believed to constitute emerging global consumer culture. Holt, D.B., Quelech, J.A., and Taylor, E.L. (2004) argued that global branding should not be interpreted as a call to rid traditional brands of their national brands of their national heritage, the two reasons. Firstly, while globalness has become a stronger quality signal than nation of origin, consumers still prefer brands that hail from countries that are considered to have particular expertise : Switzerland in chocolates, Italy for clothing, France in cosmetic, Germany in cars, Japan in electronics, for example.

More important, consumers expect global brands to tell their myths from the particular places that are associated with the brand. For Nestle to spin a credible myth about food, the myth must be set in the Swiss mountains, because that is where people imagine the brand hails from. As per Holt, D.B.(1995) there are four types of consuming as experience -- subjective, emotional reactions to consumption objects, consuming as integration -- consumer's acquire and manipulate object meanings, consuming as classification -- consumed objects are used to classify consumers, consuming as play -- how consumption objects are used to play.

It is impossible to predict the culture profile from the income position and vice versa. There is an influence of income and culture over the consumption of luxury products. Income induces consumers to acquire luxury goods. The penetration of luxury goods is at a maximum between the "wealth on trend" (Doubois B and Duquesne, P (1993). (Cesare Amatulli, Gianluigi Guido, 2010) Consumers buy luxury fashion goods mainly to match their lifestyle, thus satisfying their inner drives. The hierarchical value map resulting from the data collection and elaboration demonstrates that self-confidence and self-fulfillment are the main hidden final values when buying and consuming luxury goods. Implications for marketers are related to tailoring products, brand values and communication messages to the subjective, self-rewarding and "internalized" consumption sought after by consumers. In their analysis Eng Tech-Young, Bogaert Julie (2010) suggest that luxury consumption conveys certain identity through matching symbolic meaning of luxury and consumption. This identity is concerned with personal values of wealth, status and socio economic success derived from luxury consumption. In this regard consumers' perceptions of luxury are susceptible to the reference group. In turn, reference groups influence predilection for luxury as part of extended self, but with perceived uniqueness from combining traditional Indian styles with the possession of western luxury products. In their result results Zhongqi Jin and Bal Chansarkar, N.M. Kondap, (2006) demonstrated that most consumers can recognize the brand origin correctly but the power of recognition decreases when the brand has a long history of "localization." Distinguished trajectories of consumer perceptions' of foreign brands and domestic brands were projected, and this allowed one to extend existing country of origin (CO) research to brand of origin research. In their research Mandel, N., Petrova, P.K. and Craldini, R.B.(2006) provides a necessary examination of how consumers' purchasing habits are influenced by comparisons with individuals who are wealthier and more successful than themselves. The consumption of luxury goods involves purchasing a product that represents value to both the individual and their reference group. Referring to personal and interpersonal oriented perceptions of luxury, it is expected that different sets of consumers would have different perceptions of the luxury value for the same brands, and that the overall luxury value of a brand would integrate these perceptions from different perspectives. Even if the overall luxury value level of a certain product or brand may be perceived equally across national borders, a differentiated measurement may reveal that the overall luxury value perception is a combination of different evaluations with regard to the sub-dimensions. Furthermore, this differentiated perception of luxury

value may be dependent on the cultural context and the people concerned (Wiedmann, K.P., Hennigs N, Siebils A, 2007).

## 4. Research Methodology

### Objectives:

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To evaluate the customer's perception towards the purchase of premium segment apparels.
2. To know whether the demographic variables of respondent have influence on selecting a premium brand.
3. To know the important variables that influences the respondents in purchasing a premium apparel brands.

### Types of Research Methods Used

**Phase 1:** Premium segments are relatively new in India. Luxury brand from a recent past are considered as premium brands today. There is little empirical evidence to help marketers fully understand what constitute progression and perception towards these brands. Therefore, the imperative of the exploratory study is to gain much needed background of information pertaining to customer perception towards premium apparel brands. This exploratory study helped us in descriptive research by developing the scales for the survey instruments.

**Phase 2:** The purpose of the descriptive research is to evaluate the customer perception towards premium brands, to know the important variable that influences the respondent in purchasing a premium apparel brand and influence of demographic behavior. For this we have used the followings:

#### • Factor Analysis

#### • Cluster Analysis

These are used to analyse and evaluate customer progression and perception towards premium brands.

### Sampling:

As our research is mainly for the men's section, they are also those at management level positions and those who have earned some higher degree and are coming into high income brackets, we have used convenient sampling. While doing the pilot study we came across one problem in our demographic segment of questionnaire. We asked the respondents about their qualifications and we gave them options like engineering, management study or some higher study like PhD. In our pilot study of 10 respondents there was one respondent who had done his engineering after that MBA and also PhD. So to avoid confusing we have considered only the higher education of the respondents. So in the initial stage of conducting the research we took the sample size of 300 respondents in order to collect relevant data and all participants were made aware of research intention and design by an introduction. As time was limited for the study, out of 300 distributed we got 192 fully filled questionnaires and out of 192 for the convenience of research we discarded 2 questionnaires. So this study was done with 190 respondents.

## 5. Discussion on results

### Demographic segmentation of respondents:

As our survey was related to men's apparel all our respondents were men only, but we had to be very careful in choosing the sample. Almost 66% of respondents are from age group 25 to 35 and the rest, 34 % are 35 years and above. Out of 190 respondents almost 56% of respondents have done a Masters in management, and then almost 36% of respondents' highest qualification was engineering. In the income group almost 45% of respondents were in income group 50000-70000 INR and almost 38% for income group 30000- 50000 INR and 17% were above 70000 INR. Almost 76% of respondents were in private jobs and the rest in government jobs.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

<b>Reno.</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
1	Age	25-30	62	32.63
		31-35	64	33.68
		36-40	48	25.26
		40 and above	16	8.42
2	Education	Engineering	69	36.31
		Master in Management	106	55.78
		Higher degree (PhD)	15	7.89
3	Income	30000-50000	72	37.89
		50000-70000	86	45.26
		70000 and above	32	16.84
4	Job	Government Job	46	24.21
		Private Job	144	75.78

### Factor Analysis to identify important factors:

Factor analysis attends to identify underlying variables or factors that explain the pattern of correlation within a set of observed variables. Factor analysis is often used in data reduction, by identifying a smaller number of factors which explains most of the variant observed in a much larger number of variables.

### Sample Adequacy

A set of fourteen variables are considered to be important to know the customer shopping behavior for premium apparel brands. These were subjected to principal component analysis, using varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization in order to reduce the multiplicity of variable into selected factor. First of all, let us observe the values of Bartlett's Test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyor-Olkin(KMO) measure of sampling adequacy.

**Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

<b>KMO and Bartlett's Test</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.725
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	411.502
	df	66
	Sig.	.000

As depicted in Table 2 the KMO measure of sampling adequacy for this sample was 0.725, which is greater than 0.5 and suggests that data is adequate for factor analysis.

**Interpretation of factors:**

After this, factor analysis using Varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalization was conducted. As a result, four factors were obtained. A rotated component matrix along with factor is given in the table below:

**Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix**

	<b>Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup></b>			
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
I usually buy only the sets of clothing I need	.073	-.040	.006	.954
I like a lot of luxury in my life	.187	.656	-.224	-.256
I find shopping for fashion clothing stimulating	.436	.718	-.259	.068
Shopping for fashion clothing makes me feel like I am in my own universe	.719	.426	-.240	.096
I go shopping for fashion clothing to feel good	.761	.240	-.307	.079
Shopping for branded clothes is a best treat to myself	.800	.082	-.120	.064
I shop for branded clothes during sale and discounts	-.189	-.367	.616	.239
I go shopping for fashion clothes with my friends/family	.056	.185	.887	-.095
I go shopping to keep up with the trends	.367	.571	-.059	-.179
An important part of my life and activities is "dressing smartly"	-.132	.870	.118	.153
I prefer fashion over comfort	.208	.382	-.590	-.008
"Made in" label (country of origin) affect my purchase decision	.672	-.030	.276	-.149
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.				



### Factor C1: Shopping Stimulus

As shown in Table 4, all loadings of item in factor C1 are significantly high. Four variables with positive loading are extracted in factor C1. The positive loading indicates that these four variables share most of their variances between them and thereby co-vary with each other. This factor exhibits that the customer finds shopping very stimulating, which gives them a very happy feeling and is a treat to them. In addition to this, respondents prefer fashion over comfort and dressing smartly is an important activity in their life.

Table 4: Factor loadings of Factor 1

Item	Statement	Factor loading
Item 1	Shopping for fashion clothing makes me feel like I am in my own universe	.719
Item 2	I go shopping for fashion clothing to feel good.	.761
Item 3	Shopping for branded clothes is a best treat to myself	.800
Item 4	"made in" labels (country of origin) affects my purchase decision	.672

### Factor C2: Brand Pullers

As depicted in Table 5, high positive loading has been observed on some variables. This variable shows that customers give importance to their self-actualization and Self-esteem needs.

Table 5: Factor loadings of Factor 2

Item	Statement	Factor loading
Item 1	I like a lot of luxury in my life	.656
Item 2	I find shopping for fashion clothing stimulating	.718
Item 3	I go shopping to keep up with the trends	.571
Item 4	an important part of my life and activities is "dressing smartly"	.870

### Factor C3: Shopping Delight

As depicted in Table 6, high positive loading have been observed on the variable - Buying branded clothes give me a lot of pleasure. This variable shows that customers give importance to brands they buy which in return give them pleasure

Table 6: Factor loadings of Factor 3

Item	Statement	Factor loading
Item 1	I shop for branded clothes during sale and discounts	.616
Item 2	I go shopping for fashion clothes with my friends/family	.887
Item 3	I prefer fashion over comfort	-0.570

### Factor C4: Self satisfied buyers

As depicted in Table 7, high positive loading have been observed on the variable- They enjoy the clothes what they have and are very satisfied with what they possess. This variable shows that respondents hesitate to spend money on premium brands.

Table 7: Factor loadings of Factor 4

Item	Statement	Factor loading
Item 1	I usually buy only the sets of clothing I need	.954

### Cluster Analysis for market segmentation:

Factor analysis, multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis all are interdependence techniques and no distinction between dependent and independent variables is made. Both factor analysis and cluster analysis are data reduction techniques but the major difference is that factor analysis is done by grouping variables where as cluster analysis is by reducing observations in a smaller number of observations. So in order to identify the market segment for different apparel brands by grouping them in same cluster we have performed cluster analysis by using (K means) in Table 8.

**Table 8: Cluster Analysis (K Means)**

Number of cases in each clusters		
Clusters	1	75
	2	48
	3	67
	Valid	190
	Missing	00

#### Interpretation of Cluster1: Premium Brands Diehards

On the basis of the opinion of the population towards the premium brands, people belonging to this group are highly influence by premium brands. They consider premium brands as durable and high quality. They strongly believe that premium brands reflect their personality and they do not mind paying a high price for them. They enjoy spending times in these stores as it offers them a good shopping environment. They believe that premium brands help them gain face.

**Profile:** Premium brands diehards are the customers with positive notions about a brand, and are loyal customers of these segments of apparels.

#### Interpretation of Cluster 2: Non Fascinated Customer

On the basis of the opinion of the population towards premium brands, people belonging to this group agree with the fact that premium brands demonstrate success and social status. But this set of population believes premium brands do not help to gain face and are unbiased on the quality and durability of the products. They strongly believe that premium brands apparel is highly priced.

**Profile:** As the name suggests non fascinated customer are unenthusiastic about premium brands and do not show a very high interest in purchasing them.

#### Interpretation of Cluster 3: Consumer on the Fence

On the basis of the preference and the choice of premium brands, the population of this set is in agreement that premium brands are durable and are of high quality. They do not strongly agree that premium brands reflect one's personality and social status but are giving consent to the statement. More emphasis should be given to this set of consumers as they are highly switchable and constitute the major chunk of the same population.

**Profile:** Consumers on the fence are highly switchable and can be turned to loyal customers if taken care off.

### 6. Finding and Conclusions

Indian consumer demonstrate unique purchasing behavior due to the diversity of the population, as we find all age groups, income groups and educational qualification people are using home made products to most branded products. It is very important to understand the perception in such a vast and growing market where the male population is also becoming more brand conscious and are constantly looking out for global premium brand as they give them a status, confidence and pleasure of shopping. Research shows consumers between the ages of 20-35 years have been the prime market for premium brands.

If we conclude the answer of the respondent, we can say that they perceived premium brands as quality products. This perception can often serve as a rationale for premium brands to charge high prices. Consumers also believe that these transnational companies compete by trying to develop new products and are very dynamic, always upgrading themselves with respect to the fashion and global trend.

### References

1. Alden, D.I., Steenkamp, J.B. and Batra, R., (1999), "Brand positioning through advertising in Asia, North America, and Europe: The role of global consumer culture", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol.63, pp.75-87.
2. Atwal G. and Williame A. "Luxury Brand Marketing - The experience is everything!" *Journal of Brand Management* ,Volume 16,pp-338-346
3. Cesare Amatulli, Gianluigi Guido,(2010) "Determinant of Purchasing Intentions for Fashion Luxury Goods in Italian Market", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol.15, Issue 1, pp.123-136.

4. Doubois B and Duquesne, P (1993), "The market for luxury goods: income vs culture", *European Journal of marketing*, Vol.21, No. 1, pp.35-44.
5. Eng, Teck-Yong, Bogaert, Julie, "Psychological and cultural insights into consumption of luxury Western brand in India", *Journal of customer behavior*, Vol.9, No.1 Spring 2010, pp.55-75)
6. Holt, D.B. (1995) "How consumers consume : A typology of consumption practices", *Journal of Consumer Research* , Vol.22, No.6, pp 1-16.
7. Holt, D.B., Quelech, J.A., and Taylor, E.L. (2004), "How global brands compete", *Harvard Business Review* , Vol. 82 ,No.9, pp.68-75
8. Mandel, N., Petrova, P.K. and Cialdini, R.B.(2006) , " Images of success and the preference for luxury brands", *Journal of Consumer Psychology* ,Vol.16, No.1, pp.56-69
9. S. Ravichandran "Daily News. lk, Wednesday, 1st July 1999.
10. Wiedmann, K.P., Hennigs N, Siebils A,(2007) "Measuring Consumers' Luxury Value Perception: A Cross-Cultural Framework", *Academy of Marketing Science* , Vol,11, pp-1-21.
11. Zhongqi Jin and Bal Chansarkar, N.M. Kondap, (2006) "Brand Origin is an Emerging Market: Perception of Indian Consumer", *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, Vol.18 Iss: 4, pp.283-302.