



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

INCLUSIVENESS IN APPAREL BRANDS : STUDY ON AWARENESS, PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR AND RECOMMENDATION INTENTION AMONG CONSUMERS

Marketing

KEY WORDS: awareness, apparel brands, inclusiveness, purchase behaviour, recommendation intention

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic fashion landscape, brands in India are increasingly recognizing inclusion not merely as a moral obligation but as a strategic driver of profitability, consumer loyalty, and sustained brand equity. The growing emphasis on inclusivity whether through size diversity, gender-neutrality, adaptive fashion, or cultural representation reflects both social awareness and strategic business imperatives. This study is aimed to understand the awareness of consumers about adoption of inclusiveness in apparel brands and its influence of purchase behaviour and recommendation intention of consumers. A structured questionnaire was administered to collect data from 150 respondents. The findings shows that consumers are strongly aware of inclusiveness apparel brands however its impact on purchase behaviour of consumers is moderate but the recommendation intention of apparel brands to other is higher. Based on the findings the managerial and practical implications are suggested to the apparel brand companies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion in India is undergoing a transformation shaped by pluralism, consumer activism, and digital democratization. Recent years have witnessed the rise of Indian brands that embed inclusion into their brand elements and promotion. The growing emphasis on inclusivity whether through size diversity, gender-neutrality, adaptive fashion, or cultural representation reflects both social awareness and strategic business imperatives. In this context, belonging becomes more than representation; it is the consumer's lived emotional connection to a brand.

The Indian fashion ecosystem is deeply rooted in diversity due to the country's rich cultural, linguistic, and regional variety. However, mainstream fashion historically catered to narrow beauty standards and limited accessibility. With globalization, social media, and increased consumer awareness, the demand for inclusive fashion has intensified. Indian consumers, especially younger demographics, now expect fashion brands to be not just style providers but also cultural representatives that acknowledge individuality. Examples several brands, provides adaptive wear that ensures independence and dignity for people with limited mobility; focuses on stylish adaptive clothing that merges comfort with accessibility; develop tactile clothing for visually impaired individuals; and revolutionize lingerie and intimate wear by foregrounding body positivity and size diversity. These brands illustrate how inclusion can be transformed from a tokenistic gesture into a strategic cornerstone that drives both belonging and profitability. The aim of the study is to investigate awareness, purchase behaviour and recommendation intention of consumer towards apparel brands in India. The objectives of the study are : i) To understand the awareness level of consumers on inclusiveness in apparel brands; ii) To evaluate the purchase behaviour of consumers from the inclusive apparel brands; iii) To estimate the recommendation intention of the consumer of the inclusive brands to other consumers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Inclusive Branding

Inclusive branding does not simply improve social perception it translates into measurable profitability. Scholars note that inclusive campaigns often broaden a brand's consumer base, attract new market segments, and increase share of wallet by making consumers feel represented (Khan, 2021). From a global perspective, brands like Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign and Rihanna's Fenty line illustrate that inclusivity can disrupt industries, creating new multi-billion-dollar business opportunities. For Indian brands, inclusion

functions as a dual lever rectifying exclusionary practices rooted in colonial-era beauty ideals while tapping into large, previously underserved consumer groups. By cultivating symbolic capital and emotional bonds, inclusive branding enhances Customer Lifetime Value (CLV), reduces churn, and increases long-term profitability, making it not just ethically desirable but financially indispensable.

2.2 Adaptive Fashion

Rao (2022) highlights the scarcity of fashionable adaptive wear in India, where people with disabilities often face limited options prioritizing medical utility over style and self-expression. Historically, disability fashion was constructed through a biomedical lens, emphasizing functionality while overlooking aesthetics, dignity, and cultural belonging. Adaptive fashion thus emerges as both a social necessity and a commercial opportunity. Profitability enters this equation through niche market expansion: with over 26.8 million people in India living with disabilities (Census, 2011), adaptive fashion represents a vast, untapped consumer base. International literature (Kabel, 2018; Kulkarni, 2020) demonstrates that adaptive fashion not only enhances autonomy and psychological well-being for differently-abled individuals but also generates significant revenues when scaled. In India, brands like AaramSe and Zyenika show that tailoring products to underrepresented consumers can open profitable market segments with minimal competition. While the upfront design costs may be higher, adaptive clothing increases consumer loyalty, reduces returns due to fit/accessibility issues, and strengthens brand equity—all of which contribute to long-term profitability.

2.3 Emotional Engagement, Purchase Behaviour and Recommendation

Theories of brand equity (Aaker, 1991) and belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) collectively suggest that consumers are more likely to form lasting relationships with brands that recognize and validate their identities. Inclusiveness enhances authenticity, fosters deep emotional attachment, and together these drivers influence purchasing decisions. Indian fashion studies (Chaudhury, 2021; Menon, 2022) demonstrate that inclusiveness related to body sizes, genders, and cultural identities has a direct impact on perceived brand trustworthiness and, consequently, sales. For instance, Nykaa's "Every Body is Beautiful" campaign led to a 22% sales spike in its Curve lingerie line (Nykaa Annual Report, 2023). This example illustrates how emotional equity translates into financial equity—when representation creates belonging, the resulting consumer loyalty directly drives profitability.

Prior research by Khan (2021) and Banerjee (2023) emphasizes that inclusion drives emotional loyalty, strengthens consumer advocacy, and contributes to sustained market relevance. In today's competitive landscape, inclusion is no longer a fringe strategy but an essential tool for differentiation in saturated fashion markets where product parity is high and consumer expectations extend beyond aesthetics. Profitability emerges here through repeat patronage and word-of-mouth advocacy, as consumers who feel represented are more inclined to pay a premium for inclusive brands and recommend them to peers.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a quantitative research approach to capture consumer awareness, purchase behaviour and recommendation intention perceptions on inclusiveness in Indian apparel brands. Non-probability and convenience sampling method was adopted for this study. A structured questionnaire, was administered through Google Forms to various respondents across the various locations in the country. The sample size of study was 150. In the questionnaire respondents were asked to share awareness levels, perceptions of inclusive practices, emotional engagement with inclusive advertisements, purchase behaviour and their likelihood of recommending such brands.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Demographic Descriptives

Among the 150 respondents, i) for age, 46% of respondents belongs to the of 18-24 years age group, 36% belongs to 25-34 years and 15% 35-44 years; ii) for gender, 56% of respondents were female, 33% male, and 17% third gender; For location, 54.7% were from metro cities, 28% from Tier 1 cities, 10% from Tier 2/3 cities and 7.3% from rural regions.

4.2 Percentage Analysis

Table 1 : Percentage Analysis

S.No		Frequency	Percentage
1	Awareness of inclusive brands	108	72%
2	Body Positivity	32	21.33%
3	Adaptive Fashion	26	17.33%
4	Gender Neutrality	43	28.67%
5	Cultural Representation	49	32.67%
6	Emotional Engagement with inclusive ads	98	65%
7	Purchased due to inclusive campaigns	81	54%
8	Likelihood to recommend an inclusive brand	117	78%

Table 1 interprets that out of 150 respondents, for awareness about inclusiveness of the brand, 108 respondents (72%) reported that they were aware of inclusiveness of the apparel brands. So majority of the respondents were aware about the inclusiveness of the apparel brands. For body positivity, 32 respondents (21.33%) only mentioned body positivity inclusion in the apparel brand. So majority of the respondents did not observe the body positivity inclusion in the apparel brand;

For adaptive fashion, 26 respondents (17.33%) only mentioned adaptive fashion features in the apparel brands. So majority of the respondents did not observe the adaptive fashion features in the apparel brand;

For gender neutrality, 43 respondents (28.67%) only mentioned gender neutrality features in the inclusiveness of apparel brand. So majority of the respondents did not observe the gender equality features in the apparel brand;

For cultural representation, 49 respondents (32.67%) mentioned cultural representation for inclusiveness in apparel brands. So majority of the respondents did not

observe the cultural representation features in the apparel brand;

For emotional connections with inclusive advertisement, 98 respondents (65%) felt stronger emotional connections with inclusive advertisements. So majority of the respondents have stronger emotional connections with inclusive advertisements.

For purchase behaviour from inclusive apparel brands, 81 respondents (54%) admitted purchasing from inclusive apparel brands. So slightly majority of the respondents have purchased from the inclusive apparel brands.

For recommendation intention 117 respondents (78%) were likely to recommend such brands. So majority of the respondents were likely to recommend inclusive apparel brands

4.3 Chi-Square Analysis

Chi-square analysis was employed to understand the association between demographic factors awareness of inclusiveness and purchase behaviour.

Table 2 gives the details about the chi-square test results between demographic variables and the awareness on of inclusive fashion brands and the purchase behaviour.

Table 2 : Chi-Square Test

Demographics	Awareness		Purchase Behavior			
	Chi-Square Value	df	Sig. (2-sided)	Chi-Square Value	df	Sig. (2-sided)
Age	0.914	3	.822	0.165	3	.983
Gender	0.729	2	.695	0.481	2	.786
Location	2.449	3	.484	0.742	3	.863

Source : Primary Data

From the table 2, it is observed that, for awareness, the demographic factors age ($p>.05$), gender ($p>.05$), and location ($p>.05$), have no significant association ($p>.05$) with the awareness.

For purchase behavior, the demographic factors age ($p>.05$), gender ($p>.05$), and location ($p>.05$), have no significant association ($p>.05$) with the purchase behavior.

4.4 ANOVA

ANOVA test was done to understand if any significant difference between demographic factors and emotional engagement and recommendation.

Table 3 : ANOVA

	Emotional engagement		Recommendation	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Age	0.769	.513	0.255	.857
Gender	0.487	.616	0.930	.397
Location	0.557	.644	2.122	.100

Source : Primary Data

From the table 3, it is observed that, for emotional engagement, the F Values and p values for the demographic factors age ($F=0.769, p>.05$), gender ($F=0.487, p>.05$), and location ($F=0.557, p>.05$). This shows that i) there is no significant difference between age categories and emotional engagement; ii) There is no significant difference between gender categories and emotional engagement and iii) There is no significant difference between location categories and emotional engagement.

For recommendation, the F Values and p values for the demographic factors age ($F=0.255, p>.05$), gender ($F=0.930, p>.05$),

p>.05), and location ($F=2.122, p>.05$). This shows that i) there is no significant difference between age categories and recommendation. ii) There is no significant difference between gender categories and recommendation and iii) There is no significant difference between location categories and recommendation.

5. DISCUSSION

Regarding awareness about inclusiveness of the brand, majority of the respondents (72%) were aware about the inclusiveness of the apparel brands, this shows a positive approach among the consumers for the inclusiveness of the brands. So the apparel brands should include more inclusive features in their brand elements, products and their promotion. Regarding body positivity, 21.33% only mentioned body positivity inclusion in the apparel brand. This shows that consumers are less aware about the body positivity features in the apparel products and brands, so the apparel brands need to promote more body positivity content in their brand promotions to educate consumers about the body positivity.

Regarding adaptive fashion, only 17.33% mentioned adaptive fashion features in the apparel brands, so the apparel brands need to include adaptive fashion features in their brand promotions to educate consumers about the adaptive fashion. Regarding, gender neutrality, only 28.67% mentioned about gender neutrality features in the inclusiveness of apparel brand. This shows that still consumers have very less consciousness about gender neutrality features in the apparel products and brand promotions. Apparel retailers should come up with advertisements which engage gender neutrality characteristics in their retail promotions. Regarding cultural representation, 32.67% only mentioned cultural representation about inclusiveness in apparel brands. So apparel retailers should include different ethnic varieties in the apparel products and brand promotions.

Regarding, emotional connections with inclusive advertisement, 65% felt stronger emotional connections with inclusive advertisements. Regarding, purchase behaviour from inclusive apparel brands, 54% admitted purchasing from inclusive apparel brands. This shows that consumers are started giving importance for inclusiveness in their apparel purchase decisions. In future, inclusiveness would become one of the important factor in the apparel purchase decisions among the consumers. Regarding, recommendation intention 78% were likely to recommend such brands. This is a very good information for the apparel retailers and brand managers. If the apparel brands include more inclusive features in their brand elements and advertisements, then the consumers would recommend the apparel brand more to other consumers.

The findings of questionnaire survey analysis shows that considerable awareness, favourable emotional engagement, promising purchase behaviour and encouraging willingness to recommend the inclusiveness to others. The approach towards inclusiveness does significantly differ among the demographics factors viz. age, gender and location. The findings underline a clear and dynamic link between inclusion elements function not in isolation but as interconnected drivers of both consumer behavior and brand performance.

6. CONCLUSION

This study is indented to study the awareness, purchase behaviour and recommendation intention of consumer towards apparel brands in India. The findings showed that there is a strong awareness, moderate purchase behaviour and strong recommendation intention among the consumers towards apparel brands. Inclusion in Indian fashion is no longer an optional gesture but a strategic necessity. Brands started showcase how authentic inclusion creates belonging,

which in turn cultivates loyalty and elevates brand equity. Authentic inclusion—where the commitment to diversity is embedded in product design, marketing communication, and internal organizational policies—emerges as the most critical factor. When consumers perceive such alignment, they are more likely to develop trust in the brand, which fosters a sense of emotional belonging. This belonging, in turn, translates into repeat purchases, stronger advocacy, and ultimately enhanced brand equity. The way forward involves embedding inclusivity into the structural DNA of fashion brands, ensuring practices are both ethical and commercially sustainable.

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