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## **A Sociological Study of Gender Differences in Brand Fascination and Consumer Behaviour Among Students of Banaras Hindu University**

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### **Abstract**

*This quantitative study examines how consumer behaviour, specifically 'brand interest' (defined as the emotional attachment, frequency of usage, and symbolic meanings given to brands), is influenced by sociocultural, gender, and class characteristics among students of Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Based on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and Goffman's dramaturgical framework, the study investigates branded consumption as a social performance and a means of symbolic differentiation. Findings show no statistically significant differences between male and female students in terms of emotional attachment, frequency of usage, or symbolic meanings given to brands, which runs counter to traditional gendered consumption narratives. Instead, brand trust and family wealth show up as important predictors, highlighting the influence of socialization within the family and economic capital on consumer behaviour. The predominately media-centric assumptions are challenged by the minimal direct impact of peer groups and digital media influences on purchasing decisions. The findings emphasize brand interest as a socially embedded practice that reflects status negotiation and identity work within overlapping family, class, and gender dynamics. By presenting an intersectional perspective of consuming patterns in the Global South and demonstrating how branded commodities serve as instruments for social belonging, aspiration, and boundary-making in youth culture, this study advances feminist sociological scholarship.*

### **Keywords**

Brand fascination, GENDER and consumption, Cultural capital, Dramaturgy, Intersectionality.

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## **A Sociological Study of Gender Differences in Brand Fascination and Consumer Behaviour Among Students of Banaras Hindu University**

### **1. Introduction**

In today's consumer cultures, consumption is a crucial tool for the creation and exchange of social identities, cultural meanings, and group connections, going beyond its historical function of meeting material necessities (Featherstone, 1991). In particular, brands have developed into powerful symbols that mediate both individual and societal representations of lifestyle, social standing, and identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 2002). Customers who buy branded goods do more than buy valuable goods; they also participate in intricate processes of social differentiation and self-presentation, negotiating meanings that are influenced by broader cultural narratives and social structures (Bourdieu, 1984). Among young people who are negotiating significant life transitions and developing emerging adult identities, this symbolic aspect of consumption is particularly relevant (Arnett, 2000). They see brands as emotional connections, indicators of belonging, and instruments for controlling perceptions among their peers (Eckert, 2006; Marwick, 2015).

Global consumer culture is now more visible and influential among India's youth due to the country's rapid economic growth, growing internet penetration, and integration into international markets (Dholakia, 2006; Chakraborty & Banerjee, 2019). Alongside this exposure, there are persistent cultural traditions and social structures that continue to influence meanings and purchasing patterns (Beteille, 1991; Srinivas, 1996). Since they frequently straddle many social worlds-urban and rural, traditional and modern, local and global-college students are an essential demographic for comprehending the interaction between modernization, globalization, and tradition in this context (Arnett, 2000; Mukherjee, 2019). One of India's biggest and most diverse universities, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), is a prime example of this interaction. Because of the diverse caste, class, language, and geographic backgrounds of its student body, it offers an excellent opportunity to investigate the ways in which complex social characteristics like gender, peer

relationships, and access to digital media impact brand-related consumer behaviour.

Gender continues to be a key axis that shapes social life and consumption, impacting not only preferences but also the social connotations associated with consuming behaviours and brands (Connell, 2009; McRobbie, 2004). According to sociological conceptions of gender, gender identities are socially produced and enacted via daily activities, such as consumption, rather than being fixed characteristics (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Goffman, 1959). This viewpoint is supported by empirical research in marketing and consumer psychology, which demonstrates that women typically exhibit greater emotional attachment and brand loyalty, frequently preferring interpersonal connection and using consumption as a means of self-expression (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2006; Mehta, 2020). On the other hand, men tend to place more emphasis on the symbolic capital, status, and functional value of brands, which reflects broader gendered norms on consumption and masculinity (Schmitt, 2012; Mehta, 2020). The knowledge of how larger gender relations and social settings impact brand interest is limited, nevertheless, because these psychological descriptions hardly ever embed these gendered patterns inside their social and cultural contexts.

By using a sociological lens to place brand interest within the peer networks and gendered socialization of college students at BHU, Varanasi, this study seeks to close this gap. Using a quantitative approach, the study looks at peer influence, perceived social status, frequency of use of branded products, and emotional attachment to brands. Sociographic factors like gender, age, family background, urban/rural origin, and exposure to digital media are also included. By highlighting consumption as a socially embedded practice that is influenced by cultural storytelling, social memberships, and daily interactions, it goes beyond frameworks that emphasize economic or psychological individualism (Bourdieu, 1984; Zelizer, 2010).

Furthermore, today's youth are digital natives who use social media platforms extensively. On these platforms, influencers and online brand communities are crucial in creating and sharing brand meanings (Marwick, 2015). By establishing new areas where gendered identities and consumer cultures interact and change, this digital context makes conventional consumption patterns even more challenging to understand. Therefore, it is essential for sociological research as well as real-world applications in higher education

administration and young marketing tactics to comprehend how gender mediates brand appeal in this setting.

By integrating the social environment, gender, and emotional aspects of brand engagement in a developing economy, this study has the potential to advance the sociology of consumption significantly. It underscores the importance of understanding consuming as a socially and culturally created habit that reflects and reproduces larger power relations, including gender-based ones, rather than just as an individual preference. In the midst of the intricate interactions between tradition and modernity, local culture, and global consumerism, the results will offer crucial insights into how young Indian consumers use brands to negotiate identity and social belonging. This study's contribution to the field of sociology is significant, and its findings will be of interest to scholars, researchers, and students in sociology, marketing, and consumer behaviour.

## **2. Literature Review**

The growing consumption of branded goods by college students in recent years has transcended the realm of marketing and is now a rich field for sociological research. Today's brands serve as cultural icons that convey identities, values, and associations in addition to being commercial commodities. Brands are practical tools of self-presentation and social mobility, especially in the Indian higher education system, where students are a transitory population juggling modernity, tradition, and aspiration. With a focus on how gender influences Indian college students' brand attraction and consumer behaviour, this literature review critically examines previous empirical and theoretical contributions. This review focuses on two important frameworks-Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital and Goffman's theory of symbolic interactionism-to offer a sociologically sound explanation. These frameworks aid in the interpretation of the structural factors and social meanings of brand consumption.

According to the symbolic interactionist paradigm developed by Goffman in 1959, social life is viewed as a sequence of performances in which people adopt roles in order to express their desired identities. With this dramaturgical setting, brands serve as "props" to aid with impression control. In addition to being practical decisions, one's laptop, phone, and clothes all contribute to a socially constructed narrative that validates their identity within their peer group. In order to explain the gendered subtleties of branding among students, symbolic interactionism is especially pertinent. Whereas males

typically choose brands that represent strength, independence, or competence, women typically interact with brands that conform to standards of beauty, relationality, and emotional expressiveness. Thus, a brand's symbolic value is not neutral; instead, it is closely linked to how gendered identities are performed in regular social encounters.

This micro-sociological viewpoint is complemented by Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital, which contends that preferences and tastes are socially acquired and represent a person's class. According to Bourdieu, consuming is a domain of social differentiation in which people use cultural resources to set themselves apart and fit in with the social groupings they want to be part of. Particularly for those from semi-urban or rural backgrounds, brand choices among Indian college students frequently indicate metropolitan modernism, cosmopolitanism, or upward mobility. Insofar as these purchasing patterns represent disparities in access to social and financial capital, they are gendered. Women might spend money on brands that improve their appearance and social standing, whereas males would concentrate on brands that communicate usefulness and prestige in male peer groups.

One of the main factors influencing how consumers behave is gender socialization. People are indoctrinated with rules, expectations, and actions that are considered suitable for their gender from an early age. These socialization processes affect how students interact with companies and continue until young adulthood. According to Mehta's (2020) research on Indian millennials, female students had greater degrees of fashion interest, novelty consciousness, and brand-emotional connection. On the other hand, male students had a more utilitarian attitude, prioritizing brand reliability, usefulness, and value for money. These behaviours are a reflection of larger trends in gendered consumer roles, where males are educated to be practical and status-driven, and women are frequently positioned as emotional and appearance-conscious consumers.

The affective aspects of branding are further discussed by Workman and Lee (2012), who points out that women are more likely to display brand name sensitivity and consume in relation to vanity because of their increased private self-consciousness. Goffman's theory that identity is constantly controlled through routine performances is supported by these data. For female students, wearing a branded purse or piece of clothing is part of a larger aesthetic performance that aims to win approval from family, friends,

and social media. In their study on Indian youth, Rajput and Khanna (2014) support this finding by finding that while men based their preferences more on product qualities and price, women were more influenced by store design, peer acceptance, and the symbolic value attached to brands.

Brand curiosity also includes an emotional attachment to brands, which also shows gendered tendencies. According to Guha (2023), female college students in Kolkata who were influenced by social media trends, peer recommendations, or visual attractiveness were more likely to make impulsive purchases and indicate higher levels of emotional response. Women were more prone to make emotionally charged purchases. In contrast, males were more restrained and deliberate, according to Ekambareswarar *et al.* (2022), who found comparable gendered tendencies among postgraduate students in Bengaluru. Bourdieu's idea of embodied cultural capital—the internalization of gendered and classed tendencies that impact aesthetic judgment and consumer behaviour—can be understood as manifested in these behavioural variations.

Brand interest is a reflection of deeper cultural and social systems and is not just based on emotional or psychological considerations. Higher education settings in India are a prime example of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, which holds that consumption serves as a social status indicator. Students from wealthy households tend to favour luxury brands as a way to reinforce their elite identity, as noted by Regatipally (2025). The brand turns into a badge of membership for these students in elite peer groups. Students from middle-class families, on the other hand, are typically more pragmatic, striking a balance between financial restraints and symbolic appeal.

Additionally, these patterns are gendered. Reddy (2022) notes that whilst male students place more emphasis on utility, durability, and brand repute, female students are more likely to favour design, peer acceptability, and brand ethics. This split reflects gendered expectations for consumption as well as economic disparities.

The emergence of digital media has further changed how people market themselves according to their gender. Female students are substantially more active in online brand communities, according to Kaur, Grewal, and Sidhu (2023), and they frequently use social media to investigate, assess, and communicate their brand preferences. Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest offer visual spaces where branded consumption turns into a performance, allowing

users-women in particular-to curate and showcase lifestyles that are consistent with aspirational femininity. Women are more receptive to influencer marketing, particularly when the influencers' narratives align with their identity ambitions, according to Sreekanth *et al.* (2024). In contrast, male students tend to use digital media more for practical purposes, depending more on technical specs and reviews than on aesthetics or narrative.

One of the most important cultural artefacts in the creation and maintenance of gendered consumption scripts is advertising. Women consumers responded particularly well to emotionally charged commercials with celebrities or societal tales, according to Zain-ul-Abideen and Saleem (2011). Women were more affected by ads that appealed to emotions, beauty standards, and lifestyle goals, whereas men were more receptive to ads that highlighted value, performance, and durability (Tam and Zeb, 2009). These gendered marketing tactics influence how students view and engage with brands by reinforcing larger social norms. In this context, Goffman's examination of commercials as coded performances is still pertinent since they not only mirror social standards but also suggest idealized gender roles that viewers might aspire to.

Brand loyalty and post-purchase views also vary by gender. In their 2020 study on luxury watch consumption in Chandigarh, Jhamb *et al.* found that long-term brand views were influenced by four aspects of brand experience: emotive, behavioural, intellectual, and sensory. Despite not being gender-specific, their research provides valuable insights into how effective engagement-which is more prevalent among female consumers-can result in enduring brand loyalty. According to Sasmita and Mohd Suki (2015), women have stronger emotional bonds with brands, which boosts brand loyalty. Esch and colleagues (2006) contend that brand loyalty is an emotional bond that is developed through a series of favourable encounters rather than just a behavioural result. Male pupils, on the other hand, typically demonstrate loyalty by dependability, peer approval, and consistency in performance. These distinctions draw attention to the two ways that brand loyalty grows: for women, it is via emotional attachment, whereas for males, it is through practical dependability.

The examined literature clearly shows that gender plays a significant role in mediating brand attraction and consumer behaviour among college students, with notable trends in emotional involvement, symbolic value attribution, and post-purchase senti-

ments. These patterns might be interpreted as socially created and structurally ingrained using strong frameworks from Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and Goffman's symbolic interactionism. Male students choose brands more strategically, performance-oriented, and logically than female students, who frequently view branding as a way to emotional fulfilment, social integration, and identity affirmation. Peer cultures, digital media, and advertising narratives all contribute to these patterns, which are further supported by the broader framework of class dynamics and gendered socialization. Comprehending these subtleties is essential to creating a more comprehensive and sociologically based grasp of young Indian consumers' culture.

### **3. Research Objectives**

1. To evaluate the extent of brand fascination among male and female students of college age studying in BHU and the Varanasi district.
2. To explore gender differences in emotional attachment, usage patterns, and symbolic meaning ascribed to branded products.
3. To determine the impact of sociocultural elements such as parental education and socio-economic standing alongside one's area of residence, whether urban or rural, on brand fascination among college students.
4. To assess the impact that the use of digital media and peer associates have on brand choices for both male and female pupils.

### **4. Research Hypotheses**

H<sub>1</sub>: A marked difference exists amongst male and female college students studying in BHU and Varanasi district with regards to the level of brand fascination.

H<sub>2</sub>: Gender differences exist amongst students with regard to their emotional attachment to brands, brand usage, and the meanings they ascribe to brands

H<sub>3</sub>: Sociocultural factors like parents' education, family's income, and students' region of residence (urban vs. rural) have a notable impact on students' brand fascination.

H<sub>4</sub>: Brand preference of male and female college students is greatly influenced by digital media, peer influence, or both

## 5. Research Methodology

The research employed a descriptive cross-sectional approach, utilizing primary data gathered from students of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and its related institutions. The aim was to investigate gender variations in brand interest and the impact of sociocultural and digital factors on brand preferences.

Data were gathered via a structured online questionnaire sent through Google Forms. The instrument had closed-ended questions aimed at eliciting demographic data, emotional attachment to brands, frequency of branded product consumption, symbolic meanings attributed to brands, and the influence of factors such as peer pressure, familial background, and exposure to digital media.

The sample size of 202 was calculated using Slovin’s algorithm to ensure statistical reliability. A stratified sampling method was employed to guarantee proportional representation of essential demographic groupings. Variables were quantitatively encoded to enhance analysis. Gender was classified as 1 (male) and 2 (female); domicile as 1 (urban), 2 (rural), and 3 (semi-urban); and institutional type as 1 (BHU) and 2 (associated). Response categories, including frequency (Always to Never) and attitudinal agreement (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), were classified using five-point ordinal scales. Brand categories and influencing variables were categorized in a similar manner (e.g., cosmetics = 6, food = 0; price = 1, peers = 5).

The data were transferred to Microsoft Excel for cleansing and subsequently prepared for statistical analysis with JAMOVI software. Analytical methods comprised descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and multiple regression models to evaluate the impact of gender and sociocultural factors on brand behavior.

The study complied with ethical norms, securing informed consent from all subjects. Participation was optional, and all replies were kept anonymous and confidential.

## 6. Analysis and Discussion

Table-1: Independent Samples T-Test

|  |             | Statistic | df  |       | Effect Size |        |
|--|-------------|-----------|-----|-------|-------------|--------|
| How often do you buy branded products? | Student's t | 0.0725    | 199 | 0.942 | Cohen's d   | 0.0104 |

Note.  $H_0: \mu_{Female} = \mu_{Male}$

**Table-2: Group Descriptives**

|  | Group  | N   | Mean | Median | SD   | SE    |
|--|--------|-----|------|--------|------|-------|
| How often do you buy branded products? | Female | 85  | 2.66 | 2.00   | 1.14 | 0.124 |
|  | Male   | 116 | 2.65 | 2.00   | 1.22 | 0.113 |

A t-test for independent samples was conducted to examine gender differences in the frequency of branded product purchases among college students from BHU and the its affiliated colleges. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between male ( $M = 2.65, SD = 1.22$ ) and female students ( $M = 2.66, SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(199) = 0.0725, p = 0.94$ . The effect size was minimal (Cohen's  $d = 0.0104$ ), suggesting that gender does not have a significant impact on the frequency of students acquiring branded products. As a result, the null hypothesis was supported, indicating that male and female students exhibit similar brand-buying behavior in terms of frequency.

**Table-3: Independent Samples T-Test**

|   |                | Statistic | df  |       | Effect Size               |         |
|---|----------------|-----------|-----|-------|---------------------------|---------|
| I am emotionally attached to certain brands | Student's t    | 0.0725    | 199 | 0.942 | Cohen's d                 | 0.0104  |
|   | Welch's t      | -0.4785   | 179 | 0.633 | Cohen's d                 | -0.0684 |
|   | Mann-Whitney U | 4785      |     | 0.714 | Rank biserial correlation | 0.0294  |
| How often do you buy branded products?      | Student's t    | 0.0725    | 199 | 0.942 | Cohen's d                 | 0.0104  |
|   | Welch's t      | 0.0733    | 187 | 0.942 | Cohen's d                 | 0.0104  |
|   | Mann-Whitney U | 4833      |     | 0.805 | Rank biserial correlation | -0.0197 |
| Branded products represent my personality.  | Student's t    | -0.4896   | 199 | 0.625 | Cohen's d                 | -0.0699 |
|   | Welch's t      | -0.4883   | 179 | 0.626 | Cohen's d                 | -0.0698 |
|   | Mann-Whitney U | 4701      |     | 0.561 | Rank biserial correlation | 0.0466  |

Note.  $H_0: \mu_{\text{Female}} = \mu_{\text{Male}}$

**Table-4: Group Descriptives**

|   | Group | N   | Mean | Median | SD   | SE    |
|---|-------|-----|------|--------|------|-------|
| I am emotionally attached to certain brands | 2     | 85  | 2.99 | 3.00   | 1.19 | 0.129 |
|   | 1     | 116 | 3.07 | 3.00   | 1.17 | 0.109 |
| How often do you buy branded products?      | 2     | 85  | 2.66 | 2.00   | 1.14 | 0.124 |
|   | 1     | 116 | 2.65 | 2.00   | 1.22 | 0.113 |
| Branded products represent my personality.  | 2     | 85  | 3.01 | 3.00   | 1.20 | 0.130 |
|   | 1     | 116 | 3.09 | 3.00   | 1.18 | 0.110 |

This investigation sought to determine if notable gender disparities are present among college students regarding their emotional connections to brands, the regularity of brand utilization, and the symbolic interpretations they attribute to branded items. Independent samples t-tests were performed to evaluate this hypothesis, focusing on three essential Likert scale items: emotional attachment to brands, frequency of purchasing branded products, and the level of agreement with the statement that branded products reflect one’s personality.

The findings indicated that there were no statistically significant differences based on gender across any of the three measures. The analysis revealed that emotional attachment to brands resulted in a p-value of 0.632, the frequency of purchasing branded products had a p-value of 0.942, and symbolic identification with brands exhibited a p-value of 0.625. In every instance, the -value surpassed the standard significance threshold of 0.05, suggesting that the null hypothesis (indicating no difference) remained unchallenged. Furthermore, the effect sizes (Cohen’s d) for all three variables were found to be negligible (ranging from -0.0699 to 0.0104), indicating that any gender differences observed were minimal and probably not significant in practical terms.

The results indicate that there is no significant difference between male and female students in BHU and the its affiliated colleges regarding their emotional connections to brands, their purchasing frequency, or their use of brands as identity symbols. This observation suggests a potential alignment in consumer behavior between genders, likely shaped by comparable digital media experiences, common social settings, and heightened brand recognition within modern youth culture. This study presents evidence of a more cohesive pattern of brand interaction among college students, regardless of gender, despite previous literature emphasizing gender as a crucial factor in branding behavior.

**Table-5: Linear Regression**

| Model Fit Measures |       |                |
|--------------------|-------|----------------|
| Model              | R     | R <sup>2</sup> |
| 1                  | 0.430 | 0.185          |

**Note:** Models estimated using sample size of N=201

Table-6: Model Coefficients

| Predictor  | Estimate | SE     | t      |       |
|--|----------|--------|--------|-------|
| How often do you buy branded products?                   |          |        |        |       |
| Intercept  | 1.10833  | 0.4460 | 2.4851 | 0.014 |
| Gender   | 0.09373  | 0.1643 | 0.5703 | 0.569 |
| What influences your brand choices the most?             |          |        |        |       |
| Influencers and celebrities affect my brand preferences. | 0.06719  | 0.0754 | 0.8909 | 0.374 |
| My family's opinion influences my brand choice           | 0.15723  | 0.0786 | 2.0008 | 0.047 |
| I buy brands my friends use or recommend                 | 0.04910  | 0.0848 | 0.5788 | 0.563 |
| I am willing to pay more for a brand I trust.            | 0.22625  | 0.0834 | 2.7141 | 0.007 |

The multiple linear regression model evaluated how sociocultural variables influence the frequency of branded product usage, serving as an indicator of brand fascination among college students. The overall model produced a  $R^2$  of 0.185, suggesting that around 18.5% of the variance in branded product usage is accounted for by the predictors incorporated in the model – specifically, gender, course of study, institution, area of residence, family monthly income, and type of branded product purchased. This indicates a modest yet significant explanatory capacity, implying that the model encompasses certain pertinent sociocultural factors.

Family monthly income was identified as a statistically significant predictor ( $\beta = -0.2849$ ,  $< .001$ ). The negative estimate indicates that with an increase in family income, there is a slight decrease in the frequency of purchasing branded products, which may seem counterintuitive at first glance. Nonetheless, this may suggest that individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds attribute greater aspirational or symbolic significance to branded items, possibly utilizing them as indicators of social standing. On the other hand, students hailing from affluent backgrounds might perceive branded products as more commonplace or functional, rather than as symbols of status.

Additional factors like gender, course of study, type of institution, and area of residence (urban/rural) did not exhibit significant effects (all  $> 0.05$ ), suggesting that these sociocultural dimensions do not independently forecast brand fascination in a statistically significant manner within this sample.

Interestingly, the specific types of branded products typically acquired did not have a significant impact on the frequency of brand fascination, indicating that preferences for product categories may not be a key factor in the regularity with which students interact with branded items.

The results offer some validation for Hypothesis 3. The overall regression model explains a modest amount of variance in brand fascination, with only family income demonstrating a statistically significant effect. This indicates that economic background, rather than other sociocultural factors such as gender or location, significantly influences students’ interaction with branded products.

The findings highlight the complex dynamics of class-influenced consumer behaviour in young people, suggesting that brand attraction is often fueled by aspirational desires in lower- to middle-income students, rather than merely by factors of access or availability. Future studies could gain from incorporating qualitative insights to delve deeper into the symbolic significance associated with branded consumption across various socio-economic levels

**Table-7: Linear Regression**

| Model Fit Measures |       |                |
|--------------------|-------|----------------|
| Model              | R     | R <sup>2</sup> |
| 1                  | 0.336 | 0.113          |

**Note:** Models estimated using sample size of N=201

**Table-8: Model Coefficients**

| Predictor  | Estimate | SE     | t      |       |
|--|----------|--------|--------|-------|
| How often do you buy branded products?                   |          |        |        |       |
| Intercept  | 1.10833  | 0.4460 | 2.4851 | 0.014 |
| Gender   | 0.09373  | 0.1643 | 0.5703 | 0.569 |
| What influences your brand choices the most?             |          |        |        |       |
| Influencers and celebrities affect my brand preferences. | 0.06719  | 0.0754 | 0.8909 | 0.374 |
| My family’s opinion influences my brand choice           | 0.15723  | 0.0786 | 2.0008 | 0.047 |
| I buy brands my friends use or recommend                 | 0.04910  | 0.0848 | 0.5788 | 0.563 |
| I am willing to pay more for a brand I trust.            | 0.22625  | 0.0834 | 2.7141 | 0.007 |

The hypothesis was evaluated through a linear regression model, utilizing the frequency of purchasing branded products as the

dependent variable, serving as a proxy for brand preference. Predictors comprised gender, the influence of digital media (including influencers and celebrities), peer influence, family influence, trust in brands, and a general item assessing the primary factors influencing brand choices.

The model produced a  $R^2$  value of 0.113, suggesting that around 11.3% of the variance in students' branded product usage is accounted for by the predictors included in the model. This indicates a modest model fit, yet it offers valuable insights into the social and media-related factors influencing brand preference among college students.

Only two predictors reached statistical significance at the conventional alpha level of 0.05. Family influence significantly affects brand selection ( $\beta = 0.157$ ,  $p = 0.047$ ): This suggests that students indicating familial influence are more inclined to purchase branded products. This challenges the prevailing assumption that youth brand preferences are primarily influenced by peers or media, underscoring the continued significance of familial influence in youth consumer behavior.

A willingness to pay a premium for a trusted brand was identified as the strongest predictor in the model ( $\beta = 0.226$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ). This underscores the significance of brand trust as a primary factor influencing purchasing behaviour, aligning with established research on brand loyalty and consumer decision-making.

Influence from digital media, including influencers and celebrities, as well as peer recommendations, did not demonstrate a statistically significant impact ( $p > 0.05$ ). The findings indicate that social media and peer influence may not directly affect the frequency of brand usage, despite their common perception as significant factors in youth culture. While such influences may shape awareness or attitudes, they might not necessarily result in actual purchase behavior.

Furthermore, gender did not emerge as a significant predictor ( $p = 0.569$ ), indicating that brand preference behaviors do not substantially vary between male and female students when other factors are accounted for.

The findings provide limited support for Hypothesis 4. The overall model accounts for a small yet significant portion of the variance in brand preference; however, the hypothesis positing that digital media and peer influence substantially affect brand preference was not corroborated by statistically significant findings.

The findings indicate that family influence and brand trust are stronger predictors of branded product usage among college students in this sample. This underscores the enduring significance of familial values and brand reputation, even amidst the prevalence of digital marketing and youth-centric culture.

These findings indicate that, from a sociological perspective, students are influenced by various external factors; however, fundamental social structures, such as family, and ingrained consumer values, such as trust, appear to play a more significant and consistent role in determining actual consumption behavior. Future research may investigate interaction effects or utilize qualitative interviews to elucidate the nuances regarding the diminished predictive power of media and peer influence in this context.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research examined the gender-specific and sociocultural factors influencing brand-related behaviours among college students at Banaras Hindu University and its affiliated institutions. The empirical investigation revealed no statistically significant gender disparities in emotional attachment to brands, symbolic identification with branded products, or the frequency of brand-related purchases. The data indicate a convergence in consumption behaviours across male and female students, possibly influenced by analogous social networks, digital media exposure, and overarching adolescent cultural trends. Nevertheless, profound sociological insights are essential to elucidate the class-based patterns that surfaced, including the importance of family income in forecasting brand utilization.

According to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1984), the findings demonstrate that students from varying economic backgrounds interact with brands in socially distinct manners. Students from lower-income families utilize branded things as tools for obtaining symbolic capital, enabling them to associate with aspirational lives and demonstrate upward social mobility. This consumption is not solely economic but also cultural, indicating attempts to conform to prevailing preferences and status symbols. Conversely, students from affluent backgrounds-who already own significant economic and cultural capital-may perceive branded purchases as customary or utilitarian, aligning with their ingrained class attitudes or habitus. Consequently, brand choice and purchasing behaviour function within a hierarchical social

framework where economic background profoundly influences students' consumption inclinations.

Furthermore, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework (1959) provides an additional perspective for comprehending these consumer behaviours. The utilization of branded products by students may be viewed as a calculated tactic for impression control in their daily social interactions. In this "front stage" of social life-whether in peer environments or on social media platforms-brands function as symbolic artefacts that assist individuals in constructing and exhibiting socially desirable identities. The absence of gender disparities noted in this study reinforces the idea that male and female students exhibit comparable behaviours in public encounters, illustrating a uniform young consumer culture where branding aids in self-presentation, acceptability, and social conformity.

Collectively, these theoretical frameworks underscore that brand-related behaviours among students are not solely the product of personal preferences or digital impact. Instead, they are integrated within larger social frameworks, including class and familial heritage, and are expressed through culturally encoded performances. The results contest prevailing beliefs about the supremacy of peers and digital media in influencing young consumption, highlighting the persistent impact of familial and class-oriented cultural structures.

Subsequent research ought to integrate qualitative methodologies, like comprehensive interviews or focus group discussions, to investigate how students perceive the symbolic significances of brands across various socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, examining the interaction effects among family wealth, digital exposure, and cultural values can enhance our comprehension of the formation of consumer identities within modern adolescent culture.

## **8. Future Scope and Limitations**

This study has a number of drawbacks that need to be noted. The findings' generalisability is first and foremost constrained by the small number of respondents. Because the data collection was timed to coincide with students' academic exams, many students were unable or unwilling to participate, which led to a small and possibly non-representative sample. Furthermore, outreach and the diversity

of student participants across different fields and colleges may have been limited due to the short duration of the data collection.

A further drawback is the use of self-reported measures, which may not fully reflect real customer behaviour due to social desirability bias. Furthermore, although the study made an effort to investigate the sociocultural and psychological elements that impact brand interest, it omitted certain potentially significant variables, such as exposure to advertising content, cultural background, and firsthand brand encounters.

To improve representativeness, future studies could use larger and more diverse samples gathered from several universities in various geographical areas. The symbolic and emotional implications associated with branded products could be further explored by including qualitative methods like focus groups or interviews. The way that consumer behaviour and brand preferences change over time in response to shifting social and economic circumstances may also be revealed by longitudinal studies.

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