

The Role of Brand Recall in Consumer Purchase Decisions: A Case Study of Surf Excel

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Abstract

In today's world, brand recall plays a significant role in influencing consumers purchase decisions in modern competitive markets. Consumers generally prefer brands that are familiar, emotionally connected, and easy to remember. This research focuses on how emotional advertising campaigns, visual communication, and digital and social media strategies influence consumer memory, engagement, and buying behaviours in the Indian market. The study is based on a conceptual and case study research approach using secondary data sources, including research articles, journals, books, websites, advertisements, and digital media content. Special attention has been given to the "Daag Acche Hain" campaign, which successfully transformed the traditional image of detergent ads by associating stains with positive experiences such as kindness, friendship, childhood learning, and emotional growth. The findings indicate that emotional advertising and visual storytelling influence consumer engagement, brand recall, and influence purchasing decisions. Repeated exposure through digital and social media in memory and trust toward the brand in the Indian advertising environment.

Keywords: Brand Recall, Emotional Connection, Visual Communication, Purchase Decisions, Surf Excel, Consumer Behaviour, and Social and Digital Media.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of so many products and advertisements in the modern-day market has made it very competitive for consumers. Companies are always fighting for consumer attention, influence, and decision-making in purchase through creative advertising & effective branding strategies. Recall value is one of the most important factors that affect consumer buying behaviour decisions. It refers to how easily customers recall a specific brand when they think of their category. Brand recall makes it easier for the consumer to find the product faster, making a choice of a place where they can buy their perfect product.

In modern marketing, consumers tend to favour brands that are familiar, trustworthy, and memorable. When people can easily recall a brand. They are more likely to choose its products over unknown alternatives. As a result, brands invest significantly in developing a strong brand identity

and creating lasting consumer memories. Advertising is one of the most effective tools for enhancing brand recall, as creative and repetitive advertisements tend to stay in consumers' minds for a long period of time. Brand recall value is very closely to connected with consumers' psychology in memory. Consumers usually remember things that attract attention and create emotional communication with humor and hidden messages to decode on ads. In India, brand recall has increased rapidly due to the growth of advertising, digital marketing, and social media communication. Consumers are exposed to ads. Through television, newspapers, websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Because of this advertising overload, brands need creative communication methods to stand out from competitors and remain memorable in consumers' minds.[1] The emotional bond a consumer has with the brand is one of many factors that can affect their ability to remember it. People are typically more likely to purchase from brands that

evoke positive feelings and experiences. Advertising can help generate this kind of positive feeling (i.e., ads that have a humorous element, emotional storytelling or use cultural references) by improving the engagement level of the audience and strengthening their long-term memory. Brands in India routinely use elements such as festivals, family values, cricket, and Bollywood, as well as social themes, to create an emotional connection with their customers. These types of connections (both social and cultural) help make brands more relatable and memorable.

In terms of creating an emotionally driven brand recall campaign in India, Surf Excel has successfully engaged customers with the brand's identity. Through a very successful marketing campaign with the slogan "Daag Acche Hain" (Stains are good), Surf Excel has differentiated its positioning from the more traditional approach of detergent ads by linking the stain removal process to more positive experiences for consumers of Surf Excel products, such as the positive emotional experiences associated with growing up, learning from your partners, showing acts of kindness, making friends and creating memories. The advertisements demonstrated that stains represent good behaviour and are associated with the moments that we create through our relationships with others.[2]

This study focuses on understanding the role of brand recall in consumer purchase decisions through a case study of Surf Excel. This research examines how creative advertising, humour, visual puns, emotional connection, storytelling, visual communication, and creative campaigns influence consumer memory, brand recognition, and purchasing behaviour in the Indian market.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To analyse the role of brand recall in influencing consumer purchase decisions in the Indian market.
2. To examine how Surf Excel ads are creative in advertising on consumer memory and brand recognition.

Research Methodology

The research takes a conceptual approach and investigates the influence of brand recall on buying behaviour, in particular, but not limited to, Surf Excel. Secondary research data was mainly collected from research papers, journals, books, advertisements, websites, and digital media.

A case study approach was used to analyse Surf Excel's advertising campaigns, emotional branding methods and specifically one of the company's most successful campaigns, 'Daag Acche Hain'. The case study shows how emotional storytelling, visual communication, repetition of exposure and digital media contribute to consumer memory, brand recall, and purchase behaviour. The research also includes conceptual analysis of factors such as emotional connection, familiarity and trust, visual puns, social media recall, and brand loyalty. Relevant literature and advertising examples have been reviewed to understand the effectiveness of brand recall in modern Indian advertising and digital marketing communication.

Literature Review

Rahmati et al. (2023), visual attention has an effect on recall of a brand; the effect of visually appealing advertisements can lead to a positive impact on consumer memory/recognition. The authors point out that being exposed to a particular visual repeatedly helps to improve recall as well as help familiarise consumers with a brand. They suggest that visual communication is important to use in the modern advertising strategy. Chauhan, Shukla et al.(2016), Consumer Psychology and Memory Recall Effect The research explained that advertisements containing more visual and emotional cues are easier for consumers to remember. The study emphasised the importance of memory effects in influencing buying behaviour and brand recall. Pandey & Tomar (2022). The paper compared traditional and digital advertising in terms of brand recall and recognition. The findings suggested that digital advertising is more interactive and effective for younger consumers, while traditional advertising creates broader emotional connection.[2]

Noer et al. (2020) studied how humorous communication positively impacts how well people remember and recommend brands. A conceptual study of the connection between color psychology

and marketing in visual cognition and memory retention was done in 2025; visually distinct advertisements help consumers remember brands better and enhance the overall effectiveness of an advertising campaign.

A study called Scroll, Smile, and Share (2026) examined the use of meme-based advertising and the level of digital engagement with that type of advertising (in this case through social media). The results showed that both meme-based advertisement and humorous visual content improve consumers' ability to remember brands and interact with brands when online, primarily among younger consumers using social media.

Kujur and Singh (2020) found that visual communication on online social networking sites has a strong influence on how consumers interact and engage with brands and participate in brand-related activities. Efendioglu and Durmaz (2022) examined the relationship between social media advertisements, advertising value, and brand awareness for Instagram users. The study found there is a positive relationship between social media advertising and brand awareness, consumer engagement and brand associations for Generation Y consumers. Noer et al. (2020) studied how humorous communication positively impacts how well people remember and recommend brands. A conceptual study of the connection between color psychology and marketing in visual cognition and memory retention was done in 2025; visually distinct advertisements help consumers remember brands better and enhance the overall effectiveness of an advertising campaign.[3]

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Context and Background of Brand Recall

In modern time consumers see different products every single day through the internet and social media. Due to so many advertisements out there, how can companies create advertisements that are original, emotionally appealing, and leave a lasting impression with people? Companies are no longer just looking to sell people products based solely on the quality of their products; companies are also striving to develop and maintain emotional ties to consumers, as well as have strong brand recall. Traditional versus New Advertising In the detergent industry, brands traditionally relied on their advertising to portray their laundry detergent products as being capable of removing stains from clothing; being capable of keeping their clothing clean and white; and being able to wash their clothes completely before wearing them. However, with more companies entering the market, brands are now utilizing emotional storytelling and creative marketing strategies in order to grab consumers' attention. Surf Excel is one of the leading players in using emotional storytelling to market its products. Surf Excel is an example of breaking traditional advertising rules with its well-known "Daag Acche Hain" Advertising Campaign. Rather than showcase stains as something that is negative, Surf Excel turned the marketing approach completely upside down by showcasing stains as evidence of kindness (helping others), sharing experiences through play, and having lasting childhood experiences. Surf's commercial used pictures of children playing, having fun, and creating messes, while still depicting the children as having positive experiences. All of these ideas quickly created an emotional connection between the audience and the brand, establishing Surf's Excel. The campaign became very successful due to its ability to relate to the values and feelings of Indian families. Parents identified and connected with the idea that children learn from experience

while creating lasting memories. This emotional communication helped Surf Excel build a strong brand recall and consumer trust.

Surf Excel ad campaigns became even more popular through the growth of digital and social media. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube allowed Surf Excel to connect with large audiences via a combination of visual and emotional content. Many people shared the ads because they were meaningful, emotional, and inspiring. (Chauhan, Shukla et al.2016)

Evolution of Consumer Purchasing Decision

As a result of the development of technology, advertising, and increased use of the internet for sales information, consumer purchase decisions have changed dramatically throughout history. Prior to the advent of the internet, a majority of consumers used newspapers, television, their family, and/or their local merchant to make their purchases. Today, consumers are able to compare products online, and use the web, social networks, and product reviews from other consumers to help them become better informed about whether to buy an item before purchasing it. Additionally, contemporary consumers are mainly influenced by the emotion of advertising, brand awareness, visual communication, and digital marketing factors. Social media sites such as Instagram and YouTube are very influential on consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions. Consequently, consumers' purchasing decision-making process has become quicker, more knowledgeable, and is more highly influenced by digital communication.

Meaning and Importance of Emotional Advertising:

Advertising that appeals to our emotions rather than simply showing us product features is termed an "emotional advertisement." Companies often use emotional content, such as joy, love, friendship, caring, enthusiasm, humor, or even inspiration in their advertising campaigns in order to give meaning to their products and make them memorable in the minds of consumers.

The primary goal of emotional advertising is to build a solid connection between the company's brand and its targeted audience. In contemporary marketing, emotional advertising is critical since consumers are

more inclined to recall advertisements that evoke an emotional response. Emotional stories in advertisements are significantly more successful than standard marketing because they have a greater influence on the human mind. Emotional advertisements assist consumers in developing a sense of trust and positive associations with the brand. Businesses utilize emotional advertisements to draw attention, improve recall, and influence buying choices. Consumers are more likely to recall an emotionally related item and buy it later if they have an emotional connection to the brand. Emotional advertisements assist businesses in developing a loyal consumer base as well as long-term customer connections.[4]

Concept of Consumer Purchase Decisions:

Consumers make choices about items or services to fulfill their needs or wants. An example of this is when someone recognizes they have a need (e.g., hunger), looks up the product they're considering (e.g., burger), compares their options (e.g., burger prices and reviews), and makes a final decision (goes to get a burger). There are many factors that influence consumer choices: price, quality, advertising, brand name, feelings/emotions, and past experiences. Companies that have strong brand recognition are able to build credibility and establish a relationship with consumers by having an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer. In today's modern marketplace, consumers heavily rely on digital/social media platforms to help them make purchase decisions through ads or word-of-mouth and customer product reviews!

Relationship between Brand Recall and Consumer Behavior

Brand recall and consumer behavior are linked; when consumers can recall a brand easily, they tend to prefer that brand. The more familiar the consumer is with the brand, the more likely they are to be able to trust and rely on it when making purchase decisions. Repeated exposure to ads, logos and messages about the brand creates a longer-lasting memory of the brand that positively impacts how the consumer behaves when making a purchase or deciding to use a certain product. In addition,

emotional advertising, visual communication and repeated exposure also help to create an association with the consumer and brand, resulting in the consumer choosing the same brand they have a relationship with instead of a competitor's brand. In today's marketing environment, digital and social media advertising can also help to create brand recall through increased engagement with the audience and increased visibility online to potential customers.[5]

Role of Brand Recall in Consumer Purchase Decisions:

Many consumers can identify a number of different brands even if they have never purchased a particular item before because they are all so different from one another as a whole. Once again, when a company has established its brand in this way, they can develop loyal customers who will purchase their products regardless of the cost. (Noer et al, 2020). Brand recall heavily influences what products and brands consumers are likely to buy when give a hidden cue. Typically, consumers will choose easily identifiable brands (via logos, advertisements, slogans, packaging) to increase their sense of connection, comfort, and assurance when making a purchase. The more frequently marketers expose consumers to their brand, the longer they will stick in the consumer's mind. Brand recall will also impact how emotionally attached consumers feel to a product or brand and the extent of their preference for the brand. In other words, consumers will choose the brand that provides them the best memories and the strongest emotional ties. Marketing via creative advertising, storytelling, and emotional advertising will help improve prospective consumers' memories and brand recall. Pandey and (Tomar, et al, 2022)[6]

6. Familiarity and trust: Branding helps establish brand reliability and familiarity, which ultimately leads to trust. When a customer has familiarity with your product, they develop an attachment to that product and are therefore more likely to buy from that brand. A customer develops trust in your brand when they see advertisements, logos, or product packaging of your brand. The customer perceives a brand as being of higher quality and dependability if they recognize and remember your brand. As a result, if you have a strong connection or brand recall

with a customer, the customer is almost guaranteed to continue purchasing from you and will choose to purchase again.

Memory Effects:

Memory effects influence how consumers recognize, remember, and choose brands during purchasing decisions. Advertisements that are emotional, creative, humorous, or visually attractive remain in consumer memory for a longer time. Strong memory of a brand increases familiarity, trust, and preferences, which positively affects consumer behavior and repeat purchases decisions. The effect of advertising clutter on the message conveyed by ads and its adverse impact on the memory of consumers. (Chauhan, et al., 2016)

Emotional Connection:

Emotional framing refers to the strategic representing of information in a way that trigger specific emotional response, which in turn influences consumer making decision, and behaviour. Buying isn't just about the item; it's how you feel when using it. Emotional attachment influences consumer behavior. Advertisements manipulate this emotion through happy, considerate, and inspirational messages that remain in our minds long after seeing the commercial. One such example is Surf Excel, which uses their product and emotionally entice viewers with its ads. [7]

Influence on purchase decision

Puns improve brand recall and consumer purchase behavior as they use images, symbols, and hidden meanings to make the advertisement memorable. When consumers think about the message behind a visual pun, they are more likely to engage with the advertisement mentally and can remember it later. Creative visual advertisements attract more attention than regular advertisements, which allows for greater brand recognition during shopping. The humor and creativity of visual puns also enhance consumer engagement with the brand and improve the overall perception of the brand. (Singh, et al 2025)

Repeated Exposure:

Brand familiarity and recognition occur when the same ad is presented across digital and social media

channels. As the consumer sees an ad through many exposures to what appears to be the same ads, the consumer will build a longer-lasting trust and loyalty to that brand. Publicly media-driven branded companies tend to have more customer residual memory than non-media-driven branded companies.[8]

Brand Loyalty:

Consumer loyalty is when a consumer chooses to buy, instead of competing products. Consumers develop brand loyalty from trust, satisfaction, and emotional connections to products they have purchased and been satisfied with. They continue to buy the same brand even though there are many alternative products for purchase in the marketplace. Consumer loyalty is very important for businesses because loyal customers help to drive sales, as well as attract new potential customers who want to know what you sell or offer.

Social Media and Digital Recall:

The emergence of social media and digital media has elevated brand recognition in today's marketing by enabling brands to communicate directly with consumers using graphics and/or interaction on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to reach broad audiences. Brands can increase their audience engagement with creative posts, video clips, memes, reels, and emotionally driven adverts that maximize how visible they are online. Through the use of social media, advertisements can quickly go viral through sharing and/or referrals. Increasing the number of times customers are exposed to an advertisement digitally helps them remember the brand and positively influence their purchase decision. Familiarity, emotional connections, visual creativity, repeated exposure, and digital connection are all factors in strengthening consumer recall of a brand and therefore affect the way consumers make purchasing decisions. (Efendioglu and Durmaz ,2022).

Case Study of Surf Excel Brand



Fig. 1.

<https://www.behance.net/search/projects/surf%20excel.%20daag>

Background of the Brand

Hindustan Unilever Limited owns Surf Excel - one of India's Top Detergent Brands. Surf Excel has gained significant traction due to the quality of its cleaning products as well as its emotionality in advertising. Surf Excel focused on the product but also forged connections with consumers emotionally as well. The brand's strength is largely attributable to advertising efforts over the years with effective taglines like 'Dirt is Good' and 'Where there is a will, there is a way,' also known for telling engaging stories. These positive themes related to kindness, friendships, childhood education, and family values help build Surf Excel's brand awareness and equity in the eyes of consumers.

The campaign "Daag Acche Hain" has been recognized in the world of advertising for its effectiveness in advertising Surf Excel's products. The campaign has altered perceptions about stains by using them to represent the positive actions of children, the learning that can come from them, and the joy children gain from having fun. The commercial demonstrates how positive actions, such as helping others and having fun, can cause children to get dirty while participating in those positive actions, thus creating an emotional connection with children and their parents/families in India. The success of the slogan has made it popular with

consumers and allowed Surf Excel to increase its brand recall among consumers. The promotion of the Surf Excel products combined with the stories created by the "Daag Acche Hain" campaign have made the advertisements for Surf Excel products memorable to consumers.

Emotional Storytelling in Surf Excel Advertisements

Surf Excel's advertisements showcase emotional storytelling as one of its key strengths. The company's advertising campaigns utilize simple stories based on themes like kindness, friendship, love and childhood memories in order to connect emotionally with consumers. The majority of Surf Excel's advertisements highlight how children demonstrate friendship by assisting each other, celebrate festivals with family and peers, or learn valuable life lessons while dirtying their clothes, which generates positive emotions among consumers and helps make advertisements seem more relatable. Rather than highlighting product features (i.e., detergent performance), Surf Excel's advertisements utilize human emotion and societal values as the basis for building a brand image. Emotional storytelling produces an increase in consumer interest, emotional bonding with the brand, and long-term memory of the brand.[9]



Fig. 2. [How Lowe Lintas Brought Surf Excel's Iconic Daag Acche Hai To Life](#)

Consumer Response and Brand Recall

Because of their heartfelt and impactful messages, Surf Excel's commercials have received a great deal of positive feedback from consumers. The "Daag Acche Hain" campaign has been particularly successful in creating appropriate traction and strong recall amongst consumers in India. Most consumers will immediately identify the brand with its slogan, and through the emotional response created by the commercials, consumers have developed a level of trust and familiarity, as well as a high degree of likeability toward Surf Excel as a brand. Consumers tend to have strong recollections of the commercials because they differ from other standard detergent commercials they have seen. Through repeated exposure on both television and the web, consumer memory and brand recognition have been significantly enhanced, resulting in Surf Excel being one of the leading and most reputable detergent brands in India. (Kujur & Singh et al 2020)

Digital and Social Media Advertising Strategies

Surf Excel is effectively utilizing digital media and social platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) to connect with larger target audiences. They share emotional videos, campaigns related to festivals, and social messages via online platforms (these ads are visually appealing and easily shareable). All of this increases audience engagement and online visibility. The social media strategy also allows the Surf Excel brand to engage directly with customers, which will enhance brand recall for younger consumers. Additionally, creative digital campaigns help create likes, comments, and shares on Surf Excel's ads and enhance the popularity and effectiveness (via marketing communications) of Surf Excel ads in today's environment. (Efendioglu & Durmaz, et al 2022)[10]

Findings and Discussion

This study found that brand recall plays a major role in influencing consumer purchase decisions in the Indian market. Consumers usually prefer brands that are familiar, emotionally connected, and easy to remember. Repeated exposure to advertisements through Digital and Social media platforms. It helps strengthen consumer memory and increases trust towards the brand.

The case study of Surf Excel showed that emotional advertising and storytelling strongly influence

consumer behaviour. The “Daag Acche Hain” campaign successfully changed the traditional image of detergent advertising by connecting stain with children, such as kindness, friendship, and childhood learning. This emotional communication creates strong engagement and improves brand recall among Indian Consumers.

The findings also indicate that visual communication, humor, and visual puns improve advertisement effectiveness. Consumers are more attracted that is creative, funny, and emotionally meaningful. Another finding is that digital and social media platforms significantly strengthen brand recall by remembering advertisements that used humor, emotional visual stories, and relatable social content more effectively than ordinary promotional ads.

Conclusion and Future Direction

The study concludes that brand recall and emotional advertising have a strong influence on consumer purchase decisions. Creative advertising strategies such as emotional storytelling, visual communication, humor, and visual puns help the brand remain memorable among consumers. How Surf Excel creates humor with stains and uses marketing to build positive emotional connections. Consumers easy to remember for long term in memory and loyalty in competitive markets.

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