

Neuromarketing: Understanding Consumer Behaviour through Neuroscience in Sustainable Development

Sanoffy Dias, Dr. Neha Choudhary

Amity Business School, Amity University School, Maharashtra, India

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ABSTRACT

In a world where consumers are constantly bombarded with advertisements, brands are shifting from simply grabbing attention to understanding the psychology behind it. This is where neuromarketing comes in: an emerging field that merges neuroscience and marketing to explore how people unconsciously react to sensory, emotional, and visual cues.

This paper investigates the role of neuromarketing in shaping consumer purchase decisions, using primary data gathered from 174 Indian respondents. While most participants were unaware of the term itself, their behaviour revealed clear signs of neuromarketing influence from gravitating toward specific colours and packaging designs to making spontaneous purchases based on emotional appeal or product placement.

The findings suggest that when used responsibly, neuromarketing can strengthen brand-consumer connections and enhance overall marketing strategies. However, it also highlights the need for ethical boundaries, as the line between persuasion and manipulation remains thin. Through an Indian lens, this study brings forward how modern marketing goes beyond selling it dives deeper into how consumers truly think and feel.

Keywords: Neuromarketing, Consumer purchase decisions, Psychology, Sensory cues, Emotional appeal, Visual cues, Spontaneous purchases, Packaging design, Colour preference, Ethical boundaries, Manipulation vs persuasion, Indian consumers, Marketing strategies.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a time where attention spans are shrinking, and every brand is fighting to stand out in an overstimulated and oversaturated environment. Traditional marketing tools like advertisements and promotions are no longer enough on their own. To truly connect with consumers, brands now need to understand the why behind their choices.

This shift has led to the emergence of neuromarketing, a field that blends neuroscience with marketing to examine how people subconsciously react to branding, packaging, storytelling, and sensory elements. It moves beyond what people say they like, and instead explores how they feel quite often without even realising it.

Unlike conventional surveys or focus groups, neuromarketing uses tools such as eye-tracking, EEG, and facial coding to study subconscious responses. While these tools are more commonly used in high-budget settings, the behavioural patterns they reveal are visible everywhere from impulse buying and brand recall to emotional ad reactions.

In India, neuromarketing is still relatively new, and consumer awareness remains low. Yet, behaviours such as choosing a product based on its colour, getting drawn to emotional advertisements, or responding to store layouts clearly show its influence. This paper aims to explore how neuromarketing plays a subtle yet significant role in shaping buying decisions, even when consumers are unaware of it.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Neuromarketing is all about figuring out how our brains respond to marketing, not just what we say we like, but what actually grabs our attention and influences our decisions, even when we don't realise it. It mixes neuroscience with marketing to understand how things like colours, sounds, emotions, and even smells affect the way we shop.

Some companies and researchers use advanced tools like eye-tracking and EEG to see how people react to advertisements or products. These tools can show where someone looks first on a website, how long they stay focused, or even how their face reacts to different content. This helps brands understand what works and what doesn't. For instance, why a certain advert gets more attention or why one type of packaging feels more "trustworthy" than another.

What studies have found is that people often respond more to emotional and sensory elements than to facts or prices. An advertisement that tells a story, uses warm colours, or plays familiar music can stick in someone's mind much more than one that just gives information. That's why brands focus so much on emotional connections. They want to be remembered, not just noticed. That being said, there are concerns. If brands are influencing us without us knowing, is that fair? Is it ethical? Some experts say this kind of marketing could cross the line into manipulation if it's not used responsibly.

Also, most research on neuromarketing has been done in Western countries, often with expensive technology in lab environments. There's not much work done on how regular people in places like India respond to these techniques in everyday situations. That's what this study is trying to explore how real consumers, especially here in India, react to the subtle tactics used by brands to shape our choices.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. To identify the emotional and psychological triggers (like colours, music, packaging, and storytelling) that influence consumer decisions.
- ii. To assess consumer awareness and perception of neuromarketing strategies, based on the primary survey data.
- iii. To explore how visual and sensory elements (product placement, design, branding) impact consumer attention and brand preference.
- iv. To evaluate ethical concerns associated with neuromarketing, including subconscious manipulation and privacy-related issues.

- v. To understand the real-world impact of neuromarketing on purchase behaviour, impulse buying, and brand loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section explores how neuromarketing techniques like emotional appeal, visual design, sensory branding, and product placement subconsciously influence consumer purchase decisions. To ensure the findings are grounded in real-world data, a structured online survey was conducted targeting Indian consumers from various age groups and professions.

1. Research Design

The study follows a quantitative, descriptive design, supported by primary data collection via Google Forms. The survey included both close-ended and Likert-scale questions to identify patterns, behaviours, and opinions regarding neuromarketing strategies.

The aim was not just to test theoretical assumptions, but to understand how everyday consumers experience and respond to neuromarketing elements in both online and physical retail environments.

2. Type of Research and Data Collection Method

A non-probability convenience sampling method was used. The survey was circulated digitally via WhatsApp, Instagram, and email, allowing easy access to urban and semi-urban respondents across India. Participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to respond, making the process quick, cost-effective, and inclusive of diverse consumer types.

3. Sample Size and Respondent Profile

The final dataset included 174 valid responses. The sample was demographically diverse:

- Age Range: Primarily 18–24 (majority), followed by 25–34, 35–44, and 45+
- Gender Distribution: Slightly more female participants, with a balanced male representation
- Occupational Background: Predominantly students and working professionals, followed by homemakers and self-employed individuals
- Shopping Habits: Most respondents were digitally active, frequently engaging with online stores and advertisements

This group was ideal for assessing subconscious marketing triggers, as they're regularly exposed to both physical and digital branding environments.

4. Data Collection Instrument

The tool used for data collection was a self-administered questionnaire created using Google Forms. The survey was divided into four key sections:

1. Demographics (age, gender, occupation, shopping habits)
2. Neuromarketing Awareness (familiarity with subconscious marketing techniques)
3. Sensory & Emotional Triggers (responses to colours, packaging, music, storytelling, etc.)
4. Perception and Ethics (views on manipulation, trust, and interest in learning more)

All questions were clear, concise, and easy to understand, encouraging honest and accurate responses.

5. Data Analysis Tools

The collected data was exported to Microsoft Excel for analysis. Pie charts and bar graphs were generated to visually represent key insights.

Qualitative comments from open-ended questions were reviewed to identify recurring themes and emotions related to branding and purchase behaviour. Each of the selected survey questions was broken down and interpreted clearly

6. Scope of the Study

This research provides insights into the invisible forces that drive buying behaviour, such as emotional connection, product aesthetics, sensory marketing, and subconscious recall. It offers real-world relevance by focusing on Indian consumers—who are often exposed to such marketing without being consciously aware of it.

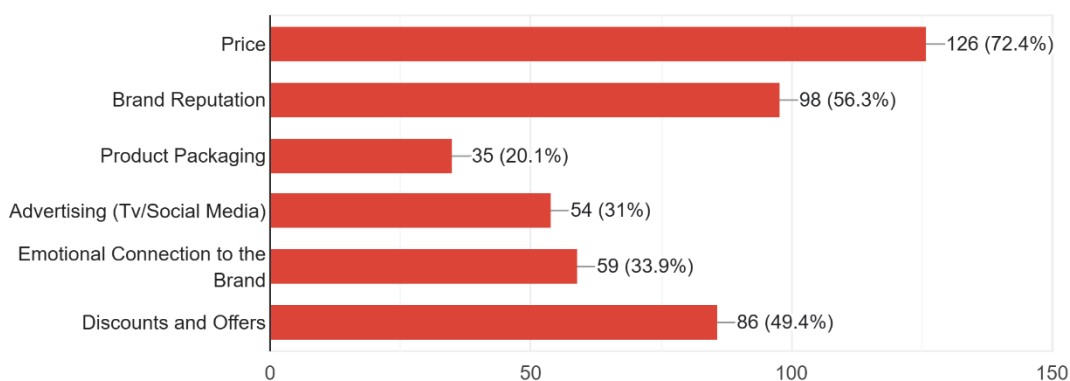
Data Analysis and Findings

Out of all the responses gathered, seven key questions were selected for detailed analysis based on their relevance to the research objectives. Below is a breakdown of these questions, with interpretations aligning the data with the core themes of neuromarketing: the emotional triggers, sensory appeal, and subconscious influence

Q1. What factor influences your buying decision the most?

5. What factors influence your purchase decisions the most? (Select multiple if apply)

174 responses



- The top answer was Price, followed by Packaging, next by Brand image, Emotional Appeal and later followed by other factors

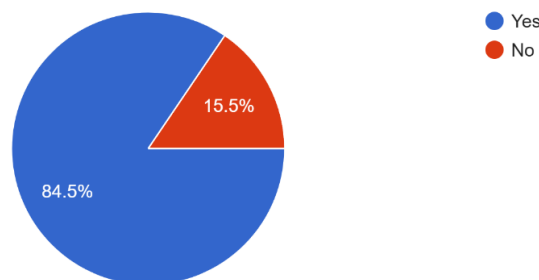
Interpretation:

- i. The Indian consumer market is highly price-sensitive, especially in urban middle-class population. This is reflective of the broader economic situation where budget conscious buying exists due to income differences and value seeking behaviour.
- ii. However, the next two topranked factors Packaging and Brand image come directly under the umbrella of neuromarketing. This suggests that even though consumers are aware of prices, visual appeal and brand perception play a subconscious role in their decision-making. Neuromarketing techniques that enhance product packaging, use colour psychology, or create a premium brand aura can help shift consumer attention away from price toward perceived value.
- iii. Emotional appeal, while not a main factor, still made a notable impact. This suggests that emotion-driven content, such as storytelling and relatable advertisements, helps brands build deeper psychological connections, especially in repeat purchases or brand loyalty.

Q2. Have you ever purchased a product just because of its attractive packaging, design or colours?

10. Have you ever chosen a product because of its color, even if a similar product was available?
(Yes/No)

174 responses



- The vast majority answered: Yes

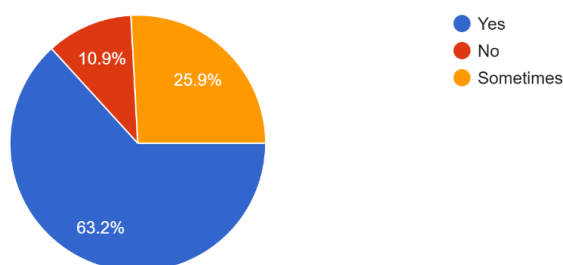
Interpretation:

Visual design has a clear influence on consumer behaviour. This reinforces the effectiveness of sensory marketing, where colours, symmetry, texture, and layout stimulate a faster emotional response in the brain. Packaging, although often overlooked in traditional marketing, is one of the most impactful neuromarketing tools for triggering subconscious attraction.

Q3. Have you ever bought something just because it was placed attractively in a store or online platform (even if you didn't plan to buy it)?

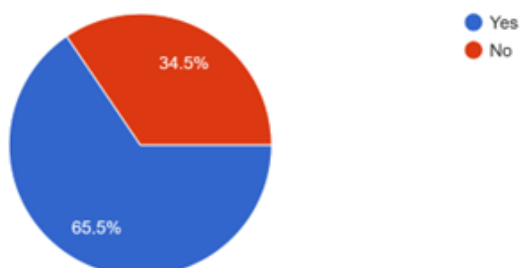
13. When shopping in-store, do you notice where products are placed on shelves?

174 responses



15. Do you feel more inclined to purchase a product when brands use limited-time offers or scarcity tactics?

174 responses



- Mixed responses, with many acknowledging impulse buying due to placement or scarcity tactics.

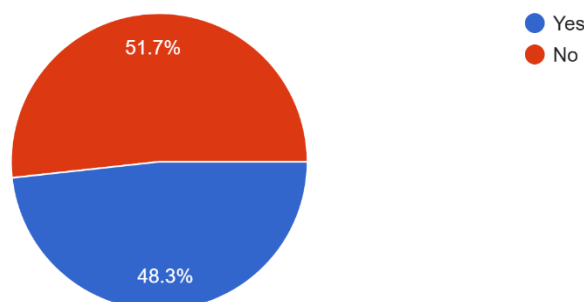
Interpretation

Impulse buying triggered by visual placement indicates the impact of retail neuromarketing. Product placement at eye level, in high-traffic zones, or next to emotionally purchased items (e.g. chocolates near billing counters) can prompt quick decisions. Digital platforms replicate this through scroll-stopping layouts and scarcity limited time offers. This behaviour proves that contextual visibility plays a role in subconscious buying triggers.

Q4. Do you think emotional advertisements influence your buying decisions (e.g. ads that tell a story or create a strong emotional impact)?

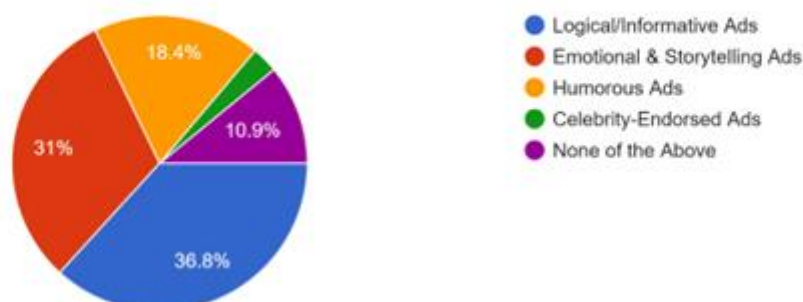
6. Have you ever bought a product because of an emotional advertisement?

174 responses



7. Which type of advertisement grabs your attention the most?

174 responses



A large number of respondents acknowledged emotional influence, but it was still less prioritized than Logical Ads which explain the worth of the price in direct decision-making

Interpretation:

While not the top driver, emotions do play a significant role in brand recall and long-term association. Indian consumers are often drawn to ads that resonate with family values, nostalgia, humour, or patriotism. These emotional undercurrents strengthen trust and recall over time, showing that neuromarketing's emotional targeting has cumulative, long-term effects, even if it doesn't directly trigger every purchase.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at how neuromarketing techniques like emotional storytelling, packaging design, and product placement affects consumer behaviour. Through the survey, it became clear that while people might not know the exact term "neuromarketing," they definitely respond to it.

In a country like India, where price plays a big role in decision-making, visual and emotional factors may not be the first trigger but they still influence how people feel about a brand and whether they remember it. Over time, that emotional connection can be the reason why someone chooses one brand over another.

So, neuromarketing isn't just a fancy concept it is already shaping buying behaviour in small but powerful ways. And if used ethically, it can help brands understand their consumers better, while also creating ads and products that people actually connect with on a deeper level.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations

- Sample is urban and digitally biased; rural or offline-only buyers are underrepresented
- Self-reported data may involve some bias or inaccuracy
- No use of scientific biometric tools like EEG or fMRI due to resource constraints

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable, relatable insights into how neuromarketing is experienced by regular Indian consumers—an area still underexplored in academic literature.

Recommendations

Based on these insights, here are a few suggestions that could help brands and marketers apply neuromarketing strategies more effectively, while also keeping the consumer's perspective in mind:

For Brands and Marketers:

- Focus on the Look and Feel** Packaging design, logo placement, and colour schemes should be well thought out because they catch attention in seconds, even before someone checks the price or product details.
- Use Emotions Strategically** Storytelling in ads works, especially when it connects with the audience's everyday experiences. But it shouldn't feel forced—consumers today can tell when something is too intentional.
- Don't Ignore Product Placement** Where and how a product is placed, both online and offline, really matters. Brands should make sure their products are visible in moments when consumers are most likely to act on impulse.
- Balance Emotion with Value** While neuromarketing focuses on triggering emotions, the Indian consumer still looks for value. So, emotional marketing works best when it's paired with affordability and usefulness.

For Consumers:

Be mindful of how visuals and emotions influence your buying choices. It is easy to fall for great packaging or a heartwarming ad, but it's always smart to check if the product matches your actual needs.

For Future Research:

It would be interesting to explore how these strategies work across different income groups or in rural areas, where price sensitivity may be even higher and digital exposure may be lower.

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