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Aspirations of New India

How Consumers Select, Shop, and Shape Brand Connections

UNDERSTANDING INDIAN CONSUMERS

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Foreword

Decoding the Indian consumer is like solving a complex puzzle. The task is challenging but also deeply rewarding. Each time we evaluate startups, we begin by re-examining the consumer from scratch. It is one of the toughest parts of our job, but also the most vital. And the task never truly ends, because the Indian consumer is constantly evolving, adapting and reshaping expectations.

As a collective force, they are driving one of the most vibrant markets in the world. Currently, this market is in the midst of a historic consumption shift. GDP growth for FY25 is projected at 7.5%[1], the fastest among major economies, with private consumption accounting for the lion's share. It is propelled by an expanding middle class, rising discretionary spending, rural demand recovery, and rapid digital adoption. By 2030, consumer spending is expected to grow nearly 46%[2], pushing the economy toward the $7.3 trillion GDP[3] mark. For investors and entrepreneurs, this presents an opportunity to understand what truly shapes Indian consumption today.

At Rukam Capital, we believe that businesses and startups cannot succeed by relying on outdated assumptions about the Indian buyer. The consumer base here is as fragmented as it is united: digital-first yet deeply rooted in culture, value-conscious yet aspirational, supportive of homegrown brands yet open to global trends. This complexity is what prompted us to commission an online survey, **Aspirations of New India-How Consumers Select, Shop, and Shape Brand Connections.** Our aim was simple—to capture the pulse of the Indian consumer ahead of the festive season, a period that not only drives peak sales but also reflects deeper cultural and behaviour shifts.

The findings highlight themes that are vital for brands and investors alike. Consumers are increasingly attentive to quality, consistency, and authenticity over celebrity appeal. They are showing greater pride in supporting local businesses and startups, often associating them with trust and social contribution. At the same time, new influencers such as gaming and pop culture are reshaping discovery and purchase, revealing how global and digital currents flow into Indian decision-making.

Sources:
1. The Economic Times
2. The Economic Times
3. Press Information Bureau

This report is an attempt to decode these signals. It offers a lens into how Indians shop, what they value, and where future opportunities lie. More importantly, it underscores why startups and brands must innovate with authenticity, sustainability, and customer-centricity at their core.

The GST reforms ushered in September 2025 are further fuelling optimism, particularly as the festive season gets underway. With higher affordability and growing consumer confidence, brands are entering a moment of opportunity that extends far beyond seasonal sales.

I am confident these insights will help entrepreneurs, businesses, and policymakers alike to navigate India's most exciting decade of consumption-led growth.

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Archana Jahagirdar
Founder and Managing Partner
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Overview

To better understand the purchase behaviour of Indian consumers across genders, geographies and generations, Rukam Capital conducted an online survey amongst 5000 consumers in 18 states through YouGov, a leading consumer research firm in India. This research study acts as a barometer of India's urban and semi-urban consumers, uncovering the rich diversity of perspectives and experiences across the market.

Responses were collected using a quota-based sampling approach for representation of different age groups, genders and target markets.

Gender: Male 51%, Female: 49%

Age Group: 18–60

City Tier: Tier 1 (~30%); Tier 2 (~30%); Tier 3 (~40%)

The report explores the drivers of brand discovery, consideration, purchase and deterrents , while also mapping consumer priorities across five segments which are engaging them the most - health & wellness, food & beverages, pet care, kitchen appliances, and fashion accessories.

The surveyed respondents belong to SEC A, representing both salaried and non-salaried groups. For generational analysis, millennials (born between 1981–1996), Gen Z (born between 1997–2012), Gen X and baby boomers (born between 1946–1980) are considered.

Homegrown businesses are winning hearts of Indian consumers

Five segments engaging today's Indian consumers

01 Health & Wellness

02 Food & Beverages

03 Pet Care

04 Kitchen Appliances

05 Fashion Accessories

Consumer First Strategies

Glimpses into India's Evolving Market

The Indian consumer is quality-conscious, value-seeking, and increasingly purpose-driven. They reward authenticity, local roots, and sustainable practices, while digital-native generations demand engaging content, wellness products, and gaming-first experiences. Category, geography, and generation-specific strategies are essential for scale.

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Quality, Trust & Conscious Choices

- Product quality, fair pricing, and reliable service remain the top purchase drivers across categories.
- Authenticity trumps celebrity hype – word-of-mouth and founder stories are more trusted than endorsements.
- Quality & safety are the strongest trust builders; poor customer service is a bigger deal-breaker than discounts.
- Eco-consciousness matters – cruelty-free, sustainable practices are now non-negotiable for many consumers.

Health & Wellness Take Center Stage

- Healthy snacking dominates festive lists – over 50% plan to buy healthy snacks; 40% opt for sugar-free alternatives.
- Tier 1 consumers are health-first, with 57% choosing healthy snacks and 41% sugar-free sweets while Tier 3 remains traditional with 65% choosing conventional sweets.

Local Brands, Start-Ups & Purpose-Driven Buying

- 58% prefer local/homegrown brands, with 14% willing to pay a 20–30% premium.
- 40% say start-ups win festive love for customer-centricity, honesty, and social impact.
- Consumers reward brands with stories – founders, women-led businesses, and social causes create lasting loyalty.
- When it comes to the festive shopping, Tier 1 leads with 61% tilt toward homegrown brands and 59% cause-driven shopping, reflecting cultural consciousness.

Regional Nuances in Consumer Preferences

- West India: Loyalty to homegrown brands, card-based festive payments, strong response to AI/virtual try-ons.
- North India: Women-led brands, cause-driven storytelling, influencer visibility, highest in-game ad receptivity.
- East India: Eco-friendly and sustainable choices, strong deal-seeking behavior (coupons, sale days, rewards).
- South India: Tradition-first, offline shopping preference, nostalgia-led buying, minimal reliance on celebrities.

Category & Channel Differentiation

- Offline-leaning categories such as fashion accessories at 60% and food and beverages at 39% rely heavily on demos, free samples, and habitual buying.
- Online-first categories include pet care at 63%, home appliances at 58%, and health and wellness at 53%.
- During the festive season, UPI stands out as India's preferred payment method, with two in five shoppers choosing it for its speed and convenience.
- Tier 1 consumers demonstrate financial maturity by balancing UPI usage at 36% with strong credit adoption at 24%, driven by rewards and cashback. Tier 3 consumers show minimal card reliance at just 16%, while recording the highest UPI usage at 42%.

Discovery, Engagement & Gaming

- In-game ads are the new discovery funnel – 50%+ have purchased after exposure; Gen Z and women show equal enthusiasm.
- Virtual try-ons & immersive experiences influence buying in metros.
- Social media responsiveness wins loyalty – 67% prefer brands that actively engage online.

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Indian Consumer's Media Habits

Diverse, Dynamic and Digital

The report gives insights about the Indian consumer's media consumption habits which can help brands to connect with them through their most used platforms, apps, and formats of content they consume. E-commerce apps and WhatsApp are used the most on a regular basis; YouTube is the most watched OTT application with movies & shows being the top content watched. People stay highly engaged with brands that have a social media presence, with 67% showing a higher preference for those that are responsive online.

Apps used regularly

72% Shopping/E-comm

71% UPI

53% Food delivery

50% Quick-commerce

MUSIC (48%), TRAVEL (41%), IN-HOME SERVICES (24%)

Platforms used regularly

86% WhatsApp

72% Instagram

60% Facebook

46% Telegram

LINKEDIN (34%), X (30%), SNAPCHAT (30%)

Type of content watched on OTT

64% Movies

59% Web series/ TV shows

44% Live sports

43% Music/concerts

42% News

73% Engage with brands on social media

67% Prefer brands that are very responsive on social media

44% Participate in brand campaigns for certain brands that they love

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The media consumption habits of Indian consumers, today, are guided by

mobile-first access,

regional language content,

and rising Internet penetration

Influencers of Brand Discovery

What Fuels Brand Discovery across India?

The survey findings indicate that celebrity and influencer endorsements play a significant role in certain categories. Pet care emerges as the most impacted, with 50% of respondents reporting that they discover brands through celebrity endorsements—the highest across all surveyed categories.

Kitchen appliances follow closely, with 43% of consumers influenced by celebrity or influencer-led brand discovery.

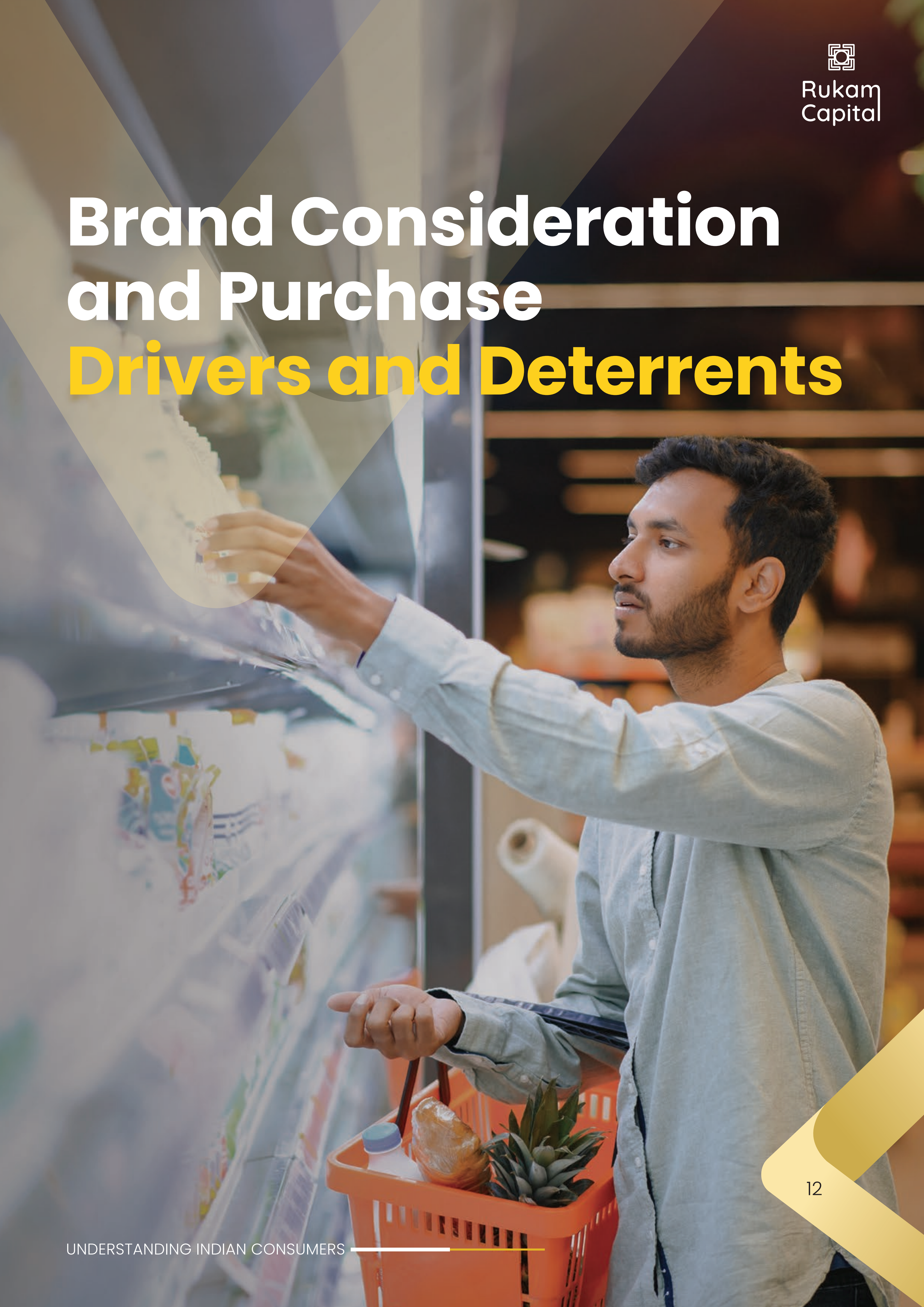
In contrast, the fashion accessories segment shows a much lower reliance, with only 3 in 10 respondents influenced by such endorsements, highlighting strong category-level differences in consumer behaviour.

In East India, celebrity influencers play a bigger role in categories like health & wellness, kitchen appliances, and pet care. Meanwhile, in South India, word-of-mouth is stronger for food & beverages and fashion accessories.

East is also the region where more people look for sale days on e-comm sites, loyalty programs or existing reward points before making a purchase.

In the North, for fashion accessories, we found respondents going back to the brands they already know instead of checking for new ones.

Loyalty programs/rewards are more popular among males



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Brand Consideration and Purchase Drivers and Deterrents

Which Factors Influence Brand Consideration and Purchase?

Discounts Continue to be the Primary Motivator

Offers or discounts looked for before purchase

48%

Sale days on e-commerce websites

47%

Festive sale/end of season sale

47%

Google/online search for offers/discounts

42%

Offers on brand websites

Brand Purchase Key Drivers

Accessibility, Trusted Recommendations and Reliable Customer Support

When it comes to selecting which brand to purchase, availability online as well as offline, word-of-mouth and customer support, emerge as the key factors across categories. Celebrity or influencer endorsements take a backseat when pitted against these parameters.

Key Factors for Brand Purchase

- **32%** Great customer service
- **27%** Easily available offline/online
- **26%** Quick delivery
- **25%** Recommended by family/friends
- **23%** Is eco-friendly
- **22%** Virtual try-ons/ smart tech features
- **21%** Aligns with personal values

Talking about Geographies and Generations

- AI features are seen to be more popular in the West vs rest of the regions.
- Influencer impact continues to play a role in purchase decisions in the North.
- Gen Z is more attracted to limited edition drops.

Brand Purchase Deterrents

Poor Quality, Price and Customer Support

Quality and price when compromised become the top deterrents which make people switch to brands that offer a better alternative. Not being sustainable is also a key deterrent with respondents showing a preference for cruelty-free/eco-friendly products.

Deterrents to brand purchase

Love for Homegrown

Indians Love **Homegrown Brands**

Indians love homegrown brands because they blend aspiration with accessibility, solving problems while inspiring pride and ambition. Startups are seen as uplifting society by creating livelihoods, driving social causes, empowering local artisans, and strengthening communities.

01

58% of the survey respondents said they like to shop for products mainly from local or small businesses.

02

Interestingly, 76% respondents said they appreciate honest and authentic communication by local brands along with innovative solutions for everyday problems.

03

3-in-10 said that the startups build a community and promote the feeling of belonging.

04

4-in-10 respondents believe that startups are customer centric which makes them appealing.

05

14% of respondents are ready to shell out a 20-30% premium for local brands.

06

When it comes to festive shopping, Tier 1 leads with 61% tilt toward homegrown brands and 59% cause-driven shopping, reflecting cultural consciousness.

07

Tier 2 (33%) and Tier 3 (33%) are less cause-aligned than Tier 1 (41%) while choosing startups to shop from.

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Love for Homegrown Brands
Supporting Social Causes

Homegrown, small businesses that support social causes are found to receive a lot of love. Indians also want to give back to the community by doing their festive shopping from nascent startups.

58%
I like to shop for products mainly from homegrown Indian brands

56%
I like to buy from brands that support a social cause

43%
During festivals, I like to shop for products mainly from new startups

Local Brands are Winning Hearts Across **Generations and Geographies**

61%

People surveyed from West India shop for products mainly from homegrown Indian brands. However, it is product quality that earns brand love and recommendations.

35%

Respondents from North India said that they shop only from women-led businesses. People in North India are seen to love brands that have an engaging content (30%) and support social causes (56%).

68%

Millennials and Gen Z respondents said that they shop only from women-led businesses. Gen Z is seen to feel closer to brands that have relatable content and engaging ads.

33%

People stated that they love startups as they constantly implement and act on user feedback.

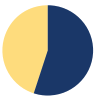
Consumer in East India

Are more likely to recommend brands that are eco-friendly.

Survey results show that a compelling founder or brand story is often the first element to leave a lasting impression in consumers' minds. This is followed closely by consistent product quality and the use of reliable raw materials, both of which contribute significantly to brand recall and memorability.

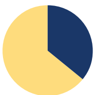
When it comes to brand recommendations, consumers prioritize quality, safety, and strong customer service as the most critical factors.

What Drives Brand Recommendations?

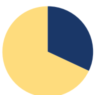


55%
Amazing founders/ brand story

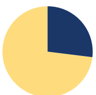
50%
Delivers great quality consistently



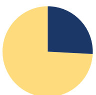
36%
Uses ingredients/ raw materials of highest quality



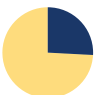
31%
Supports social cause close to my heart



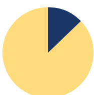
28%
Environmentally safe (eco-friendly and cruelty free)



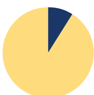
27%
Safe to use (preservative free/ organic)



27%
Engaging ad/ story telling/ content



13%
Put their customers first/ great customer service



9%
Always coming up with innovative launches

Festival Shopping

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Culture, Conservation and Customer-Centricity

take Centre Stage

GST 2.0 was announced by the government in September 2025 with a focus on ensuring ease of doing business for all, including small traders and businessmen. It proposes to retain two major GST rates, eliminating the 12% and 28% slabs. The resulting tax relief will boost affordability of goods for households. A majority of the products and services have been moved to a simplified two-slab structure (5% and 18%), reducing prices for consumers.

The GST cut is poised to make festive shopping season more dynamic, leading to a significant boost in consumer spending and creating a vibrant retail environment during the upcoming festive season in India.

This report uncovers many interesting insights about the Indian festival shopping and what it means for the brands.

>30%

Respondents buy products that have cultural value and uniqueness.

40%

People believe that startups are customer-centric which makes them appealing.

23%

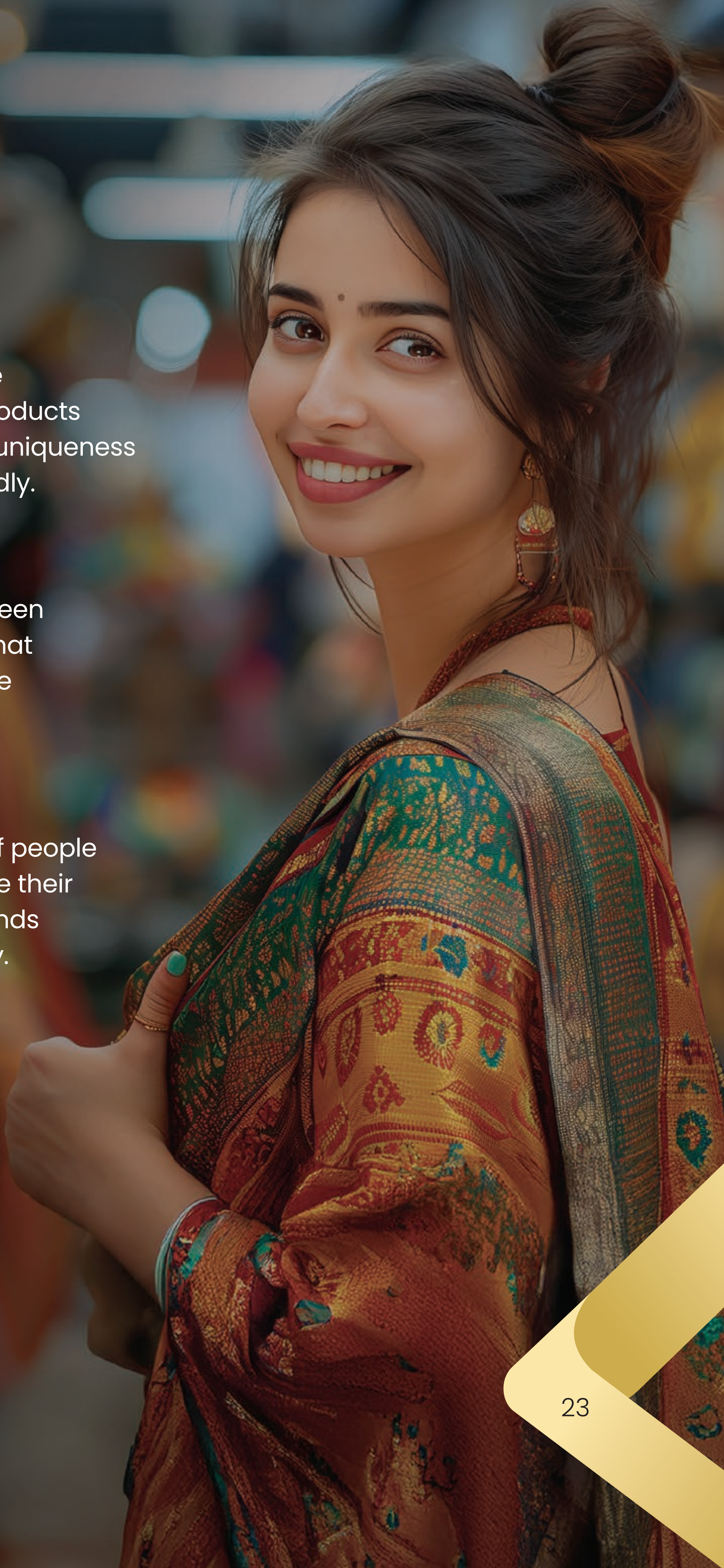
People actively look for brands that demonstrate eco-friendly practices.

76%

Consider eco-friendly an important aspect when purchasing.

100%

Every respondent said they prefer brands that offer products made from completely natural ingredients in health & wellness segment.



West India is more appreciative of products that offer culture, uniqueness and are eco-friendly.

East India is also seen to love products that have cultural value and uniqueness.

Highest number of people in South India base their purchases on brands being eco-friendly.

Wellness Wrapped
in Festivities

01
Healthy snacks rule the festive season shopping lists with more than 50% of the respondents showing intention to purchase them.

02
Almost 40% respondents are interested in sugar-free sweets/ sweets with sugar substitutes instead of traditional sweets for the festive season.

03
53% millennials and 47% Gen Z are planning to buy healthy snacks during the festive season.

04
73% millennials and Gen Z are planning to buy sugar-free sweets instead of traditional sweets in the festive season.

05
East India is ahead of other zones in healthy snacking during the festive season.

06
Tier 1 consumers are health-first, with 57% choosing healthy snacks and 41% sugar-free sweets while Tier 3 remains traditional with 65% choosing traditional sweets.

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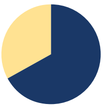
Payment Mode
During Festival Shopping

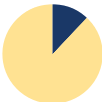
UPI is the most preferred choice for payments with ~2/5 choosing it for its speed during festival rush; Cards are used more for their reward points/ cashback.

Tier 1 showcases financial maturity by balancing UPI (36%) with strong credit adoption (24%) driven by rewards and cashback. Tier 3 showed minimal card reliance at just 16% with the highest UPI usage (42%).

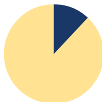
Most preferred payment mode while shopping



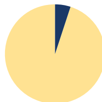
67% UPI



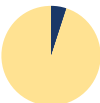
12% Cash



11% Debit Card



5% Mobile Wallets



4% Bank Transfers

1% Buy Now, Pay Later

**All numbers are %*

39%	I prefer UPI because it's faster during festive rush
20%	I switch to credit cards for reward points and cashback
11%	I choose whatever gives me the best festive offer
8%	I stick to my usual payment method—no change
8%	I rely more on cash for local or street shopping
5%	I use gift cards or vouchers I receive during festivals
4%	I use BNPL (Buy Now, Pay Later) to manage big purchases

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Categories Engaging Today's Consumers

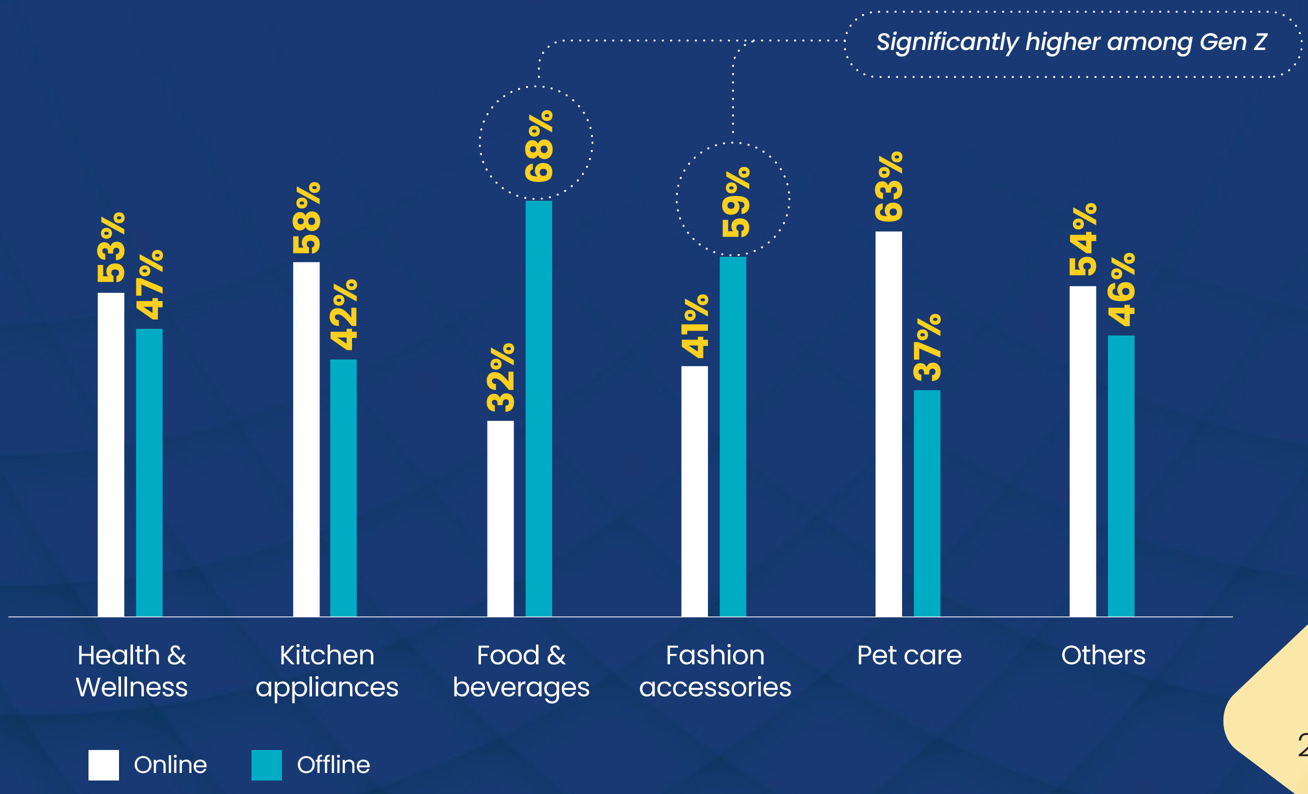
Categories which are Engaging

today's Consumers

Health & wellness, kitchen appliances, food & beverages, fashion accessories, and pet care are experiencing increased consumer interest, with health & wellness, kitchen appliances, and pet care seeing heavy online engagement, while food & beverages and fashion accessories remain predominantly offline purchases. Notably, almost 50% of respondents in pet care report that celebrity or influencer endorsements shape their purchasing choices.

Across all these categories, the top purchase decision drivers are ease of availability, word of mouth, and great customer service, underlining the importance of convenience, social proof, and service quality in consumers' buying journeys.

Interestingly, offline purchase for Food & Beverages and Fashion Accessories is higher among Gen Z



Channel Preference
by Category

Predominantly Offline Purchase Categories

Food & Beverages

- 39% prefer offline purchasing.
- Many use both online and offline channels but lean toward offline.
- Among online purchasers, **81% rely on e-commerce platforms.**

Fashion Accessories (e.g., belts, purses, bags)

- Almost 60% buy offline.
- E-commerce is also widely used, with 86% mentioning purchasing on these platforms.

Predominantly Online or Omni-Channel Categories

Health & Wellness Products

- 53% purchase online.
- 44% follow a multi-channel approach but tend to prefer online.
- **E-commerce marketplaces** are the leading channel, used by **40%**.

Home Appliances

- 58% prefer buying online.
- 44% have a multi-channel purchase approach but lean online.
- E-commerce is the **top preferred channel with 87%; Quick-commerce** is also gaining traction with 62%.

Pet Care Products

- 63% purchase online, indicating the category's growing popularity.
- 87% of online buyers rely on **e-commerce** for routine purchases.

General & Other Products

- 63% purchase general items online.
- E-commerce also dominates for miscellaneous products.*

**Stationery, toys, home décor, gift items, pet supplies, fitness accessories, travel essentials, and kitchen tools*

Behaviour for Categories
in the Regions

Health & Wellbeing and Kitchen Appliances

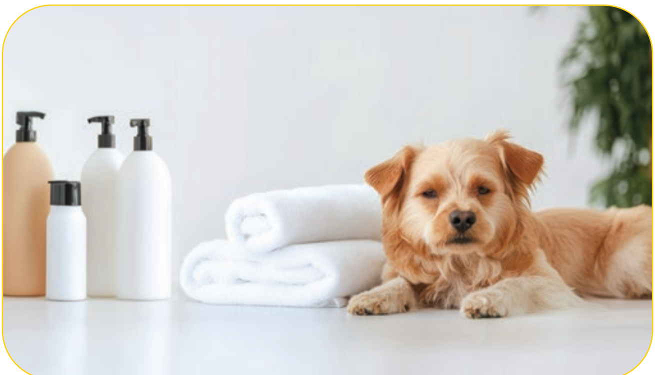
Celebrities are the most impactful driver of brand discovery in the East.

Food & Beverages

Both, South and West are highly influenced by habitual purchase; they do not look for newer brands.

Fashion Accessories

Habitual purchase is more in the North.



Pet Care

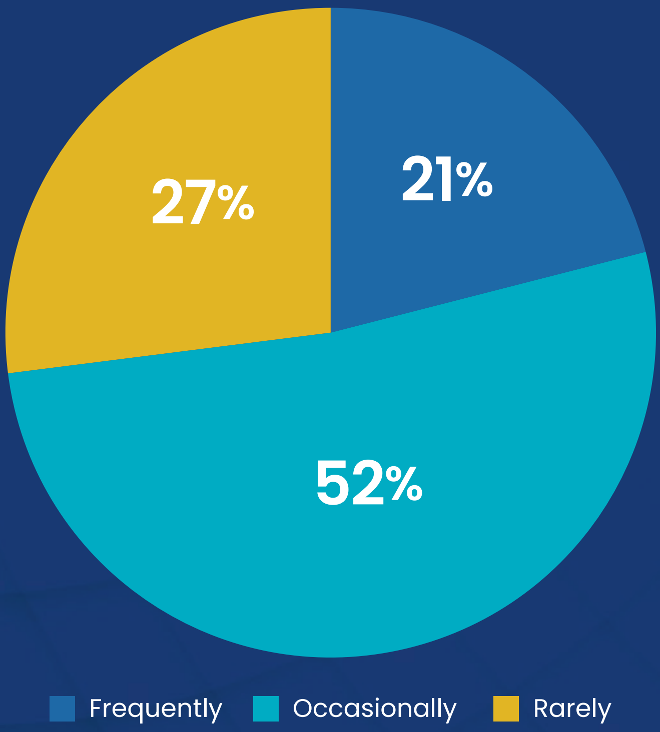
Prefer brands recommended by family/friends.

Pop Culture and Gaming

Pop Culture Picks

52% occasional purchase of pop culture related products suggest a new trend in the market. While product posts might not alone be as compelling for purchase, close to 60% said they have purchased products from brands that are popular abroad.

Frequency of buying pop culture/ TV show inspired products



Likelihood of buying a product featured in a pop culture post/video

43%

Were likely to buy a product featured in a pop culture post

Purchase of products popular in other country/culture

59%

Have purchased from a brand that sells products that are popular in another country or culture

Game Screen
to the Shopping Cart

01
Over 50% of the respondents purchased a product or service after seeing it advertised in a game.

02
Interestingly, equal number of men and women reflected gaming-driven brand affinity.

03
41% people said that it is great to see brands collaborating with their favourite games.

04
44% Gen X respondents said that seeing advertisements on the games they love, makes them trust the brand more.

05
Almost 37% people discuss products or brands with other gamers in online communities.

06
More than 30% of the respondents follow gaming influencers/streamers and like to purchase brands that they endorse.

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Looking Ahead

With domestic consumption as the backbone of India's growth story, Rukam Capital's Aspirations of New India survey offers a timely view of how Indians shop, what they value, and where opportunities lie. The findings point to a consumer landscape that is digital-first yet culturally rooted, price-conscious yet aspirational, and increasingly open to both global influences and homegrown brands.

Waning Power of Celebrity Endorsements

Celebrity endorsements are no longer universal triggers, the survey shows. While they do matter in pet care and kitchen appliances categories, fashion & accessories surprisingly remain largely immune with only 2 in 10 respondents feeling moved by celebrities and influencers. All the product categories surveyed were found to be influence-agnostic when pitted against enduring factors such as consistent service, peer recommendations, and online & offline accessibility.

For Indian consumers, value is crucial, and inconsistent product quality is a major deterrent. The survey shows that pricing is a delicate balancing act for brands. Set too high, it drives consumers away, while set too low, it raises doubts about product quality.

Local and Purpose-Driven Advantage

A standout trend is the affinity for local brands. More than half (56%) of respondents prefer buying from small or homegrown businesses, often associating them with pride, trust, and social contribution. 14% are even willing to pay a 20-30% premium for local brands. This affinity, the survey found, also extends to brands that support a social cause (56%) and in case of millennials and Gen Z respondents from North India it heavily favours only women-led businesses (72%). Regionally, the sentiment for homegrown brands was found to be strongest in West India (61%) and for eco-friendly brands in East India.

Startups as Catalysts of Trust and Community

Startups are seen as community builders, problem-solvers, and authentic storytellers, especially when they align with sustainability and social causes. This growing sentiment towards local entrepreneurship strengthens India's consumption story and positions startups as a critical force in shaping the next decade of consumer growth.

Festive shopping reflects a deeper layering of culture, conservation, and customer centricity, the survey reveals. Whether it is buying products with cultural value, opting for eco-friendly and organic alternatives, or preferring healthier snacks over traditional sweets, consumers are combining tradition with modern sensibilities. Millennials and Gen Z are driving this trend, making the festive season not only a peak period for consumption but also a barometer of evolving aspirations. Government reforms like GST cuts add to affordability, thus fuelling optimism.

Regional Nuances, Common Expectations

The survey also underscores that India's consumer base is as fragmented as it is united. Regional nuances highlighted by the survey—like West's preference for eco-friendly purchases, North's affinity for women-led businesses, or East's loyalty toward sale days and celebrity endorsements—underline the complexity of the Indian market. Yet, across geographies, the underlying sentiment is the same. Consumers want to engage with brands that are authentic, accessible, innovative, and responsible.

Pop Culture and Gaming: New Frontiers of Influence

The survey also shows pop culture and gaming emerging as strong drivers of consumer behaviour this festive season. While 52% make occasional pop culture-related purchases, 36% are likely to buy products featured in such posts, and nearly 60% have purchased from brands popular abroad. It reflects a growing global orientation in Indian consumption.

Gaming in fact, is fast becoming a powerful brand touchpoint. It is shaping brand discovery as well as trust. Over half of respondents have purchased products advertised in games, with women engaging almost as actively as men. Notably, 41% appreciate brand-game collaborations, 44% of Gen X say such ads boost trust, and a third follow gaming influencers or streamers, often buying brands they endorse.

With the ongoing festive and holiday season, the brands can mine this survey to turn seasonal buyers into lifelong customers by inculcating authenticity, sustainability, and meaningful engagement while tapping into cross-cultural and interactive spaces. By doing so, they will be best positioned to ride the next wave of India's consumption-led growth.

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