

Emotional Marketing: How brands influence Consumer Buying Behaviour

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Introduction

Emotional marketing is defined as the practice of building marketing strategies and campaigns that primarily appeal to consumers' emotions, feelings, and psychological responses, rather than relying solely on product features, price, or logic. The goal is to create a memorable emotional experience associated with the brand that drives action - whether that action is a purchase, a share, or a long-term loyalty commitment.

The roots of emotional marketing can be traced back to the early 20th century, when advertisers began moving beyond product descriptions to associating their brands with aspirational lifestyles. The 1950s and 1960s saw brands like Coca-Cola and Marlboro craft identities built almost entirely on emotional imagery - happiness and community for the former, rugged independence for the latter.

The advertising revolution of the 1980s brought more sophisticated storytelling, culminating in iconic campaigns like Apple's '1984' Super Bowl ad. By the 2000s, digital platforms enabled two-way emotional engagement, allowing consumers to become brand advocates and participants in brand narratives.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions: Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions (1980) identifies eight primary emotions: joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, and anticipation. These emotions can be combined to create complex emotional states. Marketers use this framework to deliberately engineer the emotional response their campaigns aim to evoke. For example, combining joy and trust produces 'love' - the emotional state brands like Apple and Disney consistently aim to cultivate in their audiences.



Emotional Contagion Theory:

Emotional Contagion Theory posits that people unconsciously mimic and adopt the emotions expressed by others. In advertising, this translates to viewers 'catching' the happiness from people in a commercial or feeling inspired by an athlete's struggle. This mechanism makes testimonial videos, influencer content, and emotional brand films particularly potent.

The Somatic Marker Hypothesis: Antonio Damasio's Somatic Marker Hypothesis suggests that emotions create 'somatic markers' bodily signals associated with past experiences - that guide future decision-making. When a brand consistently delivers positive emotional experiences, it creates somatic markers that steer consumers back to that brand unconsciously, which is the neurological basis for brand loyalty.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Marketing:

Emotional marketing frequently operates at the upper levels of Maslow's Hierarchy targeting needs for love and belonging (community-based campaigns), esteem (luxury branding), and self-actualization (purpose-driven brands). Brands that help consumers feel they are fulfilling higher-order needs build far deeper emotional bonds than those addressing only basic functional needs.

EMOTIONAL APPEALS IN MARKETING - Types & Examples

Emotional Trigger	Key Insight	Brand Example
Happiness	Joy-based ads increase sharing by 65%	Coca-Cola - 'Open Happiness'
Fear & FOMO	Urgency cues spike conversions by 30-40%	Amazon - 'Only 3 left!'
Pride & Status	Luxury brands leverage aspiration & social identity	Rolex
Nostalgia	Nostalgic content generates 2× more engagement & trust	Maggi - 'Maakiyaad'
Belonging	Community-led campaigns build tribal loyalty	Harley-Davidson
Surprise	Unexpected experiences create powerful memory anchors	Kinder Joy

Source: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780125587013500077>

EMOTIONAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

Brand Storytelling: Storytelling is the most fundamental and powerful tool in emotional marketing. Human brains are neurologically wired to process information through narrative. A well-crafted brand story follows a classic arc - a relatable protagonist facing a challenge, a transformative journey, and a resolution - with the brand playing the role of guide or enabler. Effective brand stories share common characteristics: they feature real or realistic characters, they acknowledge pain points, they are authentic, and they resolve with an emotional payoff that aligns with the brand's values. Google's 'Reunion' ad, which tells the story of two childhood friends separated by the India-Pakistan partition being reunited through Google Search, is a master class in emotionally driven storytelling that drove millions of views and became culturally significant.

Nostalgia Marketing: Nostalgia marketing leverages consumers' emotional connections to their past. Psychological research confirms that nostalgic memories are predominantly positive and social, making them powerful anchors for brand affinity. Nostalgia also reduces self-continuity anxiety – the worry about one's changing identity making consumers more willing to spend. Brands like Cadbury, McDonald's, and Pepsi have periodically revived retro packaging, jingles, and brand imagery to trigger nostalgic responses, particularly during festive seasons or brand milestones. In the digital era, platforms like Instagram's 'Throwback Thursday' and the revival of 1990s aesthetics by fashion and food brands demonstrate the continued potency of nostalgia.

Cause Marketing and Brand Purpose: Today's consumers particularly Millennials and Gen Z want to buy from brands that stand for something beyond profit. Cause marketing aligns a brand with a social, environmental, or humanitarian cause, creating emotional resonance through shared values. When consumers believe a brand genuinely supports a cause they care about, they develop emotional loyalty that transcends price sensitivity. Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaign, launched in 2004, challenged narrow beauty standards and championed self-esteem among women. Not only did it generate enormous media coverage, but it repositioned Dove from a soap brand to a social movement, dramatically increasing sales and brand equity. Similarly, Tata Tea's 'Jaago Re' campaign tied the brand to civic awareness and voter participation, making it culturally significant in India.

Influencer and Social Proof Marketing: Social proof - the psychological phenomenon where people look to others' behaviour to determine correct action - is a powerful emotional trigger. When consumers see people they admire,

identify with, or trust using a product, it creates aspirational and reassurance-based emotional responses. Influencer marketing operationalizes social proof at scale by partnering with individuals who have established emotional credibility with specific audiences.

Personalization and Emotional Relevance: Personalization converts generic marketing into emotionally meaningful communication. When a brand addresses a consumer by name, references their past behavior, or delivers content relevant to their current life stage, it signals that the brand understands and values them as an individual. This recognition triggers positive emotional responses - particularly feelings of being seen and valued - which are among the most powerful drivers of brand loyalty.

Sensory Marketing: Music is one of the most direct routes to emotional response, capable of bypassing cognitive filters and triggering immediate emotional and physiological reactions. In advertising, background music that matches the desired emotional tone of a campaign significantly amplifies the emotional impact of the visual message. Retail environments that use strategically chosen music have been shown to influence consumer pace, mood, and willingness to spend.

Beyond music, brands engage all five senses to create emotional experiences: signature scents in retail stores (Abercrombie & Fitch), distinctive packaging textures (Apple's unboxing experience), and even proprietary sounds (the Intel chime, the Netflix 'ta-dum') all contribute to multi-sensory emotional branding.

CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING & THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS

Emotions play a decisive role at every stage of the consumer's purchase journey. Research confirms that emotional engagement accelerates decisions and deepens post-purchase satisfaction, which in turn drives loyalty and advocacy.

Emotion's Role in Each Stage of the Consumer Journey

Sl. No.	Stage	Role of Emotion
1	Need Recognition	Emotion triggers awareness – 'I feel incomplete without this'
2	Information Search	Emotional framing shapes which information consumers seek
3	Evaluation of Alternatives	Brand feelings dominate logic when features are similar
4	Purchase Decision	Emotional impulse overrides rational hesitation
5	Post-Purchase Behaviour	Emotional satisfaction drives loyalty & referral

IMPACT ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR

Emotion as Primary Purchase Driver: Research by the Advertising Research Foundation found that 'likeability' an emotional metric - is the single greatest predictor of whether an ad will increase a brand's sales. Further, Harvard Business School professor Gerald Zaltman famously estimated that approximately 95% of purchasing decisions are made subconsciously, driven by emotional and sensory cues rather than rational deliberation.

Impact on Brand Loyalty: The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) analyzed 1,400 advertising case studies and found that campaigns with purely emotional content performed twice as well as those with rational content, and campaigns that combined emotional and rational elements performed better still. Emotionally engaged consumers are significantly less likely to switch brands even when presented with a cheaper alternative.

Effect on Purchase Frequency and Basket Size: Emotionally connected consumers not only return more frequently but also spend more per visit. A study by Motista found that emotionally connected customers have a 306% higher lifetime value, stay loyal for an average of 5.1 years (compared to 3.4 years for satisfied customers), and recommend the brand to others at a rate of 71% (compared to 45% for satisfied customers).

Viral Potential and Word-of-Mouth: Emotionally charged content is significantly more likely to be shared. Content that evokes high-arousal emotions - awe, excitement, amusement, and even anger – spreads more virally than content that is purely informational. This organic amplification extends a campaign's reach far beyond its paid media spend, generating earned media value that is difficult to replicate through rational advertising.

EMOTIONAL VS. RATIONAL MARKETING

Dimension	Rational Marketing	Emotional Marketing
Core Appeal	Product features, price, specifications	Feelings, values, identity, experiences
Consumer Response	Deliberate, analytical decision-making	Instinctive, gut-driven purchasing
Memory Retention	Short-term; easily forgotten	Long-term; tied to emotional memory
Brand Loyalty	Transactional; easily switched	Deep; resistant to competitors

Typical Formats	Spec sheets, comparison ads, discounts	Storytelling, testimonials, cause campaigns
Example	"50% off this weekend only"	Nike: "Just Do It"

EMOTIONAL APPEALS IN INDIAN AGRIBUSINESS

Indian agribusiness brands have increasingly leveraged emotional marketing to differentiate in a highly competitive market. The following tables document how major brands have applied specific emotional appeals and their market impact.

AGRIBUSINESS EMOTIONAL MARKETING

Brand	Sector	Emotional Appeal	Campaign Approach	Market Impact
Amul	Dairy Cooperative	National Pride & Nostalgia	Amul Girl topical ads + 'Taste of India' since 1966	83% household penetration; ₹72,000 Cr+ turnover
Akshaya Kalpa	Organic Dairy	Trust, Purity & Farmer Empathy	'Meet Your Farmer' films; open farm visits	98% retention; ₹500 Cr+ revenue; zero paid media
Mother Dairy	Dairy & Produce	Family Safety & Maternal Care	Mothers ensuring pure, safe milk for children	₹14,000 Cr+ revenue; top-3 dairy brand in urban India
Nandini (KMF)	Dairy Cooperative	Regional Pride & Local Identity	'Proudly Karnataka' positioning vs national giants	60% state share; ₹17,000 Cr+ revenue
Patanjali Agro	FMCG / Agri-products	Swadeshi & Spiritual Belonging	'Buy Indian' narrative led by Baba Ramdev	₹450 Cr (2012) → ₹46,000 Cr+ (2024)

ITC Aashirvaad	Agri-foods	Tradition & Wholesome Nourishment	'Maakeha athjaisa' – atta as an act of family love	Largest branded atta; 40%+ packaged market share
Jain Irrigation	Agri-tech	Farmer Dignity & Hope	'More crop per drop'; farmer transformation stories	Largest drip irrigation co. in Asia; 7M+ farmers helped
Big Basket Farms	Online Agri-retail	Urban Guilt & Conscious Eating	Farm-origin labels; 'know your farmer' storytelling	10M+ customers; premium segment grew 4x
Tata Sampann	Pulses & Spices	Heritage, Purity & Home Cooking	Sanjeev Kapoor; 'unpolished & natural' dadi-ki-rasoi feel	₹1,000 Cr+ brand in 4 years; premium pulses segment
Mahindra Krishie	Agri-services	Farmer Aspiration & Modernity	'Tech as ladder to prosperity'; rural youth empowerment	2M+ farmers reached; strong aspirational brand equity
Suguna Poultry	Poultry	Partnership & Economic Security	'Steady income guarantee'; farmer-family success stories	35,000+ farmer partners; ₹10,000 Cr+ revenue
Organic India	Organic Herbs	Mindful Living & Spiritual Wellness	Tulsi tea linked to Ayurvedic lifestyle	45+ export markets; 10,000+

			le; fair-trade stories	farmer partners
Hatsun Agro	Dairy (South India)	Farmer Trust & Long-term Bond	Daily doors tep collection; 'we grow together' in Tamil	3M+ litres/day; ₹7,000 Cr+ revenue; 95%+ farmer retention

Emotional Connection Score vs Sales Growth – Selected Global Brands

Brand	Emotional Connection Score (0-100)	Annual Sales Growth (%)	Category
Apple	91	18	Technology
Nike	88	11	Sports & Lifestyle
Coca-Cola	85	8	Beverages
Dove (Unilever)	79	9	Personal Care
Amul	76	14	Dairy
Cadbury (Mondelez)	82	13	Confectionery

Source: Author’s calculation

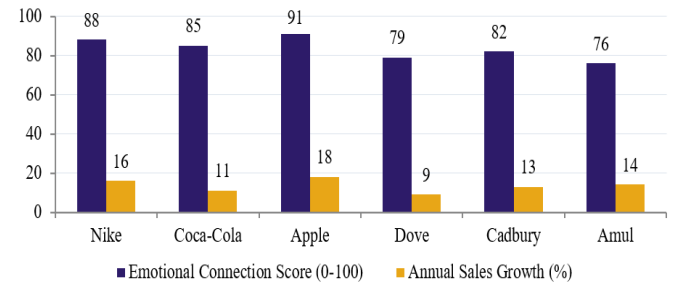


Fig. 1. Emotional Connection Score vs Sales Growth – Selected Global Brands

Source: Brand Finance Global Report (2023)

Emotional Drivers of Consumer Purchase Decisions in India

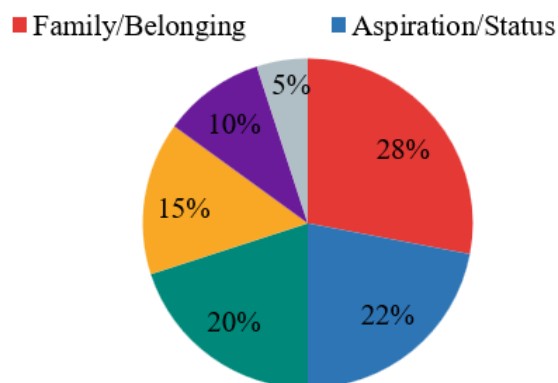


Fig. 2: Emotional Purchase Triggers in India

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The power of emotional marketing to bypass rational decision-making creates significant ethical responsibilities. When emotional appeals are used to promote products that are harmful, misleading, or unnecessary, emotional marketing crosses into manipulation. The tobacco and alcohol industries' historical use of emotional advertising associating smoking with sophistication and drinking with social success exemplifies ethically questionable emotional manipulation.

Vulnerability and Exploitation: Emotional marketing that targets vulnerable populations; children, the elderly, people in crisis raises particular ethical concerns. Fear-based marketing that exaggerates health risks or social consequences to drive purchases of unnecessary products is ethically problematic, even when legally permissible. The diet and weight-loss industry's use of body image insecurity as a marketing lever has been widely criticized for causing psychological harm.

Authenticity vs. Performance: Consumers are increasingly sophisticated at detecting when emotional appeals are performative rather than genuine. Brands that adopt cause marketing positions without substantively aligning their business practices with those causes risk 'purpose-washing' a form of emotional inauthenticity that, when exposed, can cause severe reputational damage. Pepsi's 2017 Kendall Jenner advertisement, which trivialized social protest movements, is a cautionary example of emotional marketing that backfired catastrophically due to perceived inauthenticity.

Data Privacy in Emotional Targeting: The use of consumer data to enable emotionally targeted advertising raises serious privacy concerns. Psychographic profiling using behavioral data to infer emotional states, vulnerabilities, and psychological profiles is now technically feasible at scale. The

ethical deployment of such capabilities requires transparent data practices, meaningful consumer consent, and responsible limits on the emotional manipulation that such targeting enables.

CHALLENGES IN EMOTIONAL MARKETING

Measurement Difficulty: Emotional responses are inherently subjective and harder to quantify than rational metrics like click-through rates or cost-per-acquisition. ROI attribution for emotional campaigns requires sophisticated tools and longer measurement windows.

Cultural Variability: Emotional triggers are deeply culture-specific. An advertisement that evokes joy and community in one cultural context may be misinterpreted or irrelevant in another. Global brands must either develop highly localized emotional campaigns or identify universal human emotions that transcend cultural specificity.

Emotional Saturation: As emotional marketing has become more prevalent, consumers have developed greater emotional literacy and skepticism. The threshold for genuinely moving an audience has risen significantly, requiring greater creativity and authenticity.

Execution Risk: Poorly executed emotional campaigns can misfire dramatically, generating negative sentiment and viral mockery rather than the intended positive response. The stakes of emotional marketing are high both the rewards and the risks are amplified.

Consistency Across Touchpoints: Emotional branding must be consistent across every consumer touchpoint - advertising, customer service, product experience, social media. A brand that promises warmth and care in its advertising but delivers cold, impersonal service creates a dissonant emotional experience that erodes trust.

FUTURE TRENDS IN EMOTIONAL MARKETING

Neuromarketing: Neuromarketing applies neuroscience tools including fMRI brain scanning, EEG, eye-tracking, and facial coding to measure consumers' subconscious emotional responses to marketing stimuli. This enables brands to optimize campaigns based on neurological data rather than self-reported responses, which are often rationalized or socially desirable rather than authentic. Major FMCG companies and entertainment studios already use neuromarketing to pre-test advertising and content.

AI-Driven Emotional Personalization: Artificial intelligence is enabling real-time emotional personalization at unprecedented scale. AI systems can analyse facial expressions, voice tones, browsing behaviour, and biometric signals to infer a consumer's emotional state and serve contextually appropriate marketing content. Spotify's mood-based playlist recommendations and Netflix's emotionally

profiled thumbnail selection are early examples of AI-driven emotional marketing.

Immersive Emotional Experiences: Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies enable brands to create immersive emotional experiences that conventional media cannot replicate. Luxury brands, automotive companies, and real estate developers are already using VR to create emotionally immersive brand experiences that deepen consumer connection before purchase. As these technologies become more accessible, immersive emotional marketing will move from novelty to mainstream.

Gen Z and Emotional Authenticity: Generation Z consumers the largest consumer cohort by population are particularly resistant to performative emotional marketing. They reward radical transparency, genuine social commitment, and brand humility, while severely penalizing perceived inauthenticity. The future of emotional marketing will require brands to demonstrate rather than merely claim their values, moving from emotional storytelling to emotional proof.

CONCLUSION

Emotional marketing represents a fundamental shift in understanding what drives consumer behavior from the rational economic model of the purely self-interested consumer to a richer, more accurate picture of the emotion-driven human being. Brands that understand and respect the emotional dimension of their consumer relationships have consistently outperformed those that do not, across categories, geographies, and economic cycles.

The most effective emotional marketing is not a manipulation of consumers but a genuine alignment between a brand's authentic identity and the emotional needs and values of its target audience. When this alignment is achieved as Apple aligned innovation with belonging, Nike aligned sportswear with human potential, and Dove aligned beauty products with self-acceptance the result is a brand relationship that transcends the transactional.

As technology enables ever more precise emotional targeting, the ethical responsibilities of marketers grow correspondingly. The power to reach people at their most emotionally vulnerable moments must be exercised with transparency, respect, and genuine commitment to consumer wellbeing. Emotional marketing at its best does not exploit emotional needs it meets them.

The future belongs to brands that are not merely emotionally intelligent but emotionally honest that recognizes the profound trust consumers place in them when they share their emotional lives, and honour that trust with authenticity, consistency, and genuine value. In a world of infinite choice and relentless noise, the brand that makes you

feel something real will always have an insurmountable advantage.

SUCCESS STORY – CADBURY DAIRY MILK INDIA

Transforming a Chocolate Bar into an Emotional Cultural Icon Brand Journey Iconic Emotional Campaigns (1994–2022)

Year	Campaign	Emotional Appeal	Campaign Highlight
1994	Real Taste of Life	Joy & Spontaneity	Famous ad featuring a girl dancing on a cricket field – spontaneous, carefree celebration
2004	Kuch Meetha Ho Jaaye	Celebration & Togetherness	Positioned Cadbury as the sweet for celebrations and special moments in Indian life
2010	ShubhAar ambh	Tradition & New Beginnings	Encouraged starting every new beginning with something sweet – became a cultural ritual
2019	Thank You, Ads,	Gratitude & Human Relationships	Featured real stories expressing gratitude; highlighted human relationships and appreciation
2022	AI Shah Rukh Khan	Innovation & Belonging	Used AI to create personalized ads featuring SRK; combined tech with emotional personalization

Measurable Emotional Marketing Impact

₹14,000Cr Mondelez India Revenue (2023) – up from ₹1,200 Cr in 1994	70% Market Share in Indian chocolate confectionery – highest emotional category recall	#1 Most Trusted FMCG Brand – ET Brand Equity Survey (2022–23)	2.5× Sales Uplift post AI-personalised Shah Rukh Khan campaign (Diwali 2022)
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Source: www.cadbury.co.in

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