Proceedings of ICFTBA 2026 Symposium: Driving Organizational Strategic Change for Financial Gains
DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38242

Beyond Age: Market Context, Perceived Value, Social Influence, and Product Category in Young Consumers' Brand Choice

Yiwen Zhu

Minhang Crosspoint Academy at Shanghai Wenqi Middle School, Shanghai, China
yvonneovo@outlook.com

Abstract. This review examines how young consumers choose brands by moving beyond explanations that rely mainly on age. Existing studies treat young consumers as an important market segment, but age alone does not explain why the effect of loyalty is stronger in some product categories than in others. This paper argues that young consumers' brand choice is shaped by three main mechanisms: market and information context, perceived value, and social influence. Market and information context influences what brands consumers notice and encounter. Perceived value explains how consumers judge price, quality, usefulness, and risk. Social influence explains how family, peers, online reviews, and user-generated content shape brand meaning and purchase decisions. The review also argues that product category acts as a boundary condition: routine products, visible identity products, and high-risk information-intensive products activate different decision mechanisms. The paper ends with a framework and future research directions that link consumer behavior to business analytics, including segmentation, prediction, and recommendation systems.

Keywords: young consumers, brand choice, perceived value, social influence, product category

1. Introduction

Young consumers form an important market segment, but age alone does not explain their brand choices. Students, young professionals, and young adults are often grouped together, yet their choices can differ across products, cultural contexts, and social settings. For example, one young consumer may purchase the same toothpaste brand for years but switch clothing brands often. The same person may rely on family habits for daily products, social media for fashion discovery, and online reviews for expensive or unfamiliar products. These examples suggest that age sets the sample boundary, but it does not fully explain brand choice.

Previous research offers several useful pieces of this puzzle. Wood shows that brand loyalty among 18-24-year-old consumers differs across product categories [1]. Zeithaml explains that value is not the same as low price. Consumers compare what they receive with what they give up [2]. Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel show that consumers differ in their susceptibility to interpersonal

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38242

influence [3]. Chowdhury shows that young consumers' media preferences can vary across market and gender contexts [4]. More recent work on social media and artificial intelligence also suggests that consumer information exposure is increasingly shaped by platforms, recommendations, and personalized content [5, 6].

However, these studies are often discussed separately. Some focus on media exposure, while others focus on price and value, social influence, or product categories. This review brings those strands together. It argues that young consumers' brand choice should be understood through three mechanisms: market and information context, perceived value, and social influence. Product category is treated as a boundary condition because it shapes which mechanism becomes most important.

The main research question asks why young consumers choose some brands over others and why the drivers of brand choice vary across market contexts, value perceptions, social relationships, and product categories. This review does not assume that all young consumers behave in the same way. Instead, it explains why young consumers should be studied through mechanisms and product situations rather than through age alone.

2. Conceptual foundations and review scope

2.1. Young consumers without generational labels

We uses the term "young consumers" as a broad sample label. It does not use generational labels because those labels do not have universally agreed academic definition. Different studies define young consumers based on their actual research targets. Wood studies the 18-24 age group, Chowdhury studies young executives in Bangladesh, and Hogg, Bruce, and Hill [7] study children aged 7-10. These samples should not be treated as the same group [1, 4, 7].

For that reason, this review records the actual age range and sample type of each study. Studies on children are used only as background evidence about early brand socialization. They are not treated as core evidence for young adult brand choice. General consumer-behavior studies are included only when they provide useful theoretical concepts, such as perceived value, brand knowledge, or interpersonal influence.

2.2. Brand choice, brand preference, loyalty, and word of mouth

Brand choice is not only the final act of buying a product. It is a broader process. Consumers first become aware of a brand, then form knowledge and associations, evaluate whether the brand is valuable, and decide whether to buy, repeat purchase, or recommend it. Keller explains that brand knowledge includes brand awareness and brand image, which influence how consumers respond to marketing [8]. This helps explain why brand choice begins before the purchase itself.

Brand preference refers to a consumer's tendency to favor one brand over another. Brand loyalty is stronger than preference because it includes repeated behavior and, in many cases, psychological commitment. Wood notes that loyalty is complex and should not be reduced to repeat purchase alone [1]. Word of mouth is another related outcome. When consumers talk about brands, post reviews, or recommend a brand to friends, they become part of the brand's social communication system. Anggraeni and Rachmanita show this in the case of Indonesian local fashion brands, where brand image, brand personality, brand love, and word of mouth are linked [9].

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38242

2.3. Review scope and literature selection

This review is a structured narrative review rather than a full systematic review. It begins with the student's seed papers and then adds selected foundational studies that help explain the mechanisms behind young consumers' brand choice. The studies are grouped by the role they play in the framework, not by the order in which they were read.

Table 1. Key studies and their role in this review

Study	Context / sample	Main idea	Role in this review
Wood [1]	18-24 consumers; multiple products	Brand loyalty and selection dimensions vary across product categories.	Core evidence for product category as boundary condition.
Zeithaml [2]	General consumer value theory	Price, perceived quality, and perceived value are different constructs.	Core theory for perceived value and purchasing power.
Bearden et al. [3]	Scale development	Interpersonal influence has informational and normative dimensions.	Core theory for social influence.
Chowdhury [4]	Young executives in Bangladesh	Media preferences differ across media types and gender.	Evidence for market and information context.
Barger et al. [5]	Social media review	Consumer engagement includes reacting, commenting, sharing, and creating content.	Digital social influence and review-article model.
Bronnenberg et al. [10]	Consumer migration and packaged goods	Past market experience can persist in brand preferences.	Evidence for place-based brand familiarity.
Keller [8]	Brand equity theory	Brand knowledge includes awareness and image.	Foundation for brand exposure and knowledge.
Sweeney & Soutar [11]	Perceived value scale	Value includes quality, emotional, social, and price dimensions.	Expands value beyond low price.
Bearden & Etzel [12]	Reference-group influence	Public/private and luxury/necessity product types change reference-group influence.	Supports product category logic.
Nogueira et al. [6]	AI and consumer behavior review	AI reshapes consumer-brand dynamics through personalization, chatbots, and virtual assistants.	Recent support for AI-mediated information context.
Kus [13]	AI and sustainable consumption scoping review	AI effects depend on psychological mechanisms and decision context.	Optional support for AI and product-context differences.

2.4. Integrated framework

The framework of this review can be summarized as a staged process. First, market and information context shapes brand exposure, awareness, and familiarity. Second, perceived value shapes whether the consumer thinks the brand is worth its price, effort, and risk. Third, social influence shapes brand meaning through family, peers, online reviews, and social media engagement. Finally, product category moderates the whole process by shaping which mechanism matters most.

Table 2. Conceptual framework

Stage	Main question	Main constructs	Typical outcome
Market and information context	Which brands does the consumer see or know?	Media exposure, AI recommendations, brand availability, familiarity	Brand awareness and consideration
Perceived value	Is the brand worth the cost?	Price, quality, usefulness, risk, value for money	Brand preference and purchase intention
Social influence	What do family, peers, reviews, or social media signal?	Informational influence, normative influence, identity meaning, eWOM	Choice, loyalty, word of mouth

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38242

Table 2. (continued)

Product category	Which mechanism is stronger in this product type?	Routine/private, identity-expressive, high-risk/information-intensive	Different patterns of brand choice

3. Market and information context

The first mechanism is market and information context. Young consumers often consider brands that they encounter, recognize, or have access to. For that reason, brand choice starts before formal evaluation. It starts with exposure. For example, what brands consumers see, where they see them, how often they see them, and what information is available about the products, determine if a certain brand or product will be considered in the first place .

3.1. Brand exposure and media environment

Media exposure matters because different media provide different kinds of brand information. Chowdhury studies young consumers in Bangladesh and shows that media preference is not uniform. Some media may be better for complete information, while others may be better for interaction or attention [4]. This means that brands do not reach all young consumers in the same way. A young consumer who often sees a brand through radio, magazines, billboards, social media, or in-store displays may develop different levels of brand familiarity.

For this review, "place" does not refer only to geography. It also includes media environment and communication channels. In one country or city, social media may dominate brand discovery, while in another context, magazines, television, radio, or billboards may still matter. Market context therefore shapes brand awareness, which is the first step of brand choice.

3.2. Place, local/nonlocal meaning, and brand experience

Market context also shapes the meaning of brands. Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, and Ramachander show that in developing countries, brands perceived as non-local may be preferred not only because of perceived quality but also because of social status [14]. This suggests that brand origin can carry symbolic meaning. A global brand may represent modernity, status, or aspiration, while a local brand may represent familiarity, identity, or cultural closeness.

Place also matters through past experience. Bronnenberg, Dube, and Gentzkow show that brand preferences can be shaped by consumers' previous market environments and can persist even when people move [10]. This helps explain why brand familiarity and habit matter. A consumer may not actively compare every brand each time; past exposure and repeated use can create a form of brand memory.

3.3. AI-mediated discovery and personalization

A more recent arena of research about market and information context indicates AI-mediated brand discovery. AI recommendation systems, chatbots, virtual assistants, and personalized platforms can influence which products consumers see first. Nogueira, Lopes, and Gomes argue that AI can reshape brand-consumer dynamics by analyzing consumer data, identifying patterns, and personalizing consumer experiences [6]. This is relevant to young consumers because many of them discover products through digital platforms rather than only through traditional advertising.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38242

However, AI should not become the whole topic of this paper. Here it works as a recent extension of market and information context. In practical terms, algorithms may act as new gatekeepers of brand exposure. They can recommend products that match past behavior, but they may also narrow the range of brands consumers see. Kus suggests that AI effects depend on psychological states and decision contexts, not on technology alone [13]. For that reason, AI is best treated as one part of the information environment, not as a separate topic that replaces the brand-choice framework.

4. Perceived value and purchasing power

The second mechanism is perceived value. It is not enough to ask only whether a young consumer has high or low income. Income and purchasing power matter, but they work through value judgments. Consumers ask whether a brand is worth its price, whether the quality is reliable, and whether the benefits justify the money, time, and effort involved.

Zeithaml is useful here because the article clearly separates objective price, perceived price, perceived quality, and perceived value [2]. Value is not the same as cheapness. For some consumers, value means paying less. For others, value means paying more for better quality, lower risk, emotional satisfaction, or social meaning. Sweeney and Soutar also show that perceived value has several dimensions, including emotional value, social value, quality and performance value, and price and value for money [11].

This is meaningful for young consumers because limited budgets do not always mean choosing the cheapest brand. For routine products, they may prefer familiar brands because switching is not worth the effort. For visible products, they may accept a higher price if the brand supports self-image or social belonging. For high-risk products, they may pay more for a brand that reduces uncertainty. In this way, purchasing power should be connected to value perception, not used as a simple explanation by itself.

Kral, Janoskova, Lazaroiu, and Suler provide evidence that demographic variables such as gender, age, education, and income may be associated with branded product preference [15]. However, this kind of demographic evidence is limited because it does not explain the psychological process behind the choice. This review therefore shifts the focus from demographic association to mechanism: income matters because it affects affordability, perceived value, and risk tolerance.

5. Social influence and brand meaning

The third mechanism is social influence. Young consumers do not make brand choices in isolation. They learn from family, friends, classmates, influencers, online reviews, and user-generated content. Social influence can help consumers make better decisions, but it can also create pressure to buy brands that are socially approved.

5.1. Informational and normative influence

Bearden et al. are central to this section because they distinguish informational and normative influence [3]. Informational influence happens when consumers seek advice, observe others, or use other people's experiences to reduce uncertainty. For example, a young consumer may ask friends before buying a new phone or read online reviews before buying skincare products. Normative influence happens when consumers choose brands to gain approval, avoid disapproval, or fit in with a group.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38242

This distinction matters because social influence is not just 'peer pressure.' It includes both learning and social approval. When consumers know little about a product, informational influence may matter more. When the product is visible and related to identity, normative influence may matter more.

5.2. Family, peer, and digital influence

Family and peer influence should also be separated. Childers and Rao show that family-based and peer-based reference groups can influence decisions differently [16]. Family influence may be stronger for products connected to household routines and repeated purchase. Peer influence may be stronger for products that are visible in social settings. Mangleburg, Doney, and Bristol also show that shopping with friends can shape teens' retail attitudes and spending tendencies. Although that study is not only about brand choice, it is useful because it shows how peer interaction can become part of consumption behavior [17].

Digital platforms add another layer. Barger et al. argue that social media engagement includes reacting, commenting, sharing, and creating content [5]. These behaviors matter because they make brand communication visible to others. Online reviews and user-generated content can also act as social proof. For young consumers, digital influence may operate through likes, comments, recommendations, influencer content, and reviews.

5.3. Brand love and word of mouth

Social influence also continues after purchase. Anggraeni and Rachmanita study local fashion brands in Indonesia and link brand personality, brand image, brand love, and word of mouth. This article works better as a small case than as the main theory [9]. Its value is that it shows consumers can become active promoters of brands. In other words, young consumers are not only influenced by others; they can also influence others through recommendations and online sharing.

6. Product category as a boundary condition

Product category is the key boundary condition in this review. It explains why the same mechanisms do not shape all brand choices equally. The question is not simply whether young consumers are loyal, price sensitive, or socially influenced. A better question is under what product conditions these mechanisms become more or less important.

Wood is the most important study for this section because it directly compares brand purchasing behavior across product categories in the 18-24 age group [1]. The study shows that young consumers' loyalty and brand-selection dimensions differ across products. This means that age alone does not explain brand behavior; product type changes the decision logic.

6.1. Routine and privately consumed products

Routine and privately consumed products include toothpaste, coffee, cereal, and soap. They are usually bought repeatedly, used privately, and considered relatively low risk. For these products, brand choice may be shaped more by habit, familiarity, and family experience than by identity expression. Wood shows that loyalty to coffee and toothpaste is partly related to parental purchase and familiarity [1]. This suggests that some brand loyalty among young consumers may be habitual rather than strongly emotional.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38242

6.2. Visible and identity-expressive products

Visible and identity-expressive products include clothing, jeans, trainers, cosmetics, and fashion brands. These products are seen by others and can communicate self-image, taste, and group belonging. Wood finds that clothing brands are linked to self-image among 18-24-year-old consumers [1]. This implies that social influence may be stronger for products that are publicly consumed or used to express identity.

6.3. High-risk and information-intensive products

High-risk and information-intensive products include electronics, durable goods, services, expensive fashion products, and AI-enabled products. In these categories, quality may be difficult to judge before purchase, and mistakes can be costly. Zeithaml distinguishes intrinsic cues, such as taste, color, and fit, from extrinsic cues, such as price and brand name [2]. When quality is hard to evaluate, consumers may rely more on brand reputation, price cues, online reviews, and recommendations.

AI recommendation studies also fit here. Castelo, Bos, and Lehmann show that consumers' willingness to accept algorithmic advice can depend on the task type [18]. Kus summarizes similar ideas by noting that consumers may prefer AI recommendations for search goods but human recommendations for experience goods [13]. This supports the product-category argument. Consumers may respond differently to recommendation sources depending on whether the product is mainly functional, experiential, emotional, or risky.

Table 3. Product category and dominant brand-choice mechanisms

Product category	Examples	Dominant mechanism	Why it matters	Key studies
Routine and privately consumed products	Toothpaste, coffee, cereal, soap	Habit, familiarity, family experience	These products are repeated and low-risk, so consumers may not actively compare brands every time.	Wood [1]; Bronnenberg et al. [10]
Visible and identity-expressive products	Clothing, jeans, trainers, cosmetics	Self-image, peer influence, social approval	These products are seen by others and can express identity, taste, and belonging.	Wood [1]; Bearden & Etzel [12]; Mangleburg et al. [17]
High-risk and information-intensive products	Electronics, durable goods, services, AI-enabled products	Information search, quality cues, reviews, risk reduction	Quality is harder to judge before purchase, so consumers rely on external cues.	Zeithaml [2]; Erdem & Swait [19]; Castelo et al. [18]

7. Future research agenda

Future research could move from age-based segmentation to mechanism-based segmentation. Instead of only asking whether young consumers are different from older consumers, researchers can ask which mechanisms predict brand choice within young consumer groups. This is also useful for business analytics because firms can measure media exposure, price sensitivity, review use, peer influence, and product category to improve segmentation and prediction.

Table 4. Future research agenda

Research gap	Future research question	Possible variables	Possible method
Age is often treated as the main explanation.	Does mechanism-based segmentation explain brand choice better than age alone?	Media exposure, perceived value, social influence, product category	Survey and cluster analysis

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38242

Table 4. (continued)

Place is often measured too broadly.	Does market context affect brand choice through brand exposure and familiarity?	Country, media use, brand availability, brand awareness	Mediation model
Income is often used without explaining value.	Does perceived value mediate the effect of purchasing power on brand preference?	Income, budget, PERVAL dimensions, price sensitivity	Structural equation modeling
Social influence is often treated as one variable.	When do informational and normative influence matter more?	Peer advice, family advice, review use, identity concern	Multi-category survey
Product category is rarely discussed.	Is social influence stronger for visible products than routine private products?	Product visibility, involvement, brand loyalty, WOM	Experiment or comparative survey
AI personalization is new but under-integrated.	How do AI recommendations shape young consumers' brand discovery?	Recommendation source, trust, product type, purchase intention	Online experiment

8. Conclusion

This review argues that young consumers should not be treated as one homogeneous market. Their brand choices are shaped by exposure, value evaluation, and social meaning. Market and information context determines what brands they know and encounter. Perceived value determines whether they think the brand is worth buying. Social influence determines how family, peers, social media, and online reviews give brands meaning. Product category explains why these mechanisms vary across routine products, visible identity products, and high-risk information-intensive products.

The main contribution of this review is to move beyond simple demographic explanations. Age is important for defining the sample, but it does not explain the decision process. A stronger approach is to examine how young consumers encounter brands, evaluate value, respond to social influence, and make different choices across product categories. This framework can support future research in marketing and business analytics, especially in customer segmentation, brand loyalty prediction, and AI-based product recommendations.

References

[1] Wood, L. M. (2004). Dimensions of brand purchasing behaviour: Consumers in the 18-24 age group. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 4*(1), 9-24. https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.154

[2] Zeithaml, V. A. (1988). Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: A means-end model and synthesis of evidence. *Journal of Marketing, 52*(3), 2-22. https://doi.org/10.1177/002224298805200302

[3] Bearden, W. O., Netemeyer, R. G., & Teel, J. E. (1989). Measurement of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. *Journal of Consumer Research, 15*(4), 473-481. https://doi.org/10.1086/209186

[4] Chowdhury, T. A. (2018). Media preferences among young consumers in Bangladesh: A multidimensional approach. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 24*(5), 486-505. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2015.1113433

[5] Barger, V. A., Peltier, J. W., & Schultz, D. E. (2016). Social media and consumer engagement: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 10*(4), 268-287. https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-06-2016-0065

[6] Nogueira, E., Lopes, J. M., & Gomes, S. (2025). The new era of artificial intelligence in consumption: Theoretical framing, review and research agenda. *Management Review Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-025-00531-7

[7] Hogg, M. K., Bruce, M., & Hill, A. J. (1998). Fashion brand preferences among young consumers. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 26*(8), 293-300. https://doi.org/10.1108/09590559810231742

[8] Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing, 57*(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299305700101

[9] Anggraeni, A., & Rachmanita. (2015). Effects of brand love, personality and image on word of mouth: The case of local fashion brands among young consumers. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 211*, 442-447. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.058

[10] Bronnenberg, B. J., Dube, J.-P. H., & Gentzkow, M. (2012). The evolution of brand preferences: Evidence from consumer migration. *American Economic Review, 102*(6), 2472-2508. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.102.6.2472

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.BH38242

[11] Sweeney, J. C., & Soutar, G. N. (2001). Consumer perceived value: The development of a multiple item scale. *Journal of Retailing, 77*(2), 203-220. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4359(01)00041-0
[12] Bearden, W. O., & Etzel, M. J. (1982). Reference group influence on product and brand purchase decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research, 9*(2), 183-194. https://doi.org/10.1086/208911
[13] Kus, O. A. (2026). Influence of AI technologies on the psychology of sustainable consumption: Scoping review. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 16*(2), Article e202622. https://doi.org/10.30935/ojcmt/18275
[14] Batra, R., Ramaswamy, V., Alden, D. L., Steenkamp, J.-B. E. M., & Ramachander, S. (2000). Effects of brand local and nonlocal origin on consumer attitudes in developing countries. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 9*(2), 83-95. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327663JCP0902_3
[15] Kral, P., Janoskova, K., Lazaroiu, G., & Suler, P. (2020). Impact of selected socio-demographic characteristics on branded product preference in consumer markets. *Management & Marketing, 15*(4), 570-586. https://doi.org/10.2478/mmcks-2020-0033
[16] Childers, T. L., & Rao, A. R. (1992). The influence of familial and peer-based reference groups on consumer decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research, 19*(2), 198-211. https://doi.org/10.1086/209296
[17] Mangleburg, T. F., Doney, P. M., & Bristol, T. (2004). Shopping with friends and teens' susceptibility to peer influence. *Journal of Retailing, 80*(2), 101-116. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2004.04.005
[18] Castelo, N., Bos, M. W., & Lehmann, D. R. (2019). Task-dependent algorithm aversion. *Journal of Marketing Research, 56*(5), 809-825. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243719851788
[19] Erdem, T., & Swait, J. (1998). Brand equity as a signaling phenomenon. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 7*(2), 131-157. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp0702_02