

Preamble: Brand Trust + Brand Desire = Brand Buying Intent

In today's dynamic business environment, trust is a vital yet multifaceted asset for brands. It emerges from a blend of factors that consumers evaluate when forming judgments about a brand. Initially, consumers may focus on tangible aspects like a brand's reliability and service quality. But as trust deepens, consumers also consider broader intangible factors – including, for example, a brand's environmental practices, its societal impact, how the brand treats its employees, or how the sales staff behaves with consumers – all of which, and more, go into shaping the buying intent of consumers.

Yet, Brand Trust alone does not fully explain brand intent or buying preference. Alongside trust operates an equally powerful emotional dimension—Brand Desire. Desire refers to the magnetic appeal a brand exerts on stakeholders. Brand Desire is essentially the “inherent force that interests, pleases, or stimulates... which makes a brand appealing.” This pull may be driven by aspiration, alignment of values, personality fit, or cultural resonance.

Together, Brand Trust and Brand Desire constitute what is now formally defined as **Buying Intent**.

Combining Three Sciences: Psychology, Sociology and Communications

In psychology, emotions are understood as outcomes shaped by the dynamic interaction between internal dispositions—such as personality, cognition, and biological states—and external influences, including cultural context, social environment, and patterns of communication. Human well-being is particularly dependent on relationships, which not only provide social and physical support but also influence neurochemical regulation, contributing to feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and connection.

Trust and Desire are the basis of all relationships, and both are equally important in defining and building affinity among humans. Humans seek out others who reflect their personality in subtle ways, as a means of sustaining the relationship over time. As our engagement with brands has increased, brands have begun to provide meaning to humans, and the relationship of consumers with brands has also become a very important association that individuals maintain.

Consumers ‘buy into’ (distinct from ‘buy’) brands that reflect their personalities. It is this relationship index—termed **Buying Intent**—that TRA measures.

Inspired by Dr. Robin Dunbar's theory—which shows that humans can cognitively maintain only about 150 meaningful relationships—TRA extends this framework to brands. Just as individuals allocate limited emotional and cognitive capacity across people, friends, and social groups, brands also compete for a place within this relational hierarchy. Each relationship, whether with a person or a brand, carries a relative value that can be measured. TRA defines **Buying Intent** as the relationship quotient between a consumer and a brand, determined by its two contributory components: **Brand Trust** and **Brand Desire**.

Understanding the Buying Intent, Brand Trust & Brand Desire Components

Attempting to quantify something as nuanced as trust or desire posed unique challenges. The development of the Buying Intent, Brand Trust and Brand Desire Matrices was done over 3 years and finally published in the book *Decoding Communication* authored by the CEO of TRA Research, N. Chandramouli.

1. Grounded in Deep Academic Research

The foundation was laid through a detailed review of academic literature in psychology, sociology, and communications—fields where Trust and Desire find theoretical grounding. While several papers addressed these independently, none provided a unified theory applicable to brand relationships. This academic gap led to the creation of an integrated framework.

2. Review of Popular Science Perspectives

All relevant popular science literature addressing Trust and Desire was reviewed to explore how lay and practitioner-level thinking approached these ideas. The fragmentation between trust (as rational) and desire (as marketing) further reinforced the need for cohesion.

3. Consultations with Over 300 Domain Experts

Structured interviews with more than 300 experts in psychology, sociology, behavioural economics, and marketing validated one core hypothesis: **consumers relate to brands as they do to people**, attributing emotions, motivations, and personalities to them.

4. Human Relationship Matrix to Buying Intent Matrix

This led to the Human Relationship Matrix, which posits that brands emanate human-like behaviours. Stakeholders react to brands as they would to other humans—by interpreting cues, making judgments, and engaging emotionally based on compatibility and self-perception. This theory became the basis for:

- The **Brand Trust Matrix** – capturing rational and emotional grounds of dependability.
 - The **Brand Desire Matrix** – mapping aspirational, emotional, and symbolic appeal.
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5. Personality Reflection and Buying Intent

One of the most powerful discoveries was that consumers “buy into” brands that reflect their personality. This identity alignment (not functional selection) became the central predictor of brand affinity and engagement. Thus, **Buying Intent**, defined as the intersection of Trust and Desire, became the most accurate representation of a brand relationship.

6. Codification in the Book ‘Decoding Communication’

All insights were distilled and presented in *Decoding Communication* (Mavrix, 2023). The book conceptualises Buying Intent as the true measure of stakeholder alignment and has become a reference across academic institutions, communication workshops, and brand strategy circles.

7. From Research to Measurement

The Brand Trust Matrix—comprising 61 Brand Attributes and 10 Brand Behaviours—was developed through deep-rooted inquiry and is now deployed in India's largest syndicated brand study, covering 16 Indian cities and thousands of peer influencers.

A similar framework for Brand Desire was developed later. While both matrices are deployed independently, their intersection yields the most powerful output—**Buying Intent**.

8. Methodology with Indian Statistical Institute

TRA partnered with the Indian Statistical Institute for statistical rigour across two dimensions:

i. Choosing the Respondents

Studying only consumers would have limited results to tactile experience (direct usage of a brand), missing the richer **vicarious experience**—recommendations from trusted peers, which are often more influential than personal experience.

TRA identified **peer-influencers**—the top 10% brand-aware individuals with influence over others. Criteria included:

- **High Brand Awareness:** Passing a screening with at least 15 correct brand-based responses.
 - **Multilingual Proficiency:** Proficiency in English and at least one Indian language (3/5+ in Speak, Read, Write).
 - **Influential Social Position:** Working in large firms (200+ employees or ₹50 Cr+ turnover).
 - **Home Influencers:** Residing in large societies (100+ homes) and influential in family decisions.
 - **Industry Exclusion:** PR, advertising, market research, BPO/KPO professionals were excluded.
 - **Non-Incentivised Participation:** No compensation; average interview time: 45 minutes.
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TRA only does Syndicated Research on Buying Intent

TRA is a pure syndicated research firm focused exclusively on Buying Intent, Brand Trust, and Brand Desire. Unlike commissioned or ad-hoc market research, syndicated research is self-funded, continuous, and independent of any brand's influence. This ensures complete objectivity, comparability across categories, and long-term trend validity. Because syndicated studies are designed for wide industry use rather than a single client, they provide deeper benchmarks, standardised methodologies, and richer cross-sector insights than normal market research can typically deliver. All TRA studies are conducted independently, without brand sponsorship, and their listings are publicly available at www.trustadvisory.info. Brands wishing to use these claims in marketing must acquire a license from TRA.

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TRA's BRAND TRUST REPORT 2026

Industry Scrutiny

All listings are publicly available, and leading Indian and global brands subject TRA's work to rigorous, multi-layered evaluation before adopting it. They begin by understanding the underlying theory of Buying Intent, Brand Trust, and Brand Desire, and then scrutinize the methodological rigour that drives TRA's syndicated studies. Finally, they assess the authenticity and independence of the research itself. Only after such thorough evaluation do brands acquire TRA's data and secure licenses to credibly integrate these recognitions into their marketing strategies and communications.

Brand Trust Details

Brand Trust is built on:

- **Brand Trust Attributes**
- **Brand Trust Behaviours**
- **Brand Trust Archetypes**

These reflect the **message, personality, and foundational signals of trust** that a brand exudes.

Brand Trust Foundations & Behaviours:

Foundation	Explanation	Constituent Brand Behaviours
Building Capacity to Trust	Enables stakeholders to feel safe and lower their guard.	Non-Threatening Ambience, Shared Interest, Display Empathy
Creating Perception of Positive Intent	Signals that the brand's motives are genuine and optimistic.	Demonstrated Sincerity, Altruism, Enthusiasm
Demonstrating Relevant Competence	Proves capability through performance.	Outward Appearance, Perceived Competence, Commanding Respect, Accepting Responsibility

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire includes three parts:

1. Recall Quotient (this question serves to test, and to de-channelize the mind)

Respondents named five brands (local/national/international) to elicit unfiltered brand associations. This had no impact on scoring but primed respondents for thoughtful responses.

2. Sub-Conscious Brand Trust Quotient

Respondents named three brands best suited to Trust and scored them on Brand Behaviours. This part captured implicit trust.

3. Conscious Trust Quotient

Respondents named their "Most Trusted Brands" and provided scores. This represented deliberate and explicit trust attribution.

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Sample and Quotas

The final respondent pool emerged from rigorous screening of a broad consumer base. Those not meeting the criteria are dropped from the respondent set.

Respondents were divided into:

- **Salaried Males**
- **Salaried Females**
- **Home-makers (Home Influencers)**

General Criteria (all respondents):

- Age: 21–50 years
- Language: English + one Indian language (minimum 3/5 proficiency)

Home Influencer Specific Criteria:

- Community Size: 100+ home societies
- High influence score in:
 - Electronics/appliances purchase
 - Product recommendations
 - Child's education decision-making

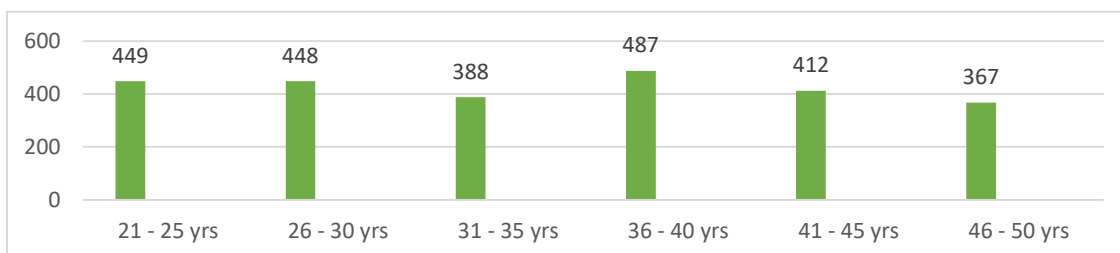
Salaried Criteria:

- Monthly income: ₹20,000+
- Company size: 200+ employees or ₹50 Cr+ turnover
- Excluded industries: PR, MR, BPOs, etc.
- **Rule of 15:**
 - Max 15 respondents per organisation across India
 - Max 15 of same brand names by one respondent

Sampling Criteria

1. Gender and Age Quotas

Reflective of urban demographic proportions. Home-makers vs. working women were proportioned ~68.4% to 31.6%.



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2. City Distribution

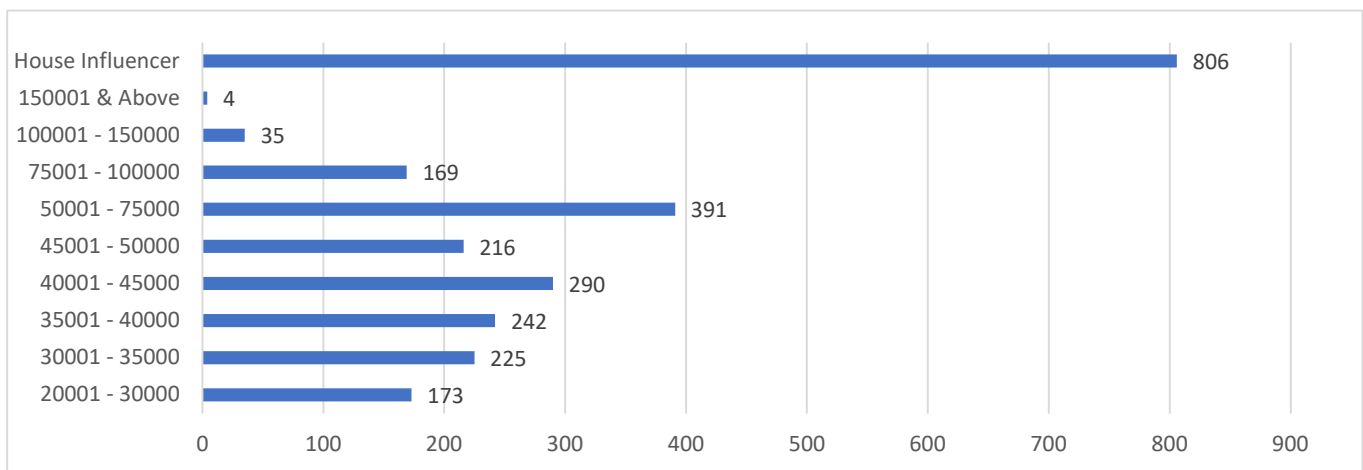
16 Indian cities were selected based on GDP contribution:

North	Delhi, Lucknow Chandigarh, Jaipur
East	Kolkata, Guwahati
West	Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Nagpur, Indore
South	Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Coimbatore, Kochi

Derived respondent demographics

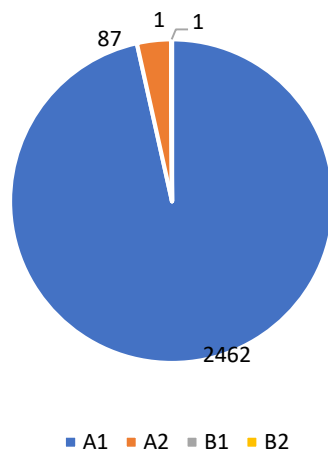
A) Income-based demographics

The respondents had a monthly income exceeding INR 20,000 as shown by the graph of income distribution given below



B) NCCS based criteria

2462 (96.5%) respondents were from NCCS A1, 3.4% were NCCS A2, 1 respondent were from NCCS B1 and 1 from B2.



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TRA's BRAND TRUST REPORT 2026

Data Collection

- Fieldwork: September 2025 – February 23, 2026
- Team: 300+ field investigators
- Time per interview: ~45 mins
- Total: 2,500+ hours, ~30 million data points, 2,000+ unique brands

App-based interviews enabled:

- Geo-tagging
- Voice recognition
- Timestamping
- Respondent verification (door pic/visiting card)

TRA applies stringent quality checks:

- Interviewer testing
 - 100% back-checks
 - Layered quotas and verification
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TRA insists on data accuracy with multiple level of scrutiny. Interviewers' testing, process quality, 100% back-checks, stringent quotas, data inspection at multiple levels, all of which ensured extremely high scrutiny.

MEASURING THE BRAND TRUST INDEX [BTI]

The Brand Trust Index® is a subtle measure of Brand Trust and takes into account the overt and covert

Brand Trust influences – those aspects of Brand Trust that normally remain hidden from scrutiny.

The three measured parameters on Brand Trust were:

- a) **Frequency** – number of times a brand gets mentioned across all the interviews
- b) **Position** – the average position that the brand was mentioned on - first, second or third, among the three brands asked for each brand query
- c) **Suitability** – the average suitability that the brand was given on a rating scale of one to five

This part of the Brand Trust Index® can be represented as:

$$\frac{SD_o}{SD_i} \times p_{5i} \times o_{5i} \times \bar{X}_{5i}$$

The other direct and visible influence on Brand Trust® was the respondent's replies to the question on the Most Trusted Brands. Additionally, this parameter is also measured on the same three parameters as above and is multiplied by 0.67 to equate the five-point scale of conscious trust to the three-point scale of the sub-conscious trust. The second part of the Brand Trust equation can be represented as

$$p_{7i} \times o_{7i} \times \bar{X}_{5i} \times 0.67$$

The addition of these gave us the Brand Trust Index, represented by the following formula:

$$\frac{SD_o}{SD_i} \times p_{5i} \times o_{5i} \times \bar{X}_{5i} + p_{7i} \times o_{7i} \times \bar{X}_{5i} \times 0.67$$

Where:

SD0 represents overall brand suitability score standard deviation

SDi represents all ith brand suitability standard deviation

O5i represents ith brand occurrence frequency of the Brand Trust question

P5i represents ith brand average positions of Brand Trust question

X represents the ith brand average suitability 5i

O7 represents the brand frequency of occurrence of the Recall question

P7i represents all ith brand average positions of the Recall question

How brands use TRA's data and 'Power of Trust' symbol

A. Power of Trust' Symbol

Over 200 brands license the 'Power of Trust' symbol as sign of surety that their brand is trusted by consumers. The 'Power of Trust' symbol has been used in marketing communications of brands in ATL advertising, POP, product packaging, social media, email signatures, among other ways. The brands which feature as Most Trusted in many of TRA's reports, use it to profess the brand's ability to garner the trust of consumers in successive years.



B. Buying Intent Report

Several brands commission TRA for the consumer Buying Intent analysis called Buying Intent Report as intricate insights are available in the syndicated study. Some brands have used the Buying Intent report to discuss future-relevant strategies, while some investment bankers and PE funds use this data to make investment decisions in other brands. The applications of the Buying Intent are only limited by the imagination of the brand.

C. Introspective Intervention

The most interesting part of the application of TRA's Brand Trust methodology has been when brands have commissioned TRA for doing a bespoke study with the brand's stakeholders using 'The Brand Trust Matrix' to bring recommendations to align internal actions to stakeholder Trust.

D. Brand Counsel

TRA helps brands align their external brand and communication initiatives to Trust, Desire and Buying Intent, creating Trust Audits for agencies to ensure all messages are aligned to gaining better brand trust, by giving the brand a complete consumer-centric approach.