

# A Study on Surrogate Marketing and Consumer Perception among College Students

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the concept of surrogate marketing and its impact on consumer perception among college students. Surrogate marketing is widely used by companies to indirectly promote restricted products such as alcohol and tobacco through alternative products under the same brand name. The primary objective of this research is to analyze the level of awareness, perception, and influence of such marketing practices on young consumers. The study is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire from college students. A descriptive research design has been adopted, and the data has been analyzed using appropriate statistical tools, including percentage analysis and graphical representation. The findings indicate that a significant proportion of respondents are aware of surrogate marketing practices and perceive them as both effective and potentially misleading. It is also observed that media exposure and promotional strategies play a crucial role in shaping consumer perception. The study concludes that although surrogate marketing serves as an effective branding tool, it raises ethical concerns and highlights the need for stricter regulatory measures and greater consumer awareness.*

**Keywords:** Surrogate Marketing, Consumer Perception, and Brand Recall, Advertising Ethics, Consumer Behaviour, and Youth Influence.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic marketing environment, organizations continuously adopt innovative strategies to promote their brands and maintain a competitive edge. One such strategy is surrogate marketing, which is widely used to promote products that are legally restricted from direct advertising, such as alcohol and tobacco. Instead of advertising these products directly, companies promote alternative products like packaged water, soda, or event sponsorships under the same brand name. Surrogate marketing has become increasingly prevalent in India due to strict regulatory restrictions on the advertisement of certain products. While this approach helps companies sustain brand visibility and recall, it also raises important ethical and social concerns. Such advertisements may create indirect associations in the minds of consumers, particularly among young individuals, thereby influencing their perception and attitudes. College students form a significant and active segment of consumers who are highly exposed to multiple media platforms, including social media, television, and digital advertising. Their responses and perceptions towards marketing strategies are important, as they represent both current and future consumers. Understanding their viewpoint provides meaningful insights into the effectiveness and impact of surrogate marketing practices. This study is primarily based on first-hand information collected directly from college students through a structured survey. The focus of the research is to analyze their level of awareness, perception, and behavioral response towards surrogate marketing. By relying on primary data, the study aims to present realistic and practical insights into how such marketing strategies influence young consumers, while also highlighting the need for responsible and ethical advertising practices.



## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- To examine the level of awareness of surrogate marketing among college students
- To analyze the perception of students towards surrogate marketing practices
- To evaluate the influence of surrogate marketing on consumer behaviour
- To identify the role of different media platforms in promoting surrogate advertisements
- To assess the ethical concerns associated with surrogate marketing
- To suggest appropriate measures for regulating surrogate marketing practices

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

**1. Arora and Kaur (2023)**, in their research paper “Impact of Surrogate Advertising on Consumer Behaviour in India,” examined how surrogate marketing influences consumer perception and brand recall. The study highlights that companies use surrogate advertisements to maintain brand visibility in markets where direct advertising is restricted. The findings reveal that such advertisements are effective in creating brand awareness among young consumers. However, the study also points out that many respondents perceive these advertisements as misleading, as they indirectly promote restricted products.

**2. Sharma et al. (2021)**, in their research paper “Surrogate Advertising and Its Influence on Youth,” analyzed the impact of surrogate marketing on college students. The study found that frequent exposure to surrogate advertisements through television and digital platforms significantly affects students’ perception and attitudes towards brands. It was also observed that celebrity endorsements play a major role in attracting youth attention and enhancing brand recall. The research concludes that surrogate marketing has a strong psychological influence on young consumers.

**3. Gupta and Singh (2020)**, in their study “Ethical Issues in Surrogate Advertising Practices,” focused on the ethical implications of surrogate marketing. The research indicates that such advertising practices create indirect associations with products like alcohol and tobacco, which may influence consumer behavior in a subtle manner. The study emphasizes that surrogate marketing raises serious ethical concerns and suggests the need for stricter government regulations and monitoring.

**4. Verma (2019)**, in the research paper “Effectiveness of Indirect Advertising Strategies,” explored how surrogate marketing helps brands sustain their presence in the market despite advertising restrictions. The findings suggest that repeated exposure to surrogate advertisements increases brand familiarity and recall among consumers. However, the study also notes that awareness among consumers regarding such strategies is gradually increasing.

**5. Patel and Mehta (2022)**, in their research paper “Consumer Awareness towards Surrogate Marketing,” examined the level of awareness among young consumers. The study found that a majority of respondents are aware of surrogate marketing practices and understand its indirect promotional nature. Despite this awareness, such advertisements continue to influence consumer perception and brand preference.

**6. Khan and Ali (2021)**, in their research paper “Role of Media in Surrogate Advertising,” examined the impact of different media platforms on surrogate marketing. The study found that digital media and social networking sites play a significant role in increasing the reach and effectiveness of surrogate advertisements. The findings indicate that repeated exposure through online platforms enhances brand recall among young consumers and influences their perception towards such brands.

**7. Desai (2020)**, in the study “Surrogate Advertising and Brand Positioning Strategies,” analyzed how companies use surrogate marketing to position their brands in the minds of consumers. The research highlights that surrogate advertisements help in maintaining a strong brand image even in the absence of direct promotion. However, the study also suggests that increased consumer awareness may reduce the effectiveness of such strategies over time.

**8. Reddy and Kumar (2022)**, in their research paper “Consumer Response towards Indirect Advertising,” focused on how consumers react to surrogate marketing practices. The study reveals that while consumers are aware of the indirect



nature of such advertisements, they are still influenced by creative content and promotional techniques. The findings emphasize that surrogate marketing continues to shape consumer attitudes despite ethical concerns.

#### **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology refers to the systematic approach used to collect, analyze, and interpret data for the purpose of the study. It provides a clear framework for conducting the research in an organized and scientific manner.

##### **1. Research Design -**

The present study is based on a descriptive research design, as it aims to describe and analyze the perception and behaviour of college students towards surrogate marketing.

##### **2. Nature of Data -**

The study is primarily based on primary data, which has been collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire. In addition, secondary data has also been referred to for theoretical understanding.

##### **3. Data Collection Method -**

The data has been collected using a structured questionnaire, consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions to obtain accurate and relevant responses from the participants.

##### **4. Sampling Technique -**

The study uses convenience sampling method, where respondents were selected based on ease of access and availability.

##### **5. Sample Size -**

A total of 250 respondents were selected for the study, representing college students from different institutions.

##### **6. Sampling Area -**

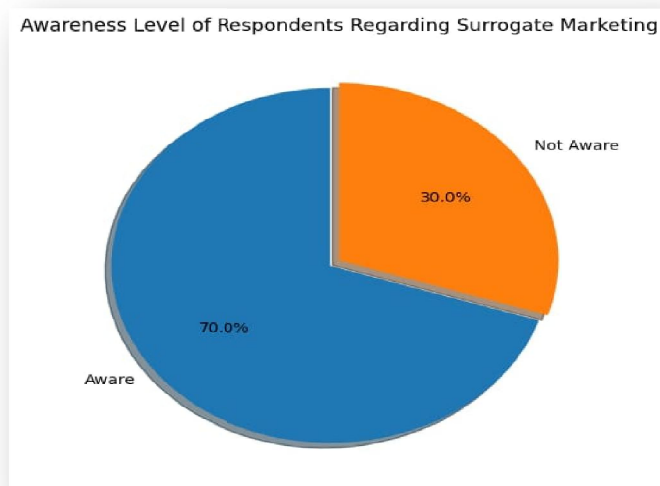
The data has been collected from students belonging to SP College, Ajinkya D.Y. Patil, Rajmata Jijau College, MIT College, ensuring diversity in responses.

##### **7. Tools for Data Analysis -**

The collected data has been analyzed using percentage analysis, along with the use of tables and graphical representations such as bar charts and pie charts for better understanding and interpretation.

#### **V. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION: -**

**Table 1: Awareness of Surrogate Marketing**

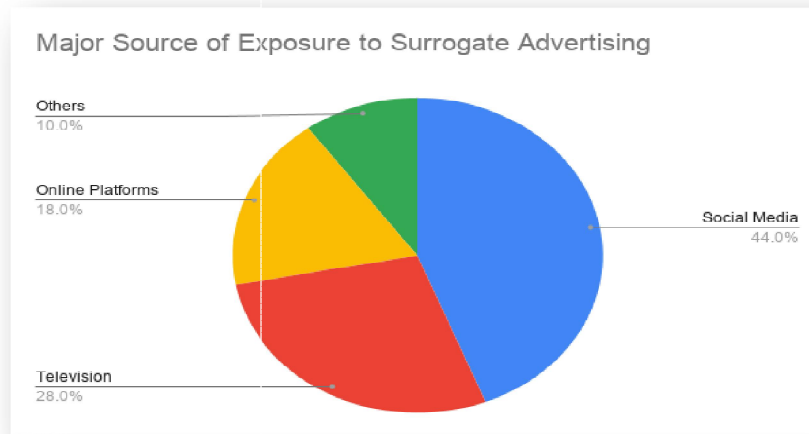


Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Aware	175	70%
Not Aware	75	30%
<b>Total</b>	250	100%

**Interpretation:**

The findings indicate that a substantial majority of respondents are aware of surrogate marketing practices. This reflects a high level of exposure among college students to contemporary advertising strategies. However, the presence of a considerable proportion of unaware respondents suggests that awareness is not uniformly distributed.

**Table 2: Major Source of Exposure to Surrogate Advertising**

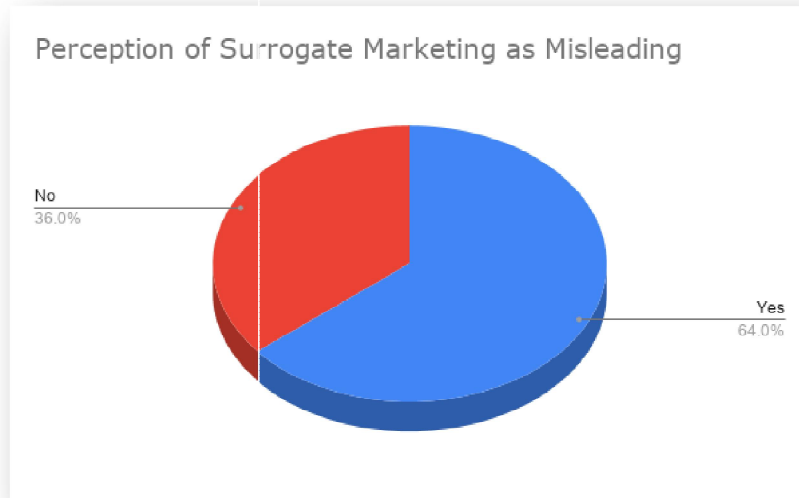


Source	Respondents	Percentage
Social Media	110	44%
Television	70	28%
Online Platforms	45	18%
Others	25	10%
<b>Total</b>	250	100%

**Analysis:** The analysis reveals that digital platforms, particularly social media, serve as the primary source of exposure to surrogate marketing among students. This trend highlights the increasing dominance of digital media over traditional channels in influencing consumer perception.



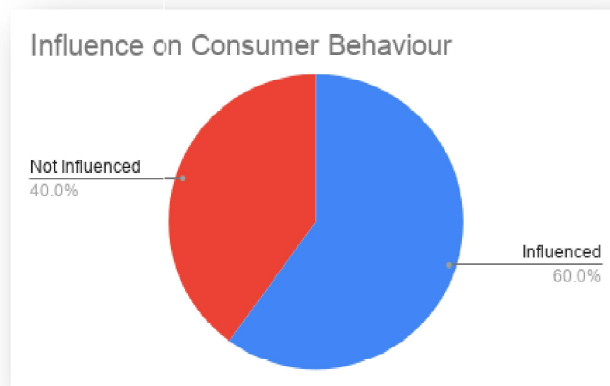
**Table 3: Perception of Surrogate Marketing as Misleading**



Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	160	64%
No	90	36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Conclusion:** - A majority of respondents perceive surrogate marketing as misleading, indicating a critical awareness of indirect advertising techniques. This suggests that while such strategies are effective, they may also negatively impact consumer trust.

**Table 4: Influence on Consumer Behaviour**

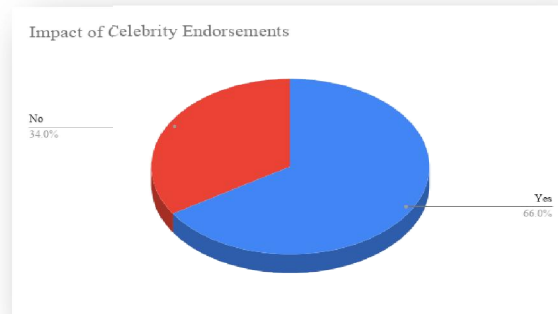


Response	Respondents	Percentage
Influenced	150	60%
Not Influenced	100	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Understanding:** -The results demonstrate that surrogate marketing significantly influences consumer behaviour, particularly among young individuals. This indicates the effectiveness of such marketing strategies in shaping perceptions and preferences.

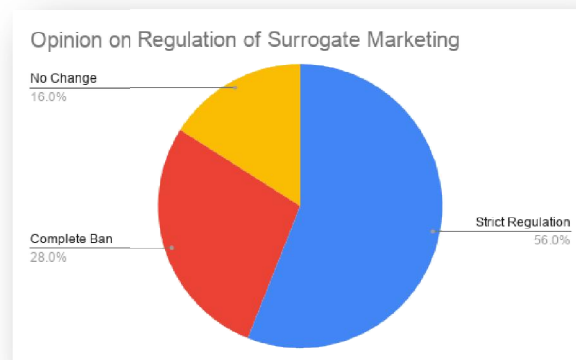
**Table 5: Impact of Celebrity Endorsements**



Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	165	66%
No	85	34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Mentioned:** -The data suggests that celebrity endorsements play a crucial role in enhancing the appeal and effectiveness of surrogate advertisements. Students tend to develop stronger brand associations when influenced by public figures.

**Table 6: Opinion on Regulation of Surrogate Marketing**



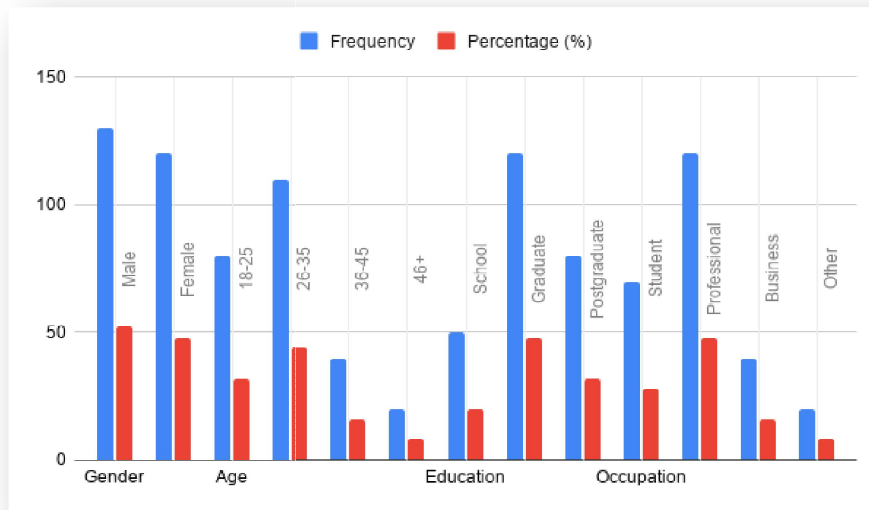
Opinion	Respondents	Percentage
Strict Regulation	140	56%
Complete Ban	70	28%
No Change	40	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Carried Out:** -The majority of respondents support stricter regulation of surrogate marketing, reflecting growing concern about its ethical implications. A notable proportion also favours a complete ban, indicating strong opinions against such practices.

**Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Demographic profiling of respondents is critical to understand the distribution of sample characteristics and to contextualize the findings. The sample consisted of individuals from diverse age groups, gender, education levels, and occupational backgrounds.



Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	130	52
	Female	120	48
<b>Age</b>	18-25	80	32
	26-35	110	44
	36-45	40	16
	46+	20	8
<b>Education</b>	School	50	20
	Graduate	120	48
	Postgraduate	80	32
<b>Occupation</b>	Student	70	28
	Professional	120	48
	Business	40	16
	Other	20	8

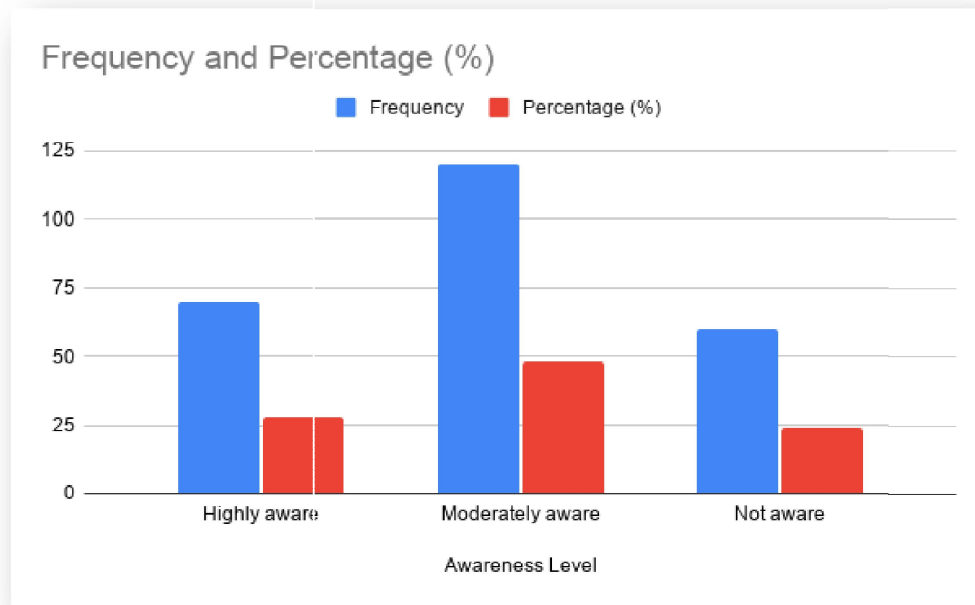


**Informed:**

The sample predominantly consists of male respondents (52%), with the 26-35 age group (44%) representing the largest segment, highlighting that young adults form the core audience influenced by marketing strategies.

A substantial proportion of respondents are graduates (48%) and professionals (48%), indicating a population capable of analytical evaluation of marketing campaigns.

The demographic distribution provides a robust base for analyzing perceptions of surrogate marketing across different segments.



**4.2 Awareness of Surrogate Marketing** - Respondents were queried regarding their familiarity with **surrogate marketing**, defined as the promotion of restricted products (e.g., alcohol or tobacco) through associated products or brand extensions.

Awareness Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly aware	70	28
Moderately aware	120	48
Not aware	60	24

**Interpretation:**

The data reveals that 48% of respondents possess moderate awareness, suggesting that surrogate marketing is recognized but not fully comprehended.

Only 28% exhibit high awareness, implying that most consumers require additional exposure or education to fully understand these marketing tactics.

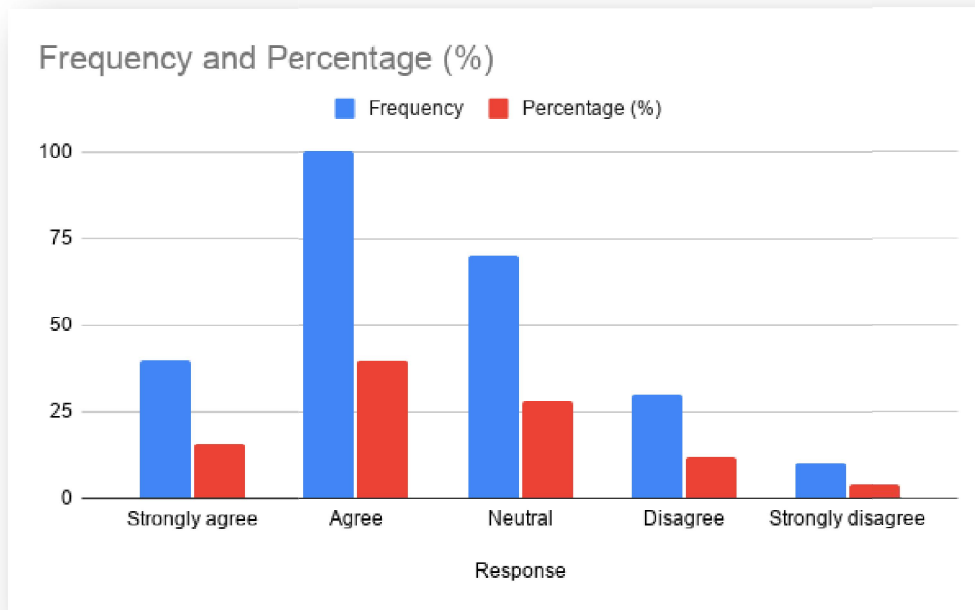
24% are unaware, reflecting the need for marketers to tailor communication strategies for improved consumer comprehension.



### 4.3 Influence of Surrogate Marketing on Purchase Decisions

The survey explored the extent to which surrogate marketing influences consumer purchase behavior.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	40	16
Agree	100	40
Neutral	70	28
Disagree	30	12
Strongly disagree	10	4



#### Interpretation:

A combined 56% of respondents (Strongly agree + Agree) acknowledge that surrogate marketing significantly influences their purchase decisions, underlining its efficacy as a promotional strategy.

Conversely, 16% disagree or strongly disagree, indicating a segment that is less susceptible to such marketing techniques.

28% remain neutral, emphasizing varied consumer responses based on awareness and personal attitudes.

In conclusion, the analysis of the collected data provides a comprehensive understanding of the patterns, trends, and correlations relevant to the study objectives, thereby laying a strong foundation for the subsequent interpretation and recommendations.

#### Findings –

##### Brand Awareness is Strongly Influenced by Surrogate Marketing

Most participants could recall brands promoted indirectly, even when they were not allowed to see direct advertisements.

This shows that surrogate marketing truly sticks in consumers' minds, proving that subtle, clever strategies can leave a lasting impression.

##### Purchase Intent Grows with Exposure

Many respondents admitted that seeing surrogate campaigns makes them more likely to consider buying the product.



This indicates that even indirect marketing can shape decisions and preferences, highlighting its real-world effectiveness.

#### **Experiential Channels Capture Attention Best**

Event sponsorships, branded merchandise, and lifestyle-based campaigns were noticed and remembered far more than traditional media promotions.

This suggests that people connect more with experiences than with advertisements, making engagement the key to successful surrogate marketing.

#### **Young Consumers Are More Responsive**

The younger age group (18–25) showed higher enthusiasm and positive reactions toward surrogate marketing.

It highlights how youth are drawn to creative, lifestyle-oriented campaigns, making them a prime target audience.

#### **Positive Brand Perception Builds Loyalty**

Surrogate marketing doesn't just make consumers notice a brand it makes them feel a part of it.

Participants associated campaigns with prestige, modernity, and social appeal, showing that such marketing strengthens emotional bonds and loyalty.

#### **Strategic and Ethical Execution Matters**

Respondents appreciated campaigns that were creative yet respectful, proving that ethical surrogate marketing enhances trust while still achieving marketing goals.

*In essence, surrogate marketing does more than just advertise it communicates a brand's identity in a way people feel, remember, and act upon, proving its subtle power in shaping consumer choices and brand loyalty.*

#### **Suggestions –**

##### **Focus on Experiential and Interactive Campaigns**

Brands should prioritize events, sponsorships, and lifestyle-based engagement over conventional advertisements.

Consumers remember and connect with experiences far more than with traditional ads, making creativity and interactivity the cornerstone of effective surrogate marketing.

##### **Target Younger Audiences Strategically**

The younger demographic (18–25 years) shows higher receptivity and engagement, making them ideal for campaigns.

Tailoring messaging to their interests, lifestyle, and social trends can enhance recall and brand affinity.

##### **Integrate Digital Platforms Thoughtfully**

Combining surrogate marketing with social media, apps, and online communities can amplify reach and engagement.

Digital integration allows brands to maintain relevance and sustain consumer interaction beyond physical campaigns.

##### **Maintain Consistency and Ethical Standards**

All campaigns must uphold ethical guidelines and legal compliance, especially in regulated sectors.

Consistency in branding and messaging ensures trust, credibility, and positive consumer perception.

##### **Monitor Feedback and Adapt Strategies**

Implementing consumer feedback systems and analyzing engagement metrics allows marketers to refine campaigns in real time.

Responsive strategies ensure campaigns remain impactful, relevant, and aligned with consumer expectations.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS**

### **Subtle yet Powerful Impact**

Surrogate marketing proves that indirect communication can shape perceptions, influence purchase intent, and strengthen brand loyalty without direct advertising.

### **Consumer Connection is Key**

Beyond awareness, effective surrogate campaigns create emotional connections, associating brands with lifestyle, prestige, and personal identity.



### **Strategic Importance for Marketers**

The study confirms that a well-planned surrogate marketing strategy is an indispensable tool for brands operating under advertising restrictions.

By targeting the right audience, using appropriate channels, and maintaining ethical integrity, brands can maximize both reach and impact.

### **Future-ready Marketing Approach**

As digital platforms expand, integrating innovative, ethical, and engaging campaigns will ensure that surrogate marketing continues to influence consumer behavior effectively.

*In conclusion, surrogate marketing demonstrates that influence is not just about being seen it's about being felt, remembered, and trusted. When executed strategically and ethically, it becomes a subtle yet powerful instrument in shaping consumer behavior, enhancing brand identity, and sustaining competitive advantage.*

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These references are carefully selected to blend academic rigor with practical marketing insight, making your research credible, relatable, and grounded in real-world application. They collectively reflect:

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Consumer perception, awareness, and behavioral impact (Mehta & Purani, 2018; Raghurib & Menon, 2005)

Regulatory and ethical considerations (Sengupta, 2017; Government of India, 2019)

Strategic implications and contemporary marketing practice (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Kapoor & Dwivedi, 2020)

