

## Charpai to Flatpack: Consumerism, Cultural Negotiation & the Globalization of Everyday Life in India

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### Abstract

This study investigates IKEA's international integration strategy with a particular focus on its structural adaptation to the dynamic and culturally diverse Indian market. As one of the world's most recognized retail brands, IKEA's global success has long been anchored in a highly standardized business model — one that champions cost leadership, supply chain efficiency, self-assembly convenience, and unwavering brand uniformity across markets. However, the complexities of entering a market as heterogeneous and price-sensitive as India necessitated a deliberate and multi-dimensional localization strategy that challenged several of the brand's core operational philosophies.

Key adaptations undertaken by IKEA in the Indian context include the introduction of Do-It-For-Me (DIFM) assembly services alongside its traditional Do-It-Yourself (DIY) framework, extensive product modifications aligned with Indian spatial constraints, aesthetic sensibilities, and culinary habits, as well as strategic pricing recalibrations to compete with deeply entrenched local furniture markets. These interventions reflect a broader tension inherent in global retail expansion — the negotiation between brand consistency and cultural responsiveness.

To examine consumer reception of these strategies, a mixed-method research approach was employed, comprising a structured customer survey of 101 respondents conducted at IKEA Hyderabad, supplemented by qualitative feedback analysis to capture nuanced consumer sentiment. The findings reveal that while Indian customers express considerable appreciation for IKEA's product diversity, in-store experience, and spatial design solutions, persistent concerns regarding pricing competitiveness relative to local and unorganized market alternatives remain a significant barrier to broader market penetration.

These findings collectively underscore the critical importance of striking a sustainable equilibrium between globally standardized operational frameworks and locally sensitive

market strategies — a balance that will ultimately determine IKEA's long-term viability and growth trajectory within India's rapidly evolving retail landscape and emerging consumer economy.

**Keywords:** Globalization, Indian Market Integration, Customer Satisfaction, Global Positioning, Customer Engagement, Business Adaptation

## **Introduction**

### **IKEA's Global Expansion Strategy**

The world's largest furniture retailer, IKEA, is renowned for its global expansion and normalized business model, which integrates operations across countries effortlessly. The firm's success lies in its capacity to balance global efficiency with adaptation to local markets. IKEA adopts a globally integrated strategy emphasizing cost leadership, supply chain efficiency, and standardized branding while maintaining flexibility to accommodate cultural and economic variations in individual markets. This strategy has enabled IKEA to maintain a standardized brand image while responding effectively to local consumer tastes.

### **Need for Localization in Emerging Markets**

The firm's expansion into India serves as a classic illustration of how global best practices can be combined with localized approaches to address the complexities of emerging markets. IKEA's international integration approach is centred on sustaining a homogenized product portfolio, taking advantage of scale economies, and streamlining its supply chain. The firm procures raw materials from various nations and maintains a systemized distribution network to ensure low costs. Its experiential store formats and ready-to-assemble furniture model have been emulated across the globe. However, in a populous and price-conscious nation like India, IKEA needed to reassess parts of its business model while remaining aligned with its international strategy.

**India:** A Market of Challenges and Opportunities- India's market presented both a challenge and an opportunity for IKEA. With a population exceeding 1.4 billion and one of the fastest-growing consumer markets globally, rising urbanization and middle-class incomes spurred demand for fashionable, affordable home furnishings. However, India also hosts a highly fragmented retail trade, multicultural consumer preferences, and strong loyalty to traditional carpentry and customized furniture. Unlike Western nations, where consumers favor Do-It-Yourself (DIY) furniture, Indian customers prefer fully assembled furniture due to the easy availability of skilled carpenters. IKEA responded by introducing a Do-It-For-Me (DIFM) program, offering assembly support alongside its traditional DIY option.

### **Navigating Regulatory Challenges**

Navigating the regulatory landscape was one of IKEA's significant hurdles in India. Stringent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) regulations initially prohibited the company from opening stores without sourcing a substantial portion of products locally. To comply, IKEA committed to sourcing at least 30% of its products from Indian manufacturers. This move not only secured government approval but also strengthened local supply chains and boosted employment. Collaborating with Indian artisans and

small-scale industries, IKEA introduced locally crafted wooden goods, textiles, and rugs, blending global designs with Indian craftsmanship.

### **Pricing Adjustments and Retail Format Innovations**

Adapting to India's extreme price sensitivity was another major adjustment. Although globally renowned for affordable solutions, IKEA had to further localize its supply chain to reduce import costs and ensure price competitiveness. Additionally, IKEA launched small-format city stores and strengthened its e-commerce platform to broaden accessibility, thus catering to customers who could not easily visit its large experience centres.

### **Product Adaptations for Indian Consumers**

India's cultural diversity significantly influenced IKEA's product line. Indian households typically prefer bold colors, multifunctional furniture, and space-saving solutions for compact living areas. Responding to this, IKEA introduced customized products such as charpais (traditional woven beds), pressure cookers, and space-efficient storage units. These products retained IKEA's universal design principles but were tailored to align with Indian consumer preferences.

### **Marketing, Customer Experience, and Cultural Integration**

IKEA also localized its marketing and customer engagement strategies. While Western economies lean towards online advertising and DIY culture, Indian consumers value personalized service and immersive in-store experiences. IKEA incorporated local narratives into its campaigns, utilized regional languages, and participated in cultural activities. Social media influencers played a role in creating brand awareness among younger consumers. In addition, IKEA's stores offered food courts serving a mix of Swedish and Indian cuisine, recognizing the cultural importance of food in India.

### **Persistent Challenges and Future Outlook**

Despite these strategic adaptations, IKEA continues to face infrastructure-related challenges such as traffic congestion and logistics inefficiencies, impacting supply chain management and store accessibility. The highly competitive environment, comprising both organized and unorganized furniture retailers and online players like Pepperfry and Urban Ladder, presents additional hurdles. To stay competitive, IKEA is investing heavily in digital transformation, expanding its e-commerce operations, and building robust last-mile delivery systems.

Looking ahead, IKEA views its Indian expansion as a long-term investment rather than an immediate profit generator. Plans include opening more physical outlets across key cities and enhancing its digital footprint to leverage the rapidly growing e-commerce sector. IKEA's ability to harmonize global integration with localized market practices will be pivotal for its sustained success in India.

IKEA's entry into India offers a model of how multinational corporations can effectively balance standardization with localization. While maintaining its core global business practices, IKEA strategically embraced local sourcing, pricing, marketing, and service

adaptations to thrive in India's unique retail landscape. The company's Indian journey serves as a compelling case study for multinationals aiming to merge global best practices with regional market realities.

## **Objectives**

- To analyze IKEA's global integration strategy.
- To study IKEA's adaptation to the Indian market.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of localization efforts in enhancing customer satisfaction.

## **Literature Review**

### **Globalization, Strategic Segmentation, and Branding**

Vanathi and Dr. Abhilasha Raj emphasized that IKEA's global success lies in strategic market segmentation, cost-leadership, and the ability to adapt its marketing mix locally [1]. Their findings suggest that improving customer experience through enhanced in-store engagement, mobile applications, and loyalty programs strengthens global brand positioning. Similarly, Zengfang Gong et al. discussed the crucial role of brand culture, highlighting IKEA's emotional connection with consumers through eco-friendly practices and innovative designs, enabling competitiveness and cultural relevance in global markets [2].

### **Sustainable Development and Supply Chain Management**

Xiangyi Li et al. reviewed IKEA's sustainable development strategy across environmental, economic, and social dimensions, acknowledging IKEA's commitment to integrating sustainability into supply chains and customer management [3]. Gunnar Lofstedt critically examined IKEA's global sourcing strategy with particular focus on India, stressing the balance between cost efficiency and corporate responsibility, while highlighting the firm's attention to long-term supplier relationships and ethical sourcing practices [4].

Inge Ivarsson and Claes Göran Alvstam further explored how IKEA facilitates technological upgrading among suppliers in Asia through training, resource access, and management enhancements, promoting supplier development and global value chain competitiveness [5].

### **Localization, Glocalization, and Cultural Adaptation**

Saud Alenezi et al. analyzed IKEA's balance between global consistency and local adaptation, noting that flexibility in operations, including local sourcing and cultural adaptation, has contributed significantly to the company's international success [6]. Tom McNamara and Irena Descubes specifically investigated IKEA's service adaptation for India, pointing out challenges around localized customer expectations without compromising brand identity [7].

Ying Pan and Min Zhang also discussed IKEA's glocalization in China, highlighting modifications in marketing and communication strategies to better align with cultural

values, particularly through the use of local social media platforms like WeChat and Douyin [8,9].

### **Knowledge Sharing, Leadership, and Organizational Culture**

Anna Jonsson and Thomas Kalling explored the challenges IKEA faces in knowledge sharing across geographical and organizational boundaries, stressing the importance of informal networks, trust, and managerial sponsorship [10]. Karl Garlin and Mathias Kostet contributed to leadership studies by analyzing how IKEA's leadership style is contextually influenced by organizational culture, promoting decentralized and values-driven management that aligns with the company's strategic goals [11].

Axel Heiskanen Nilsson extended this discussion to supplier management, indicating that inconsistencies and communication barriers could deter performance, suggesting streamlined global practices to enhance overall supply chain efficiency [12].

### **Customer Experience, Service Innovation, and Market Challenges**

Harapiak examined IKEA's international expansion strategies, highlighting the importance of cost leadership, supply chain efficiency, and localization to overcome cultural and logistical challenges in markets like the U.S. and China [12,13]. Jens Hultman et al. emphasized the networked nature of IKEA's supply chains, showcasing how interaction effects influence the global sourcing transition, as seen in the case of the PAX wardrobe system [14].

Ritika Goel and Shraddha Garg reviewed IKEA's innovative marketing and operational strategies in India's rapidly growing furniture market [15]. Their study pointed out the opportunities created by urbanization, rising purchasing power, and traditional handcrafted furniture integration within modern retail formats, critical for IKEA's long-term positioning in India.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative data (structured surveys) and qualitative insights (open-ended survey questions).

### **Data Collection Method**

Primary data was collected from 101 customers visiting IKEA Hyderabad using structured questionnaires. Secondary data was obtained from academic journals, business magazines, and company reports.

### **Sampling Technique**

Simple random sampling was used to minimize bias. Despite an ideal sample size of 400 based on Cochran's formula, 101 responses were obtained due to practical constraints.

### **Tools for Data Analysis**

SPSS and Microsoft Excel were utilized for statistical analysis, descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, and inferential hypothesis testing.

## Results And Discussion

### Demographic Analysis

Table1: Age

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Age	101	1	4	2.28	0.072	0.723

Source: Primary data

The descriptive statistics for age are based on 101 valid responses. The minimum value is 1, and the maximum is 4, indicating that age is categorized into four groups rather than representing exact years. The mean age is 2.28, suggesting that most respondents fall closer to the lower end of the age categories. The standard deviation of 0.723 reflects a moderate level of variation, meaning that while some individuals fall into different age groups, the majority are relatively close to the mean. The standard error of 0.072 indicates that the mean estimate is precise. These statistics provide an overview of the age distribution within the sample, which can be useful for further analysis.

Table 4.2 Gender

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	101	1	2	1.56	0.498

Source: Primary Data

The descriptive statistics for gender are based on 101 valid observations. The minimum value is 1, and the maximum value is 2, indicating that gender is categorized into two groups, like representing male and female. The mean value of 1.56 suggests that the distribution is slightly skewed toward one of the categories, possibly indicating a higher number of participants in the second group. The standard deviation of 0.498 shows a relatively low level of variation, meaning that the gender distribution is not widely spread. This data helps provide insight into the composition of the sample population in terms of gender distribution.

Table 4.3 Occupation

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Occupation	101	1	7	1.81	0.147	1.475

Source: Primary Data

The descriptive statistics for occupation are based on 101 valid responses. The minimum recorded value is 1, and the maximum is 7, indicating that occupation is categorized into seven different groups. The mean occupation value is 1.81, suggesting that most participants belong to the lower-numbered categories, possibly indicating a concentration in specific occupations. The standard deviation of 1.475 indicates a moderate level of variability, meaning that while responses are somewhat spread out across different occupation categories, they tend to be closer to the lower end of the

scale. The standard error of 0.147 suggests that the mean is estimated with relatively high precision. This data provides useful insights into the occupational distribution of the sample population.

Table 4.4 Location

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Location	101	1	2	1.06	0.024	0.238

Source: Primary Data

This data provides useful insights into the occupational distribution of the sample population. The descriptive statistics for location are based on 101 valid responses. The minimum value is 1, and the maximum is 2, indicating that location is categorized into two groups, likely representing different geographical areas such as urban and rural settings. The mean value of 1.06 suggests that most participants belong to the first category, meaning the sample is highly skewed toward one location type. The standard deviation of 0.238 indicates very low variability, reinforcing that the majority of respondents are in the first category. The standard error of 0.024 shows that the mean is estimated with high precision. This data suggests that the sample is largely concentrated in one location, which may impact the generalizability of the findings.

### Data Analysis

Objective 1: To analyse and identify the key age group of consumers who are most actively engaged in purchasing products from IKEA

Table 4.5: Age Group Distribution of Respondents Purchasing from IKEA

Age Group (Code)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	8	7.90%	7.90%	7.90%
2	65	64.40%	64.40%	72.30%
3	20	19.80%	19.80%	92.10%
4	8	7.90%	7.90%	100.00%
<b>Total</b>	101	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Primary Data

The age distribution of respondents provides valuable insights into how IKEA has adapted its business strategies in the Indian market. The majority of respondents fall into Category 2 (64.4%), followed by Category 3 (19.8%), while Categories 1 and 4 each account for 7.9% of the sample. This distribution indicates that IKEA primarily attracts a younger to middle-aged demographic segment, which together constitutes approximately 92.1% of the total respondents. Such a pattern suggests that IKEA's strategies in India are largely aligned with the preferences of this demographic group.

This trend may reflect IKEA's focus on offering modern, functional, and space-saving furniture designs that cater to the lifestyle of urban consumers, particularly younger households and working professionals. Additionally, the company's emphasis on affordability, contemporary aesthetics, and a strong digital presence may further

enhance its appeal among this segment, which is generally more receptive to innovative retail formats and global home-furnishing trends.

At the same time, the relatively lower representation of respondents in Categories 1 and 4 indicates that IKEA may still have opportunities to expand its reach among older age groups. This could be achieved by developing products and services that better address the specific needs and preferences of these segments, such as comfort-oriented designs, customized solutions, or enhanced in-store assistance. Overall, the findings suggest that IKEA's business adaptation in India has largely focused on engaging younger and middle-aged consumers by emphasizing affordability, functionality, and modern design. Such strategic alignment has enabled the company to establish a strong presence in the Indian market while also highlighting potential areas for expanding its customer base in the future.

Objective 2: To analyze IKEA's business adaptation strategies in the Indian market  
Table 4.6: Cross Tabulation-Awareness of IKEA among Respondents by Age Group

Response	Age Group 1	Age Group 2	Age Group 3	Age Group 4	Total
Have heard about IKEA (Yes)	52	37	5	5	99
Have not heard about IKEA (No)	0	0	0	2	2
Total	52	37	5	7	101

Source: Primary Data

The crosstabulation analysis indicates that the vast majority of respondents (99 out of 101) have heard about IKEA, demonstrating a high level of brand awareness among the sample population. Among those who were familiar with the brand, the most common source of information was Category 1 (52 respondents), followed by Category 2 (37 respondents). In contrast, Categories 3 and 4 recorded significantly fewer responses, with only 5 respondents each indicating these sources. The two respondents who reported that they had not heard about IKEA were classified under Source Category 4. This observation may suggest a possible data entry issue or misclassification within the dataset, which should be carefully reviewed to ensure the accuracy of the analysis. Overall, the findings suggest that IKEA enjoys widespread recognition among respondents. However, the uneven distribution of responses across information sources should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results and drawing conclusions from the data.

Table 4.7: Physical Store Visit and Experience at IKEA

Response	Excellent (1)	Good (2)	Average (3)	Poor (4)	Never Visited (5)	Total
Have visited IKEA store physically (Yes)	53	30	3	1	0	87
Have not visited IKEA store physically (No)	1	1	0	0	12	14
Total	54	31	3	1	12	101

Source: Primary Data

The crosstabulation analysis examines the relationship between respondents who have physically visited an IKEA store and their corresponding store experience. Out of the total 101 respondents, 87 respondents (86%) reported that they had visited an IKEA store, while 14 respondents (14%) indicated that they had not visited one. Among those who had visited the store, the majority rated their experience under Category 1 (53 respondents) and Category 2 (30 respondents), suggesting that most visitors had a generally positive experience. Only a small number of respondents selected Category 3 (3 respondents) and Category 4 (1 respondent), indicating that negative experiences were relatively rare among the respondents.

Overall, the findings suggest that a strong majority of customers who visited IKEA stores reported positive experiences. However, careful interpretation of the response categories is important to ensure an accurate understanding of customer perceptions and the overall store experience.

Objective 3: To assess the effectiveness of IKEA's customer engagement strategies

Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Perception About IKEA

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
How was the store experience?	101	1	5	1.87	1.294
IKEA provides a wide range of products	101	1	3	1.28	0.68
IKEA provides good quality products	100	1	3	1.39	0.777

Products are expensive or overpriced	101	1	3	2.01	0.911
IKEA provides good customer service	101	1	3	1.46	0.819
Would recommend people to buy from IKEA	101	1	3	1.61	0.905

Source: Primary Data

The descriptive statistics provide valuable insights into how effectively IKEA engages customers in India. The store experience has a mean score of 1.87 with a relatively high standard deviation (1.294), indicating considerable variation in customer experiences. This suggests that while some customers find the in-store experience satisfactory, others may have certain concerns or less positive perceptions.

IKEA's wide range of products is rated positively, demonstrating that the brand effectively attracts customers through its diverse product offerings. However, the perception of product quality indicates mixed opinions among customers. While they acknowledge the variety available, some may have reservations regarding durability and craftsmanship, which could influence long-term engagement and repeat purchases.

Pricing emerges as a key factor influencing customer engagement, as many customers perceive IKEA's products to be relatively expensive or overpriced. This perception could act as a potential barrier to repeat purchases and long-term customer retention. Additionally, customer service receives a moderate rating, suggesting that although some customers are satisfied, others believe there is room for improvement in areas such as personalized assistance, in-store support, and post-purchase services.

Overall, IKEA appears to be effective in engaging customers through its product variety and distinctive store experience. However, challenges remain in addressing pricing perceptions, enhancing customer service, and ensuring consistent customer satisfaction. Addressing these issues could further strengthen customer engagement, improve brand loyalty, and increase customer advocacy.

### Findings

The findings of the study provide meaningful insights into customer engagement and perceptions of IKEA in the Indian market. The demographic analysis indicates that the majority of respondents belong to the second age group, accounting for 64.4 percent of the sample. This suggests that middle-aged consumers constitute the most actively engaged customer segment for IKEA. In contrast, both younger and older age groups demonstrate comparatively lower levels of engagement, indicating that IKEA's current

marketing and positioning strategies may be more aligned with the preferences and purchasing power of middle-aged consumers. This pattern highlights the need for the company to design targeted marketing initiatives and engagement strategies that appeal to a broader demographic spectrum, particularly younger consumers who represent a significant and growing segment of the Indian retail market.

The study also reveals that customer perceptions regarding pricing, product quality, and service experience vary across different age groups, suggesting that demographic characteristics significantly influence brand perception and customer expectations. Despite these variations, one of IKEA's key strengths in the Indian market lies in its extensive and diverse product range. Customers generally recognize and appreciate the variety of products offered by IKEA, which enables the brand to cater to the diverse tastes, lifestyle preferences, and functional needs of Indian consumers. This diversity in product offerings enhances IKEA's ability to attract a wide customer base and strengthens its market positioning as a comprehensive home furnishing retailer.

However, the findings also indicate certain areas of concern that may influence overall customer engagement and satisfaction. Customer experiences within IKEA stores appear to be mixed. While a considerable number of respondents report positive experiences with the store environment and product displays, others express concerns regarding aspects of in-store service quality and support. This inconsistency in service experience suggests that there may be variations in the level of assistance provided to customers, which could influence their overall perception of the brand and their likelihood of returning for future purchases.

Pricing emerges as a particularly significant factor influencing customer perceptions. A notable proportion of respondents perceive IKEA's products as relatively expensive or overpriced, especially when compared to locally available alternatives in the Indian market. Given the price-sensitive nature of many Indian consumers, this perception may reduce IKEA's competitiveness and potentially affect repeat purchase behavior. Addressing pricing perceptions through strategic pricing adjustments, value communication, or promotional strategies could therefore play a crucial role in improving customer acceptance and engagement.

Customer service satisfaction is found to be moderate, indicating that while customers do not express strong dissatisfaction, there is a clear expectation for improved service delivery. Respondents highlight the need for more personalized assistance, better customer engagement during the shopping experience, and enhanced post-purchase support. Improving these aspects of service quality could significantly strengthen customer relationships and contribute to higher levels of satisfaction and trust in the brand.

Furthermore, although IKEA has established a recognizable and strong brand presence in the Indian market, the willingness of customers to recommend the brand to others is not uniformly high. While many customers express a positive inclination to recommend IKEA, a portion of respondents remain hesitant. This hesitation suggests that certain

aspects of the overall customer experience—such as pricing concerns, service inconsistencies, or product quality perceptions—may still require improvement. Strengthening these elements could enhance customer advocacy, increase brand loyalty, and encourage more positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Overall, the findings suggest that IKEA's diverse product offerings and unique retail concept provide a strong foundation for customer engagement in India. Nevertheless, challenges related to pricing perceptions, service quality, and consistency in customer experience remain important areas for improvement. By addressing these concerns and adopting more inclusive marketing strategies that appeal to different demographic groups, IKEA can further enhance customer satisfaction, strengthen brand loyalty, and improve its long-term competitiveness in the Indian retail market.

## **Conclusion**

IKEA has demonstrated significant success in adapting to the Indian market through an extensive and diverse product range and strong store presence. However, key challenges remain, particularly regarding the perception of product pricing, customer service quality, and consistent customer engagement across demographic segments. One of IKEA's greatest strengths lies in its broad variety of home furnishing solutions, which resonates well with Indian consumers. This product diversity has been instrumental in building a substantial customer base.

Nevertheless, the perception of high pricing continues to be a notable concern. Many customers view IKEA products as expensive or overpriced compared to local alternatives, posing a potential barrier to broader market adoption, especially among price-sensitive customers. To address this, IKEA could explore localized pricing strategies, offer discounts, or introduce flexible financing options to make products more accessible.

Another critical area requiring attention is customer experience. Data analysis reveals a wide range of customer experiences, suggesting inconsistencies in in-store navigation, staff assistance, and service quality. Improvements in these areas could lead to a more seamless, enjoyable shopping experience and greater customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, customer service scores highlight the need for better support structures. Training programs for staff, quicker response times, and enhanced after-sales service could significantly improve IKEA's brand loyalty and customer retention.

Overall, while IKEA has effectively entered and grown within the Indian market, focusing on localized pricing, improved customer service, and consistent store experiences will be key to sustaining long-term success and enhancing customer loyalty in India.

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