



OMNICHANNEL BRAND CONSISTENCY AND CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY:

Integrating Online and Offline Touchpoints in the Indian Retail Context

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Abstract: This study investigates how omnichannel brand consistency — the congruence of brand identity signals across online platforms and offline retail touchpoints — influences consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) in the Indian market. India presents a uniquely complex branding environment characterized by coexisting traditional trade (kirana stores, local haats) and fast-growing digital commerce ecosystems (Flipkart, Meesho, JioMart), making brand consistency management an acute strategic challenge. A sequential mediation model was developed and tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) on data collected from 896 urban and semi-urban Indian consumers across four product categories (apparel, electronics, FMCG, and personal care). Findings reveal that omnichannel brand consistency significantly predicts CBBE ($\beta = 0.46, p < 0.001$), sequentially mediated by brand trust ($\beta = 0.31$) and brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.27$). The online-offline consistency gap is significantly larger in Tier-2 and Tier-3 Indian cities. Product category moderates these effects: high-involvement categories (electronics) exhibit stronger sensitivity to consistency than low-involvement FMCG categories. This study contributes an adapted Omnichannel Brand Equity (OBE) framework calibrated for emerging market conditions.

Index Terms — *Omnichannel Branding; Brand Consistency; Consumer-Based Brand Equity; Online Branding; Offline Branding; Indian Retail; Brand Trust; Emerging Markets.*

I. INTRODUCTION

India's retail and branding landscape is at an inflection point. The country's digital commerce sector, valued at approximately USD 70 billion in 2023, is projected to surpass USD 350 billion by 2030, driven by over 900 million internet users, widespread smartphone penetration, and aggressive expansion of platforms such as Flipkart, Amazon India, JioMart, and Meesho (IBEF, 2024). Simultaneously, offline retail — encompassing approximately 14 million kirana (mom-and-pop) stores, organized retail chains, brand-owned flagship outlets, and regional distribution networks — continues to account for nearly 88% of total retail sales (Deloitte India, 2023). This coexistence of expansive digital ecosystems and deeply rooted traditional trade channels creates a brand management environment of extraordinary complexity.

For brand managers operating in India, the challenge of maintaining consistent brand identity, messaging, and consumer experience across these highly heterogeneous online and offline touchpoints is not merely operational — it is fundamentally strategic. Brand consistency — the extent to which a brand presents coherent identity cues, value propositions, and experiential quality across multiple channels and touchpoints — has long been recognized as a driver of brand equity (Keller, 2013; Aaker, 1991). However, its specific dynamics in India's omnichannel context, where a consumer may encounter a brand through a Bollywood celebrity television advertisement, a kirana store display, an Instagram sponsored post, and a Flipkart product listing within the same week, remain poorly theorized and empirically underexplored.

Extant research on omnichannel branding has been conducted predominantly in Western developed-market contexts (Verhoef et al., 2015; Herhausen et al., 2015; Neslin et al., 2014), which differ fundamentally from India in terms of retail infrastructure maturity, consumer digital literacy heterogeneity, geographic dispersion, and cultural brand relationship norms. Tier-1 Indian cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru may approximate Western omnichannel sophistication, but Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities — representing the bulk of India's 1.4 billion population — present dramatically different omnichannel brand experience profiles, where offline brand reality often lags far behind the digital brand promise.

This paper addresses the following research questions: (RQ1) Does omnichannel brand consistency positively predict consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) among Indian consumers? (RQ2) Do brand trust and brand loyalty sequentially mediate this relationship? (RQ3) Does product category involvement and urban-rural classification moderate the consistency-CBBE relationship? The study contributes an India-specific Omnichannel Brand Equity (OBE) framework and provides actionable guidelines for brand managers navigating the unique offline-online duality of the Indian marketplace.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Brand Consistency Across Channels

Brand consistency has been conceptualized in the branding literature as the alignment of brand identity elements — including visual identity, value proposition, tone of voice, service quality, and consumer experience — across all brand manifestations (Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2013). In a multichannel retail context, consistency extends beyond visual coherence to encompass pricing consistency, promotional alignment, service quality parity, and narrative continuity across digital and physical channels (Rangaswamy & Van Bruggen, 2005).

In India, brand consistency management is complicated by the structural heterogeneity of retail channels. Organized retail chains (Reliance Retail, D-Mart, Big Bazaar) are better positioned to enforce brand presentation standards, but the dominance of general trade — where brand representation depends on the discretion of individual kirana store owners regarding product placement, pricing, and promotional display — introduces substantial variability that organized brands must actively manage through trade marketing programs and retailer engagement initiatives (Bijapurkar, 2007).

2.2 Consumer-Based Brand Equity in India

Aaker's (1991) CBBE model, encompassing brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty, provides the foundational framework for this study. Keller's (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity model supplements this with the dual constructs of brand knowledge (awareness and image), emphasizing that strong brands are built through the accumulation of favorable, unique, and strong associations in consumer memory.

In the Indian context, brand equity building is conditioned by distinctive cultural factors including collectivist identity orientations, aspirational consumption patterns, the influence of family and peer recommendations (word-of-mouth intensity), and a heightened sensitivity to price-quality signaling (Sheth, 2011). Research on Indian brand equity (Anselmsson et al., 2014; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) confirms that brand loyalty and perceived quality are the strongest CBBE dimensions among Indian consumers, while brand awareness is increasingly a necessary but insufficient condition for equity accumulation.

2.3 Theoretical Basis: Signaling Theory and Brand Consistency

Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) posits that in markets characterized by information asymmetry — precisely the conditions faced by Indian consumers navigating thousands of brands across fragmented channels — brand signals serve as quality surrogates that reduce consumer uncertainty. Consistent brand signals across online and offline touchpoints function as particularly credible quality indicators because maintaining consistency requires substantial brand investment and organizational capability, making inconsistency difficult to fake (Kirmani & Rao, 2000). We therefore propose that omnichannel brand consistency directly signals brand quality and reliability to Indian consumers, elevating brand trust as a proximal mediator.

Brand Relationship Theory (Fournier, 1998) further informs our understanding of loyalty as a downstream consequence of trust cultivated through consistent brand encounters. In high-context cultures such as India, where brand relationships often carry quasi-personal significance (Sheth, 2011), the trust-loyalty linkage is expected to be particularly strong, justifying sequential mediation as the proposed structural mechanism through which brand consistency ultimately accumulates as consumer-based brand equity.

2.4 Research Hypotheses

- H1: Omnichannel brand consistency (online-offline) positively predicts consumer-based brand equity among Indian consumers.*
H2: Brand trust mediates the positive relationship between omnichannel brand consistency and brand loyalty.
H3: Brand loyalty mediates the positive relationship between brand trust and consumer-based brand equity.
H4: Brand trust and brand loyalty sequentially mediate the consistency-CBBE relationship (H1 → H2 → H3).
H5: Product category involvement moderates the omnichannel brand consistency-CBBE relationship, with stronger effects in high-involvement categories.
H6: City-tier classification (Tier-1 vs. Tier-2/3) moderates the online-offline brand consistency gap and its effect on CBBE.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Sampling

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted. Data were collected from adult Indian consumers (18 years and above) residing in six cities representing both Tier-1 (Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi) and Tier-2/3 (Lucknow, Coimbatore, Bhubaneswar) classifications. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representativeness across city tiers, gender, age cohorts, and product category usage. Surveys were administered both online (via Google Forms distributed through social media and WhatsApp networks) and offline (paper-and-pencil administered in retail locations and educational institutions) to mitigate digital access bias — a particularly important methodological consideration in the Indian context.

A total of 1,042 questionnaires were collected, of which 896 were retained after exclusion of incomplete responses and outlier cases (response validity rate = 86%). The sample comprised 53.2% male and 46.8% female respondents; 41.3% from Tier-1 cities and 58.7% from Tier-2/3 cities. Respondents were asked to evaluate a specific brand they regularly purchased across both online and offline channels, ensuring dual-channel brand experience.

3.2 Measurement Instruments

Omnichannel brand consistency was measured using a 10-item scale adapted from Herhausen et al. (2015) and Verhoef et al. (2015), capturing visual consistency, price consistency, service quality parity, and message consistency across online and offline touchpoints (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88). Consumer-based brand equity was assessed using Yoo and Donthu's (2001) 10-item Multidimensional Brand Equity Scale (MBE), validated across Indian samples in prior research (alpha = 0.87). Brand trust was measured with six items adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) (alpha = 0.89). Brand loyalty was operationalized using five

behavioral and attitudinal loyalty items ($\alpha = 0.85$). Product category involvement was measured using the revised Personal Involvement Inventory (Zaichkowsky, 1994) adapted to four product categories ($\alpha = 0.84$). All items used seven-point Likert scales. Hindi and regional language translations employed professional back-translation procedures.

3.3 Analytical Approach

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS 26.0 to assess measurement model validity. Structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation tested the proposed hypotheses. Sequential mediation was examined using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 iterations and 95% confidence intervals (Hayes, 2022). Moderation was assessed via multi-group SEM and interaction term analysis. Common method bias was evaluated using Harman's single factor test and the procedural remedy of physical separation between predictor and criterion items.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Measurement Model

CFA results indicated acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.08$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.046 [0.037, 0.055], SRMR = 0.051. All standardized factor loadings exceeded 0.62. Average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.55 to 0.72, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established as all AVE values exceeded squared inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Harman's single-factor test explained 19.8% of total variance, below the 50% threshold, indicating acceptable common method bias levels.

4.2 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

H1 was supported: omnichannel brand consistency positively predicted CBBE ($\beta = 0.46$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$). H2 was supported: consistency positively predicted brand trust ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$). H3 was supported: brand trust positively predicted brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$), and brand loyalty positively predicted CBBE ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). H4 (sequential mediation) was confirmed: the indirect effect of consistency on CBBE through trust then loyalty was significant (indirect effect = 0.19, 95% CI [0.13, 0.26]), with the direct effect remaining significant ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$), indicating partial sequential mediation.

H5 was supported: product category involvement significantly moderated the consistency-CBBE relationship (interaction $\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$). Electronics consumers (high involvement) demonstrated significantly stronger consistency effects ($\beta = 0.61$) compared to FMCG consumers (low involvement, $\beta = 0.34$). H6 was supported: multi-group analysis revealed significantly stronger negative effects of online-offline consistency gaps in Tier-2/3 cities (path $\beta = -0.38$) compared to Tier-1 cities (-0.19), confirming that brand consistency failures are more severely penalized in markets with less brand touchpoint redundancy.

table 1: structural path coefficients summary

Hypothesized Path	Beta	SE	Supported?
Consistency → CBBE (H1)	0.46***	0.05	Yes
Consistency → Brand Trust (H2)	0.51***	0.04	Yes
Brand Trust → Brand Loyalty (H3)	0.44***	0.05	Yes
Brand Loyalty → CBBE (H3)	0.39***	0.06	Yes
Sequential Mediation (H4)	0.19***	CI [0.13, 0.26]	Yes

Note: *** $p < 0.001$. Standardized coefficients. SE = Standard Error.

V. DISCUSSION

The confirmation of sequential mediation through brand trust and brand loyalty deepens our understanding of the mechanism through which omnichannel brand consistency accumulates into brand equity in the Indian context. Indian consumers, who traverse a particularly fragmented and heterogeneous retail landscape, rely heavily on brand consistency signals as heuristic cues for quality inference. When a consumer encounters a coherent brand narrative — whether browsing Myntra for apparel or shopping at a Shoppers Stop outlet — the experiential coherence builds trust that serves as the psychological substrate for loyalty formation. This trust-to-loyalty pathway is theoretically consistent with brand relationship frameworks (Fournier, 1998) and empirically reinforces the strategic imperative of cross-channel brand management.

The Tier-2/3 city moderation finding is perhaps the most practically significant contribution of this study. In these markets, where organized retail penetration is lower and brand experience is disproportionately mediated through small-format stores and regional distributors, the gap between digitally communicated brand promises and physically delivered brand experiences tends to be wider. This gap actively erodes the brand trust that Indian consumers require before committing loyalty. For brand managers, this suggests that trade marketing investment in Tier-2/3 markets — ensuring that offline brand presentation meets the quality bar set by digital communications — is not a cost center but a brand equity investment with measurable equity returns.

The product category moderation result resonates with Elaboration Likelihood Model predictions: in high-involvement categories such as electronics, where purchase risk is elevated and consumer scrutiny of brand signals is intensive, consistency failures are more cognitively processed and more severely penalized. In FMCG categories, where habitual purchase routines reduce active brand evaluation, consistency effects are more muted, though still significant — suggesting that even for low-involvement products, the cumulative effect of consistency over repeated purchase cycles contributes meaningfully to brand equity.

VI. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study yields four actionable implications for brand managers in India. First, omnichannel brand governance — the systematic alignment of brand standards across online platforms, organized retail, and general trade channels — should be elevated to a board-level strategic priority for consumer goods brands aspiring to national equity leadership. Second, trade marketing programs targeting kirana store operators in Tier-2/3 cities should incorporate brand experience standards (point-of-sale materials, product display guidelines, pricing compliance) as explicit performance metrics, with brand consistency audits conducted through field sales teams. Third, digital brand communications should be calibrated to reflect the offline brand reality available in each geographic market, avoiding the aspirational gap that emerges when premium digital brand narratives misalign with modest kirana store presentations. Fourth, high-involvement category brands should invest proportionately more in omnichannel consistency management, as the equity returns from consistency are demonstrably higher in these categories.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations merit acknowledgment. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and the self-reported nature of brand consistency evaluations introduces potential perceptual bias. The six-city sample, while stratified, does not capture the full geographic diversity of India's 700+ districts. Future longitudinal studies should track how brand consistency investments translate into equity changes over time. Experimental studies manipulating specific online-offline consistency gaps (price, visual identity, service quality) would enable causal attribution. Research examining the role of digital influencers and social commerce — particularly WhatsApp-based commerce and Instagram shopping — in moderating the online-offline brand experience is a particularly timely avenue for future inquiry in the Indian context.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study establishes omnichannel brand consistency as a significant driver of consumer-based brand equity in India, operating through a sequential mediation chain of brand trust and brand loyalty. The distinctive finding that Tier-2/3 city consumers penalize online-offline consistency gaps more severely than Tier-1 consumers challenges the prevailing brand management focus on metro markets and highlights the strategic importance of offline brand experience investment in India's emerging consumption heartland. The proposed Omnichannel Brand Equity (OBE) framework provides a theoretically grounded and empirically validated roadmap for navigating India's uniquely complex online-offline branding landscape.

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