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Exploring the Connect Between Personal Values and Brand Image and its Impact on Brand Liking: An Institutional Brand Perspective

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Abstract

In this era of intense competition one of the best ways to retain a competitive advantage over a period of time is by building a brand. One of the aspects of brand building is the positive feelings that the marketer is able to develop for his brand in the minds of the target audience. This liking will be a buffer in times of crisis and a competitive advantage in times of plenty for the brand. There are different things that contribute to brand loyalty. Studies have proven that the self-image congruity the person has with the brand image or personality helps in creating loyalty to the brand. In this study, the connect between personal values and brand image was studied. And instead of brand loyalty, the study has tried to examine whether this connect leads to brand liking. Further, since the term brand encompasses a vast number of goods and services, only top institutional brands in India, in this case, Tata and Reliance have been taken for analysis. The results indicate that self-perception traits do not significantly influence brand preference for either brand, which means that external brand attributes and social perceptions are more influential than individual personality characteristics. In summary, the study highlights two distinct brand positioning strategies: Tata's brand appeal is rooted in ethical alignment and employee-centric values. Reliance benefits more from a strong social identity and customer-based community perception.

Keywords: Self-image. Brand Image, Personal Values, Brand Liking, Self Image Congruity.

Introduction

With consumers becoming more value-conscious and socially aware, the emotional and psychological alignment between a brand and its audience (Sheth, 2020) has gained prominence in shaping brand preference and loyalty (Keller, 1993). According to Sirgy (1982) this alignment is often influenced as a mirror to an individual's personal values, self-image, and the perceived image of the brand. Emotional attachment directly impacts satisfaction and loyalty (Chebab & Boukerch (2025). Moreover, according to Liu & Chelliah (2025) consumer preference and purchase intentions are mediated by the emotional value that consumers associate with the brand. Interestingly, consumer-brand alignment in digital, socially connected situations further reinforce loyalty.

Self-image is the mental picture or perception that a person has about themselves, including their appearance, abilities, personality, and overall sense of self-worth. According to Santi & Gorghiu (2016) it is shaped by personal experiences, social interactions, cultural influences, and feedback from others.

Zhuang (2023) found that there is impact of social media on self-image. In fact, positive online interactions affirm self-image.
Brand image refers to the perception and mental picture that consumers have about a brand (Taheer, Adnan & Saeed, 2024). As per studies (Keller, 2013, Aaker, 1991, Ladhari et al, 2017, Forbrun & Shanley, 1990, Biel, 1992), it is shaped by a combination of experiences with the brand, marketing messages, word of mouth, reputation and symbolism and emotional associations. According to research (Aulia et al, 2025, Van Laer et al, 2021) brand storytelling helps to shape the symbolic meanings to the brand, which leads the consumer to associate with it. In addition to it Forbes (2024) demonstrate that emotional resonance significantly enhance brand preference and trust. Keller (2013) concludes that brand image is the impression of a brand in the minds of consumers, based on their beliefs, ideas, feelings, and experiences associated with it. It is what people think and feel when they hear or see a brand's name - it's the emotional and cognitive imprint left in their minds.
Personal values are the deeply held beliefs and guiding principles that influence a person's attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making (Schwartz, 1992). Values act as cognitive and emotional filters that shape consumer preferences, including which brands individuals relate to and choose to support (Kahle & Xie, 2008). Brand image—the set of associations and perceptions a consumer holds about a brand—often acts as a mirror reflecting whether a brand resonates with an individual's self-identity and values (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1996). From a cultural perspective, consumer interpretations of brand image are strongly influenced by underlying cultural value systems, as described in consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).
Brand liking refers to the positive emotional response or favourable attitude a consumer develops toward a particular brand. It is often viewed as part of the affective component of brand attitude, reflecting how much consumers emotionally favour or are attracted to a brand (Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Keller, 1993). Consumers who like a brand tend to develop emotional bonds, which in turn foster repeat purchases and long-term brand equity (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Moreover, research in consumer psychology highlights that psychological compatibility between consumer values and brand identity strengthens this favourable relationship (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).
Brand liking is shaped by multiple factors such as product quality, advertising and brand storytelling, customer service, and the perceived personality and values of the brand. Additionally, social proof in the form of reviews and word of mouth plays a significant role in building favourable attitudes toward a brand (Aaker, 1997; Ismagilova et al., 2020). When customers develop a positive emotional response toward a brand, they are more likely to prefer it over competitors, recommend it to others, remain loyal, and experience satisfaction from using its products and services (Esch et al., 2006).
Consumers are more likely to favour brands that resonate with their values, as they often perceive such brands as extensions of their own identity (Allen, 2002; Belk, 1988). Research shows that when brands successfully align with consumers' values, they evoke stronger emotional connections and foster brand attachment (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995; Rokeach, 1973).
Brand liking is influenced by both affective (emotional) and cognitive (belief-based) factors. Personal values frequently trigger affective responses to brands, deepening emotional bonds and strengthening consumer–brand relationships (Allen, 2002; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Consumers interpret brand messages through the lens of their value systems, which shapes attitudes and behaviors toward brands (Schwartz, 1992).

Studies consistently highlight that personal values are a foundational driver of brand liking. Brands that successfully align their identity and communications with consumers' core values are more likely to foster stronger emotional connections, enhance brand liking, and ultimately increase brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Keller, 1993).

Institutional Brand

A brand is essentially a product and a product is anything that you offer a customer or consumer for acquisition, use, consumption or maybe entertainment. So a brand can take the form of a physical good like a car or a mobile, a service like banking or education, an institution like a corporate or charity, a place like a beach or mountain or a person like an actor or advocate. For the purpose of this study, we are taking the institutional brand.

Two of India's most influential conglomerates, Tata and Reliance, represent differing value propositions. The Tata Group is widely perceived as an ethically driven and socially responsible organization, renowned for its century-long commitment to trust, employee welfare, and community engagement—factors that contribute to a deeper emotional connection with consumers beyond mere product satisfaction (Gupta et al, 2023, Jaiswal, 2024; Shah, 2010). While Reliance is associated with innovation, scale, and aggressive market strategies as per studies (Raiyani et, al, 2024, Chovatiya, D, 2023), consumers often associate Reliance with technological advancement. These differences create fertile ground for exploring how consumer perceptions and personal values affect brand preference.

Research Gap and Problem Definition

In today's competitive and brand-saturated marketplace, understanding what drives consumer brand preference is increasingly critical for strategic brand positioning. While traditional approaches have emphasised tangible attributes such as price, functionality, and product quality (Zeithaml, 1988), other research highlights the growing importance of intangible psychological factors. Elements such as personal values (Allen, 2002), self-concept congruence (Sirgy, 1982), and brand image perception (Keller, 1993) play a pivotal role in shaping consumer attitudes, emotional attachment, and brand loyalty.

Previous research in consumer behaviour and branding has established that individuals tend to favour brands whose personalities align with their own self-concept and values—a phenomenon known as self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982; Malär et al., 2011). When such alignment occurs, it fosters deeper emotional connections, resulting in stronger brand liking and loyalty.

Despite these differences, there is limited scholarly inquiry into how these perceptions interact with consumers' personal values and self-concept to influence brand liking. This is particularly true with respect to comparing consumer perceptions across brands with distinct and contrasting identities (e.g., Sahay & Sharma, 2010). The lack of comparative, data-driven studies on this subject represents a critical gap in the literature.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the relationship between personal values, perceived brand similarity, self-concept congruence, and brand image, and how these factors collectively shape brand liking in the case of Tata and Reliance. By focusing on these two iconic Indian brands, the research aims to generate context-specific insights into consumer-brand relationships, thereby contributing both to academic theory and practical brand strategy.

This study was done in the South Indian city of Kochi. India's urban youth demographic-especially in progressive cities like Kochi-is increasingly educated, aspirational, and value-conscious. These consumers are not only seeking functional benefits from brands but also looking for symbolic alignment with their personal identities and ethical beliefs.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the research is limited to individual consumers within Kerala, particularly those who are familiar with the products and services offered by Tata and Reliance across sectors such as telecommunications, retail, energy, and consumer goods. The focus is on measuring psychological constructs such as personal values (e.g., honesty, responsibility, achievement) perceived brand image (e.g., ethical conduct, employee treatment, customer orientation), and the alignment between a consumer's self-concept and the brand. By targeting consumers aged 18 and above in a cross-sectional framework, the study does not aim to assess financial performance or product quality but instead seeks to understand emotional and attitudinal preferences-what makes a consumer "like" a brand at a personal and value-driven level.

Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to understand the connect Between Personal Values and Brand Image for Brand Liking with reference to Tata and Reliance

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the relationship between consumers' personal values and their preference for Tata and Reliance.
- To assess the correlation between perception dimensions (such as perceived similarity, identification with customers, and value alignment) and the liking of Tata and Reliance.
- To evaluate the influence of self-concept traits (e.g., honesty, responsibility) on consumer liking for Tata and Reliance.

The Connection Between Personal Values and Brand Image

Several studies highlight the relationship between personal values and brand image in driving brand liking. Research by Kressmann et al. (2006) found that self-congruence between personal values and brand identity enhances brand preference. Similarly, prior research emphasizes that consumers with strong ethical values tend to favour brands that demonstrate sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Lee & Workman, 2020). When brands effectively communicate such value-driven messages, they are more likely to foster deeper emotional connections and stronger brand relationships with consumers (Freling & Forbes, 2005).

Several studies (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak & Sirgy, 2012) have emphasised that personal values, more specifically their self-concept shape consumers' emotional responses to brands. According to Kumagai, (2022) brands that reflect or resonate with an individual's core values tend to be liked more and preferred over. For example, environmentally conscious consumers prefer brands aligned with sustainability values. Research shows that value congruence—the alignment between consumer values and brand values—enhances brand liking and loyalty (Sirgy & Lee, 2008). When consumers perceive a brand as sharing their personal values, they are more likely to form stronger attachments and emotional connections with the brand (Kumagai & Nagasawa, 2023). Such congruence not only fosters trust but also encourages positive word-of-mouth and long-term brand commitment.

Impact on Brand Liking and Consumer Loyalty

The alignment of personal values and brand image enhances brand liking, which in turn influences consumer loyalty. Fournier (1998) introduced the concept of brand relationships, demonstrating that consumers develop affection and commitment toward brands when they perceive congruence between their own values and the brand's personality. Similarly, Park, Eisingerich, and Park (2013) highlight that brand authenticity, rooted in value consistency, strengthens consumer trust and fosters brand advocacy.

The literature has long established that personal values and brand image are interdependent factors influencing brand liking. For example, Richins (1994) and Ball & Tasaki (1992) highlight the symbolic role of possessions and brands in reflecting self-identity, while Sirgy et al. (2000) emphasize the self-congruity perspective, wherein consumers prefer brands aligned with their self-concept. Pioneer work by Zeithaml (1988) further underscores that consumer evaluations extend beyond functional attributes, as individuals gravitate toward brands that mirror their beliefs, lifestyles, and aspirations. Building on these insights, it is likely that marketers can foster long-term brand loyalty by crafting authentic narratives and engaging in value-driven marketing that resonates with consumers' personal values.

Branding is widely recognized as an abstract construct that exists in the minds of consumers. As Aaker (1997) notes, brands are perceived as possessing distinct personalities that shape consumer associations. Over time, the images and meanings attached to a brand develop through consumers' interactions with the brand and its various touchpoints, creating emotions that play a crucial role in loyalty (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012).

Brand liking is a crucial determinant of consumer behaviour, shaped by the interaction between personal values and brand image**.** As highlighted by Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012), brand liking reflects the emotional attachment consumers develop toward a brand. Khan et al. (2024) emphasize that personal values, representing deep-seated beliefs and motivations, strongly influence consumer preferences. Similarly, Liu and Chelliah (2025) note that brand image is formed by consumers' perceptions of a brand's attributes, personality, and associations. Understanding the interplay between these factors enables marketers to design strategies that align with consumer expectations, thereby fostering brand loyalty and advocacy (Khan et al., 2024).

In this study, the connect between the individual's personal values and the brand's social values is compared. Further, the question of how these affect brand liking is considered. Such studies on brand liking have not been done before in Kerala. These will help the advertisers to decide what kind of images and values they have to cultivate for their brand through their communication. The self-image of their customers as well as potential customers, has to be studied and this analysis is used for creating content for their communication efforts.

Research Methodology: Secondary data from authentic published sources were accessed to understand the theoretical framework better in order to plan the research as well as prepare the research instrument. For the primary data collection, customers were interviewed using the Computer Aided Web Interview (CAWI) method. The instrument was a structured questionnaire and the tool used was Google Form. The research was descriptive in nature in order to get a perception of the people on different aspects of branding. The target audience were both male and female, between 21-60 years of age, graduates and above, based in and around Kochi. A total of 103 people were interviewed. The sampling method used was convenience sampling. The collected data was analysed using SPSS and Excel and using such statistical tools as percentage analysis, ANOVA, correlation and regression.

Reliability Statistics

The research instrument used was a structured questionnaire. It consisted of demographic questions besides MCQ. The main correlation questions were done as statements using Likert Scale. The questionnaire was validated using Cronbach's Alpha. The tale of result is given below.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
.89	16

The reliability test is used to measure the questionnaire stability and consistency, which should be between 0 and 1. The reliability test results of the study is presented in the above table. In this questionnaire, Cronbach's α coefficients were all greater than 0.7, indicating that the reliability of the questionnaire administered is satisfactory.

Descriptive Statistics

As far as the demographics of the respondents are concerned, males formed 57.3% and females 42.7%. Students formed 45.6% of the respondents, followed by 36.9% in private jobs, 11.7% self-employed, and Housewives and government employees 2.9% each. As far as the age of respondents is considered, there were 53.3% in the 18-25 category, 30.1% in the 26-35 category and 14.6% in the 26-50 category. Of the total 43.7% were graduates, 34% post-graduates, 17.5 percent had passed SSLC/HSC and the rest 4.9% some amount of schooling.

As far as self-concept is concerned, while most (69%) considered themselves as honest and fair, 38% considered themselves as responsible and hardworking and 31% as responsible and hardworking, it was found that these traits did not affect their liking for Tata and Reliance.

Table 2 Preference: Tata over Reliance

		Tata over Reliance
N.	Valid	103
	Missing	0
Mean		3.38
Std Dev		1.08

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	9.7%	9.7%	9.7%
	Disagree	6	5.8%	5.8%	15.5%
	Neutral	33	32.0%	32.0%	47.6%
	Agree	43	41.7%	41.7%	89.3%
	Strongly Agree	11	10.7%	10.7%	100.0%
Total		103	100%		

Interpretation

It is clear that the majority of the respondents prefer Tata over Reliance (Mean 3.38).

Test of Hypothesis

Table 3

Correlation: Liking Tata and Personal Values

H1: There is a significant correlation between Liking Brand Tata and Personal Values

		Personal Values	Liking Tata
Personal Values	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1.000 103	.396 .000 103
Liking Tata	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.396 .000 103	1.000 103

Interpretation: The correlation table shows the Pearson correlation between two variables: Personal values and Liking Brand Tata, based on a sample size of 103 participants. An r = 0.396 and significance of .000 shows significant but moderate correlation between the two.

Table 4

Correlation: Liking Reliance and Personal Values

H2: There is a significant correlation between Liking Brand Reliance and Personal Values

		Personal Values	Liking Reliance
Personal Values	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1.000 103	.141 .156 103
Liking Reliance	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.141 .156 103	1.000 103

Interpretation: The correlation table shows the Pearson correlation between two variables: Personal Values and Liking Brand Reliance, based on a sample size of 103 participants. An r = 0.141 and significance of .156 shows that the correlation is not significant and it is weak.

Table 5

Correlation: Liking Tata and Perception

H3: There is a significant correlation between Liking Brand Tata and Perception (Identification with brand, similar customers, similar values)

		Identifying	Liking Tata	Similar Values	Similar Customers
Identifying	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1.000 103	.410 .000 103	.596 .000 103	.501 .000 103
Liking Tata	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.410 .000 103	1.000 103	.455 .000 103	.367 .000 103

Similar Values	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.596 .000 103	.455 .000 103	1.000 103	.576 .000 103
Similar Customers	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.501 000 103	.367 .000 103	.576 .000 103	1.000 103

Interpretation: The correlation table shows that all relationships are statistically significant (p < .001). The strongest correlations involve similarity with Tata and values in working in Tata, showing that value perception is central to positive brand associations.

Liking Tata is significantly predicted by both perceived value alignment and perceptions about how Tata treats employees and its customer base.

Table 6

Correlation: Liking Brand and Perception

H4: There is a significant correlation between Liking Brand Reliance and Perception (Similarity, similar customers, similar values)

		Liking Reliance	Identifying	Similar Values	Similar Customers
Liking Reliance	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1.000 103	.440 .000 103	.524 .000 103	.591 .000 103
Identifying	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.440 .000 103	1.000 103	.675 .000 103	.691 .000 103
Similar Values	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.524 .000 103	.675 .000 103	1.000 103	.749 .000 103
Similar Customers	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.591 000 103	.691 .000 103	.749 .000 103	1.000 103

Interpretation: The correlation table shows that all relationships are statistically significant (p < .001). The strongest correlations involve identifying with customers of Reliance and values in working in Reliance, showing that value perception is central to positive brand associations.

Liking Reliance is significantly predicted by both perceived value alignment and perceptions about how they treat their employees and the customer base.

ANOVA

Table 7

ANOVA: Liking Tata and Self Concept

H5: There is a significant correlation between Liking Brand Tata and respondents self concept

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Liking Tata	Between Groups Within Groups	2.76 98.93	6 96	.46 1.03	.45	.846

	Total	101.69	102			

Interpretation: F-value, which is the ratio of between-group variance to within-group variance is 0.45. Sig. (p-value) is 0.846, which is much greater than 0.05, indicates the result is not statistically significant. This means there is no significant difference in the Tata like scores across self-perception.

Table 8
ANOVA: Liking Reliance and Self Concept

H6: There is a significant correlation between Liking Brand Reliance and respondents self concept

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Liking Reliance	Between Groups	3.28	6	.55	.65	.691
	Within Groups	80.84	96	.84		
	Total	84.12	102			

Interpretation: F-value, which is the ratio of between-group variance to within-group variance is 0.65. Sig. (p-value) is 0.691, which is much greater than 0.05, indicates the result is not statistically significant. This means there is no significant difference in the Reliance like scores across self-perception.

Regression

H7: There is a significant impact of different image perceptions and Liking Brand Tata

Table 9
Model Summary (Liking Tata)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.49	.24	.22	.88

Coefficients (Liking Tata)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.07	.44	.00	2.42	.017
Identify	.12	.07	.19	1.68	.096
Similar Values	.17	.07	.28	2.34	.021
Similar Customers	.07	.07	.11	1.03	.306

Interpretation:

The regression model is statistically significant overall, explaining 24% of the variance in the Liking the Tata Brand outcome. Values and working in Tata is the most significant contributor (p = .021), suggesting that individuals who align with Tata's work values are more likely to have favorable views toward Tata. Similarity to Tata has a positive but marginally significant effect (p = .096), implying it might play a role but needs further evidence. Identifying with customers of Tata is not a significant predictor (p = .306), indicating limited or no influence on the dependent variable.

This suggests that shared work values have the strongest influence on the liking of Tata, while general customer similarity has little impact.

H8: There is a significant impact of different image perceptions and Liking Brand Reliance

Table 10
Model Summary (Liking Reliance)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.60	.36	.35	.73

Coefficients (Liking Reliance)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.10	.29	.00	3.76	.000
Identify	.00	.06	.01	.05	.959
Similar Values	.09	.06	.18	1.42	.158
Similar Customers	.25	.07	.45	3.45	.001

Interpretation: The regression model is also statistically significant ($p < .001$). Identifying with customers of Reliance is a strong and significant predictor ($p = .001$), indicating that social similarity (knowing similar customers) plays a crucial role in liking Reliance. Values working with Reliance and similarity with Reliance are not significant ($p = .158$ and $p = .959$), meaning personal alignment or perceived similarity with Reliance do not significantly impact brand preference. This suggests that for Reliance, social influence (i.e., knowing similar customers) drives brand preference more than personal alignment with company values or perceived similarity.

Summary of Findings:

The study involved a balanced and diverse sample of respondents, making the findings more robust and representative. Gender Representation was fairly balanced ensuring gender inclusivity in perceptions of brand associations. Occupation Distribution showed that nearly half of the respondents were students, followed by those in private jobs, and self-employed. This diversity offers insights from various socio-economic backgrounds. The age group 18-25 dominated the sample, followed by those aged 26-35. This focus on young adults is appropriate, considering the study explores brand perception, often influenced by generational attitudes. Most respondents were graduates or postgraduates suggesting that the insights are largely drawn from a well-educated population, which can impact how branding is interpreted. When asked about self-perception traits, most respondents identified as honest and fair, followed by responsible and hardworking, which gives context to how personal traits might shape brand associations.

For Tata, there is a moderate and statistically significant correlation between value alignment and brand liking, indicating that people who share Tata's values tend to like the brand more. For Reliance, the correlation between value alignment and brand liking is weak and not significant suggesting other factors influence preference more strongly.

Further correlation analysis reveals: The strongest drivers of liking the brand are perceived value alignment, employee treatment, and customer identification, all showing significant and moderate-to-strong correlations. The relationships between feeling similar to the brand and values, and between values and customer identification, are particularly robust. Reliance: Similar patterns emerge, with strong, statistically significant correlations among value perception, customer identification, and brand liking. Notably, identifying with customers and how Reliance treats its employees are central to shaping positive perceptions.

The ANOVA results indicate that self-perception traits (like being honest, responsible, cooperative, etc.) do not significantly affect liking for either Tata or Reliance. This implies brand perception is more influenced by external brand traits rather than internal personality characteristics. The regression model for Tata was statistically significant showing that perceived alignment with work values is the most significant predictor of brand liking. This implies that Tata's image as a value-driven employer strongly influences how people feel about the brand. In contrast, the regression model for Reliance revealed that the most significant factor influencing brand preference is identification with other customers not personal alignment with values or perceived similarity. This suggests that social validation and community perception are more important for Reliance than individual value resonance.

Tata's brand is preferred by individuals who align with its work values and ethical image. Personal values and employee-centric reputation are central to its brand perception. Reliance's brand, on the other hand, is driven by social influence-people tend to like Reliance if they identify with its customer base, regardless of shared values or perceived similarity with the company. Brand loyalty and preference are shaped more by how people perceive a company treats its employees and customers than by personal traits or identity. Young, educated consumers, especially students and early professionals, form the core audience shaping these perceptions, making them a key demographic for branding strategies.

Relevance of study to Managers:

The relevance of this study lies in its contribution to brand management, marketing communication, and consumer psychology. Building on the conclusions of Sirgy et al. (1997), in an era where consumers increasingly base their loyalty and purchasing decisions on shared values and social perceptions, it becomes critical for companies to align their brand image with the personal values of their target audience. Tata and Reliance, being legacy brands with distinct public perceptions, provide a compelling contrast for analyzing how value congruence and brand perception shape consumer attachment. Insights from this study can assist brand managers in refining brand positioning, strengthening emotional resonance with consumers, and fostering deeper brand relationships built on shared beliefs and ethical alignment—supporting the findings of Widodo, Tarofder, and Kumar (2025), who emphasize that emotional resonance and thereby in this case alignment with personal values significantly influence brand liking and loyalty.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of value alignment, employee treatment, and customer identification in shaping brand liking among young, educated Indian consumers. The sample, largely composed of students and early-career professionals aged 18–35, provides a robust reflection of the evolving urban consumer mindset, especially in relation to institutional brands like Tata and Reliance.

For Tata, brand preference is significantly influenced by perceived alignment with ethical and work values. Consumers see their personal values reflected in Tata's image-particularly its employee-centric and socially responsible positioning-are more likely to express brand liking. This underscores the importance of value congruence and internal brand ethics in driving emotional brand attachment.

In contrast, for Reliance, brand liking is primarily driven by social identification with other customers, rather than personal value alignment. This suggests that community perception and social validation play a stronger role in shaping positive sentiment toward the Reliance brand.

Interestingly, while respondents largely identify as honest, fair, and responsible, self-perception traits did not significantly impact brand liking for either brand. This implies that external brand attributes-how a brand treats its employees and is perceived by its customer base-are more influential than individual personality traits.

Overall, the findings reveal that brand loyalty and preference are shaped more by perceived social and ethical behavior of brands than by personal identity. For marketers, this suggests that cultivating a strong employee reputation and customer community is key to building deeper brand resonance, particularly among the emerging generation of young, educated consumers.

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