

Strategic Branding and Consumer Purchase Intention: An Empirical Analysis of the Mediating Role of Brand Image

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Abstract

In today's fiercely competitive environment, strategic branding has emerged as an essential organization strategy for shaping consumer behaviour and gaining sustainable competitive advantages. This study investigates the impact of strategic branding on the purchase intention of customers, using the brand image as the mediator. The research design used was the quantitative research design and the data collected was the primary data which were obtained through the structured questionnaire from 485 consumers in Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software was used to analyze the collected data. The reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model were satisfactory, and the model fit of the structural model was good. The results indicated a high and positive relation between strategic branding and brand image and purchase intention. In addition, the image of the brand plays a significant role in determining the intention of consumers to buy and it partially mediates between strategic branding and consumer buying intention. Results indicated that the organizations can be more powerful in building consumers' purchasing intent by adopting effective branding strategy to increase positive brand perception and emotional relationship. The study adds to the literature of branding and consumer behavior by confirming the mediating role of brand image and gives practical applications for those who are interested in enhancing the performance of their brands and customer acquisition by designing and implementing a good branding strategy.

Keywords: Strategic Branding; Consumer Purchase Intention; Brand Image; Branding Strategy; PLS-SEM; Consumer Behavior; Brand Management.

Introduction

In the current competitive and dynamic market, branding has become a strategic asset for an organization and influences consumer perceptions, product and service differentiation, long-term business sustainability, and more. With consumers' access to a multitude of brands in both the physical and virtual world, it is increasingly important for organizations to create strategic branding campaigns that will clearly differentiate them in the market and build meaningful connections with their target audience. Strategic branding involves the systematic creation of a brand's identity, positioning, values, communication and consumer experience, which seeks to shape consumer attitudes and behaviours. It is, therefore, highly probable that an organization which manages to implement strategic branding properly will benefit from increased purchase intention and customer preference (Akturan, 2018; Chen et al., 2021).

Consumer purchase intention is one of the most important measures of marketing effectiveness and is defined as consumers likelihood to buy a product or service in the future. Purchase intention is linked to consumers' mental appraisal and feelings about a brand prior to purchasing. Social media engagement, digital interactions and online information are increasingly impacting business-to-consumer buying decisions, and businesses are not holding back in investing in their brands—activities that can positively influence consumers' buying decisions. Previous research has found that successful branding strategies play a crucial role in influencing consumers' intention to buy as it fosters positive brand perceptions, mitigates perceived risks, and boosts consumers' confidence in purchasing decisions (Ali & Naushad, 2023; Evgeniy et al., 2019; Yousaf et al., 2023).

Brand image has been found to be one of the most influential intangible factors influencing the purchase intention of consumers among various factors. Brand image means the perceptions, beliefs, associations and impressions

consumers have of a specific brand. Building trust and creating a sense of value and emotional connection with consumers can help drive purchase behavior, all through a positive brand image. Developing a positive brand image involves a series of strategic brand activities, such as the consistent use of communication, visuals, product quality, corporate values and customer engagement. Therefore, the brand image plays an important role in the lives of consumers because it makes them more likely to buy products from brands they believe to be reliable, credible and socially desirable (Elseidi & El-Baz, 2016; Islam & Rahman, 2016).

Since brand image plays a mediating role in linking the brand activities to consumer behavioral outcomes, it has been given much attention in marketing literature. While it may have direct impacts on purchase intent, strategic branding is more likely to indirectly affect it by influencing consumers' perceptions of the brand, which in turn will affect their purchase willingness. The empirical evidence supports the importance of brand image in the relationship between the marketing activities such as social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, corporate social responsibility, and green marketing, and purchase intentions (Al-Dmour et al., 2021; Jabeen et al., 2023; Majeed et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2022). This study shows that businesses aiming to increase consumer purchase intention need to promote the brand as well as build a positive brand image that helps build consumer trust and emotion.

The technology has been rapidly developing and has further changed the way organizations brand, allowing them to communicate with consumers through various channels. DIGITAL branding strategies, INFLUENCER marketing, USER GENED content and ONLINE customer engagement has become key assets to establish a good brand image and to boost purchase intention. The days of traditional marketing and media are coming to an end, and consumers are turning to digital information, peer recommendations, and online brand experiences to guide their purchasing decisions. Previous studies have shown that interactive digital content, eWOM and social media participation positively affect consumer brand perceptions which, in turn, increase purchase intention (Chen et al., 2021; Geng & Chen, 2021; Poturak & Softić, 2019). The new developments underline how essential it is to combine strategic brand communication with digital communication to keep and gain customer interest and competitiveness in the market.

Although a lot of literature exists about branding and consumer behavior, there are empirical studies that comprehensively study the direct effect of strategic branding on purchase intention, as well as study the mediating effect of brand image. The current research has concentrated on a part of the branding element, either green branding, social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth or corporate social responsibility, and little study has been done on strategic branding as an integrated organizational competency. In addition, the findings showed that the relationship between consumer involvement and purchase intention differs according to industry, suggesting that the relationship between brand image as a mediator needs further empirical study in each industry. This will offer important theoretical knowledge in the field of literature on branding and give useful tips for managers who want to improve the purchase intentions of consumers by proper branding.

From the above discussion, the current study aims at exploring the relationship between strategic branding and consumer purchase intention with the mediation of brand image. More specifically, the aims of the study are: (1) to check the effect of strategic branding on the brand image; (2) to analyze the influence of strategic branding on the consumer purchase intention; (3) to investigate the effect of brand image on consumer purchase intention; and (4) to examine the mediating role of brand image between strategic branding and consumer purchase intention.

Literature Review And Hypotheses Development

Strategic branding has become an integral part of the organizational strategy to build a unique brand and establish long-term relationships with consumers, which would create a sustainable competitive advantage in the long term. Strategic branding is brand communication that is connected to positioning and vision, and it is connected to value creation, influencing the consumer perception and purchasing behavior, unlike traditional brand communication. Having a strong brand identity can help companies stand out from their competitors and boost customer trust and loyalty. Consumers are more likely to judge brands by their credibility, consistency and emotional pull in more competitive markets, not just on their product features. From this point, strategic branding has become an

important factor in consumer decision making and in the success of an organization (Akturan, 2018; Chen et al., 2021).

Consumer purchase intention is the willingness or probability of a consumer buying a specific product or service due to his/her cognitive assessments and emotional feelings about a brand. It is believed to be a valid indicator of actual purchases, since consumers tend to have purchase intentions before making a purchase decision. In previous marketing studies it was suggested that good marketing brand can play a significant role in purchase intention, decrease perceived risk, increase product familiarity and build consumers' confidence. Brands that communicate brand values and provide excellent customer experiences regularly have a higher likelihood of enticing consumers to make a purchase. Empirical findings have shown that various aspects of branding such as digital branding, social media branding, and integrated marketing communications have positive impact on purchase intention in different industries (Ali & Naushad, 2023; Evgeniy et al., 2019; Yousaf et al., 2023). Hence, it can be believed that a strategic branding will have a direct positive effect on the consumers' propensity to buy a branded product and service.

H1: Strategic Branding has a significant positive effect on Consumer Purchase Intention.

Brand image is a set of consumers' perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and associations that form due to their experiences with a brand and its marketing messages. It is an intangible asset that can positively affect consumers' perceptions and drive their buying choices. A positive brand image establishes trust in the quality of the product, its reliability and the credibility of the organization, it builds emotional bonds and perceived value between the brand and the consumers. Strategic branding is a key component in creating a consistent brand message, visual identity, customer experience and organizational reputation. When businesses clearly articulate their brand promise, and they are consistent in their customer interactions, consumers form positive brand perceptions. Numerous empirical studies have validated that branding activities play important roles in creating a strong brand image that in turn leads to improving customer trust and brand positioning (Elseidi & El-Baz, 2016; Islam & Rahman, 2016; Ramesh et al., 2019). Thus, it is expected that strategic branding will have a positive impact on brand image.

H2: Strategic Branding has a significant positive effect on Brand Image.

Brand image is a long identified as one of the most powerful factors in influencing consumers' purchase intentions. Most people like products that bring them happiness, that are high quality and that abide by the values that they like. A positive brand image helps to mitigate uncertainty in the buying process and make consumers more confident in buying a specific brand in comparison to other brands. Furthermore, a positive brand image fosters emotional ties with customers, which can lead to the brand's continued popularity and customer loyalty. In recent years, empirical studies have shown that brand image not only affects the purchase intention but it can also influence the purchase intention in a variety of contexts such as electronic word of mouth, social media marketing, green marketing and corporate social responsibility programs (Al-Dmour et al., 2021; Jabeen et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2022). These results indicate that consumers are more inclined to buy products from brands that they believe to be positive.

H3: Brand Image has a significant positive effect on Consumer Purchase Intention.

Marketing scholars are increasingly finding that while strategic brand can directly affect consumers' intention to buy, the link is better accounted for by the intermediary of brand image. Strategic branding efforts are designed to add value by improving consumers' brand perception and thus increase consumers' buying behavior. That is, brand activities influence purchase intention mostly by reinforcing the general impression that a consumer has about the brand. This mediation process has been confirmed by a number of empirical studies. For instance, Ali and Naushad (2023) concluded that brand image plays a mediating role between social media marketing and purchase intent. Al-Dmour et al. (2021) also showed that brand image has a significant mediating role between EWOM and purchase intention, similarly, Majeed et al. (2022) and Tan et al. (2022) found in green marketing context that brand image plays a significant mediation role between EWOM and purchase intention. In sum, the studies suggest that creating a positive brand image is a crucial pathway for strategic branding to influence buyers'

purchase intentions. Thus, the present study suggests the brand image as a key mediating variable in strategic branding and purchase intention.

H4: Brand Image significantly mediates the relationship between Strategic Branding and Consumer Purchase Intention.

Methodology

This study employed quantitative, cross sectional research design to investigate the relationship between strategic branding, brand image and consumer purchase intention. The study was carried out among the consumers of the area of Tiruchirappalli, Tamilnadu with the help of structured questionnaire prepared based on validated measurement scales used in the past by the researchers in various studies on branding and consumer behavior. Primary data was collected using the convenience sampling technique, and data screening was conducted after gathering the primary data to obtain the validity, which amounted to 485 valid samples. The questionnaire contained two parts: the first was demographic information and the second was the items measuring the study constructs with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree". Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with software of SmartPLS was used in analyzing the collected data. The analysis was carried out in two stages, first the measurement model was analyzed for its reliability and validity using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity. The structural model was then validated by analyzing path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2) and bootstrapping procedures to test the hypotheses and brand image as a mediator. PLS-SEM was chosen because it can accurately analyze complex mediation models, can be used for prediction-oriented research, and is able to handle multiple indicator measurement of latent variables (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2011; Sarstedt et al., 2014).

Results And Findings

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 485)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	246.00	50.70
	Female	239.00	49.30
	Total	485.00	100.00
Age (Years)	Below 20	48.00	9.90
	21–30	182.00	37.50
	31–40	137.00	28.20
	41–50	81.00	16.70
	Above 50	37.00	7.70
	Total	485.00	100.00
Educational Qualification	Higher Secondary	54.00	11.10
	Diploma	67.00	13.80
	Undergraduate	176.00	36.30
	Postgraduate	145.00	29.90
	Doctoral/Professional	43.00	8.90
	Total	485.00	100.00

Occupation	Student	92.00	19.00
	Government Employee	76.00	15.70
	Private Employee	184.00	37.90
	Business/Self-employed	83.00	17.10
	Homemaker/Others	50.00	10.30
	Total	485.00	100.00
Monthly Income (INR)	Below ₹25,000	118.00	24.30
	₹25,001–₹50,000	159.00	32.80
	₹50,001–₹75,000	102.00	21.00
	₹75,001–₹1,00,000	69.00	14.20
	Above ₹1,00,000	37.00	7.60
	Total	485.00	100.00
Purchase Frequency of Branded Products	Weekly	103.00	21.20
	Monthly	191.00	39.40
	Occasionally	134.00	27.60
	Rarely	57.00	11.80
	Total	485.00	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 485 respondents surveyed in Tiruchirappalli. The findings reveal a nearly balanced gender distribution, with 50.7% male and 49.3% female respondents, ensuring adequate representation of both groups. The majority of respondents (37.5%) belonged to the 21–30 years age group, followed by those aged 31–40 years (28.2%), indicating that young and middle-aged consumers constituted the largest segment of the sample. Regarding educational qualifications, most respondents were undergraduates (36.3%), followed by postgraduates (29.9%), reflecting a relatively well-educated consumer base capable of evaluating branding strategies. In terms of occupation, private-sector employees represented the largest proportion (37.9%), while students (19.0%), business owners/self-employed individuals (17.1%), and government employees (15.7%) also formed substantial portions of the sample. With respect to monthly income, the highest percentage of respondents (32.8%) earned between ₹25,001 and ₹50,000 per month, suggesting a predominantly middle-income consumer group. Furthermore, 39.4% of respondents reported purchasing branded products on a monthly basis, followed by 27.6% who purchased occasionally and 21.2% who purchased weekly. Overall, the demographic profile indicates that the sample comprises diverse consumer groups with varying socio-economic backgrounds, thereby providing a suitable basis for examining the influence of strategic branding and brand image on consumer purchase intention.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Measures

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Strategic Branding (SB)	SB1	0.81	0.91	0.93	0.69
	SB2	0.85			
	SB3	0.86			
	SB4	0.83			
	SB5	0.81			
Brand Image (BI)	BI1	0.86	0.90	0.93	0.71
	BI2	0.85			
	BI3	0.83			
	BI4	0.87			
	BI5	0.83			
Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI)	CPI1	0.82	0.90	0.92	0.70
	CPI2	0.85			
	CPI3	0.86			
	CPI4	0.83			
	CPI5	0.84			

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 presents the reliability and convergent validity assessment of the measurement model. The results indicate that all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.812 to 0.867, confirming satisfactory indicator reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values for Strategic Branding (0.913), Brand Image (0.904), and Consumer Purchase Intention (0.898) were well above the acceptable limit of 0.70, demonstrating strong internal consistency. Similarly, the Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.921 to 0.930, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 and indicating high construct reliability. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values varied between 0.689 and 0.712, surpassing the minimum criterion of 0.50, thereby establishing adequate convergent validity for all constructs. Overall, these findings confirm that the measurement model possesses satisfactory reliability and validity, supporting its suitability for subsequent structural model evaluation and hypothesis testing using PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2011).

Table 3. Model Fit Summary (PLS-SEM Path Analysis)

Model Fit Index	Obtained Value	Recommended Threshold	Assessment
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.05	< 0.08	Good Fit
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.92	> 0.90	Good Fit
RMS Theta	0.10	< 0.12	Acceptable
Chi-Square (χ^2)	512.84	Lower values preferred	Acceptable

d_ ULS	0.85	Lower than HI95	Acceptable
d_ G	0.39	Lower than HI95	Acceptable

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 presents the model fit summary of the PLS-SEM analysis, demonstrating that the proposed structural model exhibits an acceptable to good fit with the observed data. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.054 is below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a satisfactory overall model fit. Similarly, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.923 exceeds the recommended level of 0.90, reflecting a good model fit. The RMS Theta value of 0.097 is below the acceptable limit of 0.12, confirming the quality of the reflective measurement model. Furthermore, the d_ ULS (0.846) and d_ G (0.392) values fall within acceptable limits, supporting the model's discrepancy measures. The Average Path Coefficient (APC = 0.462, $p < 0.001$) and Average R-squared (ARS = 0.538, $p < 0.001$) are statistically significant, indicating that the structural relationships in the model are meaningful. In addition, the Average Variance Inflation Factor (AVIF = 2.184) is well below the threshold of 3.30, confirming the absence of multicollinearity among the predictor constructs. Overall, these goodness-of-fit indices demonstrate that the proposed PLS-SEM model is statistically robust and appropriate for testing the hypothesized relationships among Strategic Branding, Brand Image, and Consumer Purchase Intention.

Table 4. Structural Model Summary

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Strategic Branding $\rightarrow$ Consumer Purchase Intention	0.34	6.78	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Strategic Branding $\rightarrow$ Brand Image	0.72	18.94	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Brand Image $\rightarrow$ Consumer Purchase Intention	0.48	9.86	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Strategic Branding $\rightarrow$ Brand Image $\rightarrow$ Consumer Purchase Intention (Indirect Effect)	0.34	7.95	< 0.001	Supported

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 presents the structural model results obtained through PLS-SEM analysis. The findings indicate that all four proposed hypotheses are statistically significant and supported. Strategic Branding has a significant positive effect on Consumer Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.341$, $t = 6.784$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Likewise, Strategic Branding exhibits a strong positive influence on Brand Image ($\beta = 0.716$, $t = 18.942$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H2. Brand Image also has a significant positive effect on Consumer Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.478$, $t = 9.863$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H3. Furthermore, the indirect effect of Strategic Branding on Consumer Purchase Intention through Brand Image is significant ($\beta = 0.342$, $t = 7.954$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the mediating role of Brand Image and supporting H4. The coefficient of determination (R^2) values indicate that Strategic Branding explains 51.3% of the variance in Brand Image and, together with Brand Image, explains 64.8% of the variance in Consumer Purchase Intention, demonstrating moderate to substantial explanatory power. Additionally, the positive Q^2 values confirm the model's predictive relevance, while the effect size (f^2) analysis reveals a large effect of Strategic Branding on Brand Image and medium effects on Consumer Purchase Intention. Overall, the structural model demonstrates robust explanatory capability and provides strong empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework.

Discussion

Consumer purchase intention is directly and indirectly affected by strategic branding as indicated by the findings of the present study, which give strong evidence to the effect of strategic branding on the consumer decision to purchase a product and/or service. As the strategic branding dimension is linked positively to the intention to purchase, it indicates that organizations that are actively working on a consistent branding strategy, with an effective brand communication and a clear brand positioning are more likely to work towards an intended favorable purchase decision by consumers. In addition, the importance of strategic branding on brand image is a confirmation that strategic branding efforts have a significant impact on the perception, belief and emotions that consumers have about a brand. The study findings align with the research conducted by Akturan (2018) and Chen et al. (2021), which found that brand strategies are key to the increase in brand equity, which subsequently leads to positive effects on purchase intention, and strategic marketing and branding activities improve the perceptions of consumers and brand preference. Likewise, the results are consistent with the findings of Ali and Naushad (2023) and Evgeniy et al. (2019) who found that branding-related activities have a significant influence on the purchase intentions of consumers by giving positive perceptions of the brand and increasing consumer confidence.

The study also finds that brand image is a significant mediator between strategic branding and consumer purchase intentions; that is, the strategic branding influences consumers' purchase intentions mainly through the strengthening of positive brand perceptions. A positive brand image can boost consumers' trust in the brand, its perceived quality and emotional connection, leading them to prefer it over other options. This finding corroborates that of previous research, in which brand image was identified as an important mechanism between marketing activities and consumer behavioral outcomes. The findings are similar with Al-Dmour et al. (2021) who have found that brand image plays a significant role as a mediator between EWOM and purchase intention, and with Jabeen et al. (2023), Majeed et al. (2022), and Tan et al. (2022) who have reported that brand image is a significant mediator between green marketing initiatives and purchase intention of consumers. In general, the results support the theory of branding in that the companies can significantly increase the desire to buy by implementing strategic branding activities that build a strong and positive brand image, thus gaining a competitive advantage in the long term, with better customer relations.

Implications

The results of this research provide interesting theoretical and managerial implications in the field of brand and consumer behavior. Theoretically, the study contributes to the previous branding studies by testing the direct impact of strategic branding on consumer purchase intention and revealing the mediating effect of brand image in PLS-SEM framework. The findings support the hypothesis that brand image is an important psychological mechanism in which branding strategies affect consumers' decision-making. The results indicated that organizations should invest more in developing robust and clear branding strategies that highlight the importance of maintaining a consistent brand positioning, communicating to customers effectively, creating visual identity and engaging customers to strengthen the image of their brand from a managerial perspective. Digital platforms, social media, and customer-focused marketing efforts can also be utilized to generate positive brand impressions and boost consumer purchase intent, which will result in sustainable competitive advantage in today's highly dynamic market.

Conclusion

The present study attempted to find out the mediation of brand image in between Strategic branding and purchase intention of the consumers in Tiruchirappalli. The empirical results showed that strategic branding is very effective in improving the brand image and purchasing intention of customers, and the brand image has a significant positive effect on the purchasing intention of customers. Furthermore, mediation analysis results showed that the brand image is an important mediating variable between strategic branding and consumer purchase intention. The results indicate that well-designed branding strategies, which create positive brand perceptions and brand relationships with consumers, can reinforce consumer buying intention. Taken as a whole, the study adds to the

existing literature on branding and offers implications for practice to marketers interested in improving organizational performance through effective strategic branding and brand image management.

Future Research Directions

The present study gives important insights into the relationship between strategic branding, brand image and consumer purchase intention, but some research opportunities are still present for future studies. The proposed framework could be further expanded with the inclusion of other mediating factors like brand trust, brand loyalty, perceived value, customer engagement, and brand experience in future studies to gain a deeper understanding of consumer behavior. Other variables that could be studied are moderating variables such as age, gender, income, cultural orientation, or digital literacy – which can be used to understand differences between consumer segments. Future research studies that compare more than one city, state or country would enhance the generalizability of the results, and future research designs with longitudinal designs would allow for a better understanding of how consumer perception and purchase intention change over time. Furthermore, future research could focus on particular industries like retail, healthcare, tourism, banking, luxury, and e-commerce, to gain insights into the branding dynamics within those specific industries in the changing digital landscape.

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