



Shri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara Institute for Management Development, Mysuru, India

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**A Comprehensive Study of Brand Identity–Perception  
Misalignment and Its Influence on Consumer Trust and Loyalty in  
India’s Quick Commerce Sector**

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**Abstract**

India's quick commerce sector faces intense competition among Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart, promising 10-30 minute deliveries amid USD 6-7 billion GMV growth. For sustainable loyalty, platforms must analyze brand identity-perception gaps between projected speed/reliability promises and consumers' experiences of delays, substitutions, and service failures. This conceptual research proposal investigates how misalignment influences trust and loyalty in India's quick commerce ecosystem.

The study conceptualizes misalignment using Aaker's Brand Personality Model and Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism, proposing sequential mediation: misalignment reduces trust, satisfaction, relationship quality, identification, and loyalty. Reference groups, perceived risk, and cultural collectivism moderate effects, with non-linear patterns where moderate gaps optimize outcomes.

Literature synthesis reveals operational volatility creates persistent gaps, amplified by Indian consumers' collectivistic orientations. The conceptual framework identifies speed/reliability, service recovery, and cultural adaptation as vital alignment attributes, while over-promising and quality inconsistencies require recalibration. Platform-specific diagnostics across major players provide strategies for realistic identity signaling and prompt misalignment handling.

**Introduction**

India’s quick commerce sector has rapidly moved from novelty to mainstream, promising 10- 30 minute delivery of groceries and daily essentials through dense dark-store networks in major cities. (Mohan, 2025). Platforms such as Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart now dominate urban purchase occasions for top-up and impulse buys, with Blinkit alone holding around 46% market share in early 2025 and leading in monthly active users. In this ultra-fast context, brand identity, i.e., what a platform claims to stand for in terms of speed, reliability, value, and experience competes with consumers’ lived perceptions shaped by actual delivery times, product quality, and service resolution. (Paladhi, n.d.)

Brand theory distinguishes brand identity (firm-defined essence and promises) from brand image (consumer-held beliefs and associations), and stresses that alignment between the two is essential for strong brands. Identity originates from the company, while image reflects consumer perceptions; congruence between them is linked to higher loyalty. When identity and perception diverge, brand identity–perception misalignment, the consumers may experience cognitive dissonance, reduced trust, and weaker relational bonds with the brand. In quick commerce, repeated micro-failures such as late

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delivers or quality issues can quickly widen this misalignment, despite aggressive identity claims around “instant” and “reliable” service. (Nandan, 2005, 264-278)

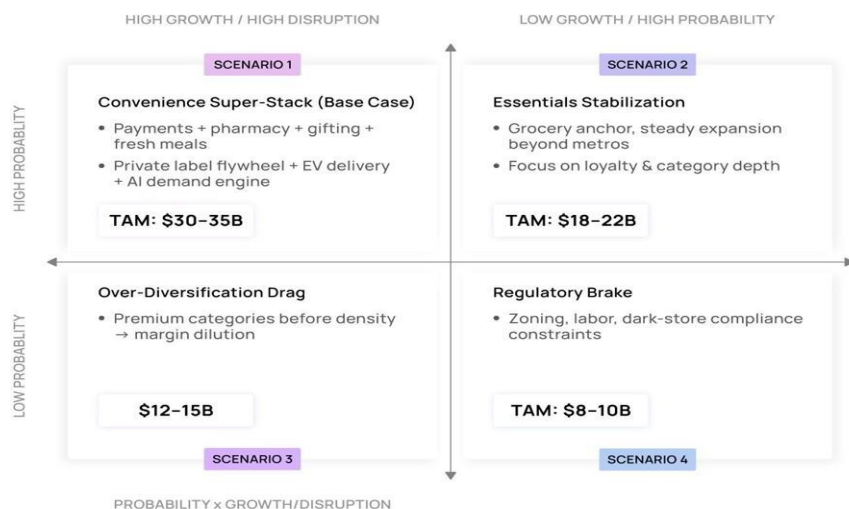
Existing studies show that trust, satisfaction, and relationship quality are core mediators between what brands communicate and whether consumers repurchase or recommend them. Corporate image influences trust, that online experience and value co-creation drive relationship quality, and that these, in turn, shape repurchase intentions and loyalty. However, most of this work is situated in general e-commerce or B2B services rather than India’s quick commerce ecosystem. This study therefore focuses on brand identity–perception misalignment in Indian quick commerce and investigates how it affects consumer trust, brand satisfaction, relationship quality, brand identification, and ultimately loyalty/repurchase intention within this fast-paced retail environment. (Pramudya et al., 2018, 224-233)

### Industry Background – Quick Commerce in India

Quick commerce, often described as “e-commerce on steroids,” promises near-instant delivery (typically 10–30 minutes) by combining hyperlocal dark stores, algorithmic routing, and high-order frequency, differentiating it sharply from traditional 1–3 day e-commerce. In India, the model scaled rapidly from 2021 onwards, with Blinkit’s repositioning and the entry of Zepto and Swiggy Instamart triggering a wave of VC funding and dense micro-fulfilment build-out in metros. By 2024, India’s quick commerce GMV was estimated at about USD 6– 7 billion, with forecasts of ~40% annual growth through 2030, reflecting strong consumer adoption of ultra-fast delivery for both essentials and discretionary categories. (*India’s Quick- Commerce Market 2025-26, 2025*)

Market structure is already highly concentrated. Reports for late 2024 show Blinkit at roughly 46% share, Zepto around 29%, and Swiggy Instamart about 24–25%, with BigBasket Now and Dunzo as niche players. (Strumpf et al., 2025). These platforms are expanding beyond top-tier metros into Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, while experimenting with higher-margin categories like electronics, beauty, and festive gifting, turning quick commerce from a pure convenience channel into a mainstream retail habit (Gupta, 2025).

India Q-Commerce Scenarios (2025–2030)



KEN RESEARCH

Source : Ken Research

Figure 1 Indian Quick Commerce Scenarios (2025-2030)

Industry analyses emphasize that speed is now a basic expectation, while trust, reliability, and experience increasingly differentiate players. As one executive summary frames it: “Speed is the on-

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ramp; trust and predictability are the destination,” highlighting that loyalty depends on perceived consistency, transparency, and quality rather than speed alone. (Customer Expectations in Quick Commerce: How to Build Trust & Loyalty, 2025). Academic and practitioner work on quick commerce loyalty in India underlines similar themes. A recent sectoral study on determinants of loyalty in quick commerce finds that perceived service quality, trust, commitment, and perceived value all significantly predict loyalty, with ease of switching making it imperative for platforms to deliver value beyond transactional convenience. (Singh et al., 2025)

This aligns with broader online retail findings in your literature review, where trust and satisfaction mediate the relationship between image/experience and repurchase intentions. At the same time, the identity–image gap has been empirically documented for Indian brands on Instagram, where misalignment between intended identity and user-generated image is shaped by collectivistic cultural responses and platform-specific communication. Indian consumers’ responses to online branding differ from Western markets, complicating identity management in digital-first sectors (Daruri & V., 2023, 768-791). Despite these insights, no existing work directly examines brand identity–perception misalignment in India’s quick commerce sector, nor how that misalignment influences trust and loyalty under conditions of high frequency, low involvement, and intense competition. The industry background thus presents a paradox: brands differentiate on bold identity claims around speed, quality, and reliability, but the very volatility of quick commerce operations (stock-outs, last-minute substitutions, delivery delays) makes misalignment structurally likely, with unknown long-term consequences for consumer trust and loyalty (Customer Expectations in Quick Commerce: How to Build Trust & Loyalty, 2025).

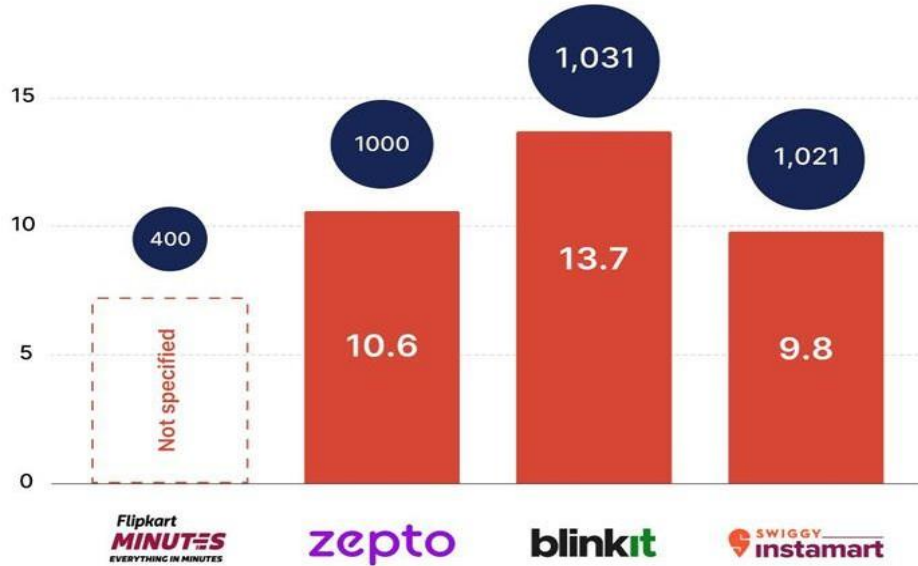
### **Relevance of the Study – Indian Context**

India’s consumer base is young, digitally savvy, and rapidly adopting app-based commerce, making it a critical test-bed for how brand identity and perception interact in high-speed retail. Indian consumers’ responses to brand communication are shaped by collectivistic cultural orientations and strong reference-group influence, particularly family and peers. (Nandan, 2005, 264-278) highlights the role of primary reference groups in shaping perceptions of brand identity, congruence, and satisfaction, while (Daruri & V., 2023, 768- 791) shows that identity–image alignment for Indian e-commerce brands on Instagram is filtered through local cultural expectations, not just global positioning. This suggests that reference groups and cultural factors can moderate how misalignment is interpreted—either cushioning its impact when peers endorse a brand, or amplifying scepticism when narratives clash with shared experiences.

From a market perspective, quick commerce now touches daily life in major Indian cities. Reports indicate that Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart together process hundreds of thousands of orders per day, with millions of monthly active users and high order frequency per customer (Malik, 2025).

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Monthly Active Users (Mn) ■ Dark Stores ■



Inc42

*Figure 2 Competitors in Quick Commerce*

This high engagement produces rich, repeated contact between consumers and platforms, making small mismatches between identity claims and actual performance highly salient over time. At the same time, consumers can switch between apps almost costlessly, heightening the importance of trust and perceived relationship quality for retaining loyalty in India's price- and convenience-sensitive environment (Singh et al., 2025).

Thematically, it also shows that trust, value congruence, and online experience drove digital loyalty during the pandemic, especially in high-risk online categories like fresh food and groceries. (Pu et al., 2025, 1673-1685) document that in online fresh food and e-commerce settings, perceived quality, trust, and perceived risk jointly influence loyalty, with trust often mediating the effect of image and experience on repurchase intentions. Yet these mechanisms have not been tested in India's 10-minute delivery model, where operational volatility (stock-outs, substitutions) is structurally higher and speed promises are more aggressive. (K et al., 2022). Addressing this gap is particularly relevant for Indian brands because identity-perception misalignment in quick commerce could erode trust not only in a single app but in the broader narrative of digital convenience and reliability, undermining long-term ecosystem growth (Smith et al., 2022, 1175-1189).

### Identification of Research Gap

While branding literature and quick commerce studies have gained much attention, the role of brand identity-perception misalignment in shaping consumer trust and loyalty remains poorly understood. Most brand management research focuses on general identity-image dynamics or corporate branding contexts, while quick commerce studies emphasise operational metrics like delivery speed and service quality rather than perceptual gaps between platform promises and consumer experiences. Very few studies explore how the disconnect between quick commerce platforms' identity claims ("10-minute



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delivery, always reliable”) and actual consumer perceptions affects trust formation, especially when compared to traditional e-commerce where expectations are less aggressive.

Globally, some branding research has examined perceptual alignment in digital and service contexts, but we still know little about how identity–perception misalignment operates in high-frequency, low-involvement sectors like quick commerce, particularly in fast-growing markets like India where cultural collectivism and reference group influence shape brand evaluations differently from Western markets. Industry reports document operational challenges such as inconsistent quality and service recovery in Indian quick commerce (“India's Quick Commerce Player Reach 96% On-Time Delivery Thanks To Micro-Warehouse Automation”), yet academic research has not connected these gaps to systematic erosion of trust and loyalty through mediating mechanisms like satisfaction, identification, and relationship quality.

This study aims to fill that gap by developing and empirically testing a comprehensive model of brand identity–perception misalignment that examines its direct and indirect effects on consumer loyalty in India's quick commerce sector, while incorporating Indian-specific moderators (reference groups, perceived risk) and testing non-linear congruence effects across major platforms (Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart).

**Research Objectives and Research Questions**

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***General Objective***

To examine the impact of brand identity–perception misalignment on consumer trust and loyalty in India's quick commerce sector, and to identify the mediating mechanisms and moderating conditions that shape these relationships.

***Specific Objectives***

1. To conceptualise and measure brand identity–perception misalignment in the quick commerce context using established frameworks (Aaker, Kapferer, BIAF).
2. To test the sequential mediating effects of brand satisfaction, consumer trust, brand identification, and relationship quality on the misalignment-loyalty relationship.
3. To investigate how reference groups (family/peers) and perceived risk moderate the effect of misalignment on trust and satisfaction.
4. To examine non-linear effects of misalignment, testing whether moderate misalignment produces more favourable outcomes than perfect or extreme alignment.
5. To compare misalignment-loyalty dynamics across major platforms (Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart) and provide platform-specific recommendations.

**Research Questions**

***RQ1: Core Relationship***

To what extent does brand identity–perception misalignment negatively affect consumer loyalty (repurchase intention, recommendation, switching resistance) in India's quick commerce sector?

***RQ2: Mediating Mechanisms***

Through which sequential mediating pathways-brand satisfaction → consumer trust → brand identification → relationship quality-does misalignment influence consumer loyalty?

***RQ3: Moderating Effects***

How do reference groups (family/peer influence) and perceived risk moderate the relationship between brand identity–perception misalignment and consumer trust/satisfaction?

***RQ4: Non-Linear Effects***

Does the relationship between identity–perception misalignment and consumer outcomes exhibit non-linear effects, with moderate misalignment potentially optimal compared to perfect alignment or extreme gaps?

***RQ5: Platform Differences***

Do the strength and pattern of misalignment-trust-loyalty relationships differ across major quick commerce platforms (Blinkit vs. Zepto vs. Swiggy Instamart)?

**Problem Statement**

Branding literature establishes that alignment between brand identity (what the firm intends to communicate) and brand image (what consumers perceive) is a prerequisite for strong, loyal customer relationships. Congruence between identity and image enhances loyalty, while perceptual alignment is a condition that fosters belonging and favourable stakeholder behaviours. Empirical models in your review further show that when identity aligns with perceived lifestyle or values, it increases satisfaction, trust, and repurchase intentions through self-congruity and identification mechanisms.

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However, recent work also cautions that congruence is not uniformly beneficial: ads or recommendations that are “too congruent” can feel manipulative or concealed, creating reactance and harming user experience. Very high content congruence in in-feed advertising can reduce click-through intention because users perceive it as deceptive (Fan et al., 2025).

In India’s quick commerce sector, leading platforms project strong brand identities centred on extreme speed, reliability, and convenience, yet consumer experiences often include delayed deliveries, product substitutions, freshness concerns, and inconsistent customer support. This creates a structural risk of brand identity–perception misalignment: the larger the gap between “10–15 minute, high-quality, always-on service” as promised and what is actually experienced at the doorstep, the more likely trust erosion becomes. Existing quick commerce research in India has begun to isolate determinants of loyalty—such as perceived quality, trust, perceived value, and perceived risk—but has not explicitly modelled the misalignment gap between identity and perception as a driver of trust and loyalty outcomes (Mohan, 2025).

There is also limited empirical work exploring how Indian cultural factors—such as collectivism, socially anchored decision-making, and scepticism about overly polished sustainability or performance claims—moderate the impact of identity–perception misalignment on trust (V & Kumar, 2023, 768-791).

This leads to the central problem this study addresses:



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In India’s quick commerce sector, where platforms rely on bold identity claims around speed, reliability, and convenience to attract and retain users, to what extent does brand identity– perception misalignment erode consumer trust and loyalty, through which mediating mechanisms (satisfaction, relationship quality, brand identification, trust), and under what moderating conditions (reference groups, perceived risk, cultural factors) do these effects intensify or attenuate?

## Literature Review

### Conceptual Definitions and Theoretical Framework

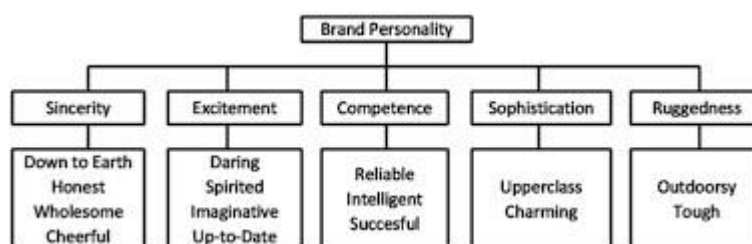
This study explores how the concept of brand identity–perception misalignment can inform and influence modern branding strategy in quick commerce, particularly through the lens of consumer experience and platform communication. It seeks to understand how platforms can align their strategic identity with consumer perceptions, fostering trust and loyalty without compromising operational realities or competitive positioning.

Brand identity, also referred to as strategic brand positioning or brand essence, encompasses the unique set of associations, values, and promises that the firm seeks to create and maintain among stakeholders (Kapferer, 2005). Rather than focusing solely on functional attributes, strong brand identity integrates emotional, cultural, and relational elements to differentiate in competitive markets (Nandan, 2005).

Brand image, by contrast, reflects consumer perceptions-the set of beliefs, associations, and experiences that shape how stakeholders view the brand. This form of perception is often motivated by direct interactions, word-of-mouth, and digital touchpoints, particularly in service-heavy sectors like quick commerce where delivery performance defines reality.

In traditional e-commerce, branding strategies have been primarily designed to create desire, drive visibility, and increase transaction volume. However, growing awareness of service volatility and consumer expectations has led to a rethinking of this role. As branding scholars suggest, effective identity management requires platforms to shift from purely functional promises to creating long-term relational value (Abratt & Bick, 2010). (Anisimova, 2010) When platforms incorporate consistent identity signals across app experience, delivery interactions, and service recovery, they can play a critical role in steering consumers toward sustained loyalty and advocacy.

Five theoretical frameworks support this evolution in branding strategy:

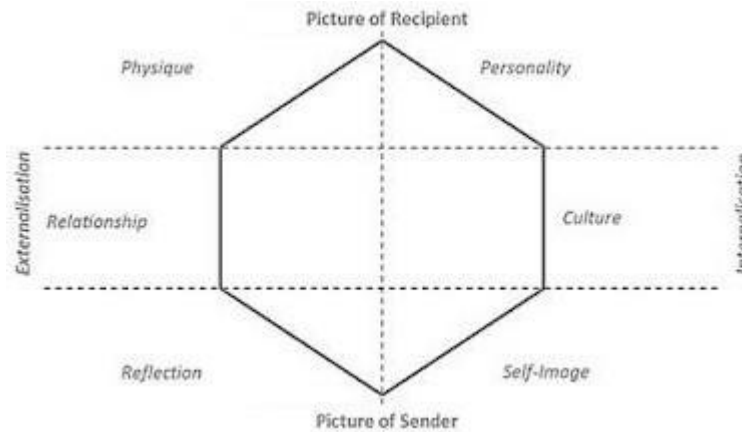


*Figure 3 Aaker's Brand Personality Model 1997*

Aaker's Brand Personality Model (Aaker, 1997) explains how consumers attribute human- like personality traits to brands-sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, ruggedness-making it especially useful for understanding emotional connections in digital

services. In quick commerce research, this framework supports examination of how platforms like Blinkit project competence (reliable delivery) and excitement (instant gratification), and how perceived mismatches affect loyalty without eroding trust.





*Figure 4 Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism*

Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2005) identifies six facets of identity-physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, self-image-providing a structured lens to evaluate internal coherence and external alignment. This model is highly relevant as it offers practical levers for diagnosing where quick commerce platforms falter (e.g., relationship via poor service recovery), aligning with the aim of identifying strategic identity tactics that build sustainable equity.

Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF) (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012) expands focus from functional attributes to dual perceptions of warmth/intentions and competence/ability, treating brands as human-like agents. Platforms that demonstrate both caring service and reliable execution strengthen authenticity and advocacy, validating the premise that identity alignment serves both loyalty and competitive differentiation (*Brands as Intentional Agents Framework: How Perceived Intentions and Ability Can Map Brand Perception*, 2014)

Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1982) focuses on psychological fit between brand image and consumer self-concept, influencing behaviour through identification and attachment (Dabija, 2022). This theory provides insight into non-coercive strategies that can shift consumer norms toward platform loyalty, particularly when identity signals match lifestyle values like convenience and efficiency.

Theory of Perceived Congruence Effects suggests that alignment between identity and perception drives positive outcomes, though recent work cautions against over-alignment that feels manipulative (Fan et al., 2025). If platform communication can activate realistic expectations alongside competence signals, it may trigger stronger loyalty without the pitfalls of unmet promises.

Finally, managing identity-perception alignment is not just strategically desirable, it is also competitively advantageous. As younger consumers increasingly prioritise reliability alongside speed, platforms that authentically reflect these ideals build deeper connections and lasting loyalty (Nielsen, 2018). Moreover, investor focus on sustainable growth metrics reinforces the need for trust-building behaviour (Gupta, 2025). Identity-aligned strategies can therefore help platforms future-proof their models while balancing operational, relational, and commercial imperatives.

### **Platform Perspective**

The main goals of quick commerce branding are to establish awareness, build habitual usage, and drive repeat transactions. However, the function of identity management is being reassessed in light of growing consumer expectations for reliability beyond speed. Kotler (2010) argues that modern branding requires a shift from short-term acquisition to long-term relational value. When platforms align identity signals with service delivery, they can encourage habitual loyalty, steering users from transactional convenience toward enduring platform preference.

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Globally, the intersection of branding and digital services has attracted growing academic interest. Aaker (1997) highlights the importance of personality congruence for emotional attachment, while Kapferer (2005) emphasises holistic identity coherence across facets.

However, recent studies caution that consumers view aggressive promises with scepticism when performance lags, particularly in high-expectation sectors (Goel & Sharma, 2025)

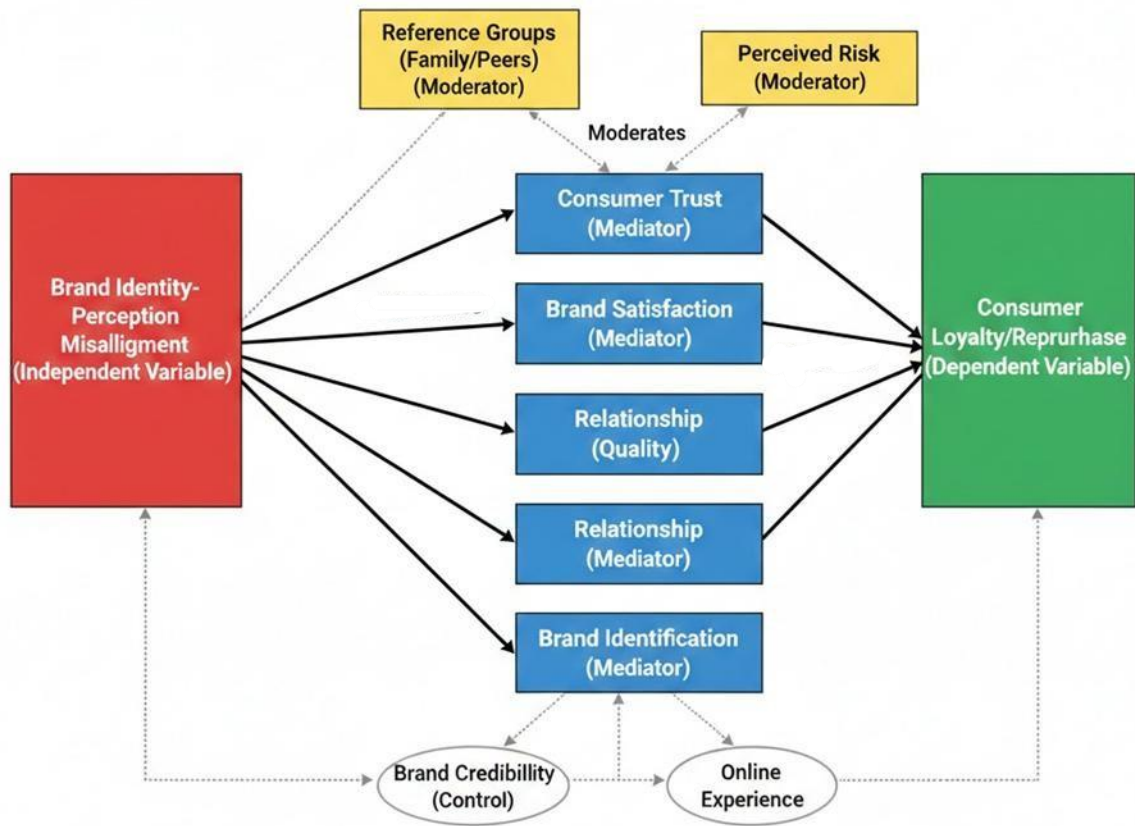
In the Indian context, quick commerce platforms must localise identity narratives to resonate with price-sensitive yet convenience-driven consumers. Industry reports note that while Blinkit leads with 46% market share, loyalty remains vulnerable to service inconsistencies (Mohan, 2025). Complementing this, analyses underscore that trust-building through consistent quality is essential for retention beyond discounts

### **Consumer Perspective**

Ghodeswar (2021) introduced frameworks linking identity alignment with perceptual congruence, emphasising that mismatch erodes satisfaction in B2B services-a pattern likely amplified in consumer-facing quick commerce. (Steenkamp & Zwakala, 2021) Unlike transactional e-commerce, quick commerce loyalty considers not only speed but also reliability and risk perception.

In India, research on digital service loyalty is emerging. KPMG reports reveal that while 70%+ consumers value convenience, only consistent service translates to repeat usage, exposing an expectation-performance gap (Pu et al., 2025). Similarly, platform studies indicate that while 96% on-time delivery builds initial trust, quality inconsistencies drive churn (“India's Quick Commerce Player Reach 96% On-Time Delivery Thanks To Micro- Warehouse Automation.”)

### **Conceptual Framework**



**Figure 5 Conceptual Framework: Brand Identity-Perception Misalignment and Consumer Loyalty in India's Quick Commerce Sector**

The conceptual framework presented here delineates the theoretical relationships among key constructs central to this study. The independent variable, brand identity-perception misalignment, positioned in the red rectangle, operationalizes the divergence between firms' intended brand positioning characterized by promises of rapid delivery and operational reliability and consumers' actual brand experiences marked by service inconsistencies prevalent in quick commerce platforms.

Direct causal pathways, represented by solid arrows, transmit effects from the independent variable through four sequential mediating constructs depicted in blue rectangles: consumer trust, brand satisfaction, perceived brand-consumer relationship quality, and brand identification. These mediators articulate the psychological transmission mechanism whereby perceptual incongruities diminish trust, which subsequently erodes satisfaction, weakens relational bonds, and reduces consumer identification, culminating in diminished consumer loyalty/repurchase intention (green rectangle).

Moderating influences from reference groups (family/peers) and perceived risk rendered as yellow rectangles with dashed "moderates" arrows intersect primary causal pathways, signifying their conditional role in amplifying or attenuating relationship magnitudes. Within India's collectivistic cultural context, social referents exert pronounced influence on brand evaluations, while transaction risk sensitivity characteristic of quick commerce magnifies misalignment consequences.

Control variables, brand credibility and online experience, shown in gray with dotted connectors, systematically influence all focal relationships while held constant in model specification.

This integrated framework addresses explicit literature gaps concerning quick commerce exclusion and underexplored trust-repurchase dynamics in high-velocity retail contexts.

### **Expected Contribution of the Study**

#### ***Theoretical Contributions***

1. First empirical test of brand identity–perception misalignment in quick commerce: Extends identity-image literature to a novel, high-growth sector characterised by operational volatility and aggressive promises.
2. Sequential mediation framework: Validates satisfaction → trust → identification → relationship quality → loyalty chain in high-frequency digital retail.
3. Indian cultural moderators: Tests reference group influence and collectivism as boundary conditions for Western-derived congruence models.
4. Non-linear congruence effects: Provides empirical evidence on inverted-U relationship between misalignment and outcomes, challenging "more alignment is always better" assumption.

#### ***Methodological Contributions***

1. Novel misalignment measurement: Develops and validates profile-deviation approach (|Intended Identity - Perceived Image|) for quick commerce context.
2. Multi-group SEM: Tests measurement invariance and path differences across platforms (Blinkit/Zepto/Instamart).
3. Polynomial regression: Models non-linear effects using linear + quadratic terms.

#### ***Managerial Contributions***

1. Platform-specific insights: Identifies which identity attributes (speed vs. quality vs. service) drive most misalignment for each platform.
2. Optimal misalignment range: Quantifies "acceptable" performance gaps that maintain trust without eroding loyalty.
3. Trust-building levers: Shows which mediators (satisfaction vs. relationship quality) platforms should prioritise based on current positioning.
4. Cultural adaptation: Demonstrates how reference groups can buffer or amplify misalignment effects in Indian market.

Practical Framework: Actionable diagnostic tool combining misalignment scores, mediator diagnostics, and moderator profiles to help quick commerce platforms align identity claims with operational reality.

### **Limitations**

1. Geographic scope: Focuses on top metros (Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore) where quick commerce penetration is highest; findings may not generalise to Tier-2/3 cities with different infrastructure and consumer expectations.

2. Platform focus: Limited to top 3 players (Blinkit, Zepto, Instamart); niche players and regional platforms excluded. Future research could compare established vs. challenger brands.
3. Category scope: Emphasises groceries/essentials; findings may differ for higher- margin categories (beauty, electronics) with different risk profiles and involvement levels.
4. Cultural generalisation: Indian collectivism tested as moderator, but sub-cultural differences (North vs. South India, urban vs. semi-urban) not examined.

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