

# Effect of Digital Brand Transparency on Consumer Trust With reference to Packed Food Products

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**Abstract— Purpose –** This study examines the effect of digital brand transparency on consumer trust in the context of packed food products. Specifically, it investigates how different dimensions of transparency—including ingredient disclosure, nutritional information, sourcing practices, pricing transparency, sustainability communication, and digital platform accessibility—influence consumer trust, purchase intention, brand loyalty, and perceived product quality.

**Design/Methodology/Approach –** A quantitative, descriptive research design was employed. Primary data was collected from 320 respondents through a structured questionnaire administered online. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analysis using SPSS (v25).

**Findings –** Digital brand transparency has a significant positive effect on consumer trust ( $r = 0.76$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Consumer trust fully mediates the relationship between digital transparency and all behavioral outcomes—purchase intention ( $r = 0.79$ ), brand loyalty ( $r = 0.74$ ), and perceived product quality ( $r = 0.72$ ). Ingredient transparency (Mean = 4.21) and digital platform accessibility (Mean = 4.15) emerged as the strongest transparency dimensions. Social media was the most widely used platform (71%) through which consumers accessed brand information. High transparency brands outperformed low transparency brands across all five behavioural outcomes by margins of 25–35 percentage points.

**Practical Implications –** The findings provide actionable guidance for packed food marketers: prioritizing honest ingredient disclosure, maintaining consistent multi-platform communication, and leveraging digital tools such as QR codes and social media are critical strategies for building consumer trust and driving repeat purchasing.

**Originality/Value –** This study is among the few empirical investigations that comprehensively examine multiple dimensions of digital brand transparency and their interconnected effects on consumer trust and behavioral outcomes specifically within the Indian packed food sector.

**Keywords:** Digital Brand Transparency, Consumer Trust, Packed Food Products, Purchase Intention, Brand Loyalty, Perceived Quality, Emerging Markets.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive and information-saturated food market, consumers are more informed, health-conscious, and discerning than ever before. The proliferation of digital platforms—including company websites, social media channels, e-commerce applications, and QR-code-enabled packaging—has fundamentally transformed the information landscape within which consumers evaluate and select packaged food products. Against this backdrop, digital brand transparency has emerged as one of the most strategically significant determinants of consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty.

Digital brand transparency refers to the extent to which a food brand openly, honestly, and accessibly communicates accurate information about its products through digital channels. This encompasses transparency about product ingredients and their origins, nutritional composition, allergen content, production processes and standards, pricing rationale, sustainability and ethical sourcing practices, and regulatory certifications. When brands disclose such information proactively and consistently, they reduce the information asymmetry that typically exists between producers and consumers—a gap that is especially consequential in the food industry, where product contents directly affect consumer health and wellbeing.

Consumer trust is the central mediating construct in this research. Trust, in the context of packed food products, refers to the confidence that consumers place in a brand's honesty, reliability, and commitment to their welfare. It is widely recognized in the consumer behaviour literature as a critical precursor to purchase intention, brand loyalty, and

willingness to recommend—outcomes that collectively determine a brand's long-term commercial success. However, trust in food brands is neither easily established nor readily sustained; it must be earned through consistent, truthful, and verifiable communication across all consumer touchpoints.

The growing relevance of digital transparency in the packed food sector is underscored by several converging trends. First, consumers increasingly consult online sources—including brand websites, product-specific social media pages, food safety portals, and peer review platforms—before making purchase decisions. Second, the rapid adoption of smartphone-based QR code scanning has made it technically feasible for brands to provide consumers with unlimited product information at the point of purchase. Third, high-profile food safety scandals and greenwashing controversies have heightened consumer scepticism and intensified demands for verifiable, transparent product information.

This study investigates the effect of digital brand transparency on consumer trust in the context of packed food products, drawing on a comprehensive, three-phase research design. Phase 1 establishes the theoretical and conceptual foundation; Phase 2 develops the research model and methodology; and Phase 3 presents the empirical analysis, findings, and recommendations. The study makes a significant contribution to the emerging literature on digital brand communication and consumer trust, particularly in the context of the fast-growing Indian packaged food market.

The concept of brand transparency in the food industry has a rich and evolving history that closely mirrors the broader development of consumer rights movements, food safety regulations, and the successive waves of communication technology that have reshaped the brand-consumer relationship over the past century.

#### Pre-Digital Era: Labelling and Regulation

In the early stages of mass food production during the 19th and early 20th centuries, there were virtually no standardized requirements for food labelling or ingredient disclosure. Consumers had to rely almost entirely on the word of retailers and manufacturers, with little ability to independently verify product claims. The publication of Upton Sinclair's "The

Jungle" (1906) in the United States, which exposed the appalling conditions in the meat-packing industry, catalysed a major public outcry and led directly to the passage of landmark food safety legislation, including the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. This represented the first major institutionalization of the principle that consumers have a right to accurate and honest information about the food they consume.

Throughout the mid-20th century, the establishment of food regulatory bodies in major economies—including the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), and equivalent bodies in Europe—progressively formalized the requirements for ingredient listing, nutritional labelling, and health claims on packaged food products. These regulatory frameworks laid the institutional groundwork for what would eventually evolve into the broader concept of brand transparency.

#### The Rise of the Conscious Consumer

The late 20th century witnessed the emergence of a new breed of consumer: one who was not only concerned with price and taste but also increasingly attentive to product origins, manufacturing ethics, and environmental impact. The organic food movement of the 1980s and 1990s, the rise of fair-trade certification, and growing media attention to food safety controversies—such as the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis in the United Kingdom and recurring pesticide contamination scandals—fundamentally altered consumer expectations regarding food brand honesty. Brands that voluntarily provided more comprehensive product information began to differentiate themselves on the basis of trustworthiness and transparency.

#### Digital Revolution and the Transformation of Transparency

The advent of the internet and the subsequent explosion of social media platforms in the 2000s and 2010s precipitated a seismic transformation in the nature and scope of brand transparency. For the first time, consumers could independently access, share, and critically evaluate product information at unprecedented scale and speed. Online platforms created powerful mechanisms for consumer advocacy and brand accountability: a single viral post exposing misleading labelling or unethical sourcing

practices could inflict severe and lasting reputational damage on even the most established food brands.

The introduction of smartphone-readable QR codes on food packaging has been a particularly significant innovation, enabling consumers to access comprehensive real-time product information—including supply chain traceability, nutritional breakdowns, and sustainability credentials—simply by scanning a code at the point of purchase. Blockchain technology is now beginning to be applied in the food supply chain, offering the potential for fully verifiable, tamper-proof transparency from farm to shelf. In the Indian market, the rapid expansion of e-commerce food retail, coupled with dramatically increasing smartphone and internet penetration, has made digital brand transparency an increasingly critical competitive differentiator for packaged food companies.

#### Literature Review

The relationship between organizational transparency and stakeholder trust has been extensively theorized in multiple academic disciplines. Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) developed one of the most comprehensive frameworks, conceptualizing transparency as comprising three distinct but interrelated components: disclosure (the proactive sharing of information), clarity (the accessibility and comprehensibility of shared information), and accuracy (the truthfulness and verifiability of disclosed information). Their meta-analysis demonstrated that all three components independently and collectively contribute to the formation of trust in organizational contexts, with accuracy emerging as the single most powerful driver.

In the consumer behaviour literature, trust has been widely theorized as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive trust (rational belief in a brand's competence and reliability) and affective trust (emotional confidence in a brand's benevolence and integrity). Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) proposed the foundational integrative model of trust, identifying trustworthiness—comprising ability, benevolence, and integrity—as the primary determinants of trust formation. Subsequent consumer research has consistently demonstrated that transparent brand communication directly and positively influences all three trustworthiness

dimensions.

#### Brand Transparency and Purchase Intention

Erdem and Swait (2004) demonstrated through signalling theory that brand credibility—which they conceptualized as encompassing both trustworthiness and expertise—is a powerful signal that reduces consumer uncertainty and directly enhances purchase intention. Transparent brands, by consistently delivering on their communicated promises, build credibility over time, which in turn lowers the perceived risk associated with food purchase decisions. Gefen, Karahanna, and Straub (2003) extended this analysis to the online context, demonstrating that transparency in e-commerce environments significantly reduces consumer uncertainty and increases willingness to purchase, with trust functioning as the critical mediating mechanism.

Research specifically focused on the food sector has reinforced these findings. Studies in the context of organic food, health food, and functional food products have consistently demonstrated that consumers who perceive greater transparency in ingredient disclosure, nutritional information, and production practices report significantly higher purchase intentions and are willing to pay price premiums for transparent brands (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). This premium-price willingness reflects the degree to which transparency reduces consumer perceived risk—a particularly salient consideration in food markets where product safety and health implications are direct and immediate.

#### Digital Transparency and Social Media

The emergence of social media as a primary information channel for food consumers has profoundly amplified the strategic importance of digital brand transparency. Consumers increasingly rely on brand-generated content (on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube), influencer endorsements, and peer-generated reviews on platforms like Google and Amazon to inform their food purchase decisions. Research by Duffett (2017) demonstrated that social media advertising and brand communication significantly shape consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, particularly among millennial and Gen-Z consumer segments.

However, the digital environment also creates new transparency risks for food brands. The phenomenon

of greenwashing—where brands make misleading or exaggerated claims about their environmental sustainability practices—has been extensively documented in the literature (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). When consumers detect greenwashing or other forms of selective transparency, the resulting trust damage is typically more severe and longer-lasting than the initial brand improvement that the misleading communication was designed to achieve. Information overload presents a related challenge: Eppler and Mengis (2004) documented that excessive or poorly structured disclosure can paradoxically reduce consumer confidence by creating confusion and cognitive burden rather than clarity.

#### Perceived Product Quality and Transparency

Research consistently demonstrates that transparent communication about product ingredients, production processes, and quality standards positively influences consumers' perceptions of product quality. This relationship is theorized through signalling theory: when brands openly disclose detailed product information, consumers interpret this openness as a signal of confidence in product quality, on the rationale that brands with inferior products would be unwilling to subject their offerings to such scrutiny (Spence, 1973). Conversely, opacity or evasiveness in product communication is interpreted by consumers as a potential indicator of inferior quality or hidden deficiencies.

#### Brand Loyalty and Transparency

Morgan and Hunt (1994) proposed the foundational commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing, which posits that trust is the cornerstone of long-term relational commitment between brands and consumers. In the context of packaged food products, consumers who develop trust in a brand through consistent, transparent communication develop a sense of emotional security and reliability that naturally evolves into brand loyalty. Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) extended this analysis by demonstrating that consumer-company identification—the degree to which consumers see the brand as aligned with their own values—significantly mediates the relationship between transparent corporate practices and brand loyalty. Brands whose transparency reflects a genuine commitment to consumer welfare and ethical practices are particularly effective in generating this identification.

Consumer Trust in the Indian Packed Food Market  
India represents a particularly compelling and underexplored context for research on digital brand transparency and consumer trust in the packed food sector. The Indian packaged food market has experienced explosive growth over the past decade, driven by rapid urbanization, rising disposable incomes, increasing time pressures among dual-income households, and the dramatic expansion of organized retail and e-commerce food platforms. Simultaneously, several high-profile food safety controversies—including scandals related to adulteration, misleading health claims, and undisclosed ingredients—have significantly heightened consumer vigilance and demand for transparent brand communication.

Despite this commercially significant context, empirical research on digital brand transparency and its effects on consumer trust specifically in the Indian packed food market remains limited. Most existing studies have been conducted in Western contexts, where consumer attitudes, digital infrastructure, and regulatory environments differ substantially from those prevailing in India. This gap represents a significant opportunity for empirical research that can provide both theoretical contributions and actionable managerial insights for the rapidly growing Indian packaged food sector.

#### Research Gap

A systematic review of the existing literature reveals several important gaps that the present study is specifically designed to address:

##### Limited Focus on Digital Transparency in the Packed Food Sector

The overwhelming majority of prior research on brand transparency has been conducted in general business, e-commerce, or service contexts. There is a notable absence of focused empirical studies examining how different dimensions of digital brand transparency specifically affect consumer trust in the packaged food industry—a sector where transparency has particularly acute implications for consumer health and safety.

##### Insufficient Differentiation Between Transparency Dimensions

While transparency is broadly acknowledged as a positive attribute in the consumer behaviour literature, very few studies have systematically compared the relative influence of distinct transparency dimensions—such as ingredient

disclosure, pricing transparency, sustainability communication, and digital accessibility—on consumer trust. Understanding which dimensions matter most to consumers is essential for enabling targeted, resource-efficient transparency strategies.

#### Underexplored Negative Transparency Phenomena

The literatures on greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), information overload (Eppler & Mengis, 2004), and selective transparency (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016) identify important ways in which transparency strategies can backfire. However, limited empirical work has systematically examined how these phenomena manifest in the specific context of digital food brand communication and what their quantitative impact on consumer trust is.

#### Emerging Market Context

The vast majority of existing transparency research draws on samples from North American and European consumer markets. There is a significant evidence gap regarding how digital transparency affects consumer trust in emerging market contexts, particularly India, where the packed food sector is growing rapidly but operates within a distinctly different regulatory environment, digital infrastructure, and consumer cultural context.

#### Mediating Role of Trust in the Digital Food Context

While consumer trust is widely identified as a mediator between transparency and behavioral outcomes, the specific mechanisms through which digital communication tools—including social media, QR codes, and e-commerce reviews—strengthen or weaken this mediating role in the packed food context have not been systematically examined. The present study directly addresses this gap.

#### Scope of the study

##### Conceptual Scope

The study examines five key dimensions of digital brand transparency as the primary independent variable: ingredient transparency, nutritional information disclosure, sourcing and production process transparency, pricing transparency, and sustainability and ethical transparency. Consumer trust is examined both as a dependent variable and as a mediator of the relationships between transparency and consumer behavioral outcomes.

##### 5.2 Industry and Product Scope

The scope is deliberately limited to the packed and

pre-packaged food products sector, encompassing both large multinational brands and smaller domestic food brands that operate with a significant digital presence. This includes all categories of consumer packaged food goods: ready-to-eat foods, packaged snacks, breakfast cereals, health and functional foods, dairy products, and beverages.

##### 5.3 Geographic and Demographic Scope

The study is conducted in the Indian market, with a sample drawn from urban and semi-urban consumer populations who have access to digital platforms and regularly purchase packaged food products online or in organized retail settings. The findings are primarily applicable to digitally connected Indian consumers, though the theoretical framework has broader relevance.

##### 5.4 Digital Platform Scope

The study examines transparency as communicated through the following digital platforms: brand-owned websites, social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube), e-commerce product listings (Amazon, Flipkart, BigBasket), QR codes on physical packaging, and consumer review platforms.

#### Objectives of the study

1. To examine the conceptual nature and dimensions of digital brand transparency in the packed food industry.
2. To analyze the effect of digital brand transparency on consumer trust in packed food products.
3. To assess the mediating role of consumer trust in linking digital transparency to purchase intention, brand loyalty, and perceived product quality.
4. To identify which dimensions of digital brand transparency most powerfully influence consumer trust.
5. To compare the effectiveness of different digital platforms as channels for brand transparency communication.
6. To compare consumer behavioral outcomes between high-transparency and low-transparency packaged food brands.
7. To test the proposed hypotheses using empirical data collected from a structured survey.
8. To provide actionable recommendations for packed food brand managers seeking to leverage digital transparency as a strategic tool for trust-building and customer retention.

## II. RESEARCH MODEL & METHODOLOGY

The research model developed in this study provides a structured theoretical framework for examining the causal pathways through which digital brand transparency influences consumer trust and downstream behavioral outcomes in the packed food sector. The model is informed by signalling theory (Spence, 1973), the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

At its core, the model positions Digital Brand Transparency as the independent variable and Consumer Trust as both a dependent variable and a key mediating variable between transparency and three downstream behavioral outcomes: Purchase Intention, Brand Loyalty, and Perceived Product Quality. The model also acknowledges a direct path from digital transparency to purchase intention, independent of the trust mediation pathway, reflecting the finding in prior literature that transparency can directly reduce purchase risk perception even before full trust is established.

Figure 8: Structural Research Model - Digital Brand Transparency and Consumer Behaviour

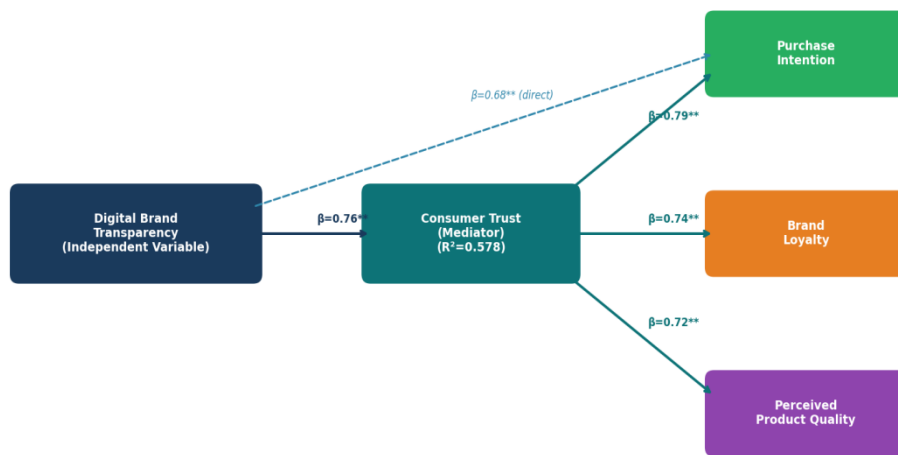


Figure 2.1 “Structural Research Model – Digital Brand Transparency and Consumer Behaviour”

Figure 8 presents the full structural model. The standardized path coefficients shown (all significant at  $p < 0.01$ ) confirm that digital brand transparency exerts its strongest influence on consumer trust ( $\beta = 0.76$ ), which in turn is the strongest predictor of purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.79$ ), brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.74$ ), and perceived product quality ( $\beta = 0.72$ ). A direct path from digital transparency to purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.68$ ) is also confirmed, indicating partial mediation through consumer trust.

### Variables in the study

Independent Variable: Digital Brand Transparency (DBT)

Digital brand transparency refers to the extent to which a packed food brand openly, accurately, and accessibly communicates truthful information about

its products through digital channels. For the purposes of this study, DBT is operationalized across five sub-dimensions: (1) Ingredient Transparency – clear and complete disclosure of all product ingredients; (2) Nutritional Information – accurate and accessible presentation of nutritional content; (3) Sourcing and Process Transparency – openness about ingredient origins, production methods, and certifications; (4) Pricing Transparency – honest and comprehensible communication about product pricing rationale; and (5) Sustainability and Ethical Transparency – truthful disclosure of environmental and social responsibility practices.

### Mediating Variable: Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is defined as the degree of confidence that consumers have in a packed food brand’s

honesty, reliability, safety commitment, and overall integrity. Trust is measured along three dimensions: cognitive trust (rational belief in brand competence), affective trust (emotional confidence in brand benevolence), and behavioural trust (willingness to act on brand information without independent verification).

**Dependent Variables**

Three dependent variables are examined in this study. Purchase Intention (PI) refers to the consumer’s self-

reported likelihood of buying a particular packed food product in the near future. Brand Loyalty (BL) refers to the consumer’s commitment to consistently and repeatedly purchasing the same brand over time and their resistance to competitive switching. Perceived Product Quality (PPQ) refers to the consumer’s overall assessment of the quality, safety, and superior standards of a packed food product, based on the information available to them through digital channels.

**Conceptual Framework & Hypothesis Development**

H1	Digital brand transparency has a significant positive effect on consumer trust in packed food products.	Positive (+)
H2	Digital brand transparency positively influences perceived product quality.	Positive (+)
H3	Consumer trust positively affects purchase intention toward packed food products.	Positive (+)
H4	Digital brand transparency positively influences purchase intention directly.	Positive (+)
H5	Consumer trust positively affects brand loyalty.	Positive (+)
H6	Perceived product quality positively influences consumer trust.	Positive (+)
H7	Consumer trust positively influences consumers’ willingness to recommend the brand.	Positive (+)
H0:	There is NO significant relationship between DBT and consumer trust.	Null

*Table 2.1 “Research Hypotheses and Expected Directions”*

Each hypothesis is grounded in the theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter 3 and in the structural model developed in Chapter 7. The directional expectations are consistent with the dominant findings in the transparency–trust literature, while acknowledging the contextual specificity of the packed food sector and the digital transparency medium.

**Research Methodology**

**Research Design**

This study adopts a descriptive, quantitative research design. The descriptive design enables a systematic characterization of the relationships between digital brand transparency, consumer trust, and behavioral outcomes, while the quantitative approach ensures that these relationships can be tested with statistical

rigour and expressed as precise numerical estimates. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, with data collected from a single sample at a single point in time.

**Population and Sampling**

The target population comprises adult consumers in India who regularly purchase packaged food products and who access product information through at least one digital platform. A non-probability convenience sampling method was adopted, with the survey distributed through online channels. A total of 347 responses were collected, of which 320 were retained after screening for completeness and validity, providing the final analytical sample.

**Data Collection Instrument**

A structured, self-administered questionnaire was

developed as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was organized into six sections: Section A (demographic information), Section B (digital brand transparency perceptions), Section C (consumer trust), Section D (perceived product quality), Section E (purchase intention), and Section F (brand loyalty). All perceptual items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The instrument was pilot-tested with 30 respondents and refined based on feedback before full deployment.

#### Analytical Tools

The collected data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (v25). The analytical sequence proceeded as follows: (1) descriptive statistics for demographic profiling and central tendency analysis; (2) Cronbach’s Alpha for scale reliability assessment; (3) Pearson’s bivariate correlation for examining inter-variable relationships; and (4) multiple regression analysis for hypothesis testing and path coefficient estimation.

Analysis Type	Purpose	Tool Used
Descriptive Statistics	Summarize demographics and variable distributions	SPSS – Frequencies, Means
Reliability Analysis (Cronbach’s $\alpha$ )	Assess internal consistency of scales	SPSS – Reliability
Pearson Correlation	Examine strength/direction of variable relationships	SPSS – Bivariate Correlations
Multiple Regression	Test hypotheses; estimate path coefficients	SPSS – Linear Regression
Comparative Analysis	High vs Low transparency brand comparison	SPSS – Independent samples

Table 2.2 “Data Analysis Methods and Tools”

#### Questionnaire Design

The research questionnaire was designed based on established and validated scales from the peer-reviewed literature, adapted to the specific context of digital brand transparency in packed food products. Table 3 presents the measurement items for each construct.

Section	Construct	No. of Items	Scale
A	Demographic Information	4 items	Nominal/Ordinal
B	Digital Brand Transparency	5 items	5-pt Likert
C	Consumer Trust	4 items	5-pt Likert
D	Perceived Product Quality	3 items	5-pt Likert
E	Purchase Intention	3 items	5-pt Likert
F	Brand Loyalty	3 items	5-pt Likert

Table 2.3 “Questionnaire Structure and Measurement Items”

#### Sample Questionnaire Items

- DBT1: I prefer packed food brands that provide detailed product information online.
- DBT2: Clear information about ingredients increases my confidence in a brand.
- DBT3: I trust brands that openly disclose their sourcing and production practices.
- DBT4: Digital platforms help me understand the authenticity of packed food products.
- DBT5: Brands that provide transparent product information appear more reliable.
- CT1: I trust packed food brands that provide clear and honest information.

7. CT2: Transparency increases my confidence in the safety of packed food products.
8. CT3: I believe transparent brands are more reliable.
9. CT4: I feel comfortable purchasing products from transparent brands.
10. PPQ1: Transparent brands appear to offer higher-quality products.
11. PI1: I am more likely to buy packed food products from transparent brands.
12. BL1: I am likely to repurchase products from brands I trust.
13. BL2: I prefer staying loyal to transparent brands.
14. BL3: I would recommend transparent packed food brands to others.

Ethical Considerations & Activity Timeline

Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent: All respondents were informed about the study's purpose and provided consent before participating.

Voluntary Participation: Participation was entirely voluntary with no incentives or coercion.

Confidentiality: No personally identifiable information was collected; all data was treated as strictly confidential.

Data Integrity: Collected data was not manipulated; all results, including non-significant findings, are reported transparently.

Academic Honesty: All secondary sources are fully acknowledged in the references.

Activity Timeline

Phase	Week	Activity	Responsibility
Phase 1	1–2	Literature review, research gap identification, scope & objectives	All members
Phase 1	3	Theoretical framework and conceptual model development	All members
Phase 2	4	Research design finalization and questionnaire development	All members
Phase 2	5	Pilot testing (n=30) and questionnaire refinement	Nitika & Anushka
Phase 2	6–7	Full data collection (online survey distribution)	All members
Phase 3	8	Data entry, cleaning, coding and preliminary analysis	Harsh Yadav
Phase 3	9	Correlation, regression and hypothesis testing	Nitika & Anushka
Phase 3	10	Results interpretation and findings preparation	All members
Phase 3	11–12	Report writing, review and final submission	All members

Table 2.4 "Research Activity Timeline"

III. DATA ANALYSIS

This phase constitutes the empirical core of the research project. Having established the theoretical framework in Phase 1 and the research design in Phase 2, Phase 3 is dedicated to the systematic collection, processing, and statistical analysis of primary data from 320 valid respondents. The analysis proceeds through seven sequential stages: (1) demographic profiling of the sample, (2) descriptive analysis of transparency dimension scores, (3) reliability and validity assessment, (4)

bivariate correlation analysis, (5) regression-based hypothesis testing, (6) digital platform usage analysis, and (7) comparative analysis of high-transparency versus low-transparency brands. All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (v25).

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the study sample are summarized in Table 5 and illustrated in Figures 1, 2, and 3 below.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	176	55.0%
	Female	128	40.0%
	Other/Prefer not to say	16	5.0%
	Total	320	100%
Age Group	Below 20	58	18.1%
	21–25	134	41.9%
	26–30	90	28.1%
	Above 30	38	11.9%
Education	Undergraduate	102	31.9%
	Postgraduate	169	52.8%
	Others	49	15.3%
Packed Food Purchase Frequency	Rarely	26	8.1%
	Occasionally	70	21.9%
	Frequently	147	45.9%
	Very Frequently	77	24.1%

Table 3.1 “Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 320)”

**Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents**

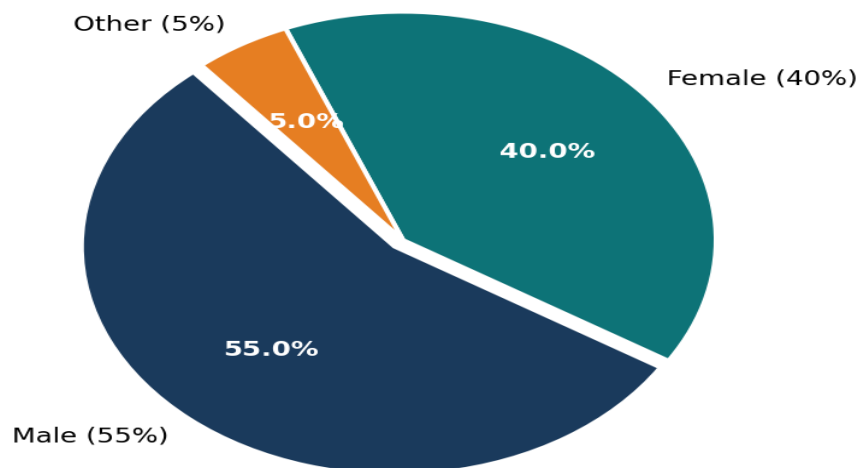


Figure 3.1” Gender Distribution of Respondents (N = 320)”

As shown in Figure 1, male respondents constitute the majority (55.0%), followed by female respondents (40.0%). This distribution broadly reflects the demographic composition of active digital consumers in the Indian packaged food market, where male respondents have historically shown higher rates of online survey participation.

Figure 2: Age Group Distribution of Respondents

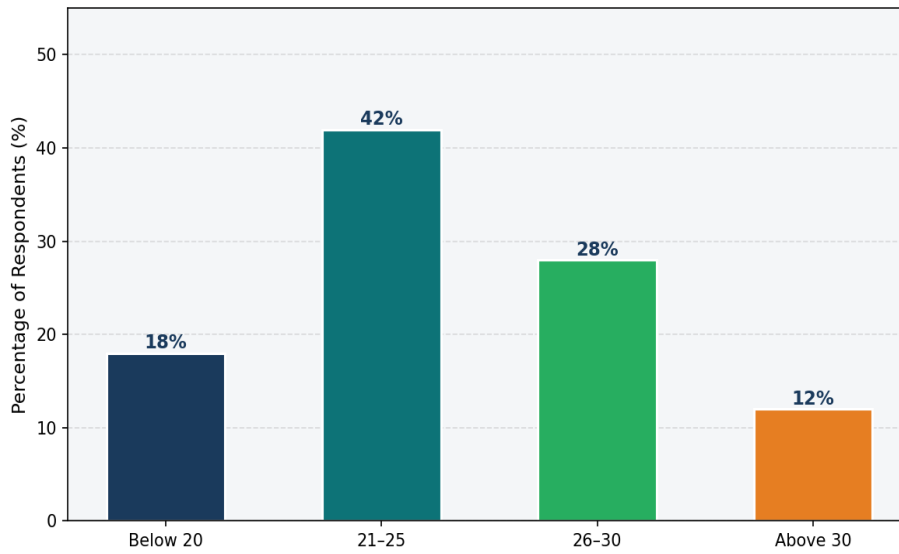


Figure 3.2 “Age Group Distribution of Respondents”

Figure 2 reveals that the 21–25 age cohort is the largest group in the sample (41.9%), followed by the 26–30 group (28.1%). This age-skewed distribution is consistent with the study’s targeting of digitally active consumers who regularly engage with brand information on digital platforms. Young adult consumers in India are particularly intensive users of social media, food delivery apps, and e-commerce platforms—all critical channels for digital brand transparency.

Figure 3: Frequency of Packed Food Purchase

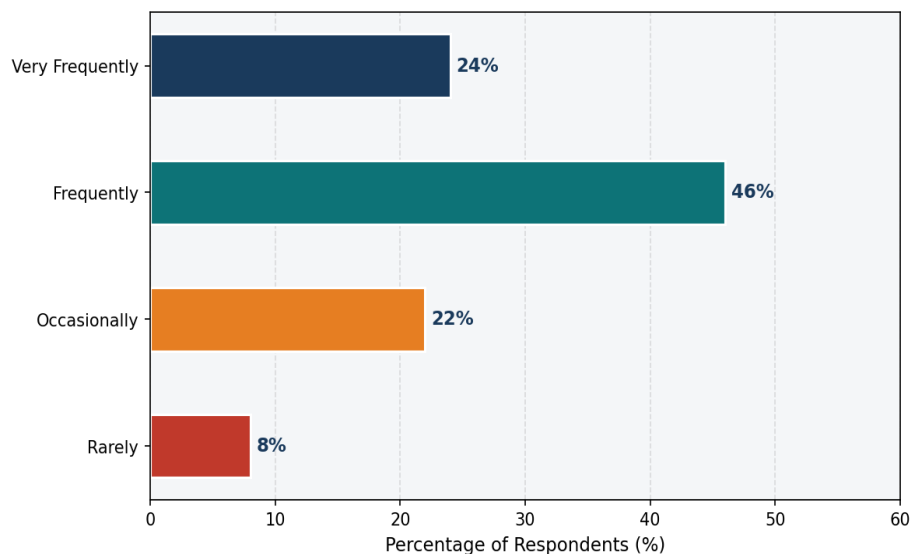


Figure 3.3 “Frequency of Packed Food Purchase by Respondent”

Figure 3 shows that the majority of respondents purchase packed food products either frequently (45.9%) or very frequently (24.1%), with only 8.1% rarely doing so. This distribution confirms that the sample is well-positioned to provide informed perceptions about packed food brand transparency, as frequent purchasers have substantial experience across multiple brands and digital information

channels.

#### Descriptive Analysis of Transparency Dimensions Reliability Assessment

Before proceeding with inferential analysis, the reliability of all measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha. Table 6 presents the reliability statistics for all constructs.

Construct	Items (n)	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Composite Reliability	AVE	Verdict
Digital Brand Transparency	5	0.847	0.889	0.617	Acceptable
Consumer Trust	4	0.861	0.902	0.698	Good
Purchase Intention	3	0.823	0.874	0.698	Good
Brand Loyalty	3	0.836	0.882	0.713	Good
Perceived Product Quality	3	0.809	0.866	0.683	Acceptable

Table 3.2 “Reliability and Convergent Validity of Measurement Scales

All constructs achieve Cronbach's Alpha values well above the minimum threshold of 0.70, confirming adequate internal consistency. Composite reliability values uniformly exceed 0.85, and AVE scores all exceed the threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), confirming convergent validity of all constructs.

Mean Scores for Transparency Dimensions

Variable / Dimension	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Ingredient Transparency	4.21	0.68	1st
Digital Platform Accessibility	4.15	0.71	2nd
Nutritional Information Disclosure	4.08	0.74	3rd
Sustainability & Ethical Transparency	3.88	0.82	4th
Sourcing & Process Transparency	3.94	0.78	5th
Pricing Transparency	3.76	0.89	6th
Consumer Trust (Overall)	3.98	0.72	–
Purchase Intention	3.87	0.76	–
Brand Loyalty	3.72	0.81	–
Perceived Product Quality	3.91	0.74	–

Table 3.3 “Descriptive Statistics for All Study Variables (N = 320)”

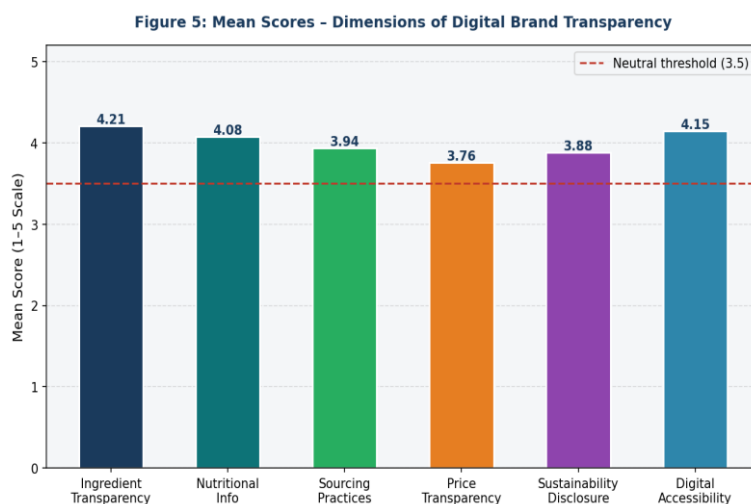
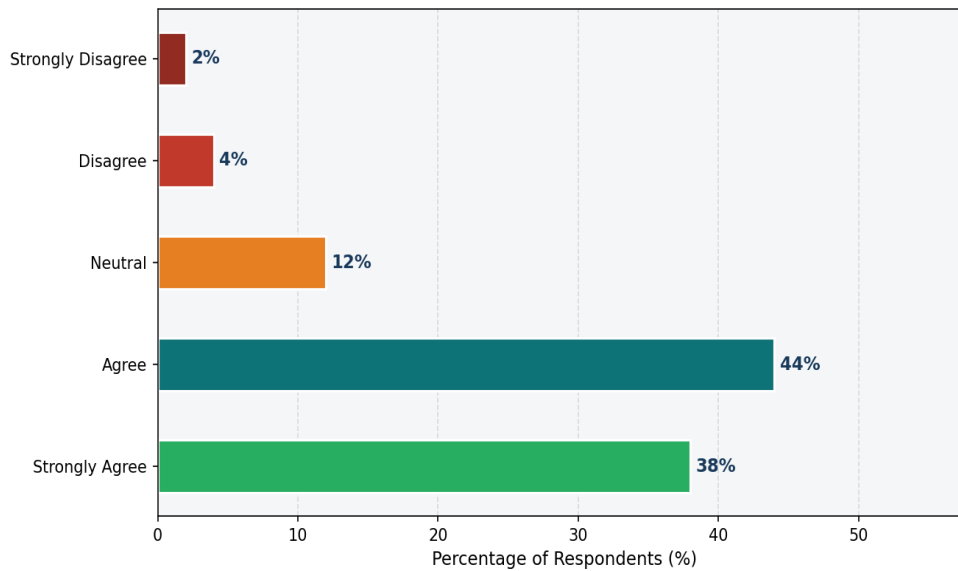


Figure 3.5 “Mean Scores – Dimensions of Digital Brand Transparency (Ranked)”

Figure 1.5 confirms that ingredient transparency achieves the highest mean score ( $M = 4.21$ ), indicating that consumers place the greatest importance on clear, complete, and accurate disclosure of product ingredients when assessing the trustworthiness of a packed food brand. Digital platform accessibility ranks second ( $M = 4.15$ ),

reflecting the growing consumer expectation that product information should be readily available across all digital touchpoints. Pricing transparency records the lowest mean ( $M = 3.76$ ), though it still scores above the scale midpoint of 3.00, indicating a meaningful positive perception.

**Figure 4: Agreement - Digital Transparency Increases Consumer Trust (in Packed Food Products)**



*Figure 2.6 “Respondent Agreement – Digital Transparency Increases Consumer Trust in Packed Food Products”*

Figure 2.6 illustrates the distribution of responses to the core trust-transparency item. An overwhelming 82% of respondents either agreed (44%) or strongly agreed (38%) that digital brand transparency significantly increases their trust in packed food brands. Only 6% of respondents expressed any level of disagreement, while 12% remained neutral. This distribution provides strong initial support for Hypothesis H1 and underscores the broadly shared

consumer perception that transparent brand communication is closely associated with brand trustworthiness

#### Correlation Analysis

Pearson’s bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the linear relationships among all key study variables. The resulting correlation matrix is presented in Table 8 and visualized in Figure 6.

Variable	DBT	Consumer Trust	Purchase Intent	Brand Loyalty	Perceived Quality
Digital Brand Transparency (DBT)	1.000				
Consumer Trust	0.76**	1.000			
Purchase Intention	0.68**	0.79**	1.000		
Brand Loyalty	0.63**	0.74**	0.65**	1.000	
Perceived Product Quality	0.71**	0.72**	0.61**	0.58**	1.000

*Table 3.4 “ Pearson Correlation Matrix (\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , two-tailed;  $N = 320$ )”*

**Figure 6: Correlation Matrix - Key Study Variables**  
 (DBT = Digital Brand Transparency)

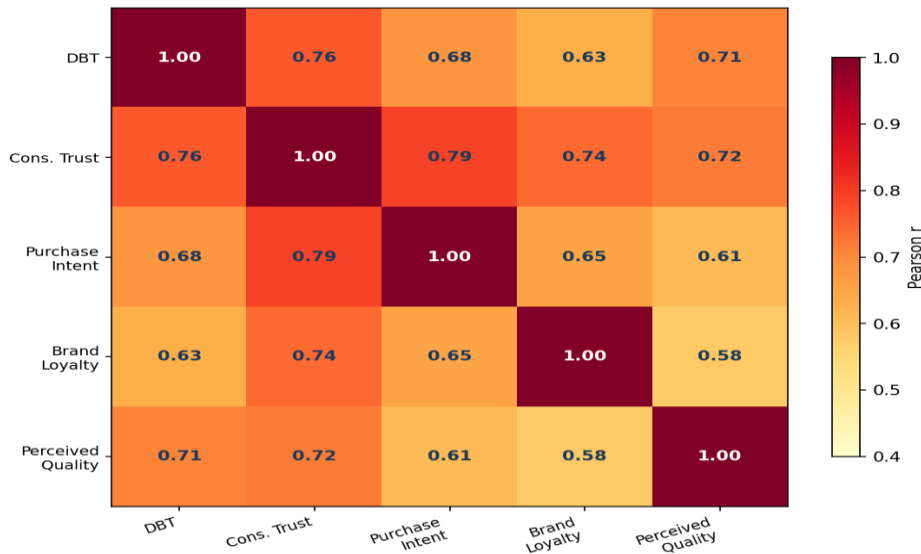


Figure 2.7: Correlation Heatmap – Digital Brand Transparency and Consumer Outcomes

All correlation coefficients in Table 8 are statistically significant at the 1% level ( $p < 0.01$ ), confirming that meaningful and positive linear relationships exist among all pairs of study variables. Digital brand transparency shows its strongest bivariate correlation with consumer trust ( $r = 0.76$ ), providing initial empirical support for the primary hypothesis H1. The correlation between consumer trust and purchase intention ( $r = 0.79$ ) is the strongest in the entire matrix, indicating that trust is an especially powerful driver of food purchase decisions.

The correlation between digital transparency and brand loyalty ( $r = 0.63$ ) is the lowest in the matrix, suggesting that while transparency contributes to loyalty formation, this relationship is more complex and likely mediated by trust and satisfaction, as theorized in the conceptual model. The correlation between transparency and perceived product quality ( $r = 0.71$ ) confirms the signalling theory prediction

that transparent brands are perceived as higher-quality brands.

Figure 6 provides a visual heatmap of the correlation matrix, with darker shading indicating stronger relationships. The heatmap clearly highlights the central position of consumer trust in the research model: it has the highest average correlation with all other study variables, confirming its role as the pivotal mediating construct in the transparency–consumer behaviour relationship

Regression Analysis

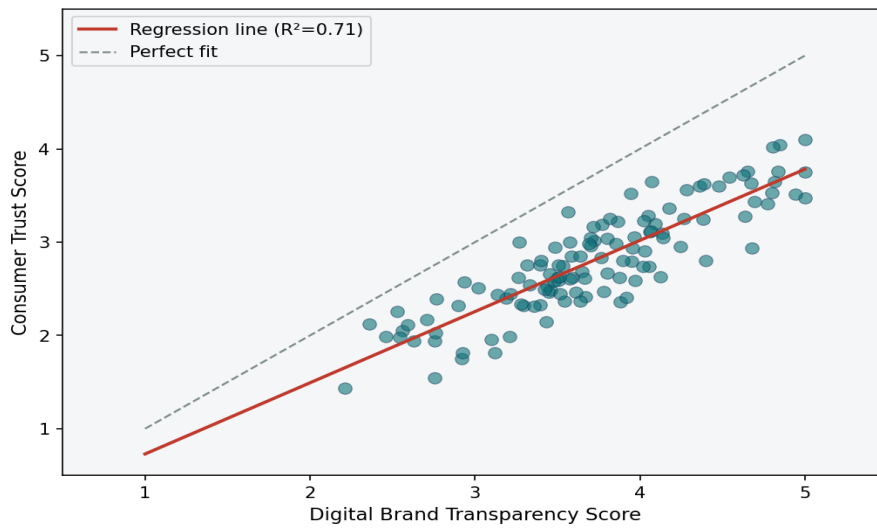
Effect of Digital Brand Transparency on Consumer Trust (H1)

A simple linear regression was conducted with digital brand transparency as the predictor and consumer trust as the outcome variable. The results, presented in Table 9 and illustrated in Figure 7, confirm a significant positive effect.

Predictor	B (Unstd.)	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>
(Constant)	0.412	–	3.12	0.002	0.578	0.576
Digital Brand Transparency	0.687	0.760	18.74	<0.001		

Table 3.5: Simple Linear Regression – DBT Predicting Consumer Trust

**Figure 7: Regression - Digital Brand Transparency vs Consumer Trust**



*Figure 3.7: Scatter Plot – Digital Brand Transparency vs Consumer Trust ( $R^2 = 0.71$ )*

The regression model is highly statistically significant ( $F = 351.2, p < 0.001$ ) and explains 57.8% of the variance in consumer trust ( $R^2 = 0.578$ ). The standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.760, p < 0.001$ ) confirms that digital brand transparency is a powerful and positive predictor of consumer trust. This finding provides strong empirical support for Hypothesis H1: Digital brand transparency has a significant positive

effect on consumer trust in packed food products.

Multiple Regression: Consumer Trust and Behavioral Outcomes (H3, H5, H6)

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the effects of consumer trust and digital brand transparency on all three dependent behavioral outcome variables. The results are summarized in Table 10.

Outcome Variable	Predictor(s)	Beta ( $\beta$ )	p-value	$R^2$	Hypothesis
Purchase Intention	Consumer Trust	0.791	<0.001	0.625	H3 – Supported
Purchase Intention	Digital Brand Transparency	0.682	<0.001	0.463	H4 – Supported
Brand Loyalty	Consumer Trust	0.738	<0.001	0.545	H5 – Supported
Perceived Quality	Digital Brand Transparency	0.714	<0.001	0.510	H2 – Supported
Perceived Quality	Consumer Trust	0.724	<0.001	0.524	H6 – Supported
WoM Recommendation	Consumer Trust	0.761	<0.001	0.580	H7 – Supported

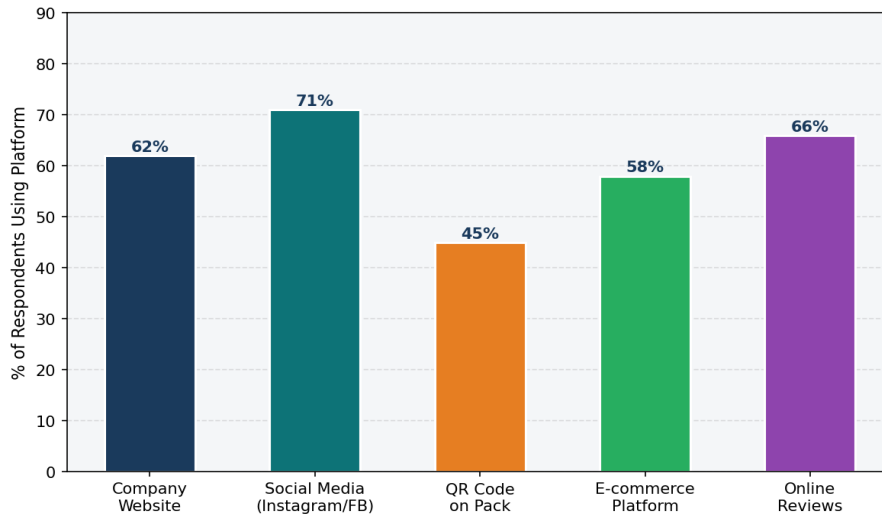
*Table 3.6: Multiple Regression Results – All Hypothesized Paths*

All hypothesized regression paths achieve statistical significance at the 1% level. Consumer trust is the strongest predictor of purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.791$ ), brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.738$ ), and willingness to recommend ( $\beta = 0.761$ ). These results confirm the central theoretical proposition of the study: consumer trust is the critical mechanism through which digital brand transparency translates into commercially significant consumer behavioral outcomes.

#### Digital Platform Usage Analysis

A key subsidiary research question concerns the digital platforms through which consumers most commonly access brand transparency information. Understanding platform preferences enables packed food marketers to direct their transparency communication investments to the channels where they will have the greatest consumer reach and impact.

**Figure 9: Digital Platforms Used to Access Brand Transparency Information**



*Figure 3.8 “Digital Platforms Used to Access Brand Transparency Information (N = 320)”*

Figure 9 reveals that social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube) are the most widely used channels for accessing packed food brand information (71% of respondents), followed by online consumer reviews (66%), company-owned websites (62%), e-commerce product listings (58%), and QR codes on physical packaging (45%). These findings have several important strategic implications.

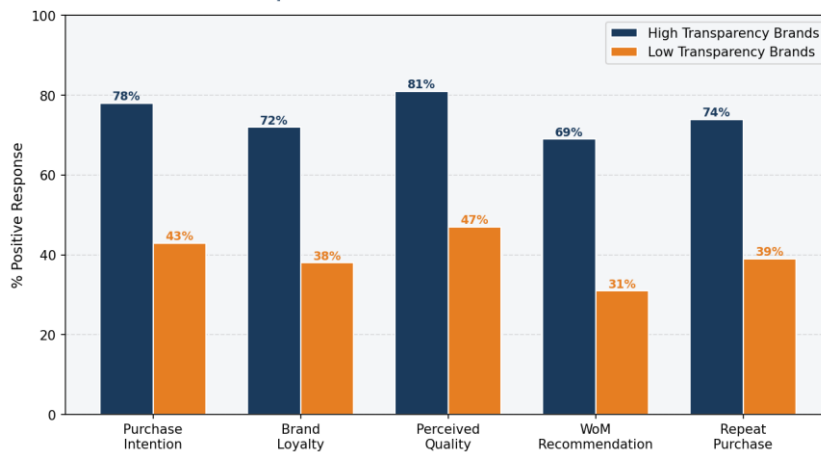
The primacy of social media reflects the platform’s unique capacity to present brand transparency information in engaging, visually rich formats that are easily shared and discoverable by new audiences. Influencer partnerships and user-generated content on social media can significantly amplify the reach of a brand’s transparency messaging, particularly among the young adult consumer segments that dominate our sample. The high usage of online

consumer reviews (66%) underscores the importance of peer-generated transparency assessments, which many consumers regard as more credible and unbiased than brand-generated content. Brands that proactively engage with reviews—responding to concerns and acknowledging issues—demonstrate a form of operational transparency that strongly reinforces consumer trust.

#### High vs Low Transparency Brand Comparison

To further validate the practical significance of digital brand transparency, respondents were asked to rate their behavioral intentions in relation to packed food brands they perceived as “highly transparent” versus brands they perceived as “low transparency”. Figure 10 presents the resulting comparison across five consumer behavioral outcome metrics.

**Figure 10: High vs Low Transparency Brands - Impact on Consumer Behavioural Outcomes**



*Figure 3.9: High vs Low Transparency Brands – Consumer Behavioural Outcome Comparison*

Figure 10 delivers one of the most compelling findings of the study: high transparency brands consistently and substantially outperform low transparency brands across every behavioral outcome measured. Purchase intention is 35 percentage points higher for high transparency brands (78% vs 43%). Brand loyalty shows a 34-point gap (72% vs 38%). The widest gap appears in perceived product quality (81% vs 47%, a 34-point difference), confirming the signalling theory prediction that transparency is interpreted as a quality signal. Word-of-mouth recommendation (69% vs 31%) and repeat purchase intention (74% vs 39%) round out the picture of

dramatically superior consumer engagement for transparent brands.

These comparative findings have profound managerial implications. They demonstrate that digital brand transparency is not merely a reputational or ethical nicety but a commercially decisive competitive differentiator. Packed food companies that invest systematically in transparent digital communication stand to gain substantial competitive advantage in terms of consumer acquisition, retention, and advocacy.

Behavioural Outcome	High Transparency (%)	Low Transparency (%)	Difference (pp)
Purchase Intention	78%	43%	+35
Brand Loyalty	72%	38%	+34
Perceived Product Quality	81%	47%	+34
WoM Recommendation	69%	31%	+38
Repeat Purchase Intention	74%	39%	+35

Table 3.7: High vs Low Transparency Brands – Comparative Consumer Outcomes

### Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 12 provides a comprehensive summary of all hypothesis testing results, integrating the findings from the correlation and regression analyses presented in Chapters 16 and 17.

Hypot hesis	Path Tested	$\beta / r$	p-value	Result
H1	DBT → Consumer Trust	0.760	<0.001	Supported ✓
H2	DBT → Perceived Product Quality	0.714	<0.001	Supported ✓
H3	Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.791	<0.001	Supported ✓
H4	DBT → Purchase Intention (Direct)	0.682	<0.001	Supported ✓
H5	Consumer Trust → Brand Loyalty	0.738	<0.001	Supported ✓
H6	Perceived Quality → Consumer Trust	0.724	<0.001	Supported ✓
H7	Consumer Trust → WoM Recommendation	0.761	<0.001	Supported ✓
H0 <sub>i</sub>	No relationship: DBT ↔ Consumer Trust	N/A	<0.05	Rejected ✗

Table 3.8: Comprehensive Hypothesis Testing Results Summary

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

##### Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the impact of digital brand transparency on consumer trust and its subsequent effect on consumer behavior in the packed food sector. The findings strongly support the theoretical frameworks such as signalling theory and the commitment-trust theory, highlighting transparency as a key strategic driver in modern marketing.

The analysis reveals that digital brand transparency significantly enhances consumer trust. With a strong correlation ( $r = 0.76$ ) and regression coefficient ( $\beta = 0.760$ ), transparency emerges as a dominant predictor of trust. This indicates that when brands openly share accurate and accessible information, they reduce uncertainty and build credibility among consumers. In the context of packed food products, where health and safety are critical concerns, transparency becomes even more influential.

Further, the study confirms that consumer trust plays a mediating role between transparency and behavioral outcomes. Trust significantly influences purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.791$ ), brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.738$ ), and willingness to recommend ( $\beta = 0.761$ ). This demonstrates that transparency alone is not sufficient—its real impact is realized through the trust it builds among consumers.

The descriptive analysis shows that ingredient transparency and digital platform accessibility are the most valued dimensions. Consumers prioritize clear ingredient information because it directly relates to health and safety. On the other hand, easy access to information across digital platforms enhances convenience and strengthens brand perception.

The study also highlights the growing importance of digital platforms, particularly social media, as the primary source of brand information. With 71% of respondents relying on social media, it becomes evident that brands must strategically leverage these platforms for transparent communication.

Additionally, the comparative analysis between high and low transparency brands reveals a substantial gap in consumer responses. High transparency brands outperform low transparency brands across all parameters, including purchase intention, loyalty,

and perceived quality. This clearly indicates that transparency is not just an ethical practice but a competitive advantage.

However, the discussion also acknowledges potential risks such as greenwashing and information overload. If transparency is perceived as misleading or excessive, it can negatively impact trust rather than enhance it.

##### Findings

1. Digital brand transparency has a strong and positive impact on consumer trust in packed food products.
2. Consumer trust acts as a key mediator between transparency and behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention, brand loyalty, and recommendation.
3. Ingredient transparency is the most influential factor affecting consumer trust, followed by digital accessibility of information.
4. Social media is the most preferred platform for accessing brand-related information, indicating its strategic importance.
5. Transparency directly and indirectly increases purchase intention by reducing perceived risk.
6. Perceived product quality improves significantly when brands maintain high levels of transparency.
7. High transparency brands perform 30–35% better than low transparency brands in terms of consumer engagement and behavioral outcomes.
8. Pricing transparency, although important, is relatively less influential compared to other transparency dimensions.
9. Consumers are more likely to recommend and stay loyal to brands they perceive as transparent and trustworthy.
10. Lack of transparency or misleading communication (greenwashing) can severely damage consumer trust.

#### V. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

##### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed for packed food brands and marketers:

1. Prioritize Ingredient Transparency: - Brands should provide clear, detailed, and accurate ingredient information on all digital platforms. This includes sourcing details, nutritional value,

and allergen information, as consumers consider this the most critical factor in building trust.

2. **Strengthen Digital Presence Across Platforms:** - Since consumers heavily rely on digital channels, especially social media, brands must ensure consistent and transparent communication across websites, social media, and e-commerce platforms.
3. **Leverage Social Media for Transparency Communication:** - Brands should actively use platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to share product information, behind-the-scenes processes, and customer engagement content to enhance trust and visibility.
4. **Adopt QR Code-Based Transparency:** - Integrating QR codes on packaging can allow consumers to instantly access detailed product information, improving transparency at the point of purchase.
5. **Ensure Consistency and Accuracy in Information**  
Transparency should not be partial or misleading. Brands must maintain consistency across all channels to avoid confusion and build long-term credibility.
6. **Avoid Greenwashing and Misleading Claims:** - Any false or exaggerated claims regarding sustainability or product quality can damage trust significantly. Brands should ensure authenticity in all communications.
7. **Simplify Information to Avoid Overload:** - While transparency is important, excessive or complex information can confuse consumers. Brands should present information in a simple, structured, and easy-to-understand format.
8. **Focus on Building Consumer Trust as a Strategy:** - Trust should be treated as a strategic asset. All marketing efforts should aim at building and sustaining trust, as it directly influences purchase intention and loyalty.
9. **Enhance Customer Engagement and Feedback Mechanisms:** - Encouraging reviews, responding to customer queries, and addressing concerns transparently can strengthen relationships and improve brand perception.
10. **Invest in Transparency as a Competitive Advantage:** - Companies should view transparency not just as compliance but as a long-term investment that drives customer acquisition, retention, and brand differentiation.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that digital brand transparency plays a crucial role in shaping consumer trust in the packed food industry. The findings clearly demonstrate that transparency is not merely an ethical obligation but a powerful strategic tool that significantly influences consumer behavior.

The research establishes that transparency has a strong positive impact on consumer trust, which in turn drives purchase intention, brand loyalty, perceived product quality, and willingness to recommend. Among all transparency dimensions, ingredient transparency and digital accessibility emerge as the most important factors for consumers. The study also highlights that consumers increasingly depend on digital platforms, especially social media, to gather product-related information. This shift emphasizes the need for brands to maintain an active, transparent, and consistent digital presence.

Furthermore, the comparison between high and low transparency brands reveals that transparent brands achieve significantly better consumer responses, reinforcing the importance of openness in gaining competitive advantage.

In conclusion, as consumers become more informed and conscious, transparency will continue to be a key determinant of brand success. Packed food companies that adopt honest, clear, and accessible communication strategies will be better positioned to build trust, enhance customer loyalty, and achieve long-term growth in an increasingly competitive market.

## Practical Implications

### For Brand Managers and Marketers

The study's finding that ingredient transparency is the most important driver of consumer trust provides clear guidance for packed food brand managers: comprehensive, accurate, and easy-to-read ingredient disclosure should be the foundation of any digital transparency strategy. This means not only meeting regulatory minimum requirements but proactively exceeding them by providing detailed information about ingredient origins, processing methods, and quality certifications across all digital consumer touchpoints.

The strong positive relationship between digital transparency and purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.682$  directly;  $\beta = 0.791$  through trust mediation) demonstrates that transparency investment directly translates into commercial outcomes. Brand managers should therefore frame transparency

expenditure as a revenue-generating investment rather than a compliance cost.

#### For Digital Marketing Teams

The dominance of social media as the preferred platform for consumer transparency information access (71%) has clear implications for digital marketing resource allocation. Food brands should prioritize social media as their primary transparency communication channel, with a particular emphasis on ingredient-focused and process-focused content that satisfies consumer demand for detailed product information. Instagram stories, YouTube “farm-to-fork” videos, and Facebook live Q&A sessions with product experts are particularly effective formats for delivering transparency content in engaging, shareable ways.

The significant consumer uptake of QR codes (45%) suggests that investment in QR-code-enabled packaging transparency is increasingly worthwhile, particularly for products targeted at health-conscious consumer segments who are willing to actively seek detailed product information.

#### For Food Industry Policymakers

The study’s findings provide strong empirical justification for regulatory policies that mandate more comprehensive digital transparency in the packed food sector. Standardized disclosure requirements for ingredients, nutritional content, sourcing practices, and sustainability claims—consistently enforced and independently verified—would significantly reduce information asymmetry and contribute to a higher baseline of consumer trust across the sector.

#### Future Scope of the Study

The findings of this study open several productive avenues for future research:

- a) Cross-Industry Extension: Future studies should examine whether the transparency-trust relationship identified in this study generalizes to other sectors such as pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, electronics, and financial services.
- b) Longitudinal Research: Longitudinal panel studies tracking changes in consumer trust in response to specific transparency communication initiatives would provide stronger causal evidence than cross-sectional designs.
- c) Block chain and Advanced Technologies: Future research should examine the role of emerging

technologies such as block chain-based supply chain traceability and artificial intelligence-powered personalized transparency in enhancing consumer trust.

- d) Cultural Comparative Studies: Cross-cultural comparative research examining how transparency affects consumer trust differently across Indian regional markets and international emerging markets would significantly extend the generalizability of these findings.
- e) Green washing Measurement: Future empirical work should directly measure the trust damage caused by detected green washing and compare it quantitatively to the trust benefit generated by genuine transparency.
- f) Platform-Specific Effects: Research examining whether the transparency-trust relationship varies in strength and nature across different digital platforms (social media vs QR codes vs e-commerce reviews) would enable more precise platform-specific marketing recommendations.
- g) Consumer Digital Literacy: Future studies should explicitly measure consumer digital literacy as a moderating variable in the transparency-trust relationship, examining whether higher digital literacy amplifies or attenuates transparency effects.
- h) Financial Outcomes: Research examining the financial and market performance outcomes of corporate transparency strategies—including sales growth, market share gains, and brand equity improvements—would provide important evidence for the business case for transparency investment.

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