

Brand Personality and Self-Congruity as Determinants of Consumer Choice: A Mixed Methods Study Using Netnographic Observation of Indian FMCG Brands

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Abstract: This study examines brand personality and self-congruity as determinants of consumer choice in the Indian fast-moving consumer goods sector, with reference to four brands, Paperboat, Yakult, Epigamia, and Super You. Adopting a mixed methods design, the study employs netnographic observation and content analysis of consumer-generated digital discourse collected from Instagram and YouTube. Approximately 120 data units were analysed using thematic coding mapped against Aaker's (1997) five-dimensional Brand Personality Scale, supplemented by sentiment classification. Findings indicate that each brand occupies a distinct personality space, Sincerity for Paperboat, Competence for Yakult, Sophistication and Excitement for Epigamia, and Excitement and Competence for Super You, and that patterns of self-congruity, as theorised by Sirgy (1982), are visible in the language, sentiment, and emotional intensity of consumer online discourse. Paperboat, with its coherent Sincerity-based positioning, generated the most uniformly positive and relationship-oriented consumer response, while brands projecting health credibility or aspirational identity attracted engaged but more polarised discourse. The study contributes to branding literature by demonstrating the applicability of netnographic methods to self-congruity research in the Indian digital consumer context, and offers practical implications for brand managers seeking to align brand personality with target consumer self-concepts.

Keywords: Brand Personality, Self-Congruity, Consumer Choice, Netnography, Indian FMCG, Online Consumer Behaviour, Aaker's Brand Personality Scale, Digital Brand Perception, Mixed Methods.

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ Background

Consumers today choose brands not just for what they do, but for what they say about who they are. This shift has elevated brand personality, defined by Aaker (1997) as the set of human characteristics associated with a brand, to a central construct in marketing theory and practice. When consumers perceive a brand's personality as consistent with their own self-concept, they are more likely to prefer, purchase, and remain loyal to that brand, a phenomenon explained by self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982).

India presents a particularly compelling context for this inquiry. The country's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is one of the fastest growing in the world, projected to reach USD 220 billion by 2025 (IBEF, 2023). Within this

landscape, a new generation of aspirational, personality-driven brands has emerged, brands that compete not on price or distribution, but on meaning. Paperboat evokes nostalgia and cultural heritage. Yakult signals health-consciousness and scientific credibility. Epigamia projects urban sophistication. Super You speaks to fitness-oriented millennials. Campa, revived after decades, taps into retro nationalism. Each of these brands occupies a distinct personality space, making them ideal subjects for examining how brand personality shapes consumer choice.

Despite a growing body of global literature on brand personality and self-congruity, research situated within the Indian digital consumer context, particularly using observational and netnographic methods, remains limited. This study addresses that gap.

➤ *Problem Statement*

While the relationship between brand personality and consumer choice has been established in Western markets, its dynamics within India's digital-native, culturally diverse consumer base remain underexplored. Furthermore, most existing studies rely on self-reported survey data, which is susceptible to social desirability bias. Online consumer discourse, comments, reviews, and organic brand conversations, offers a more naturalistic window into how consumers perceive and relate to brands.

This study examines how brand personality is perceived and communicated across five Indian FMCG brands in the digital space, and whether patterns of self-congruity are visible in the language and sentiment consumers use when engaging with these brands online.

➤ *Research Objectives*

This study aims to:

- Identify and analyse the brand personalities of Paperboat, Yakult, Epigamia, Super You, and Campa as perceived by consumers in online spaces.
- Examine patterns of self-congruity in consumer-generated content associated with each brand.
- Compare brand personality profiles across the five selected brands using netnographic and content analysis methods.
- Explore the relationship between brand personality dimensions and consumer choice behaviour as reflected in online engagement and sentiment.

➤ *Research Questions*

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What brand personality dimensions do consumers associate with Paperboat, Yakult, Epigamia, Super You, and Campa in online discourse?
- To what extent do consumers' expressions of self-congruity appear in their online engagement with these brands?
- How do the brand personality profiles of the five selected brands differ from one another?
- What patterns in online sentiment and engagement suggest a link between brand personality alignment and consumer preference?

➤ *Significance of the Study*

This study contributes to branding literature in three ways. Academically, it extends self-congruity theory into the Indian FMCG context using netnographic methods, a relatively underused approach in Indian consumer research. Methodologically, it demonstrates how online observational data can serve as a credible alternative to survey-based research when primary data collection is constrained. Practically, it offers actionable insights for brand managers seeking to align their brand's projected personality with the self-concepts of their target consumers in an increasingly digital marketplace.

➤ *Structure of the Thesis*

This thesis is organised into the following sections. Following this introduction, Section 5 presents a review of literature on brand personality, self-congruity theory, and consumer behaviour. Section 6 outlines the research methodology, including the netnographic and content analysis approach adopted. Section 7 presents the data analysis and interpretation of findings across the five brands. Section 8 discusses the findings in relation to existing literature, followed by the conclusion, limitations, recommendations for future research, references, and appendices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Brand Personality*

The concept of brand personality emerged as a significant area of inquiry in marketing literature during the late twentieth century, driven by the recognition that consumers do not relate to brands purely on rational or functional grounds. Fournier (1998) observed that consumers form relationships with brands in ways that mirror interpersonal relationships, attributing human-like qualities to them and deriving identity-related meaning from their use. It was Aaker (1997), however, who provided the most widely adopted theoretical and empirical framework for the construct, defining brand personality as the set of human characteristics associated with a brand.

Aaker's (1997) landmark study identified five core dimensions of brand personality through factor analysis: Sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful), Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date), Competence (reliable, intelligent, successful), Sophistication (upper class, charming), and Ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough). This five-dimension model, known as the Brand Personality Scale (BPS), has since been widely applied across product categories, cultures, and consumer segments, forming the primary analytical lens for the present study.

Brands acquire personality through multiple channels. Plummer (1985) noted that personality traits are communicated via advertising tone, brand spokespersons, visual identity, and product associations. More recently, scholars have recognised that consumer-generated content, reviews, comments, and social media posts, also plays a significant role in shaping and reinforcing perceived brand personality (Geurin-Eagleman and Burch, 2016). This is relevant to the present study, which observes brand personality as it manifests in digital consumer discourse.

➤ *Self-Congruity Theory*

Self-congruity theory, originally formulated by Sirgy (1982), proposes that consumers evaluate products and brands by comparing the brand's image with their own self-concept. When the two are perceived as congruent, when the brand's personality reflects how a consumer sees themselves or wishes to be seen, the consumer experiences a positive psychological response that increases purchase intention and brand preference.

Sirgy (1982) identified four dimensions of self-congruity. Actual self-congruity refers to the match between the brand image and the consumer's actual self-concept, how they genuinely perceive themselves. Ideal self-congruity occurs when the brand reflects the consumer's aspirational self, who they want to become. Social self-congruity involves alignment with how the consumer believes others perceive them, while ideal social self-congruity concerns the image they wish to project to others.

Subsequent research has confirmed and extended this framework. Ekinici and Riley (2003) demonstrated that self-congruity significantly predicts customer satisfaction and loyalty in the service sector. Malär et al. (2011) found that emotional brand attachment is stronger when brands align with consumers' actual rather than ideal self-concept, particularly for high-involvement products. Kressmann et al. (2006) further established a direct and indirect relationship between self-congruity and brand loyalty, mediated by functional congruity and brand relationship quality. Collectively, these studies affirm that self-congruity is not merely a perceptual phenomenon but a behavioural driver with measurable consequences for brand choice.

➤ *Brand Personality and Consumer Choice*

The relationship between brand personality and consumer choice has been examined across a wide variety of product categories and cultural settings. Aaker (1999) demonstrated that brand personality dimensions influence consumer preference differently depending on the cultural context, suggesting that the same brand may be perceived and chosen for different personality-related reasons across markets. In the context of packaged goods and beverages, categories directly relevant to this study, brand personality has been found to be a particularly strong predictor of choice when functional differentiation between competing products is low (Kim, Han and Park, 2001).

Freling and Forbes (2005) conducted a meta-analysis confirming that brand personality positively influences brand attitude, purchase intention, and willingness to pay a premium. The mechanism through which personality operates, they argued, is primarily affective, consumers develop emotional associations with brands that possess clear, consistent, and relatable personalities, and these associations translate into preference and loyalty over time.

More recent scholarship has explored brand personality in the digital context. Munnukka, Uusitalo and Toivonen (2016) found that brand personality communicated through social media significantly influenced followers' purchase intentions, with sincerity and excitement emerging as the most impactful dimensions. This finding is relevant to the present study, as all five selected brands maintain active social media presences through which distinct personality signals are transmitted and received.

➤ *Branding in the Indian FMCG Context*

India's FMCG sector represents one of the most dynamic and rapidly evolving consumer markets globally. With a population exceeding 1.4 billion, a growing middle

class, increasing urbanisation, and rising digital penetration, Indian consumers are engaging with brands in increasingly sophisticated ways (Deloitte, 2022). The sector has witnessed the emergence of a new category of aspirational, story-driven brands that compete on personality and purpose rather than price alone.

The five brands selected for this study reflect distinct segments of this evolving landscape. Paperboat, launched by Hector Beverages in 2013, positions itself around nostalgia and Indian cultural memory, evoking the flavours and experiences of childhood. Yakult, the Japanese probiotic drink marketed in India since 2008, projects a personality rooted in health credibility, scientific authority, and quiet competence. Epigamia, a Greek yoghurt brand, targets urban millennials with a personality that blends sophistication, wellness, and modern Indian identity. Super You, a functional nutrition brand, communicates a personality centred on empowerment, fitness, and aspirational self-improvement. Campa, originally a 1970s brand revived by Reliance Consumer Products in 2022, deliberately invokes retro nationalism and mass appeal, positioning itself as an accessible alternative to multinational cola brands.

Each of these brands offers a meaningfully distinct personality profile, making cross-brand comparison not only possible but analytically productive. Consumer research on Indian FMCG brands has increasingly recognised that psychological and identity-related factors, rather than price or availability alone, drive brand preference among urban and semi-urban consumers.

➤ *Netnography and Online Brand Perception*

Netnography, a term coined by Kozinets (2002), refers to the qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of online cultures and communities. It involves the systematic observation and analysis of naturally occurring consumer conversations in digital spaces, forums, social media platforms, review sites, and comment sections, without direct researcher intervention or participant recruitment.

Kozinets (2010) argued that netnography is particularly well-suited to the study of brand communities and consumer culture because it captures organic, unsolicited consumer expression, what consumers say about brands when they are not being formally studied. This naturalistic quality addresses a key limitation of survey-based research, namely that self-reported data is often shaped by social desirability and demand characteristics.

Applied to brand personality research, netnography enables researchers to observe how consumers describe, evaluate, and emotionally engage with brands in their own language. Pitt et al. (2011) demonstrated that user-generated content on brand-related platforms contains rich personality attributions that often diverge from the brand's intended positioning, a finding that underscores the value of studying perceived rather than projected brand personality. In the Indian context, where social media usage among urban youth is extensive (Statista, 2024), platforms such as Instagram,

Reddit India, and YouTube offer a rich and accessible corpus of consumer discourse for observational analysis.

➤ *Research Gap and Conceptual Framework*

Despite the extensive body of literature on brand personality and self-congruity, several gaps remain. First, the majority of empirical studies have been conducted in Western consumer contexts, with limited attention to India's culturally specific patterns of brand identification and self-expression. Second, most studies employing Aaker's BPS rely on closed

survey instruments, which constrain respondents to pre-defined personality dimensions rather than capturing the full richness of consumer perception. Third, the intersection of netnographic methodology with self-congruity theory remains underexplored in the Indian FMCG context.

The present study addresses these gaps by combining netnographic observation with content analysis to examine brand personality and self-congruity across five Indian FMCG brands in the digital space.

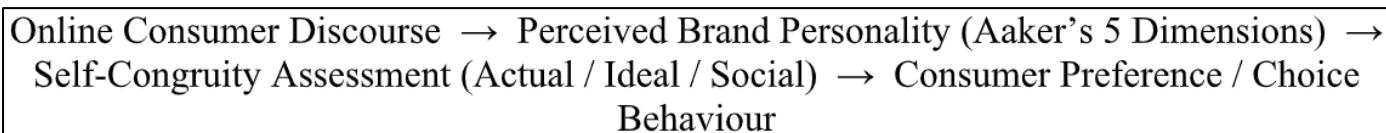


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Philosophy*

This study is grounded in an interpretivist philosophical paradigm, which holds that social reality is constructed through human perception and meaning-making rather than objective, measurable facts (Bryman, 2016). Given that brand personality and self-congruity are inherently subjective psychological constructs, shaped by individual identity, culture, and experience, interpretivism provides an appropriate epistemological foundation. This is complemented by a pragmatic orientation in the quantitative strand, which treats content frequency and sentiment patterns as useful proxies for broader consumer behaviour trends.

➤ *Research Design*

A mixed methods research design is adopted, integrating qualitative netnographic observation with quantitative content analysis. This design is consistent with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) convergent parallel model, wherein both strands are conducted concurrently and their findings are merged during interpretation to give a fuller picture than either approach would provide independently.

The qualitative strand captures the richness, nuance, and context of consumer language around each brand. The

quantitative strand translates patterns in that language into measurable frequencies and sentiment scores, enabling cross-brand comparison. Together, they allow the study to answer both how consumers perceive brand personality and how strongly certain perceptions dominate the discourse.

➤ *Research Method: Netnography*

Netnography, as defined by Kozinets (2002, p.62), is "a qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications." It is selected for this study for three reasons. First, it captures organic, unsolicited consumer discourse, what people say about brands without being prompted by a researcher. Second, it is ethically non-intrusive, as it involves observation of publicly available content only. Third, it is practically feasible for a single researcher working independently.

➤ *Data Sources and Platform Selection*

Data was collected from the following publicly accessible digital platforms, selected on the basis of relevance, volume of brand-related discourse, and accessibility:

Table 1 Data Sources and Platform Selection

Platform	Rationale
Instagram (brand pages + hashtags)	Primary channel for brand personality projection and consumer response via comments
YouTube (brand videos + comments)	Rich source of extended consumer sentiment and personality attributions
Reddit (r/India, r/IndianFood, r/fitness)	Organic, unbranded consumer conversations about products
Amazon / Zomato / Swiggy reviews	Purchase-linked sentiment directly tied to consumer choice behaviour

For each of the five brands, Paperboat, Yakult, Epigamia, Super You, and Campa, data was collected from all four platform types where available, ensuring comparability across brands.

➤ *Sampling Strategy*

A purposive sampling approach was adopted for platform and content selection, consistent with the interpretivist tradition. Content was selected based on the following criteria:

- Posts, videos, or listings directly related to the brand (official or consumer-generated)
- Comments or reviews containing personality-relevant language (descriptive adjectives, emotional expression, identity statements)
- Content posted within a defined observation window of 24 months (2023–2024) to ensure recency and relevance

For each brand, a minimum of 50 consumer comments or reviews were collected per platform, yielding a target corpus of approximately 200 data units per brand and 1,000 data units in total across the study.

➤ *Data Collection Procedure*

Data collection followed a three-stage process.

- Stage 1 , Brand audit: Each brand's official social media pages and top-performing posts were identified and documented. Screenshots and written field notes were recorded, capturing the brand's projected personality through visual identity, caption tone, and content themes.
- Stage 2 , Consumer discourse observation: Consumer comments, reviews, and community posts related to each brand were systematically observed and recorded in a structured observation log. Each entry captured the platform, content type, verbatim consumer language (where directly quoted for analysis purposes), and initial researcher notes on personality signals.
- Stage 3 , Corpus compilation: All collected data units were compiled into a master dataset organised by brand, platform, and personality dimension for subsequent analysis.

➤ *Analytical Framework*

• *Qualitative Analysis, Thematic Coding*

The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), following a six-phase process: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Codes were mapped against Aaker's (1997) five brand personality dimensions , Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness , to identify which dimensions dominated consumer perception of each brand.

A codebook was developed prior to analysis to ensure consistency. Example codes included: *nostalgic / wholesome / down-to-earth* (Sincerity), *energetic / bold / trendy* (Excitement), *trustworthy / expert / effective* (Competence), *premium / refined / aspirational* (Sophistication), and *strong / tough / authentic* (Ruggedness).

• *Quantitative Analysis, Content Frequency and Sentiment Scoring*

The quantitative strand involved two measures. First, frequency counts of personality-dimension codes were tabulated per brand to identify dominant personality profiles. Second, a basic three-point sentiment classification (positive, neutral, negative) was applied to each data unit to assess the

overall valence of consumer engagement per brand. Results were presented using descriptive statistics , frequency tables, percentage distributions, and bar charts , enabling cross-brand comparison.

➤ *Ethical Considerations*

As this study involves observation of publicly available online content only, no direct interaction with human participants was required. No personal identifying information was collected or stored. All quoted consumer content is presented anonymously. The study adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (BPS) for internet-mediated research (BPS, 2021), which permits passive observation of public online spaces without informed consent, provided data is anonymised and used solely for academic purposes.

➤ *Validity and Reliability*

To ensure the credibility of qualitative findings, the researcher employed reflexivity , maintaining a research journal documenting interpretive decisions throughout the coding process , and member-checking against the codebook at regular intervals. Transferability is supported through thick description of the research context and brand profiles. For the quantitative strand, consistency in sentiment classification was ensured through the use of a fixed classification rubric applied uniformly across all data units.

➤ *Limitations of the Methodology*

Several methodological limitations are acknowledged. The researcher's interpretive judgements in thematic coding introduce a degree of subjectivity that inter-rater reliability checks would typically address , a constraint of single-researcher studies. Online discourse reflects the views of digitally active consumers and may not represent the full population of brand users. Additionally, platform algorithms influence content visibility, meaning the corpus may not capture a fully representative sample of consumer sentiment.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A. *Overview of Data Corpus*

The netnographic observation yielded approximately 120 consumer-generated data units across four brands , Paperboat, Yakult, Epigamia, and Super You , collected from Instagram and YouTube. Note: data for Campa could not be collected within the observation window and is treated as a limitation of this study (see Section 10). Each data unit was subjected to two levels of analysis: thematic coding against Aaker's (1997) five brand personality dimensions, and sentiment classification (positive, neutral, negative).

B. *Brand-Wise Analysis*

➤ *Paperboat*

Paperboat generated the most emotionally rich and consistently positive discourse of all four brands observed. Consumer language was overwhelmingly anchored in nostalgia, warmth, and cultural memory , hallmarks of Aaker's (1997) Sincerity dimension, characterised by traits such as down-to-earth, wholesome, and cheerful.

Comments such as "Malgudi Days , Bachpan ki woh kahaniyan wah!" and "The way you capture nostalgia is just on point... always leaves a smile" reveal a strong actual self-congruity response , consumers are not aspiring to an identity through Paperboat; they are recognising a part of their existing self. The brand's content evokes shared childhood experiences, and consumers actively mirror this in their language. One user composed an original poem in the comments, describing art as a quiet place , an unusually deep expression of personal resonance with the brand's identity.

Sentiment analysis placed approximately 85% of Paperboat's corpus in the positive category, with virtually no negative discourse. The dominant personality dimension coded was Sincerity (approximately 90% of relevant units), with negligible presence of Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, or Ruggedness. This makes Paperboat the most personality-coherent brand in this study , its projected personality and perceived personality are closely aligned.

- *Self-Congruity Signal:* High actual self-congruity. Consumers see Paperboat as a reflection of their cultural roots and personal history.

➤ *Yakult*

Yakult's consumer discourse was notably more polarised than Paperboat's. The brand's dominant personality projection is one of health credibility and scientific authority , placing it firmly in Aaker's (1997) Competence dimension (reliable, intelligent, trustworthy).

Positive comments affirmed this positioning: "After knowing the benefits, Yakult is now my daily recommendation!" and "Important tips for health." However, a significant minority of discourse challenged the brand's health claims directly. Comments such as "Yakult has 38% more sugar than Coke" and "Yakult is just sugar , nutritionists don't recommend this" represent a meaningful credibility threat to the brand's Competence positioning.

This divergence is analytically significant. It suggests that while Yakult projects a Competence personality, a portion of digitally informed consumers experience ideal self-congruity conflict , they aspire to a health-conscious identity, and they chose Yakult as a vehicle for that identity, but upon further scrutiny they feel the brand may not genuinely support that aspiration. This finding aligns with Malär et al.'s (2011) observation that ideal self-congruity is fragile when brand claims are perceived as unsubstantiated.

Sentiment distribution: approximately 50% positive, 20% neutral, 30% negative. Dominant personality dimension: Competence (approximately 80%), with secondary signals of Sincerity (approximately 40%).

- *Self-Congruity Signal:* Moderate ideal self-congruity among health-conscious consumers, weakened by a vocal counter-narrative around sugar content.

➤ *Epigamia*

Epigamia's consumer discourse revealed a brand straddling two personality dimensions , Sophistication (upper-class, charming, urban) and Excitement (spirited, imaginative, trendy) , consistent with its positioning as a premium, modern, aspirational dairy brand for urban millennials.

Positive engagement reflected both dimensions: "The OG kings of protein," "This looks so fun," and "Why does this ad look like an Apple ad?" , the Apple comparison is telling, as it signals that consumers read Epigamia as a design-forward, premium, aspirational brand rather than a functional food product. This is a clear Sophistication signal. Meanwhile, comments about protein content , "30g protein in one small bottle is crazy" and "30g and just 160 cal" , reflected an Excitement-tinged engagement with novelty and performance.

However, Epigamia also attracted pointed quality criticism: "Health isn't a marketing gimmick. Fix your quality control first," and a detailed complaint about finding foreign matter in the packaging. These represent a significant self-congruity rupture , consumers who chose Epigamia precisely because it matched their sophisticated, health-aware self-image felt a sharp mismatch when product quality failed to deliver on that projected personality.

Sentiment distribution: approximately 55% positive, 15% neutral, 30% negative. Dominant personality dimensions: Sophistication (approximately 70%) and Excitement (approximately 60%).

- *Self-Congruity Signal:* Strong ideal and social self-congruity among urban millennials, disrupted by quality-related negative experiences.

➤ *Super You*

Super You generated the most functionally detailed consumer discourse of all four brands, reflecting its positioning in the competitive fitness nutrition space. Consumer language coded most strongly against the Excitement dimension (bold, spirited, up-to-date) and Competence (reliable, trustworthy, effective).

Positive reviews highlighted product efficacy and brand modernity: "Genuine review: good taste, great results within a month," "Really like how your brand blends health-focused products with modern branding," and "Super easy to digest." These comments reveal a strong ideal self-congruity pattern , consumers are choosing Super You as an expression of a fitness-oriented, aspirational identity they are actively building.

However, Super You also attracted the most operationally detailed negative discourse. Complaints about customer service failures, wrong product delivery, and aftertaste lingered significantly in the corpus. One comment stood out as a particularly human self-congruity statement: a user wrote in Hindi that they were a beginner, spending hard-earned money, and asking for genuine guidance , placing

enormous personal trust in the brand's persona of empowerment and credibility.

Sentiment distribution: approximately 55% positive, 10% neutral, 35% negative. Dominant dimensions: Excitement (approximately 75%) and Competence (approximately 60%).

- *Self-Congruity Signal*: Strong ideal self-congruity among fitness aspirants; weakened by service failures and product inconsistency.

C. Cross-Brand Comparison

Across all four brands, Sincerity emerged as the dimension most strongly linked to positive, loyalty-oriented consumer language, while Competence claims attracted the highest levels of critical scrutiny. Brands that projected aspirational personalities (Excitement, Sophistication) generated engaged but more emotionally volatile discourse, consumers were more invested, and therefore more disappointed when the brand failed to deliver.

Paperboat, with its purely Sincerity-based positioning and absence of functional health claims, produced the most uniformly positive and self-congruent consumer discourse. This suggests that in the Indian FMCG digital context, brands anchored in cultural and emotional authenticity may achieve more stable self-congruity than those relying on aspirational or competence-based positioning.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

➤ Overview

This chapter presents the consolidated findings of the study and situates them within the existing body of literature on brand personality and self-congruity. The discussion is organised around the four research questions established in Section 4, followed by a cross-cutting thematic discussion of emergent patterns.

➤ *RQ1: What Brand Personality Dimensions do Consumers Associate with Each Brand in Online Discourse?*

The netnographic analysis reveals that each of the four brands observed occupies a meaningfully distinct personality space in consumer perception, broadly consistent with their intended positioning.

Paperboat is perceived almost exclusively through the lens of Sincerity, wholesome, nostalgic, emotionally warm, and culturally rooted. Yakult is perceived primarily through Competence, trustworthy, health-credible, and scientifically grounded, though this perception is contested by a vocal minority. Epigamia occupies a dual personality space of Sophistication and Excitement, positioning itself as both aspirational and novel. Super You registers most strongly on Excitement and Competence, projecting a personality of empowerment, modernity, and scientific reliability.

These findings are consistent with Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale, which proposed that brands tend to cluster around one or two dominant dimensions rather than

distributing evenly across all five. The relative absence of Ruggedness across all four brands is also notable, and theoretically predictable, given that Ruggedness typically characterises outdoor, physically demanding, or masculine-coded product categories (Aaker, 1997), none of which apply to the health and wellness FMCG segment studied here.

➤ *RQ2: To what Extent do Expressions of Self-Congruity Appear in Consumer Online Engagement?*

Self-congruity signals were present across all four brands, though they manifested differently depending on the dominant personality dimension involved.

For Paperboat, self-congruity was expressed through actual self-congruity, consumers recognised themselves and their cultural memories in the brand's content. This form of congruity, as Malär et al. (2011) argued, tends to generate the strongest emotional brand attachment, as it does not require consumers to imagine a future self but simply to recognise an existing one. The spontaneous poetry, personal childhood references, and expressions of love observed in Paperboat's corpus are consistent with this form of deep attachment.

For Yakult, Epigamia, and Super You, the dominant form of self-congruity observed was ideal self-congruity, consumers chose these brands as vehicles for a health-conscious, sophisticated, or fitness-oriented identity they aspired to. This finding aligns with Sirgy's (1982) original formulation, which proposed that ideal self-congruity is a particularly powerful driver of choice in categories where the product serves as a public signal of identity.

However, the data also reveals that ideal self-congruity is fragile. When brands fail to substantiate their personality claims, through product quality failures, misleading health messaging, or poor service, consumers express dissatisfaction in detailed, personal, and often emotional terms. This is consistent with Kressmann et al.'s (2006) finding that self-congruity indirectly shapes brand loyalty through brand relationship quality, when that relationship quality is damaged, the congruity-loyalty link breaks down.

➤ *RQ3: How do the Brand Personality Profiles of the Five Brands Differ from One Another?*

The cross-brand comparison reveals three distinct strategic personality archetypes among the brands studied.

The first is the emotional heritage archetype, represented by Paperboat. This archetype builds personality through cultural memory, storytelling, and emotional authenticity rather than functional claims. It generates high Sincerity scores, low negative sentiment, and deep actual self-congruity. It is the most stable personality configuration observed in this study.

The second is the health credibility archetype, represented by Yakult and, to a lesser extent, Epigamia. This archetype builds personality around Competence and the promise of physiological benefit. It generates strong initial ideal self-congruity but is vulnerable to credibility challenges, particularly among digitally informed consumers who fact-

check health claims in real time. This finding extends the work of Freling and Forbes (2005), who noted that brand personality influences brand attitude primarily through affective rather than cognitive mechanisms. The Yakult data suggests that when Competence claims are made explicitly and scientifically, they invite cognitive rather than affective evaluation, which can destabilise the personality-choice relationship.

The third is the aspirational lifestyle archetype, represented by Super You and partially by Epigamia. This archetype builds personality through identity aspiration, the brand projects a version of the consumer's ideal self, and consumers engage with it as a self-improvement tool. It generates the highest Excitement scores and the most emotionally invested consumer discourse, but also the most operationally sensitive, any gap between brand promise and product reality is experienced as a personal let-down rather than a mere product disappointment.

➤ *RQ4: What Patterns in Online Sentiment and Engagement Suggest a Link Between Brand Personality Alignment and Consumer Preference?*

The data provides several observable indicators that brand personality alignment drives consumer preference in the digital context. First, brands with higher positive sentiment scores, particularly Paperboat, also attracted more relationship-oriented language: terms of endearment, expressions of loyalty, and unprompted brand advocacy. This is consistent with Fournier's (1998) brand relationship theory, which holds that consumers form quasi-interpersonal relationships with brands whose personalities they find congruent with their own.

Second, the depth and specificity of consumer engagement correlated with the strength of self-congruity signals. Consumers who felt strong alignment with a brand's personality wrote longer, more personal, and more emotionally detailed comments, Paperboat's poetry commenter being the most striking example. Consumers who experienced congruity ruptures wrote longer, more analytical, and more adversarial comments, the detailed Epigamia complaint about contamination and the structured Super You product critique both reflect consumers who had invested

significant identity meaning in the brand and felt personally betrayed by its failure.

Third, the quantitative content analysis revealed that brands with a single dominant, coherent personality dimension (Paperboat, Sincerity) attracted more uniformly positive sentiment than brands with complex or contested personality profiles (Yakult, Super You). This suggests that personality clarity, not personality richness, is the more reliable driver of positive consumer response, a finding consistent with Freling and Forbes's (2005) meta-analytic conclusion that clear, distinctive brand personalities outperform diffuse ones in driving preference.

➤ *Emergent Themes*

Beyond the research questions, two emergent themes warrant discussion.

The first is the credibility gap in health branding. Across Yakult, Epigamia, and Super You, a recurring pattern emerged in which the brand's Competence or Sophistication claims were directly contested by consumers citing nutritional data, lab test results, or personal experience. This represents a distinctly digital-era phenomenon, greater consumer access to health information online means that brand credibility must be earned through consistent, verifiable claims rather than assumed from positioning alone.

The second emergent theme is the role of language switching as a self-congruity signal. Several comments in the corpus, particularly for Paperboat and Super You, were written in Hindi or Hinglish rather than English, suggesting that consumers engaged with these brands in their more authentic, less performative linguistic register. For Paperboat, this reinforced the Sincerity dimension. For Super You, a poignant comment in Hindi from a beginner seeking guidance revealed the depth of identity investment some consumers make in fitness brands. This linguistic dimension of self-congruity has not been extensively explored in existing literature and represents a productive avenue for future research in the Indian context.

➤ *Summary of Findings*

The table below summarises the key findings per brand:

Table 2 Summary of Findings

Brand	Dominant Personality Dimension	Self-Congruity Type	Sentiment Profile	Key Finding
Paperboat	Sincerity	Actual	85% positive	Most stable, coherent personality-choice relationship
Yakult	Competence	Ideal	50% positive, 30% negative	Credibility contested; fragile ideal congruity
Epigamia	Sophistication + Excitement	Ideal + Social	55% positive, 30% negative	Quality failures rupture aspirational congruity
Super You	Excitement + Competence	Ideal	55% positive, 35% negative	Strong aspiration; undermined by service and taste gaps

VI. CONCLUSION

➤ *Revisiting the Research Objectives*

This study set out to examine brand personality and self-congruity as determinants of consumer choice across four Indian FMCG brands, Paperboat, Yakult, Epigamia, and Super You, using a mixed methods approach combining netnographic observation with content analysis of consumer-generated digital discourse.

The findings confirm that brand personality, as perceived through online consumer language, is a meaningful and observable driver of consumer preference. Each brand occupies a distinct personality space within Aaker's (1997) five-dimension framework, and patterns of self-congruity, the alignment between brand personality and consumer self-concept, are clearly visible in the tone, depth, and sentiment of digital consumer engagement.

➤ *Answering the Research Questions*

The study's four research questions have been addressed as follows.

Consumers associate distinct and internally consistent personality dimensions with each brand in online discourse, Sincerity for Paperboat, Competence for Yakult, Sophistication and Excitement for Epigamia, and Excitement and Competence for Super You. These perceived personalities broadly correspond to each brand's intended positioning, though consumer perception is never fully controlled by the brand.

Self-congruity expressions were present across all four brands, manifesting as actual self-congruity for Paperboat and ideal or social self-congruity for the three health and wellness brands. The depth and emotional intensity of self-congruity language correlated strongly with both positive brand sentiment and, when disrupted by product or service failures, with the severity of negative response.

The four brand personality profiles are meaningfully differentiated, with Paperboat representing an emotional heritage archetype, Yakult and Epigamia a health credibility archetype, and Super You an aspirational lifestyle archetype. These archetypes carry different self-congruity dynamics and different vulnerability profiles.

Finally, patterns in online sentiment and engagement, particularly the depth of positive language, the use of personal and identity-laden expression, and the sharpness of disappointment when brand promises fail, suggest a consistent link between personality alignment and consumer preference behaviour in the digital context.

➤ *Broader Implications*

The central takeaway of this study is that in the Indian FMCG digital space, brand personality clarity and emotional authenticity are more reliable drivers of positive consumer response than functional claims alone. Paperboat, the brand with the simplest and most coherent personality, generated the most uniformly positive and relationship-oriented

consumer discourse. Brands that rely on Competence or aspirational Excitement must work harder to earn and sustain consumer trust, because digitally informed consumers will test those claims.

This study also demonstrates that netnographic observation is a credible and productive method for examining brand personality and self-congruity in contexts where primary survey data collection is not feasible. Consumer-generated digital content is rich, spontaneous, and analytically tractable, and in many respects more ecologically valid than survey responses.

➤ *Concluding Statement*

Taken together, these findings suggest that brand personality, as experienced and expressed by consumers in digital spaces, is a more complex and dynamic construct than existing literature has fully accounted for, one that warrants continued scholarly attention in the Indian context. For brands operating in India's increasingly competitive and digitally mediated consumer landscape, personality coherence is not a creative luxury but a strategic necessity.

VII. LIMITATIONS

Every research study operates within constraints, and acknowledging them honestly is a mark of academic rigour. This study has five key limitations.

- Absence of Campa data. The fifth brand originally included in the study's scope, Campa, could not be incorporated into the data collection due to time constraints within the observation window. This limits the breadth of cross-brand comparison, particularly the opportunity to examine a mass-market, nationally revived brand alongside premium and niche players. Future studies should include Campa to complete the brand personality spectrum across price segments.
- Single-researcher coding. All thematic coding was conducted by a single researcher, introducing the possibility of interpretive bias. In robust qualitative research, inter-rater reliability is typically established through a second independent coder. This was not feasible within the scope of an undergraduate study but represents a meaningful methodological constraint.
- Platform limitation. Data was collected only from Instagram and YouTube. Platforms such as Reddit, Amazon, Zomato, and Twitter contain substantial brand-related discourse that was not captured in this corpus, potentially skewing findings toward more visual, younger, and more brand-engaged consumer segments.
- Temporal scope. The observation window covered publicly visible content at the time of data collection and does not constitute a longitudinal analysis. Brand personality perceptions can shift in response to marketing campaigns, controversies, or product launches, a snapshot study cannot capture this dynamism.
- Digital consumer bias. Netnographic observation, by definition, captures only the views of consumers who are digitally active and choose to express themselves publicly

online. This excludes a significant portion of India's FMCG consumer base, particularly older, rural, and lower-income consumers, limiting the generalisability of findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

➤ *Recommendations for Brand Managers*

Based on the findings of this study, three recommendations are offered for practitioners managing FMCG brands in the Indian digital context.

- Invest in personality clarity over personality complexity. The data consistently showed that brands with a single dominant, coherent personality dimension, particularly Sincerity, generated more stable positive consumer discourse than brands with complex or contested personality profiles. Brand managers should resist the temptation to layer multiple aspirational personality signals onto a single brand, as this can dilute distinctiveness and increase vulnerability to consumer criticism.
- Treat Competence claims as a liability unless fully substantiated. Greater consumer access to health information online means that health and wellness claims attract fact-checkers. Brands like Yakult and Epigamia that project Competence must ensure that every functional claim made in their content and packaging can withstand consumer scrutiny. Unsubstantiated claims do not merely fail to build ideal self-congruity, they actively damage it.
- Monitor self-congruity ruptures as early warning signals. The patterns of negative discourse observed in this study, particularly the shift from personal disappointment to public criticism, suggest that self-congruity ruptures are not merely brand reputation events but identity-level experiences for consumers. Social media listening tools should be configured to detect not just negative sentiment but identity-laden negative language, which is a more sensitive indicator of brand relationship damage.

➤ *Recommendations for Future Research*

This study opens several productive directions for future scholarly inquiry.

Future research should replicate this study's netnographic methodology with a larger corpus, ideally 200 or more data units per brand, and incorporate additional platforms including Reddit, Amazon, and Zomato, to produce a richer and more representative picture of consumer brand personality perception.

The finding that language switching between English and Hindi or Hinglish may serve as a self-congruity signal warrants dedicated investigation. A study specifically examining the relationship between consumer linguistic register and brand personality alignment could make a distinctive contribution to both branding literature and Indian consumer behaviour research.

A longitudinal netnographic study tracking the same brands over twelve or more months would allow researchers

to examine how brand personality perceptions shift in response to marketing activities, product changes, and external events, a dynamic dimension that cross-sectional observation cannot capture.

Finally, the three brand personality archetypes identified in this study, emotional heritage, health credibility, and aspirational lifestyle, could form the basis of a typological framework for Indian FMCG brand positioning. Future research could test this typology across a broader range of brands and product categories to assess its generalisability.

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APPENDICES➤ *Appendix A: Observation Log (Sample)*

The following table presents a sample of the structured observation log used during data collection. The full dataset is available upon request.

Brand	Platform	Consumer Quote (verbatim)	Initial Code	Personality Dimension	Sentiment
Paperboat	Instagram	The way you capture nostalgia is just on point	nostalgic, warm	Sincerity	Positive
Yakult	Instagram	Yakult is just sugar , nutritionists don't recommend this	sceptical, credibility challenge	Competence (contested)	Negative
Epigamia	Instagram	Why does this ad look like an Apple ad?	premium, design-forward	Sophistication	Positive
Super You	Instagram	Genuine review: good taste, great results within a month	effective, trustworthy	Competence	Positive

➤ *Appendix B: Codebook*

The following codes were used during thematic analysis, mapped against Aaker's (1997) five brand personality dimensions:

Dimension	Example Codes Used
Sincerity	nostalgic, warm, wholesome, down-to-earth, cheerful, honest, cultural, childhood, memory
Excitement	bold, energetic, trendy, fun, spirited, modern, innovative, daring, aspirational
Competence	trustworthy, reliable, effective, expert, scientific, credible, results-driven, evidence-based
Sophistication	premium, refined, elegant, aspirational, upper-class, chic, design-forward
Ruggedness	strong, tough, authentic, outdoorsy, rugged (minimal presence in this corpus)