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UNIVERSAL HUMAN VALUES (UHV) OF FMCG COMPANIES IN SHAPING BRAND EQUITY: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF TOOTHPASTE BRANDS

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ABSTRACT

"In a transparent world, brands are judged not only by what they sell but how they behave." — (Gerzema & Lebar, 2008)

A shift has emerged in the relationship between brands and consumers. Today, people prefer to purchase product items not solely based on functionality, but rather with brands that resonate with their values and belief systems. In this research, we explore the impact of Universal Human Values on brand equity regarding Fast-Moving Consumer Goods, specifically focusing on toothpaste brands in Punjab and Chandigarh. Contemporary consumers are more conscious of a corporation's business ethics and social responsibilities. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to investigate how these core values of humanity—trust, empathy, responsibility, and honesty— impact the perception of brands and the loyalty of consumers. Through an online questionnaire sent to more than 240 people, convenience sampling yielded 222 valid responses. This study focuses on four leading brands of toothpaste: Colgate (Colgate-Palmolive Company), Sensodyne (Haleon UK Trading Limited), Dabur Red (Dabur India Limited), and Dantkanti (Patanjali Ayurved). The outcome of this study revealed that UHVs such as trust, fairness, empathy and respect significantly & positively influence brand equity of 4 discussed toothpaste brands in 2 regions.

KEYWORDS: Brand Equity, Universal Human Values, Ethical Branding, Aaker Model, Schwartz Theory

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Evolving Branding World

With today's consumers being more informed, brands need to go beyond providing products and behave responsibly, empathetically and with strong values. Individuals in regions like Punjab and Chandigarh pay attention to how a company operates, not only to what products they provide.

Therefore, it is highly important for FMCG brands to make sure that their strategies include high ethical standards and care for all persons.

1.2 Comprehending Branding, Brands and Their Etiology

Essentially, a brand serves as a company's or product's identity, character, and promise. It includes a name, logo, design, and an emotional bond which helps in differentiating one offered product from the others in the market. Thus, it becomes important to communicate the identity successfully so that the product forms a bond with loyal consumers. This process is called branding. Branding of everyday household items is essential for drivers of loyalty, even in the case of minimal expenditure for switching brands, like FMCG items. Perceptions and familiarity can at times outweigh the functional advantages offered by the product itself. In the case of toothpaste which every consumer uses on multiple occasions throughout the day, loyalty can only be ensured through seamless emotional and ethical marketing on the part of the brand.

1.3 The idea underlying Brand Equity

In today's marketing, brand equity stands for the non-functional value a brand provides for its products. In his book, Aaker defines brand equity as all the things that impact the value created by products and services, connected to a brand, name and symbol (Aaker, 1991). "A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add value to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/ or to that firm's customers" (Aakar,1991, p.15). These assets cannot just be touched or valued by money; they are mostly formed by what people feel and think about a brand. Whereas in simple terms brand equity means the value and power of a specific brand that exists in the consumer's mind. The Aaker model is especially valuable since it discusses brand equity by dividing it into five functions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and proprietary brand assets. Although these elements are separated, they blend together to influence the way consumers relate to a brand in terms of their feelings and logic.

The initial part, **brand loyalty**, means that a consumer will buy a brand over and over again, even with competitors and new market situations. Regular buyers provide trusted profits, reduce expenses for advertising and tell others about the brand. Apple Inc. Has succeeded in having customers remain loyal by giving them a familiar experience, impressive designs and connecting all its products. Apple's loyal users choose the company over other brands with less costly, yet similar, options.

In Aaker's model, the second main point is **brand awareness**, explaining how easy it is for customers to recall or recognize a brand. When it is highly visible, chances improve that the consumer will add it to their list of options. In numerous countries like India, Colgate is almost the same as toothpaste to many people. Even outside big cities, this brand is easily recalled by many, influencing their decisions without them checking rivals' qualities or costs.

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Perceived quality looks at how customers view the performance of the brand, not at its actual performance. Because of these views, consumers are more or less willing to pay for certain products and tend to prefer some brands over others. Many people see Sensodyne as a top toothpaste suggested by dentists for those experiencing sensitivity. Thanks to its reputation and level of trust, it can charge more and be found in a specialized area of oral care, despite not every person having proof of its quality.

Brand associations consist of anything that might be related in a person's mind to the brand: pictures, lifestyle, emotions, experiences, values or social messages. Strong and unique ties with customers allow brands to be different from competitors. For example, Dabur connects Ayurvedic principles, traditions and herbal treatments. They are reinforced at every step, through communication and how brands design their products. Nike creates images of athletics, encouragement and empowerment, mainly due to its famous slogan, "Just Do It." Additionally, Tata in India is linked with trust, ethics and feeling patriotic which often leads it to be selected by customers over others that may cost less.

In the end, ("proprietary brand assets" – Kotler 2007 Framework) having trademarks, patents, logos and preferred distribution relationships helps a brand avoid competition.

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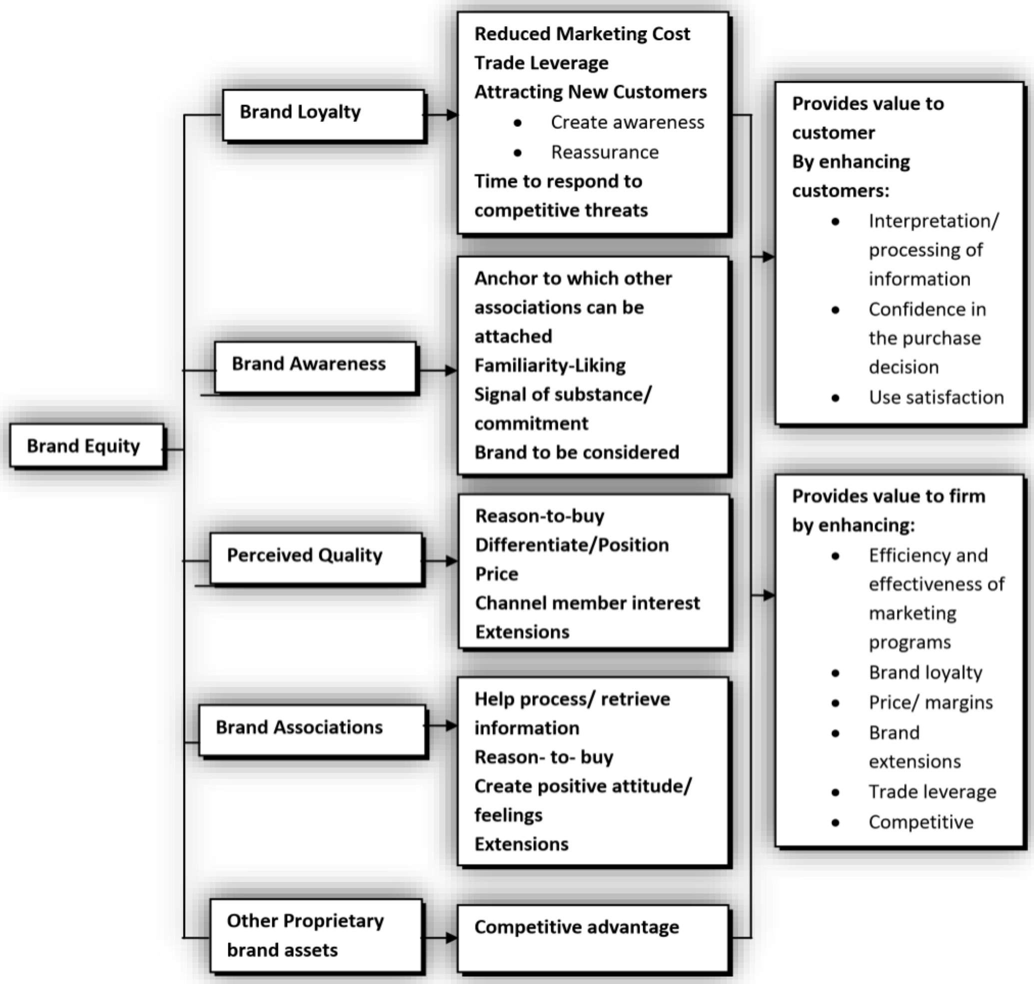
Figure-1: Aaker's Model of Brand Equity



(Source: David A. Aaker, 1996)

Although consumers might not notice them, these assets build protective barriers and keep the brand's image secure. For instance, the famous script logo of Coca-Cola and its special formula are assets only the company can use and access which makes its brand stand out.

1.4 Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values

The main idea of Shalom H. Schwartz's theory is to divide basic human values into four main groups and then assign ten types of human motives within them. Although the way individuals view these values may change depending on their culture, these values are considered important in every society. How consumers view, associate with, trust and support a brand is highly affected by its values which enables the brand to gain value in people's minds, a thing known as brand equity.

Brands connected to **self-transcendence** values like universalism and benevolence usually appeal strongly to people who pay attention to ethics. As an example, The Body Shop uses animal rights, fair trade and environmentally friendly methods to boost its brand and these initiatives have worked well. Because these values indicate care for others and the environment, people who care such kind of things have higher chances to choose these brands. Also, global brand Patagonia includes a focus on caring for the environment and encourages sustainable habits which helps the brand support universalism and develop close connections with customers.

In this case, the value cluster of **conservation** is important for brands who want to link their offerings with tradition, a feeling of security and staying the same as others. The Indian company Dabur supports Ayurvedic and age-old remedies, meeting the needs of people who want to maintain their heritage and be safe. In some backgrounds, a brand like Lifebuoy has long been about hygiene and health and so people are drawn to it because it offers both security and conformity in traditional or rural locations.

When brands stress the values of achievement and power (**self enhancement**), they usually emphasize prestige, accomplishment and personal growth. Nike takes this approach, focusing on highlighting great athletes, strong individual achievements and willpower. The famed athletes Michael Jordan and Serena Williams give Nike a strong link to people's dreams of achieving and being recognized. Such alignment strengthens feelings with customers and increases the brand's reputation, helping it succeed in fierce markets.

Additionally, brands that encourage people to grow and learn, enjoy new sensations and seek pleasure (**openness to change**) tend to support creativity, innovative ideas and novelty. Apple highlights innovation and self-expression by using will advancements. Advertisements for this industry stress individuality, imagination and freedom which are essential aspects of self-direction. Apple earns loyal and supportive customers when their values attract and interest consumers. Just like Red Bull, Mountain Dew uses extreme sports advertisements and its "Do the impossible" slogan to build a stronger emotional reaction among consumers.

To conclude, Schwartz's value theory provides an effective way to explore the emotional reasons behind how people react to brands as consumers. If brands are in step with what is important to their target audience, they can link their brand to deeper feelings and increased loyalty. This brings both more trust and satisfaction from consumers and helps the brand grow and keep its identity among others in the market

1.5 Universal Human Values and Ethical Branding

Today's modern Marketplace in which consumers are making more and more purchasing choices based on ethics and emotional connect, Universal human values have taken Central level as core drivers of consumer loyalty and brand image. Values like empathy, trust, integrity, responsibility and

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respect are not limited to interaction among the human beings but now are ended up being a critical part of organisational behaviour and brand positioning. These values uphold significance to the development of brand equity and important advertisement aid that includes brand recognition and elements of brand equity. The interaction of human values in brand equity has grown to be mainly foregrounding as clients look for authenticity and ethical consonants within the brands they choose to support.

When companies practice ethical branding, they emphasize their moral principles to tie in with consumers' values. If brands highlight these values in their actions, marketing and social activities, they foster more involvement from consumers and long-term relationships with the brand. Since there is a lot of competition in the FMCG industry, companies lean on their values to distinguish themselves.

1.6 Research Context: Toothpaste Brands and FMCG Ethics

The FMCG Enterprises that is typified by excessive frequency of purchases and excessive usage provides a rich setting to explore these phenomena. In this industry toothpaste brands are special and unique because they are used on a daily basis, have massive base of consumers and are highly differentiated at brand levels, they present a good case to analyze the role of values in brand selection. Businesses in this industry are increasingly recognising the imposition of values which are attractive to the cultural and ethical aspirations of consumers can dramatically enhance brand equity and inspire long-lasting customer relationships.

For this study, Colgate, Sensodyne, Dabur Red and Patanjali Dantkanti were chosen since they are sold in many places across the country and have unique branding strategies. As, some brands such as Sensodyne, value sensitivity; Dabur and Dantkanti use natural and Ayurvedic approaches; and Colgate strengthens the belief in everyone's dependable care. The study looks into how North Indians (specifically Punjab residents) view these brands and explains how well their messages about value meet their expectations.

1.7 Purpose and Contribution of the Study

As ethical consciousness and values-based consumption are growing, a brand is assumed to be more and more the mirror of human values in its identity and activities. Through the study of consumer behavior towards four common toothpaste brands, the present research provides evidence-based insights into the role of values in the formation of brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. The value of the study is that it fills the gap between the ethical branding and consumer behavior literature and offers both scholarly understanding and practical recommendations to marketers who intend to develop strong value-based brand identity in culturally rich and competitive markets.

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1. LITERATURE REVIEW

A brand is not only its logo or slogan; it means much more to the consumer after being exposed to it consistently in different ways (Keller, 2013). With little difference in products in these industries, branding is very important because people's feelings toward the brand make a big difference. They (Kotler and Keller, 2016) point out that good branding means building a unique brand that suits consumers' needs and values. Under these situations, using emotional branding, based on trust, empathy, and responsibility, usually results in more people being loyal and preferring the brand.

Brands generate value for consumers, which in turn drives increased revenue for the company. Therefore, regular evaluation of brand performance can lead to improved outcomes. Assessing brand equity across multiple dimensions over time serves as a key indicator of a brand's growth or decline. David Aakar, in his book, "Managing Brand Equity," concludes that managing brand equity needs to be an ongoing, well-planned effort that focuses on customers. It is important to work on brand equity over time, which helps grow loyalty, influence pricing, and make the business more competitive. This book recommends focusing on brand assets, delivering quality value, and building good connections with buyers. The current research adopted the theoretical model proposed by Aaker and Keller with the advised four components of brand equity.

Aaker's Brand Equity Model is one of the best-known tools to explain what brand-building does for both the finances and emotions of a company. Companies with high brand equity usually earn more consumer trust, can raise prices without worrying, and inspire loyal customers, which is necessary when competition increases and it is simple for buyers to switch products.

Throughout the world and across ages, people have accepted honesty, empathy, trust, fairness, and responsibility as moral values (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Thanks to these values, corporate entities can connect more strongly with each person. Brands that stand for UHVs usually have a deeper emotional bond with people who shop with them. Sheth et al. (2011) observed that using value-based marketing greatly increases a company's ability to win long-term loyalty from consumers in culturally grounded places like India, where ethics and emotions matter in people's everyday decisions.

Since people use toothpaste daily and it is connected to good hygiene, having ethical values matters a lot. Nowadays, consumers wish for brands to provide high-quality goods, and at the same time, demonstrate honesty, care for health, and be socially responsible. Ethical branding is the concept of making business actions match responsible and ethical values. Businesses that take part in ethical practices, such as choosing fair suppliers, advertising honestly, and creating health-related products, are better able to earn trust and good reviews (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

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Recently, more focus has been given to the connection between Universal Human Values (UHVs) and brand equity as people realize better brand-building requires strong ethical values. Most consumers these days have begun to value honesty, trust, responsibility, empathy, and integrity when making choices. Erdem and Swait's (2004) study revealed that trusting a brand and regarding it as credible boosts brand equity, thus allowing other studies to look into brand positioning that focuses on value. Iglesias, Singh, and Batista-Foguet also found in 2011 that if consumers feel a brand is authentic, it encourages closer links and more support, encouraging loyalty.

As people become more aware of what they purchase, FMCG companies have to be more forthcoming about what they believe in. Cone Communications (2017) reported that a majority of people would buy a product when a company is passionate about an issue they feel strongly about. When a product is low-involvement, like toothpaste, having advocates gives the brand an edge over others.

As Schwartz (1992) asserts, universal human values consist of fundamental beliefs that affect individuals' attitudes and behaviours. Self-transcendence, conservation, openness to change, and self-enhancement are some of the broad categories under which these values can be categorized. These fundamental principles significantly affect consumer preferences, brand attitudes, and buying decisions, according to several studies (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990; de Mooij, 2011). Values are internal drivers in marketing that influence how customers perceive and engage with brands. Individuals who believe in security and kindness, for example, might appreciate firms that emphasize safety, health, and trust—values that are often highlighted in advertisements for toothpaste.

Using human values in a company's branding approach helps create an emotional difference. They found that brands with ethical thought in UHVs tend to increase people's trust in them and raise their perceived quality, making vital points in Aaker's framework for brand equity. From the statistics, it seems that consumers are more loyal and pay less attention to prices if they feel aligned with the brand's values. Likewise, research conducted by Loureiro, Sarmento, and Bilro in 2017 proved that empathy-based campaigns (for instance, programs focused on people and the environment) increase brand attachment among millennials and Gen Z groups, who are more likely to choose companies with strong values.

According to He, Li, and Harris (2012), ethical consumerism has become more popular and is valuable in forming a brand's worth. If brands fail to adjust to this trend, people may see them as old-fashioned or inapparent. According to the authors, both The Body Shop and Ben & Jerry's owe their success to the values they promote, such as fairness, justice, and respect for everyone they do business with.

This relationship in values and brand equity is further explained by matching with the Basic Human

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Values in Schwartz's Theory. The various values guide people's actions and shape their choice of brand. If brands demonstrate benevolence and universalism, they touch consumers on a mental and emotional level. In India, because customs and beliefs play a big role in their purchase decisions, Schwartz' theory is useful in understanding how UHVs increase brand equity. As Pérez and Rodríguez del Bosque (2015) found, while executing CSR initiatives, a company can increase its brand equity by earning the consumer's moral support.

The relationship between universal human values such as trust, identity, belonging, integrity strengthens emotions ties as well as enhances emotional commitment leading to frequent engagement and brand loyalty. Building strong brand equity transforms people into loyal advocates and enables to enhance long term value. (Kemp,2012). Brands that serve humanity not just markets build the strongest equity, when ethical business practices reflect universal human values, they help the brand to elevate, transforming consumers into loyal partners proving ethics-based branding is not just effective but deeply resonate with consumer's core beliefs (Mbonigada,Celestin,Sujata Kumar,2024)
In addition, brand equity formed by UHVs needs more than just storytelling; it must be backed by real actions. Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak claim that people today can quickly notice when a business pretends to care, and brand equity results from acting on values across the entire business and within the community. Longitudinal studies proved that if a brand values something different from what it actually does, it can cause many consumers to doubt and have less trust in the brand.

Nonetheless, not much evidence – based research has measured the effects of UHVs on brand equity in the Indian FMCG sector. Many studies have shown that values influence a brand's success, but there is a need for studies that show this connection in real numbers, especially in Punjab and Chandigarh. As such, the current work addresses the gap by analyzing values and how they affect choices related to widely used toothpaste brands.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND MODEL

3.1 Overview of the Framework

The theoretical structure used in this study is based on the combination of the Brand Equity Model by Aaker and the Theory of Basic Human Values by Schwartz supported by the empirical studies on the relationship between values and branding in FMCG industry. This research contends that Universal Human Values (UHVs) constitute foundational predictors of various dimensions of brand equity, especially within culturally embedded and ethically conscious consumer contexts, as exemplified by the markets of Punjab and Chandigarh. The basis of this framework is the belief that by a toothpaste brand demonstrating UHVs in its marketing, product design, communication and social responsibility activities, positive brand associations are formed, and perceived quality is bolstered which, in turn, leads to brand loyalty and brand awareness- thereby generating a stronger brand equity, overall.

3.2 Key Constructs of the Model

Independent Variable: (IV) Universal Human Values (UHVs) : Trust[1], Empathy[2], Honesty[3], Responsibility[4], Fairness[5], Respect[6]

Dependent Variable: (DV) Brand Equity – Brand Loyalty[1], Brand Awareness[2], Perceived Quality[3], Brand Associations[4]

3.3 Theoretical Basis

David Aaker conceptualized brand equity as a multidimensional entity that included such consumer-based measures as awareness, loyalty, and perceived value. The model assists marketers to comprehend the emotional and cognitive connections that customers have to a brand and how these associations develop brand resilience and business results. Schwartz developed a universal theory dividing core values into ten domains. This study concentrates on values which are most applicable to ethical branding such as benevolence, universalism and security. These values are applied in a business sense with the help of fair pricing, truthful advertising, concern about the well-being of customers, and socially responsible actions.

3.4 Hypothesized Relationships and Conceptual Model Diagram

Table 1. Hypothesized relationship model

Code	Hypothesis
H_1	Universal Human Values strongly and positively influence overall Brand Equity.
H_2	UHVs have a positive effect on Brand Loyalty.
H_3	UHVs have a positive effect on Perceived Quality.
H_4	UHVs have a positive effect on Brand Associations.
H_5	UHVs have a positive effect on Brand Awareness.

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Here is a simplified structure of the conceptual model

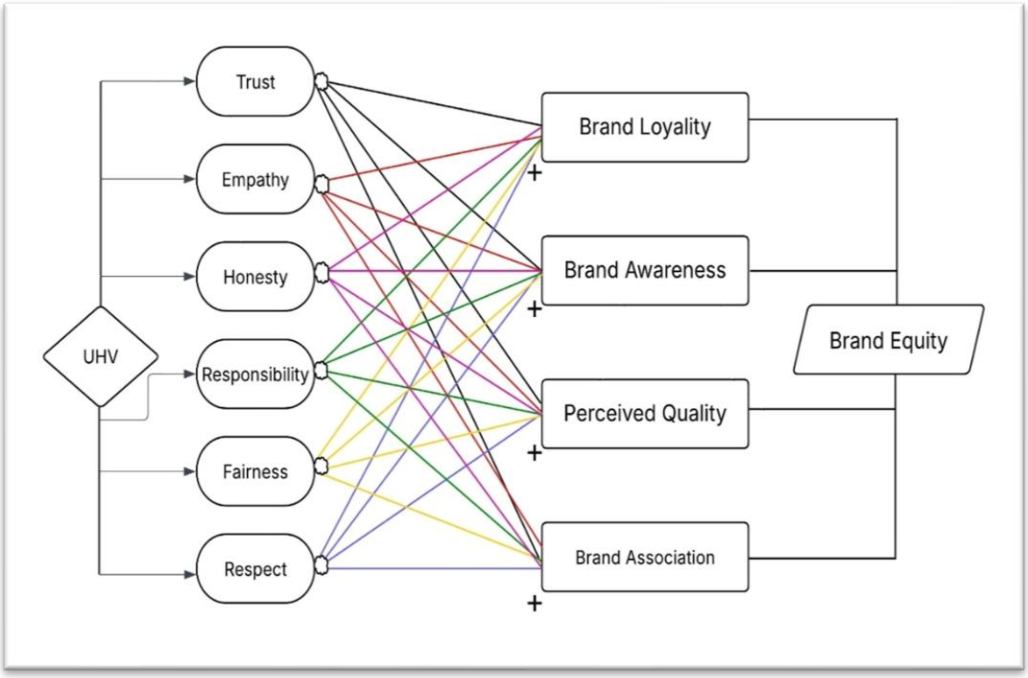

Figure- 2: Conceptual Framework

3.7 Practical Relevance of the Model

The model is of practical value to marketers and strategy formulators in the FMCG industry. High frequency, low involvement product category such as toothpaste requires the brand to look beyond product benefits to generate emotional significance and moral authority. When coordinated with UHVs, branding would help firms to establish stronger relations, as well as, guarantee consumer retention in the long-term.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research seeks to explore the influence of Universal Human Values (UHVs)—including trust, empathy, honesty, responsibility, fairness, and respect—on various dimensions of brand equity, namely brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand association across FMCG brands, and specifically toothpaste brands in the state of Punjab and it's capital Chandigarh. In addition, it aims to evaluate the differences in the consumer's tastes as function of demographic variables such as age, gender. Finally, the main aim of study is to give FMCG businesses some useful advice on how to maximization brand equity with value-based marketing strategies.

5. HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses have been developed in alignment with the study's objectives and existing

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literature:

H 1: Universal Human Values have significant positive influence on overall brand equity of FMCG toothpaste brands.

H 2: UHVs have a strong positive impact on all the elements of brand equity.

H 3: Perception of Universal Human Values between the chosen toothpaste brands (Colgate, Sensodyne, Dabur Red, Dantkanti) differs significantly.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study involves a quantitative, descriptive research design, which attempts to investigate the effect of Universal Human Values (UHVs) on different aspects of brand equity in the region of Punjab and Chandigarh administerd through well-structured, close-ended primary data questionnaire (developed through Google Forms) considering six independent variables and four dependent ones. The questionnaire is framed in three parts; Part 1 consisted of demographic profile of the respondents such as, age, gender, occupation, income, toothpaste brand of the respondents, Part 2 contained specific questions with respect to the 6 human values (UHV variables) and Part 3 deals with the four dimensions of brand equity. The study adopted the non-probability convenience sampling technique, focused on four widely recognized toothpaste brands in India: a. Colgate (Colgate-Palmolive), b. Sensodyne (Haleon UK), c. Dabur Red (Dabur India Ltd.), d. Dantkanti (Patanjali Ayurved) and 222 valid samples were considered for the study and results were analysed using the tools such as percentage analysis, correlation and regression analysis with the help of MS Excel, Google Sheets and SPSS. The instrument was a set of Likert-scale items that were aimed at quantifying the dimensions of UHVs and brand equity according to the perception of the consumers.

7. RESULTS and DISCUSSION:

7.1 Reliability Analysis

In order to measure the reliability of the measurement instrument, a reliability analysis on the measurement instrument carried out through the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The questionnaire consisted 16 questions, and these questions were arranged in two major constructs, including the Universal Human Values (UHV) and the Brand Equity.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

	Cronbach's Alpha
Universal Human Values	0.95
Brand Equity	0.96

The reliability assessment of the UHV construct proved that its value was equal to 0.95 whereas the

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value of the Cronbach alpha of the Brand Equity construct was 0.96. These values are well above the desired level of 0.70 and imply a high level of internal consistency as well as a high correlation of the items in these constructs and the likelihood that such constructs measure the same underlying dimension. Given the fact that most of these results were positive, there is a good indication that the scale is reliable and is appropriate in further statistical analysis and makes the results more credible in the results that will be obtained based on this data.

7.2 Demographic profile of the respondents

The demographic variables such as gender, age, occupation, monthly income and the choice of toothpaste brand of the respondents were collected and analysed using frequency distribution table. The outcomes are presented below.

Table 3. Demographic information of the respondents

	Sample Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	78	35.14
	Female	144	65.86
Total		**222**	**100.00**
Age	18-25	136	61.26
	26-35	78	35.14
	36-50	07	03.15
	Above 50	01	00.45
Total		**222**	**100.00**
Residence Area	Urban	111	50.00
	Rural	111	50.00
Total		**222**	**100.00**
Occupation	Student	140	63.06
	Working Professional	70	31.53
	Homemaker	06	02.70
	Other	06	02.70
Total		**222**	**100.00**
Income per Month	None	110	49.55
	Upto 20000	46	20.72
	20001 to 40000	40	18.02

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(Rs.)	40001 to 60000	11	04.95
	Above 60000	15	06.76
Total		**222**	**100.00**
Toothpaste Brand	Colgate	133	59.91
	Sensodyne	31	13.96
	Dantkanti	22	09.91
	Dabur Red	36	16.22
Total		**222**	**100.00**

From the above table it can be inferred that out of 222 valid respondents there are more female participants (144) as compared to the male respondents who comprise 78 in numbers. The age bracket with the most subjects is in the 18-25 age range (136), then 26-35 age range (78); from this, it is derived that mostly younger people create the sample. Both the urban and rural respondents were represented reasonably (50 percent), making the geographical coverage balanced. Data on occupation reveals that students are the highest category of occupational members (63.06%), working professionals followed in the second category (31.53%). Such a concentration of student-respondents might influence such results as income sensitivity and brand loyalty. Regarding income, 110 respondents were not earning any monthly income probably because of the high number of students in the sample.

Data on brand preference shows that Colgate leads the market with 59.91 percent of the respondents preferring it whereas Dabur Red trails at 16.22 percent, Sensodyne at 13.96 percent, and Dantkanti at 9.91 percent. This indicates high confidence level of consumers in the established FMCG brands, whereas the Ayurvedic and specialist products hold a large niche share.

7.3 Descriptive Statistics

To gain an initial understanding of the dataset and evaluate the central tendencies and dispersions, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on key variables of the study. Table 4 involves the presentation of the opinion of respondents on the Universal Human Values (UHVs) and Brand Equity aspects.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Universal Human Values and Brand Equity Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviations
Trust	3.29	1.45
Empathy	3.13	1.41
Honesty	3.04	1.40
Responsibility	3.00	1.43
Fairness	3.18	1.38
Respect	3.18	1.37
Brand Loyalty	3.08	1.34
Brand Awareness	3.55	1.46
Perceived Quality	3.20	1.27
Brand Association	3.19	1.31
Brand Equity (Composite)	3.23	1.24

Trust had the highest mean (M = 3.29) thus it was the most known value to the consumers whereas Responsibility had the lowest (M = 3.00). The Brand Awareness dimension had the highest under the dimensions of brand equity with a mean (M = 3.55) indicating good recalling and recognition of brands by the consumers. The general picture of the Brand Equity composite score (M = 3.23) indicates good to moderate perception of the sampled toothpaste brands. The standard deviation figures demonstrate that there was an acceptable variance in the response and this means there are diverse but predictable consumer opinions in the sampled population. Building further, Table 5 presents a brand-wise breakdown of UHV perceptions across four major toothpaste brands: Colgate, Sensodyne, Dabur Red, and Patanjali Dantkanti. This comparison highlights subtle yet meaningful differences in how each brand is aligned with ethical and human-centric values.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of UHV Elements by Brand

Brand	Trust		Empathy		Honesty		Responsibility		Fairness		Respect	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Colgate	3.22	1.36	3.17	1.41	3.23	1.28	3.23	1.32	3.17	1.41	3.23	1.30
Sensodyne	3.57	1.27	3.48	1.26	3.23	1.18	3.37	1.16	3.48	1.26	3.38	1.17
Dabur Red	2.82	1.28	2.83	1.34	2.76	1.27	2.94	1.42	2.83	1.34	2.88	1.41
Dantkanti	3.54	1.40	3.41	1.44	3.00	1.43	2.54	1.56	3.41	1.44	3.23	1.47

As per data, Dant Kanti leads in nearly all UHV dimensions, particularly Responsibility (3.91) and

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Trust (3.82), indicating strong alignment with ethical consumer expectations. Sensodyne follows closely, especially excelling in Fairness (3.48) and Empathy (3.39), reflecting a balanced and consumer-friendly image. Colgate shows moderate scores across all values, with no extreme highs or lows, suggesting a consistent but less differentiated ethical perception. Dabur Red consistently records the lowest mean values, particularly in Trust (2.64) and Respect (2.64), suggesting a possible disconnect between brand image and perceived human values.

7.4 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the Universal Human Values (UHV) elements (independent variables) and the components of Brand Equity (dependent variables). The results, presented in the table below, reveal strong positive correlations across all dimensions.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix: UHV Elements and Brand Equity Components

UHV Elements / Brand Equity ⬇ ➜	Brand Loyalty	Brand Awareness	Perceived Quality	Brand Association	Overall Brand Equity
Trust	0.73	0.70	0.79	0.70	0.79
Empathy	0.79	0.78	0.86	0.79	0.87
Honesty	0.74	0.68	0.78	0.77	0.80
Responsibility	0.71	0.67	0.80	0.73	0.79
Fairness	0.74	0.73	0.79	0.79	0.82
Respect	0.79	0.69	0.83	0.81	0.85
UHV (Composite)	0.84	0.79	0.90	0.85	0.91

Among individual UHVs, Empathy had the strongest associations with Perceived Quality ($r = 0.86$) and Brand Equity ($r= 0.87$), which leads to the conclusion that consumer perception of quality and overall brand equity increases greatly when empathetic brand behavior is implemented. Likewise, Respect was substantially correlated to Brand Association ($r = 0.81$) and Brand Equity ($r = 0.85$) implying that respectful treatment amounts to pleasant brand associations and loyalty. Composite measure of all the UHV elements depicted a strong and consistent positive association with all the dimensions of brand equity. It is interesting to note that the highest correlation was found between all the elements of UHV and Perceived Quality ($r = 0.90$), followed by Brand Equity ($r = 0.91$). These results point to the fact that the value and ethical-oriented practices are highly endorsed in enriching the overall brand strength.

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7.5 Anova Analysis

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in Universal Human Values (UHV) perceptions across four toothpaste brands: Colgate, Sensodyne, Dantkanti, and Dabur Red.

Table 7. Anova Analysis Findings

Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	54.21	3	18.07	11.05	< 0.001
Within Groups	356.83	218	1.64		
Total	411.04	221			

The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference among group means, $F(3, 218) = 11.05$, $p < 0.001$. The mean UHV scores indicated that Dantkanti ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.17$) and Sensodyne ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.18$) were perceived to have higher alignment with human values. Colgate followed with a moderate score ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.27$), while Dabur Red had the lowest UHV perception.

7.6 Regression Analysis

These results suggest that consumer associations of human values differ notably by brand, reinforcing the importance of ethical positioning and communication in branding strategy.

Table 8. Multiple Regression Analysis

	Unstandarized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Variable	B	SE	Beta	T stat.	Sig.
Trust	0.201	0.054	0.235	3.751	0.000**
Empathy	0.161	0.048	0.183	3.327	0.001
Honesty	0.052	0.044	0.059	1.171	0.243
Responsibility	0.072	0.047	0.030	1.489	0.139
Fairness	0.300	0.054	0.335	5.535	0.000**
Respect	0.104	0.042	0.115	2.450	0.015

Model Summary: • $R^2 = 0.840$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.835$, F = significant at $p < 0.001$

The regression analysis examined the impact of six universal human values (Trust, Empathy, Honesty, Responsibility, Fairness, and Respect) on Brand Equity (composite). The model demonstrated excellent explanatory power, accounting for 84% of the variance in Brand Equity ($R^2 = 0.84$). Fairness emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.335$), $p < 0.001$, followed by Trust ($\beta = 0.2345$) and Empathy ($p = 0.001$, $\beta = 0.1829$), all showing statistically significant positive effects. Respect had a modest but significant influence ($B = 0.1041$, $p = 0.015$), while Honesty ($p = 0.243$) and Responsibility ($p = 0.139$) were not statistically significant. These results highlight that ethical values like Fairness and Trust are critical drivers of Brand Equity, whereas Honesty and Responsibility may require contextual or industry-specific considerations. The findings suggest that brands should prioritize fairness, trust-building, and empathetic engagement to enhance their equity, while further research could explore why some values showed limited impact in this model.

8. FINDINGS

The study considered the internal consistency as a means to evaluate reliability of two constructs of the study written in the form of universal human values (UHV) and brand equity. Both were very reliable with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.95 and 0.96 respectively which he stated that is well above the minimum requirement of 0.70. From the demographic characteristics of the sample, it was revealed that most of the respondents were within the low-income earners bracket (49,55 % were reported as having no income), young (61.26 % aged between 18 and 25 years old), female (65.86 %), and students (63.06 %). The most popular type of toothpaste was Colgate (59.91 %).

Descriptive statistics provided answers that: (1) UHV: Trust had maximum mean (3.29) and Responsibility minimum mean (3.00); (2) Brand equity: Brand awareness got maximum (3.55) and Brand equity composite received 3.23 which indicates moderate to good perceptions; (3) brand-wise UHV-fit: Dantkanti and Sensodyne ranked highest and Dabur Red ranked lowest. Correlation analysis results revealed that there were quite high positive correlations between UHV elements and Brand equity components. The empathy demonstrated the highest correlation with perceived quality ($r = 0.86$) and overall Brand equity ($r = 0.87$).

ANOVA affirmed remarkable variations in brands on the scope of UHV perceptions ($p < 0.001$). Dantkanti ($M = 3.60$) and Sensodyne ($M = 3.53$) followed by Colgate ($M = 3.13$) and Dabur Red ($M = 2.82$) had the highest mean, respectively. In regression models, Fairness (beta = 0.335, $p < 0.001$), Trust (beta = 0.235, $p < 0.001$) and Empathy (beta = 0.183, $p = 0.001$), explained significant results of Brand equity with 84 % of variance explained ($R\ 2 = 0.84$). There was no substantive contribution by Honesty and Responsibility.

9. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE SCOPE

The current study has some limitations, which can be understood in the following way: (1) limitation associated with overrepresentation of students and young participants that may limit external validity; (2) geographic limitation related to the focus of the study in the region (Punjab & Chandigarh) with balanced structure of the urban populated groups and the rural population that cannot reflect national and international trends; (3) reliance on self-reported data, which introduces the potential of social desirability effects or measurement errors; (4) the limited number of examined toothpaste brands, including the possibility of neglecting.

Additional research related to the same sphere could be conducted beneficially in the following directions: (1) the more comprehensive sampling of age and occupation groups in order to expand the scope of the representativeness of the observed results; (2) cross-cultural research to compare UHV-Brand Equity correlations across different cultures; (3) longitudinal research design to trace the changes in the consumers perceptions over time and identify tendencies in brand value convergence; (4) research with specific HMCSs (e.g., skincare products, food) in order to justify whether the reported outcomes

10. CONCLUSION

Overall, the study demonstrates the vital role of Universal Human Values as a determinant of Brand Equity, in general, and Fairness, Trust, and Empathy in specific, which ended up as important predictors. The constructs have been demonstrated to be true through the high reliability numbers and the high correlation generated by the study. Dantkanti and Sensodyne scored well in fitting with the UHV framework but the red score of Dabur Red lagged behind, which indicates there is room to do better in ethical positioning. Despite the limitations provided above, the findings provide viable recommendations to marketers who may be willing to use value-based branding strategies. Researchers ought to be more inclusive in their approach to demographics and explore cross-sector application to cement such relationships further in their future researches.

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