

Repositioning in the Digital Age: Assessing Consumer Perceptions of SHEIN India's Brand Equity Following Its 2025 Make in India Relaunch

Krishna Khurad and Sneha Gupta

National Institute of Fashion Technology, Bangalore, India

Under the supervision of Prashanth CK

Corresponding Author: Krishna Khurad, krishna.vijay.khurad@nift.ac.in;

Sneha, sneha.snehal@nift.ac.in

Abstract

This study examines consumer perceptions of brand equity following the 2025 relaunch of SHEIN India through a domestic manufacturing partnership with Reliance Retail. The brand's reentry into the Indian market, after its suspension due to border tensions, represents a deliberate repositioning effort warranting empirical investigation. Drawing on the consumer based brand equity (CBBE) framework developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) and signalling theory (Spence, 1973), seven brand equity dimensions are measured: Repositioning Perception, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Association, Brand Preference, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intent. A structured online questionnaire comprising 24 Likert scale items was administered to 38 urban Indian consumers with awareness of SHEIN. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, independent samples t tests, one way ANOVA, chi square tests, and simple linear regression were employed. Results indicate that consumer brand equity perceptions are marginally positive across all dimensions (overall $M = 3.14$ on a 5 point scale), with Brand Trust emerging as the strongest predictor of Purchase Intent ($R^2 = 0.740$, $p < .001$). Brand Association scored lowest ($M = 2.87$), reflecting persistent data privacy concerns. Chi square analysis revealed that repositioning communications disproportionately reach prior users rather than new segments ($\chi^2 = 15.69$, $p = .016$). The findings suggest that while structural repositioning signals have generated cautious positive perceptions, deeply embedded negative associations require sustained communication strategies to overcome. This study contributes to the CBBE literature on geopolitically motivated brand reentry in emerging markets.

Keywords: equity, CBBE, repositioning, SHEIN, signalling, manufacturing, trust

1. Introduction

Due to border tensions, several international digital brands with foreign affiliations faced regulatory suspension in India, creating a unique disruption in the consumer technology and retail landscape. SHEIN, an ultra fast fashion brand, was among the companies affected when the Indian government suspended a number of foreign linked digital applications in 2020. In 2025, the brand reentered the Indian market through a partnership with Reliance Retail and committed to a Make in India manufacturing model. This relaunch represents a deliberate brand repositioning effort: an attempt to reframe consumer associations, rebuild trust,

and reestablish relevance in a market where the brand's earlier identity carried considerable reputational baggage related to data privacy and ethical concerns.

Brand repositioning is well recognised as a difficult strategic undertaking. The literature demonstrates that consumers' preexisting brand schemas are resistant to change, and that success depends on the credibility of new brand signals relative to established expectations (Keller, 2003; Kapferer, 2012). Whether SHEIN India's structural transition has shifted consumer brand equity perceptions is the central question this study addresses.

The study employs the consumer based brand equity (CBBE) framework, originally conceptualised by Aaker (1991) and operationalised into the Multidimensional Brand Equity (MBE) scale by Yoo and Donthu (2001). The CBBE approach is adopted because it measures brand equity from the consumer's perspective, capturing the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response (Keller, 1993). This framework has been widely validated across cultural and product contexts. Recent applications include Zheng et al. (2025), who integrated CBBE with the theory of planned behaviour to predict electric vehicle adoption in China, and Zulfiqar (2025), who applied CBBE to examine value cocreation in the fashion industry. The present study extends the MBE scale with three dimensions specific to the repositioning context: Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and Repositioning Perception. Seven brand equity dimensions are measured in total: Repositioning Perception (RP), Brand Awareness (BAW), Perceived Quality (PQ), Brand Association (BA), Brand Preference (BP), Brand Trust (BT), and Purchase Intent and Loyalty (PI).

In addition to the CBBE framework, the study draws on signalling theory (Spence, 1973) to interpret how consumers evaluate the credibility of repositioning efforts. The integration of these two theoretical pillars provides a robust basis for examining whether SHEIN India's Make in India transition and Reliance partnership have produced measurable shifts in consumer brand equity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

Consumer based brand equity (CBBE) refers to the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand (Keller, 1993). Aaker (1991) conceptualised brand equity through five dimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets. Keller (1993) further argued that brand knowledge, comprising awareness and image, is the foundation upon which equity is built. These foundational models have guided decades of brand equity research and continue to inform contemporary measurement approaches.

Yoo and Donthu (2001) operationalised Aaker's and Keller's conceptualisations into the Multidimensional Brand Equity (MBE) scale, a psychometrically validated instrument tested across 1,530 participants from three cultural groups and 12 brands. The MBE scale has since been widely applied across diverse cultural and product contexts. A recent systematic review of brand equity measurement models by Ishaq et al. (2025) confirmed that the four key dimensions of brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty, and perceived quality remain the most reliable measures of brand equity across industry sectors, with most researchers guided by the original conceptualisations of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993).

The present study uses the CBBE approach because it directly captures consumer perceptions and attitudes toward the brand, making it particularly suitable for evaluating brand repositioning outcomes. The MBE scale is adopted as the primary measurement framework and extended with three dimensions specific to the repositioning context: Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and Repositioning Perception. This extension is consistent with recent applications of CBBE in specialised contexts, such as Zheng et al. (2025), who integrated CBBE dimensions with the theory of planned behaviour to predict electric vehicle adoption, demonstrating the continued adaptability of the framework to emerging research questions.

2.2 Brand Repositioning

Repositioning refers to the deliberate alteration of a brand's perceived position relative to competitors (Kapferer, 2012). Consumer scepticism is consistently identified as the primary barrier: when brands carry negative associations, consumers tend to discount positive new signals (Aaker, 1996; Coombs, 2007). Research indicates that repositioning is more effective when claims are verifiable, communication is consistent, and a trusted third party endorses the transition (Dacin & Smith, 1994; Rao et al., 1999).

In the Indian context, studies by Batra et al. (2000) and Sharma and Kumar (2019) have shown that consumers attribute higher quality perceptions and purchase intentions to domestically manufactured goods. This body of evidence provides theoretical grounding for examining the Make in India framing of the SHEIN India relaunch, as local manufacturing may serve as a credibility enhancing signal in the repositioning effort.

2.3 Brand Trust

Brand trust is defined as the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). It operates as a mediating construct between brand equity antecedents and behavioural outcomes such as purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) demonstrated that brand trust, together with brand affect, determines both purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, which in turn drive brand performance outcomes including market share and relative price.

In the context of brand repositioning, trust assumes particular significance. When a brand carries prior negative associations, consumers must be persuaded that the repositioning claims are credible before they will convert to purchase behaviour. Morgan and Hunt (1994) identified trust as a central variable in relational exchange, arguing that successful relationships depend on the presence of both trust and commitment. Delgado Ballester and Munuera Aleman (2001) further demonstrated that brand trust mediates the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, reinforcing the importance of trust in sustaining consumer brand relationships through periods of change.

In the present study, the Reliance Retail partnership is examined as a potential trust transfer mechanism. A trust transfer occurs when the established credibility of one entity extends to an associated entity through partnership or endorsement (Srinivasan et al., 2002). The theoretical expectation is that Reliance's domestic credibility may positively influence consumer trust in the repositioned SHEIN India brand.

2.4 Purchase Intent

Purchase intention, the subjective probability of buying from a brand, is shaped by antecedent brand equity perceptions and depends on whether repositioning is perceived as genuine (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Cobb Walgren et al., 1995). In brand equity research, purchase intent is frequently used as a behavioural outcome variable that reflects the combined influence of awareness, associations, perceived quality, trust, and preference. The present study uses Purchase Intent as the primary dependent variable in regression analyses, consistent with the MBE framework's treatment of loyalty related intentions as the behavioural endpoint of brand equity.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study integrates two theoretical pillars. The first is the Yoo and Donthu (2001) MBE framework, which structures the measurement of brand equity across seven dimensions. The four original MBE dimensions (Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Association, and Purchase Intent as a proxy for Loyalty) are retained. Three dimensions are added for the repositioning context: Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and Repositioning Perception.

The second pillar is signalling theory (Spence, 1973). In repositioning scenarios, consumers cannot directly observe internal brand changes and must rely on credible signals. A signal is credible when it is costly to imitate (Erdem & Swait, 1998). SHEIN India's Make in India manufacturing commitment and the Reliance equity partnership serve as such signals: both involve substantial investment and reputational stakes that are difficult to fabricate. The integrated framework predicts that credible repositioning signals will strengthen Brand Trust and Brand Preference, which in turn drive Purchase Intent.

4. Constructs and Measurement Items

The survey instrument comprised 24 Likert scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) across seven constructs, plus six demographic and screening items. Items were piloted with five postgraduate students before distribution.

The measurement items are grounded in the CBBE framework and signalling theory. The four core CBBE, namely Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Association, and Purchase Intent, are measured using items adapted from the Yoo and Donthu (2001) MBE scale. Brand Awareness items (BAW1 to BAW2) capture the salience and recognition component of CBBE, measuring whether consumers can identify the brand and understand its current positioning. Perceived Quality items (PQ1 to PQ2) assess consumer expectations of product quality under the new manufacturing model, reflecting the quality perception dimension of CBBE. Brand Association items (BA1 to BA2) measure both the formation of new positive associations (ethical practices) and the persistence of prior negative associations (data privacy concerns), with BA2 reverse scored to capture the resistance of preexisting schemas to repositioning signals. Purchase Intent items (PI1 to PI4) operationalise the loyalty and behavioural intention dimension of CBBE, measuring the likelihood of purchase, recommendation, and continued patronage.

The three extended dimensions are designed to capture repositioning specific aspects of brand equity informed by signalling theory. Repositioning Perception items (RP1 to RP6) measure the extent to which

consumers perceive the Make in India transition and Reliance partnership as credible and genuine signals of brand change, consistent with Erdem and Swait's (1998) framework of signal credibility. Brand Preference items (BP1 to BP4) capture shifts in overall brand image, credibility, and identification following the repositioning. Brand Trust items (BT1 to BT4) measure consumer confidence in the brand's reliability, data governance, and ethical claims under the new model, drawing on Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2001) conceptualisation of trust as a driver of loyalty and performance. Together, these seven constructs operationalise a comprehensive CBBE assessment of a brand undergoing structural repositioning. Table 1 lists all items by construct.

Table 1. Survey Constructs and Items

Construct	Code	Item Statement	Source
Repositioning Perception (RP)	RP1	SHEIN India's Make in India transition has shifted my overall perception of the brand.	Purpose built
	RP2	SHEIN India's move to local manufacturing reflects a genuine change in its values.	Purpose built
	RP3	The Reliance partnership makes SHEIN India feel more relevant to Indian consumers.	Purpose built
	RP4	I believe SHEIN India's strategic transition is more than just a marketing move.	Purpose built
	RP5	SHEIN India's new operational model has changed how I think about the brand.	Purpose built
	RP6	SHEIN India's transition to local production makes it feel like a more responsible company.	Purpose built
Brand Awareness (BAW)	BAW 1	I can easily recognise SHEIN India among other online fashion brands.	Yoo & Donthu (2001)
	BAW 2	I am aware of what SHEIN India currently stands for as a brand.	Yoo & Donthu (2001)
Perceived Quality (PQ)	PQ1	I expect SHEIN India's locally manufactured products to be of good quality.	Yoo & Donthu (2001)
	PQ2	SHEIN India's Make in India transition has improved my perception of its product quality.	Adapted
Brand Association (BA)	BA1	I now associate SHEIN India with more ethical and responsible fashion practices.	Adapted
	BA2*	I still associate the SHEIN name with data privacy concerns despite its transition.	Purpose built (Reverse)
Brand Preference (BP)	BP1	SHEIN India's overall image feels more credible following its Make in India transition.	Adapted
	BP2	My general impression of SHEIN India has improved since its 2025 relaunch.	Adapted
	BP3	I can identify with the values that SHEIN India's current positioning represents.	Adapted
	BP4	SHEIN India's corporate reputation has improved through its Reliance partnership.	Purpose built
Brand Trust (BT)	BT1	I trust that SHEIN India now handles my personal data responsibly under its new model.	Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001)
	BT2	I believe SHEIN India's ethical production claims under the Make in India model are genuine.	Adapted
	BT3	The Reliance partnership has increased my confidence in SHEIN India as a brand.	Purpose built

	BT4	Overall, I consider SHEIN India to be a more trustworthy brand than before its 2025 transition.	Adapted
Purchase Intent / Loyalty (PI)	PI1	I intend to purchase fashion products from SHEIN India following its 2025 transition.	Yoo & Donthu (2001)
	PI2	Knowing that SHEIN India now manufactures locally has increased my willingness to buy from it.	Adapted
	PI3	I would recommend SHEIN India to others based on its current positioning.	Adapted
	PI4	If SHEIN India continues its local production model, I will consider it as a regular shopping platform.	Purpose built

* BA2 is reverse scored. Recoded as: $BA2_Reversed = 6 \text{ minus } BA2$, prior to analysis.

5. Sample Details

A structured online questionnaire was administered via Google Forms between March and April 2026. Non probability convenience and snowball sampling were used, targeting urban Indian consumers with at least basic awareness of SHEIN. The survey was distributed through social media and academic networks. The final sample comprised 38 valid respondents with complete responses across all 24 scale items. Table 2 provides the demographic profile.

Table 2. Demographic Profile (N = 38)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	18 to 27 years	37	97.4
	28 to 40 years	1	2.6
Gender	Female	23	60.5
	Male	14	36.8
	Non binary	1	2.6
Education	Completed undergraduate degree	17	44.7
	Postgraduate degree	15	39.5
	Currently pursuing undergraduate degree	5	13.2
	Other	1	2.6
Prior Usage	No, but aware of brand	25	65.8
	Yes, before the 2020 suspension	7	18.4
	Yes, after the 2025 relaunch	4	10.5
	Both periods	2	5.3
Relaunch Awareness	Yes, fully aware	13	34.2
	Heard about it but unsure	9	23.7
	Not aware at all	16	42.1

The sample is predominantly composed of respondents aged 18 to 27 (97.4%), which is consistent with SHEIN's primary consumer demographic. Notably, 42.1% of respondents were unaware of the 2025 relaunch at the time of the survey, meaning a substantial share evaluated the brand on available general signals rather than specific knowledge of the repositioning.

6. Descriptive Statistics

Dimension scores were calculated as the arithmetic mean of constituent items. The reverse coded item BA2 was transformed before inclusion. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Brand Equity Dimensions (N = 38)

Dimension	Items	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Brand Preference (BP)	4	3.30	0.85	1.25	5.00
Brand Trust (BT)	4	3.22	0.85	1.25	5.00
Repositioning Perception (RP)	6	3.21	0.66	1.17	4.67
Purchase Intent / Loyalty (PI)	4	3.20	0.82	1.50	5.00
Perceived Quality (PQ)	2	3.13	0.88	1.00	5.00
Brand Awareness (BAW)	2	3.09	0.62	2.00	4.00
Brand Association (BA)	2	2.87	0.71	1.00	4.50
Overall Brand Equity Index	22	3.14	0.64	N/A	N/A

All dimension means fall between 2.87 and 3.30, clustering narrowly above the scale midpoint of 3.00. This indicates marginally positive but cautious consumer perceptions of the repositioned brand across all dimensions. Brand Preference scored highest ($M = 3.30$), while Brand Association was the only dimension below the midpoint ($M = 2.87$), reflecting persistent negative associations tied to data privacy. The overall Brand Equity Index stands at $M = 3.14$ ($SD = 0.64$).

7. Statistical Analysis

7.1 Cronbach's Alpha

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). The accepted threshold for reliability is 0.70 or above (Nunnally, 1978). Results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients

Dimension	Items	Alpha	Interpretation
Brand Preference (BP)	4	0.898	Excellent
Brand Trust (BT)	4	0.881	Good
Purchase Intent / Loyalty (PI)	4	0.849	Good
Repositioning Perception (RP)	6	0.792	Acceptable
Perceived Quality (PQ)	2	0.670	Borderline
Brand Association (BA)	2	0.354	Low*
Brand Awareness (BAW)	2	0.139	Low*

* Low alpha for BAW and BA is a known artefact of two item scales in small samples. Findings from these dimensions are interpreted conservatively.

Brand Preference, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intent achieve good to excellent reliability. Repositioning Perception is acceptable at 0.792. The low values for Brand Awareness and Brand Association are attributed to the two item scale limitation rather than conceptual incoherence, and both dimensions are retained for theoretical completeness.

7.2 Normality of Data: Shapiro Wilk Test

Given the sample size of 38, the Shapiro Wilk test was used to assess normality, as it is more appropriate than the Kolmogorov Smirnov test for samples below 50 (Razali & Wah, 2011). Results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Shapiro Wilk Normality Test Results

Dimension	W	p value	Result
Repositioning Perception (RP)	0.952	.101	Normal
Brand Preference (BP)	0.965	.270	Normal
Perceived Quality (PQ)	0.945	.063	Normal
Brand Trust (BT)	0.979	.667	Normal
Purchase Intent / Loyalty (PI)	0.974	.497	Normal
Brand Awareness (BAW)	0.886	.001	Non normal
Brand Association (BA)	0.923	.012	Non normal

Five dimensions satisfy the normality assumption ($p > .05$), supporting the use of parametric tests for these variables. Brand Awareness and Brand Association deviate from normality, likely due to a ceiling effect in Brand Awareness and a bimodal distribution in Brand Association. Findings from parametric tests on these two dimensions are treated with additional caution.

7.3 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlations were computed among all seven dimensions. Table 6 presents the matrix.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Matrix

	RP	BAW	PQ	BA	BP	BT	PI
RP	1.000	0.376*	0.765***	0.453**	0.804***	0.747***	0.778***
BAW		1.000	0.459**	0.422**	0.601***	0.469**	0.516***
PQ			1.000	0.418**	0.735***	0.776***	0.766***
BA				1.000	0.566***	0.387*	0.356*
BP					1.000	0.835***	0.814***
BT						1.000	0.860***
PI							1.000

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The correlation matrix shows positive, statistically significant associations across all dimension pairs. Repositioning Perception correlates most strongly with Brand Preference ($r = 0.804$, $p < .001$) and Purchase Intent ($r = 0.778$, $p < .001$). The strongest single pairwise relationship in the matrix is Brand Trust with Purchase Intent ($r = 0.860$, $p < .001$), confirming trust as the primary attitudinal driver of purchase intention in this repositioning context. Brand Association shows the weakest correlations overall, consistent with its status as the most resistant dimension to repositioning influence.

7.4 Independent Samples t Test

Independent samples t tests were conducted to examine gender differences on Purchase Intent and Brand Trust. The non binary respondent was excluded due to insufficient subgroup size for inference.

Table 7. t Test: Gender Differences on Purchase Intent and Brand Trust

Dimension	Male (n=14)	Female (n=23)	t	p	Result
Purchase Intent (PI)	3.357	3.174	0.685	.498	Not significant
Brand Trust (BT)	3.571	3.087	1.850	.073	Marginal

No significant gender difference exists for Purchase Intent ($p = .498$). For Brand Trust, male respondents scored higher ($M = 3.57$ vs. $M = 3.09$), though the result is marginal ($p = .073$) and does not reach the conventional 0.05 threshold. Gender is not a significant differentiating variable in this sample.

7.5 One Way ANOVA

A one way ANOVA tested whether prior usage history was associated with differences in Purchase Intent across four groups. The result ($F = 0.781$, $p = .512$) is not statistically significant. However, the directional pattern is noteworthy: consumers with any transactional history with SHEIN, whether before the suspension ($M = 3.50$) or after the relaunch ($M = 3.50$), score higher on Purchase Intent than awareness only consumers ($M = 3.05$). The lack of significance is partly attributable to very small subgroup sizes (post relaunch $n = 4$; both periods $n = 2$).

7.6 Chi Square Test of Independence

A chi square test examined whether relaunch awareness was independent of prior usage history. The result was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 15.69$, $df = 6$, $p = .016$). Respondents who had previously purchased from SHEIN were proportionally more likely to be aware of the 2025 relaunch than those who had not. This indicates that repositioning communications are currently reaching a preengaged consumer base more effectively than entirely new audiences.

7.7 Simple Linear Regression

Simple linear regressions were run with Purchase Intent as the dependent variable and, separately, Repositioning Perception and Brand Trust as predictors.

Table 8. Simple Linear Regression: Predictors of Purchase Intent

Predictor	Beta	Intercept	R ²	p
Repositioning Perception (RP)	0.963	0.111	0.606	< .001
Brand Trust (BT)	0.829	0.529	0.740	< .001

Both predictors are significant. Brand Trust explains more variance in Purchase Intent ($R^2 = 0.740$) than Repositioning Perception alone ($R^2 = 0.606$), confirming trust as the stronger driver of conversion in the post repositioning context.

8. Findings and Inferences

The study yields five principal findings. First, SHEIN India's 2025 relaunch has produced measurable, if modest, positive brand equity across all seven dimensions. The overall Brand Equity Index of $M = 3.14$ is above the scale midpoint, a noteworthy result given that over 40% of respondents were unaware of the relaunch at the time of the survey.

Second, Brand Trust ($M = 3.22$) and Brand Preference ($M = 3.30$) are the most responsive dimensions, and Brand Trust is the single strongest predictor of Purchase Intent ($R^2 = 0.740$). The data indicate that trust related perceptions are relatively more receptive to the repositioning signals than other dimensions of brand equity.

Third, Brand Association ($M = 2.87$) is the weakest and most resistant dimension. Item BA2, measuring persistent data privacy concerns, continues to weigh down the composite score even after reverse coding. Structural repositioning alone has not resolved the data privacy stigma carried by the SHEIN brand name.

Fourth, the significant chi square result ($p = .016$) shows that repositioning communications are disproportionately reaching prior users rather than new consumers. This is a critical limitation for a repositioning effort whose success ultimately depends on attracting audiences who did not previously engage with the brand.

Fifth, consumers with any prior transactional experience with SHEIN, regardless of whether it predates the suspension, report higher Purchase Intent than those who are only brand aware. Experience creates a familiarity premium that predisposes consumers toward the repositioned brand.

9. Managerial Implications

The findings suggest four actionable directions for SHEIN India's brand management. First, since Brand Trust is the strongest predictor of Purchase Intent, communications should prioritise verifiable proof of data governance reform rather than image led advertising. Independent audits, supply chain disclosures, and direct statements on data handling would carry more credibility than general brand messaging.

Second, the persistent weakness in Brand Association requires direct remediation rather than avoidance. SHEIN India should consider explicitly addressing its presuspension data privacy controversies in its communications, explaining the structural changes made, and providing evidence of those changes. Consumers are more likely to update negative associations when they are directly acknowledged than when they are ignored (Coombs, 2007).

Third, the chi square finding that repositioning awareness is concentrated among prior users signals that current communications are not reaching new consumer segments effectively. Broad reach channels such as television, outdoor advertising, and regional language digital media would extend the repositioning message beyond the existing user base.

Fourth, modest Purchase Intent scores suggest that trial incentives, such as first purchase discounts or free returns, could lower the perceived risk of engaging with a brand that is still in transition. Generating transaction experience, even at reduced margin, is valuable because this study shows that experienced consumers hold meaningfully higher purchase intentions than those who are only aware of the brand.

10. Theoretical Implications

This study makes three contributions to the literature. First, it extends the Yoo and Donthu (2001) MBE framework to the context of geopolitically motivated brand reentry in an emerging market. The adapted framework, which incorporates Repositioning Perception, Brand Trust, and Brand Preference, offers a methodological template for future research on brand rehabilitation and crisis recovery.

Second, the study provides empirical support for applying signalling theory (Spence, 1973; Erdem & Swait, 1998) to brand repositioning. The strong correlation between Repositioning Perception and Brand Trust ($r = 0.747$, $p < .001$), combined with regression evidence that Repositioning Perception explains 60.6% of the

variance in Purchase Intent, indicates that costly, verifiable repositioning signals do translate into measurable attitudinal and behavioural outcomes in the consumer brand equity context.

Third, through the Brand Association dimension, the study contributes to understanding consumer resistance to repositioning. Deeply encoded negative associations, particularly those tied to data governance and corporate origin, are more resistant to structural repositioning signals than trust and preference dimensions. This aligns with schema theory (Bartlett, 1932; Fiske & Taylor, 1991): schema inconsistent signals require more sustained and explicit communication to generate cognitive change than signals that simply add positive information to existing schemas.

11. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has four main limitations. First, the sample of $N = 38$ limits statistical power and generalisability. Future research should target at least 200 respondents to enable structural equation modelling and more robust subgroup comparisons. Second, the sample is predominantly composed of respondents aged 18 to 27 and recruited through urban academic networks, which does not reflect the full breadth of SHEIN India's target market. Stratified sampling across age groups and geographic regions would improve representativeness. Third, the cross sectional design prevents causal inference. Longitudinal designs that track brand equity perceptions over time, before and after direct exposure to repositioning communications, would provide stronger evidence for causal claims. Fourth, the two item scales for Brand Awareness and Brand Association produced low Cronbach's alpha values, limiting their reliability. Future iterations of the instrument should include at least three to four items per construct.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a meaningful empirical snapshot of how a major international brand's structural repositioning is being received by urban Indian consumers in real time. The SHEIN India case is distinctive in its combination of geopolitical motivation, domestic partnership architecture, and national manufacturing framing, and it warrants continued scholarly attention as the repositioning matures and consumer perceptions evolve.

12. Conclusion

This study set out to assess consumer perceptions of SHEIN India's brand equity following its 2025 Make in India relaunch in partnership with Reliance Retail. Using the consumer based brand equity (CBBE) framework developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001), extended with Repositioning Perception, Brand Trust, and Brand Preference dimensions, and interpreted through signalling theory (Spence, 1973), the study measured seven brand equity dimensions among 38 urban Indian consumers.

The findings demonstrate that SHEIN India's structural repositioning has generated marginally positive brand equity perceptions across all seven dimensions, with an overall Brand Equity Index of $M = 3.14$. Brand Trust emerged as the strongest predictor of Purchase Intent ($R^2 = 0.740$), underscoring its centrality in the post repositioning context. However, Brand Association remains the most resistant dimension ($M = 2.87$), indicating that deeply encoded negative associations related to data privacy persist despite the structural changes. The chi square analysis further revealed that repositioning communications are predominantly reaching prior users rather than new consumer segments, highlighting a significant gap in the current communication strategy.

The study contributes to the brand equity literature by extending the CBBE framework to the underexplored context of geopolitically motivated brand reentry in emerging markets and by providing empirical evidence for the application of signalling theory to brand repositioning. For practitioners, the results emphasise the importance of prioritising verifiable trust signals, directly addressing legacy negative associations, and expanding communication reach beyond the existing consumer base. As SHEIN India's repositioning matures, longitudinal research with larger and more representative samples will be essential to track the evolution of consumer brand equity perceptions over time.

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