

## Consumer Perceptions on Food Production Companies' Brand Strategy and Customer Experience Alignment

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Received 24-06-2024

Revised 26-06-2024

Accepted 15-07-2024

Published 16-07-2024



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### Abstract:

This study explores consumer views on the alignment between brand strategy and customer experiences in food producing enterprises in Chinese setting. The research aims to analyze the complex dynamics that influence customer attitudes by examining familiarity, personal experience, components of interaction that align with the brand's identity, and instances of uncertainty or conflict.

By conducting in-depth interviews, a wide range of consumer groups were actively involved to obtain detailed and subtle observations. The study focused on collecting the many aspects of customer experiences, analyzing their interactions and experiences with food manufacturing firms.

Consumers showed different levels of perceptual alignment. Positive alignment impressions were highly impacted by familiarity with brand message and personal experiences. Factors such as clear and open communication, environmentally friendly methods, and constant high quality consistently have a favorable impact. Nevertheless, instances of misalignment were detected, namely in situations when promoted values contradicted actual experiences.

The findings emphasize the crucial importance of communication, sustainability, quality, and technology in promoting a strong brand affinity. The main focus of consumer ideas for development were around improving communication, adopting transparent processes, and ensuring that organizations really reflect their brand claims.

This research highlights the significance of matching brand strategy with concrete consumer experiences in the food manufacturing industry. Customer insights provide practical suggestions, highlighting the need of clear communication, environmentally-friendly methods, and reliable quality to close the gap between brand objectives and customer encounters.

**Keywords:** Brand Strategy; Customer Experience; Brand Experience; Food Production; Chinese Consumers; Chinese Food Production Sector

### Introduction

This research explores public opinion on how food production companies align their brand strategy with

customer experience. Consumers are increasingly driving the food industry. While strong brands used

to be a major differentiator (Martinho, 2020), that's no longer enough. Today's consumers crave experiences that go beyond simply buying a product; they seek interactions that exceed their expectations (Clark, 2020). This research delves into how well food production companies are aligning their brand strategies with what truly matters to consumers: a memorable and positive customer experience. It examines how consumers perceive the alignment between a company's brand promises and the actual customer journey, encompassing product quality, packaging, design, and customer service interactions.

China's booming food manufacturing sector exemplifies the intense competition for consumer attention (Wang & Mohammad Shah, 2023). Beyond offering high-quality products, success hinges on creating emotional connections with consumers through brand strategies that resonate with their values (Motta-Filho, 2021). In today's fast-paced environment, Chinese consumers prioritize not just product quality but also a smooth and engaging purchasing experience. They are looking for interactions that feel more personal and memorable, rather than just a basic transaction.

Hence, this research study's overarching goal is to explore how consumers perceive the alignment of brand strategy and customer experience, particularly in the food production industry. More specifically, it aims to ascertain the following:

1. What are the perceptions of consumers regarding the alignment of brand strategy and customer experiences in food production companies, especially in terms of:
  - a. Familiarity;
  - b. Personal experience;
  - c. Elements of interaction with the food production company that resonated strongly with the brand's identity; and
  - d. Experiences where they found alignment confusing or conflicting.

2. What actionable suggestions can be recommended by consumers to improve the alignment of brand strategy and customer experience in food manufacturing firms?

### *Significance of the Study*

The study's main contributions are in the areas of brand strategy and customer experience as they pertain to a food manufacturing firm. This research employed a qualitative research approach to provide a clear understanding of the perspective of consumers as regards brand strategy and customer experience alignment. Similarly, due to its potential to spur change in the food production business and beyond, this research is of critical importance to many different communities and groups.

This study delves into consumer perceptions of how well food production companies align their brand strategy with the actual customer experience. By understanding these public opinions, **food business leaders** can gain valuable insights into the aspects of their brand strategy that resonate most with consumers and identify areas for improvement. This knowledge empowers businesses to bridge the gap between what they promise and what they deliver, ultimately fostering stronger brand loyalty, increased customer engagement, and a competitive edge in the marketplace.

The findings of this study will be extremely helpful to **future academic researchers** who are interested in comparable topics. The research can serve as a springboard for future research by offering a clear understanding of consumer priorities in brand alignment. By dissecting public perceptions, it establishes a foundation for future investigations into how food companies can effectively bridge the gap between brand promises and customer experience. Thus, the **academic world** stands to acquire a deeper appreciation of the dynamic relationship between brand management, customer engagement, and sustainable food production.

This research will benefit not only academics and professionals in the **food sector** but the industry as a whole. Practical techniques that increase brand connections with consumers may boost brand loyalty and strengthen a company's standing in the marketplace. These results are crucial to the continued success of companies in the **food production industry**. The findings from this study provide a significant input for food production businesses as it faces shifting customer preferences, sustainability imperatives, and dynamic markets.

### ***Literature Review***

Relevant literature provided the necessary impetus to proceed with the research study. The review focused on the role of brand strategy in the food business, how brand strategy relates to the customer experience, and how to achieve alignment via the use of best practices and proven solutions.

### **Brand Strategy and its Significance in the Food Industry**

Brand strategies describe an organization's mission, goals, and tactics (Eriksson, 2022). Brand strategies are comprehensive plans for positioning and differentiating a company's brand in the market to achieve goals. Values, communications, audience segmentation, and competitive analysis must be considered (Wheeler, 2018). A strong and consistent brand identity helps a firm connect with people emotionally and stand out in a crowded market. A product's market success depends on its brand promotion plan. Brand strategy aims to change consumer behavior (Yao & Zhu, 2022). Brand strategies encompass advertising, marketing, PR, and other promotion approaches for long-term brand maintenance. The brand's values and traits are key to this goal (Eskiev, 2023). According to Kotler, Armstrong, and Opresnik (2020), marketers must decide where to position, what to call, who to sponsor, and how to establish a brand.

Brand strategy shapes how people view and interact with a food firm. When one studies how the most successful food enterprises create their brand

identities to leave a lasting impact on consumers, brand strategy that appeals to customers is linked to commercial success (2022, Perkins & Seals). For instance, a premium chocolate maker uses elegant packaging, a rich color palette, and a gorgeous font style to convey indulgence and elegance. As a result, these aesthetic choices target high-end consumers who value excellent products.

However, brand strategy goes beyond looks (Dewoody, 2020). A snack company that cares about its customers' health may emphasize natural goods, sustainability, and wellness. This method will please health-conscious and environmentally conscious customers (Zhang et al., 2022). Consistent messages and honest labeling build trust and loyalty with customers. Many successful food businesses employ story marketing. For example, a family-owned artisanal bakery may tout its decades-old recipes. This story's authenticity, history, and nostalgia will appeal to diners seeking a unique experience (Heinberg et al., 2020).

Another facet of brand strategy is brand loyalty. An effective brand strategy that attracts and retains loyal customers may greatly benefit the food industry. Making clients understand the brand's values, story, and promise helps build enduring relationships (Pavlou, 2022). A socially and environmentally responsible organic food company may create strong ties with customers who respect these values. When a company's values match its target audience's, customers trust it and stay loyal (Mishra, 2020). Food companies benefit from this devotion, which is the result of a strong brand strategy. Customer loyalty allows recurrent purchases (Kotler, Armstrong, & Opresnik, 2020). A coffee chain that supports fair trade and local producers may retain ethical customers. The brand's devotion converts these clients into regulars, increasing revenue. Consumer loyalty spreads as devoted customers become brand advocates (Kotler & Keller, 2021).

Accordingly, an effective brand strategy helps firms stand out in the ever-changing food industry. Food

companies may win niche markets with innovative value propositions, engaging messaging, and memorable brand experiences (Armstrong, Kotler, & Opresnik, 2019). Businesses may stand out in a competitive market with many product and service alternatives with a well-planned brand strategy.

### **Best Practices and Strategies for Alignment**

Putting customers first requires more than fast service and a good product range. It permeates the company's culture and impacts morale, product quality, and customer service. The Forbes study by Blake Morgan (2019) on the 100 most customer-centric firms stressed that putting customers first requires more than a timely support crew and a great product range. It permeates the company's culture and impacts morale, product quality, and customer service. Some of these firms are food producers. Trader Joe's has the second-highest American Customer Happiness Index (ACSI) score due to its commitment to customer happiness and staff's desire to go above and beyond. Another is Impossible Foods, famed for its plant-based Impossible Burger. They make ecologically friendly, tasty cuisine for word-of-mouth advertising. Bright Farms, a company, is building indoor greenhouses in US communities to provide inexpensive, locally grown vegetables.

According to Daxue Consulting (2020), a captivating brand narrative in China goes beyond standard marketing. A Budweiser case study showed how the brand's Chinese advertising matches its laid-back and friendly personality. The firm values transparency, aspiration, and originality, and its slogans are positive and humorous. The 70-year-old iconic candy brand White Rabbit, which for young children is more than simply a creamy sweet but a creamy joy wrapped in memories, is another great marketing strategy that ties to customer experience. In an industry with constantly changing flavors, White Rabbit Candy has kept to its original formula and become a symbol of Chinese childhood bliss. For years, nostalgia marketing has worked for this

corporation. Overall, brand strategy in China involves brand promises to acquire customer trust. Emotional commitment to a brand or company and immersive events to tell its narrative create brand loyalty (Law, 2020).

### **The Relationship Between Brand Strategy and Customer Experience**

Food manufacturers' brand strategy shapes customer experiences (Dang, 2023). This dynamic relies on a company's brand personality and customer experience alignment. Brand strategy includes the company's values, mission, and commitments as well as its goods (Armstrong, Kotler, & Opresnik, 2019). This strategic compass would guide menu development, ingredient procurement, personnel training, and customer communication for a local, organic food company. Brand strategy is the backbone of consumer experiences (Walker, 2023), ensuring authenticity, trust, and long-term commitment to the company's identity.

Brand strategy also affects consumer perception and differentiation of food brands (Motta-Filho, 2021). Food businesses require a unique brand identity, market position, and value proposition to stand out and provide customers with a memorable experience. A food company may promote a sustainable brand strategy by using eco-friendly packaging, reducing food waste, and participating in community initiatives (Mu & Zhu, 2023). The brand strategy instills a consistent sense of purpose in each customer encounter, allowing food businesses to create a memorable, cohesive, and meaningful customer journey that speaks to the intended audience, inspires positive emotions, and fosters brand loyalty and sustainable business growth (Motta-Filho, 2021).

When a food company's brand strategy and customer experience align, it can boost profits and product perception (Clatworthy, 2019). Customers have a great and memorable experience when a company's mission, values, and promises are regularly delivered. Unifying the company's message fosters authenticity,



trust, and consumer loyalty. Food and service are often well-received by customers. According to Čivić and Čilimković (2022), consumers who feel emotionally connected and trust the company are more likely to make repeat purchases and refer them to others. Brand strategy and customer experience alignment boost customer retention, revenue, and market share (Kapooria & Karnik, 2019).

However, misaligned brand strategy and customer experience might hurt corporate outcomes and consumer satisfaction (Motta-Filho, 2021). Failure to create brand-aligned experiences can lead to confusion and a loss of trust. Marketing promises that don't match client experiences might leave people unhappy and alienated (McDade, 2022). A mismatched approach can also damage consumers' perspectives, making them distrust the brand's authenticity and honesty. Misaligned strategies can cause a food business to lose market share in the highly competitive food industry because consumers will look elsewhere for products and services that better meet their needs. Brand strategy and customer experience have a significant impact on a food business's financial success and consumer loyalty.

## Methods

### *Research Design*

The research study employed qualitative approaches. Qualitative research uses non-numerical data to better comprehend concepts, theories, and phenomena. Bhandari (2023) states that this strategy helps scholars understand more about a topic or discover new pathways. According to Merriam & Grenier (2019), qualitative researchers ask inquiries regarding people's views and interpretations of the world at a specific time and location. More specifically, the study made use of interviews as its research method. In Frey (2018), the interview method was defined as individual dialogue that ranges from structured to inquiries, with the objective of actively interacting with respondents in order to get an understanding of their actual experiences, perspectives, insights, and concerns.

### *Research Locale*

The study was carried out in Foshan City, Guangdong Province, China. Foshan is located on the Fen River, which is part of the estuaries that make up the western portion of the Pearl River Delta. This locale was chosen for this research study because the target participants came from this city. Likewise, the findings of the study that is based from consumer perspectives, can contribute to a framework that improves the alignment of brand strategy and customer experience in food production companies located in the industrial parks in Foshan City.

### *Sampling Methods and Participants of the Study*

The interview respondents were chosen using purposive and convenience sampling. Because of the nature and content of the study, it requires participants who maintain or possess information that can shed light on the subject matter being investigated. Thus, purposive sampling is employed because it is a technique involving the selection of samples who are rich in information to examine and can provide insight into the research issue at hand (Patton, 2023). Additionally, convenience sampling was also utilized. Choosing study subjects according to their accessibility and availability is known as convenience sampling (Patton, 2023).

The participants of this research study are representatives of identified Chinese consumer groups. The categories of Chinese consumers listed by Ernst & Young (2021) served as the basis for choosing respondents. The participants from the consumer group provided the necessary information that can show areas of resonance or discord between brand strategy and customer perception in practice and in finding practical information that will improve the food business' ability to deal with problems and bring its brand strategy and customer service efforts into closer alignment. The categories of Chinese consumers are: (1) new urban residents; (2) older generations; (3) health-conscious individuals; (4) environmentalists; and (5) tech-savvy consumers.

They were described in Ernst & Young (2021) as follows:

1. **New urban residents** have the spending power unleashed by urbanization because of their discretionary income, aspirations for social mobility, and the enhanced digital infrastructure of the cities, thus also having better living conditions.
2. **Older generations** consist of a sizable portion of the first generation that benefited from China's economic development and are now entering retirement age. They are known to be in the thick of their savings cycles and are often prepared to shell out cash for entertainment and amusement on par with medical treatment and gym memberships.
3. **Health-conscious individuals** include those who still bear the effects of the global pandemic in terms of an emotional toll that may take a lot longer to subside. Thus, they would rather avoid human interaction and pay more for high-quality, healthful items.
4. **Environmentalists** are those buyers who increasingly want to know that their money is going toward a good cause. They support brands that anticipate and prevent environmental crises.
5. **Tech-savvy consumers** are those who want more engaging and tailored experiences. With the proliferation of online resources, shopping in remote areas may be both influential and entertaining.

Each consumer group was represented by 10 members selected through purposive and convenience sampling. In this study, there is a total of 50 interview participants. Interview respondents were selected while they were transacting (convenience sampling) with food stores in Foshan City, and once they consented to the interview, they were asked which among the consumer groups they belong (purposive sampling). Likewise, data

saturation, the point at which no new significant insights emerge from additional interviews, was used to guide the recruitment process. When thematic saturation, where recurring themes ceased to appear with new interviews was achieved, recruitment of additional interview respondent stopped.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Data collection using semi-structured interviews must adhere to a protocol that allows the researcher to effectively answer the research questions and provide the study's results. Once informed consent was obtained from the study's intended sample of respondents, data collection commenced. Once the respondents have given their consent, data collection will start at the same time as the interview guide. Customers who were buying in various food stores in Foshan City were chosen as interviewees for this research study after they agreed to be available for a quick interview. They were made to understand the description of the consumer groups and were asked in which group they thought they belonged.

During the interview, the study utilized an interview guide consisting of questions that gather consumer perceptions on brand strategy and customer experience alignment and provide actionable suggestions for improved integration of customer experience into brand strategy. The interview guide consists of five questions, as follows:

1. How familiar are you with the brand strategy of food production companies?
2. Could you describe your recent experiences with a food manufacturing company? How do you perceive the alignment between their brand strategy and your overall experience?
3. Are there any specific aspects or elements of your interactions with food production company that resonated strongly with the brand's identity? Could you share examples?
4. On the other hand, were there any moments where you found the alignment between the brand's strategy and your experience confusing

or conflicting? Could you elaborate on these instances?

- Based on your experiences and observations, what practical suggestions or changes would you recommend to enhance the alignment between food production companies' brand strategy and customer experience?

The interview was conducted in Chinese, but was translated to English prior to the data analysis process. As soon as interviews are completed, thematic analysis used as data analysis technique and to make sense of the information gathered.

**Data Analysis**

No statistical analysis was undertaken because the study design is qualitative. Instead, the collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was performed on the results of consumer interviews. Braun and Clarke (2021) say thematic analysis is simple and effective. This technique for detecting, assessing, and understanding patterns across qualitative datasets uses systematic data coding to develop themes, the ultimate analytic goal. Thematic analysis comprises six steps: understanding the data, developing initial codes, finding themes, assessing themes, defining and labeling themes, and writing up the results. This study was able to thematically examine qualitative

data from semi-structured interviews. Data was then analyzed to see how successfully the food firm aligns brand strategy with customer experience, from the perspective of the consumer groups. This inputs allowed the researcher to understand consumer perspective as regards brand strategy and customer experience alignment.

**Results and Discussion**

As a result of our extensive interviews with various consumer groups, with ten (10) representatives each, such as New Urban Residents (NUR), Older Generations (OG), Health-Conscious Individuals (HCI), Environmentalists (ENV), and Tech-Savvy (TS), the study uncovered a diverse range of viewpoints and preferences. The following discussion delves into the key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews, including consumer familiarity with brand-experience alignment, personal experiences that shaped their perceptions, specific touchpoints influencing brand identity, perceived challenges in achieving alignment, and practical recommendations offered by the respondents for improving brand strategy-experience alignment.

**Consumer Awareness of Brand Strategy and Customer Experience Alignment**

**Table 1. Thematic Analysis: Consumer Familiarity with Brand Strategies in Food Production Companies**

Themes	Sub-themes	Insights From (Consumer Group)	Significant Statements
Alignment with Values and Environmental Concerns	Emphasis on Values	NUR	“I tend to stick with products that are easy to use and good value. If the brand does what it says, I am likely to stick with it all the time.”  “Brands that prioritize sustainability and eco-
	Prioritizing Health	HCI	
	Environmental Consciousness	ENV	
	Emphasis on Sustainability	ENV	
	Certifications and Transparency	HCI	
	Reliance on Labels	ENV	

			friendly practices resonate with me and influence my purchasing decisions.”  “I like to be open about where they get their products and how their products are made.”
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Insights From (Consumer Group)</b>	<b>Significant Statements</b>
			“I love when companies clearly state what is in their products on the packaging.”
Familiarity and Influence of Recommendations	Varying Familiarity	All	“I usually buy foods that my friends tell me to try or what I see in store.”  “I like brands that have foods that are easy to prepare and ready to eat as I approach retirement. I often search online to find deals and sales.”  “I like technology-based features like scanning QR codes to get information about a product, but the food's authenticity and taste are what really matter to me.”
	Influence of Recommendations	NUR	
	Online Research and Deals	OG	
	Tech-Driven Familiarity	TS	
Sustainability, Health, Tradition, and Convenience	Focus on Sustainability and Health	All	“I am more familiar with brand strategies of food production companies that prioritize eco-friendly packaging, sustainable sourcing, and ethical production practices.”
	Importance of Convenience	OG	
	Emphasis on Tradition, Taste and Authenticity	OG, TS	
	Interaction through Technology	TS	



		<p>“I am more familiar with those that emphasize quality ingredients, transparency in sourcing, and sustainable practices.”</p> <p>“I look for names that offer traditional and authentic Chinese food because I love the flavors and recipes I grew up with I love names that highlight their history.”</p> <p>“I know those that use technology to make things like personalized suggestions and easy online shopping possible.”</p>
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*Legend: Consumer Group Codes NUR = New Urban Residents; OG = Older Generations; HCI = Health Conscious Individuals; ENV = Environmentalists; TS = Tech-savvy*

The question, “how familiar are you with the brand strategy of food production companies?” were responded through varying themes by different consumer groups. One key theme centered on **alignment with values and environmental concerns**. This suggests that consumers were more attuned to companies that reflected their own beliefs and social aspirations, particularly when it came to sustainability, health, transparency, environmental consciousness, and social responsibility. This theme resonated strongly with specific groups like new urban residents, health-conscious individuals, and environmentalists.

Another theme highlighted the varying levels of **familiarity and influence of recommendations**. The thematic analysis revealed a range of consumer awareness levels regarding food production practices. Certain consumer groups had a profound comprehension of brand strategy, while others displayed a more rudimentary awareness. Peer

influence and recommendations were significant topics of discussion. Consumer impressions are greatly influenced by friends, family, and internet reviews, since shared experiences play a crucial role in shaping brand awareness and choice. Interestingly, many consumers across various demographics reported that online platforms played a crucial role in their understanding of food companies' brand strategies. This highlights a desire for readily accessible information and the appeal of unique deals and promotions. Furthermore, tech-savvy consumers utilized varying technologies including social media, apps, and online sites, as well as, interactive challenges to delve deeper into food production companies, ultimately influencing their perspective of these brands.

Consumer responses regarding familiarity with brand strategies also revealed a strong **focus on sustainability, health, tradition, and convenience**. An interesting sub-theme emerged around the

challenge of balancing health and sustainable practices with culinary heritage. Older generations, for instance, expressed a preference for companies that cater to specific health needs at different life stages. Interestingly, convenience emerged as a priority for both older and tech-savvy consumers, though in different ways. Older adults gravitated towards quick-prep options and ready-to-eat meals, while tech-savvy consumers valued seamless online experiences and contactless delivery. Taste and authenticity were also important factors. Consumers, particularly older generations but also some tech-savvy individuals who valued tradition alongside

innovation, were drawn to companies using high-quality ingredients and original recipes. The study found that technology wasn't just about convenience, but could be an integrated part of the culinary journey, reflecting a modern fusion of tradition and innovation. Ultimately, consumer familiarity with a food production company's brand strategy appears to be heavily influenced by personal preferences and beliefs.

*Personal Experiences vis-à-vis Brand Strategy and Customer Experience Alignment*

**Table 2. Thematic Analysis: Consumer Experiences and Alignment with Brand Strategy**

Themes	Sub-themes	Insights From (Consumer Group)	Significant Statements
Quality, Trust, and Values Alignment	Quality and Convenience	NUR	“Some goods are convenient and of high quality, which fits well with their brand strategies. But some companies don't seem to live up to their promises—they seem to focus more on marketing than on providing.”  “I have had interactions with companies that focus on traditional flavors and quality, which shows that some of them understand what our age wants. Their business strategies are in line with what we expect from real, healthy
	Values Alignment	NUR	
	Trust and Quality	OG	
	Health and Tradition	OG	
	Health and Quality	HCI	
	Environmental Consciousness	ENV	
	Sustainability, Ethical Sourcing and Packaging	ENV	
Themes	Sub-themes	Insights From (Consumer Group)	Significant Statements
			food experiences.”  “My experience was positive—the products tasted fresh and

			wholesome, just as they promised. This alignment between their brand strategy and my experience makes me trust them more.”
			<p>“When their business strategy is in line with sustainability, it not only makes my experience better, but it also makes me more loyal to their products.”</p> <p>“I've noticed a big difference in my new interactions with food companies that care about the environment. Sustainability is a big part of their brand plans, and it shows in how they package and source their products.”</p>
Customer Understanding and Convenience	• Understanding and Nostalgia	OG	<p>“Some have impressed me with how much they care about memories and the tastes I remember from my childhood.”</p> <p>“These days, contactless delivery is very important to me, especially. Some companies that make food have made this part of their brand plan, which made my experience easy and safe.”</p> <p>“When food companies use technology to increase their brand awareness by creating fun apps or online experiences, it improves my general impression and makes the process more enjoyable.”</p>
	• Contactless Delivery	HCI	
	• Ease of Ordering	TS	
	• Fun and Engaging Online Experiences	TS	

Themes	Sub-themes	Insights From (Consumer Group)	Significant Statements
Mixed Experiences and Marketing Focus	Mixed Experiences	NUR	“I have seen, though, that some brands put marketing tricks ahead of quality, which is upsetting.”  “But some companies don't seem to live up to their promises—they seem to focus more on marketing than on providing.”
	Quality vs. Marketing	OG	

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The next question to customers was, “Could you describe your recent experiences with a food manufacturing company?” and “How do you perceive the alignment between their brand strategy and your overall experience?” When asked these questions, three key premises emerged in the major theme: **quality, trust, and values alignment**. Consumers expressed a strong desire for products that matched a company's advertised quality, but also fit seamlessly into their busy lives. This "quality and convenience" pairing highlights the modern consumer's desire for both excellence and ease within the overall customer experience. Additionally, interview responses revealed a preference for brands that integrated their values into their operations, demonstrating alignment with social responsibility, sustainability, or cultural awareness that resonated with the consumers themselves. This extended to a desire for companies prioritizing both health and culinary traditions, suggesting a growing interest in ethnic and traditional cuisines that complement health-conscious choices. Interestingly, the emphasis on high health and quality standards suggests a more sophisticated consumer who does not compromise on product excellence for the sake of healthy options.

Building trust emerged as a crucial factor within this theme, with clear communication and verifiable indicators being paramount, particularly for aspects like health and environmental claims. Consumer expectations went beyond product quality to encompass a brand's environmental impact, including sourcing practices and packaging. Notably, environmentalist consumer groups emphasized the need for companies to not only promote environmental responsibility but also demonstrate it through concrete actions like ethical sourcing and eco-friendly packaging solutions.

Consumer experiences with brand alignment highlighted the importance of **customer understanding and convenience**. This theme encompassed a desire for brands to connect with personal memories, preferences, and cultural backgrounds to create personalized and memorable interactions. A key emphasis emerged around companies prioritizing health and safety through fast, secure contactless delivery methods – a clear reflection of the ongoing pandemic's impact on consumer behavior and the growing demand for safe, touchless options. Similarly, interview responses underscored the importance of user-friendly

interfaces and systems that streamline the ordering process. Brands that facilitate easy online ordering were seen more favorably by consumers. This theme further emphasizes the need for companies to address practical needs and create a more memorable online experience.

The analysis also revealed a theme of **mixed experiences and marketing focus**. Consumers reported a wide range of experiences with food manufacturers, with quality, customer service, and

other factors impacting their overall sentiment. This highlights the importance for brands seeking customer loyalty to understand the reasons behind these diverse experiences. The interviews also indicated a potential disconnect between marketing claims and product quality, with some consumers encountering companies that prioritized marketing efforts over delivering a high-quality product.

***Brand Identity Resonance: When Interactions Align with Strategy***

**Table 3. Thematic Analysis: Consumer Perceptions of Brand Identity Through Interactions**

Themes	Sub-themes	Insights From (Consumer Group)	Significant Statements
Quality and Sustainability	Quality and Safety	NUR	<p>“I've noticed that food production companies that put quality and safety first have strong brand identities. As an example, when a dairy business talks about its dedication to using fresh, local milk and clear production methods, it fits with their brand's personality of offering healthy and reliable products.”</p> <p>“I go for brands that care about the environment and sustainability, like companies that reduce the amount of packaging trash they make or support fair farming practices.”</p>
	Sustainability and Environment	NUR	
	Organic and Natural Ingredients	HCI	
	Environmental Care	HCI	
	Traditional Recipes Quality	OG OG	



			“Food companies that stress the quality and safety of their products really connect with their brand identity,” As an example, a brand that does strict quality checks and promises to use healthy products fits with its image as a reliable food source for our age group.”
Customer-Centric Approach	Excellent Customer Service	NUR	“When workers of a food production company are knowledgeable and friendly, it shows that they care about their customers and is in line with their brand's promise of "excellent service.”
	Unique Presentation	OG	
	Convenience (for older generations)	OG	
	Customization	TS	
	Community Involvement	TS	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Insights From (Consumer Group)</b>	<b>Significant Statements</b>
			“I care about getting involved in my community. Someone told me that a food company had online cooking lessons and forums for foodies. It shows that they want to build an online food group.”
			“Food companies that make it easy to

			order online and deliver on time are in line with their brand's image as convenient choices for seniors who like home-cooked meals.”
Transparency and Technology	Transparency in Labeling and Sourcing	HCI	“Transparency in labeling and sourcing is very important to me.” Food companies that clearly state the nutritional value and origin of their materials show that they are honest”  “Another thing that speaks to me is local sources. When a food company works with local farmers and gives back to the community, it shows that their brand supports healthy farming.”  “Customization is important to me, and there's a brand that stands out. They use AI algorithms to suggest new recipes based on what I like.”
	Eco-Friendly Packaging	ENV	
	Transparency	ENV	
	Energy Efficiency	ENV	
	Local Sourcing and Conservation Support	ENV	
	Embracing Technology	TS	
	Social Media Engagement	TS	
	Smart Packaging	TS	

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When the consumers were asked about “specific aspects or elements of their interactions with food production company that resonated strongly with the brand's identity,” all groups provided substantial

inputs. In the first key theme, two concepts emerged: **quality and sustainability**. When it comes to quality, new urban residents valued strong manufacturing standards that ensured food safety and product

integrity. They also emphasized their preference for brands that demonstrated a commitment to sustainable practices, including responsible sourcing, waste reduction, and environmental initiatives. Health-conscious consumers gravitated towards companies promoting organic and natural ingredients, while also appreciating efforts to minimize environmental impact through energy-efficient operations and eco-friendly packaging. For older consumers, brand identity resonated strongly with the inclusion of traditional recipes, showcasing a respect for culinary heritage. Ultimately, consistent delivery of high-quality products, particularly in terms of taste and freshness, was a major factor in consumer admiration for food production companies.

Consumers, particularly across different generations, highlighted the importance of a **customer-centric approach** in shaping brand identity. Older adults valued companies that offered easy ordering and personalized delivery options. They were also drawn to brands with unique and visually appealing presentations, encompassing packaging, branding, and overall aesthetics. Tech-savvy consumers, on the other hand, emphasized the ability to customize products and the opportunity for community engagement, such as supporting local initiatives, attending community events, or witnessing a company's commitment to social causes. New urban residents echoed the desire for excellent customer service, including personalized assistance, user-friendly platforms, and prompt support. Ultimately,

consumers across demographics felt that a positive brand experience stemmed from feeling valued and supported throughout their interactions with a food production company.

The other theme that emerged from the consumer interview with regard to notable interaction aspects is **transparency and technology**. Consumers, particularly those concerned with environmental sustainability, highlighted transparency and technology as key aspects influencing brand identity. The environmentalist group emphasized the importance of sustainable or eco-friendly packaging that aligned with their values. Beyond just labeling and sourcing, transparency in corporate processes and policies emerged as a strong preference. Consumers who prioritized environmental responsibility expressed a desire to support brands that utilized energy-efficient manufacturing and delivery methods, while also valuing companies that invested in local communities and conservation efforts. Tech-savvy consumers, on the other hand, were drawn to companies that embraced technology, engaging customers through augmented reality, smart packaging, and well-designed online platforms. They also highlighted the importance of social media interaction for brands to connect with their audience, while viewing smart packaging solutions as a way to showcase a company's modern and innovative approach.

*Misalignment and Confusion in the Customer Journey*

**Table 4. Thematic Analysis: Consumer Perceptions of Brand Strategy Misalignment**

Themes	Sub-themes	Insights From (Consumer Group)	Significant Statements
Quality and Brand Promise Discrepancy	Quality Discrepancy	NUR	“There was this food brand that advertised itself as very high-end. When I ordered their products, the packaging looked fancy, but the
	Taste vs. Ingredient Claims	OG	
	Quality Discrepancy (high-class vacation)	OG	
	Questionable Ingredients	HCI	
	Freshness Discrepancy	HCI	
	Lack of Personalization	HCI	

Themes	Sub-themes	Insights From (Consumer Group)	Significant Statements
	Endangered Species	ENV	quality and taste didn't live up to the hype.”
	Zero-Waste Packaging Discrepancy	ENV	<p>“I tried a brand that said its food was made with high-quality ingredients, but it didn't taste great at all.”</p> <p>“I tried some health food products that said it only used fresh, locally grown food. But one time I found out they were using frozen veggies, which went against their promise to be fresh.”</p> <p>“A tech-savvy food delivery service sent me targeted ads, but when I clicked on the links, they often took me to broken or irrelevant pages.”</p>
Lack of Recycling Options	ENV		
Transportation Discrepancy	ENV		
App Functionality Issues	TS		
Promotion Redemption Challenges	TS		
Lack of Customization	TS		
Technical Difficulties in Virtual Events	TS		
Digital Marketing Discrepancy	TS		
Health and Sustainability Claims Discrepancy	Unhealthy Choices	NUR	<p>“I once went to a store that said it was all about healthy food. But when I went there, I saw that their food still had a lot of unhealthy choices.”</p> <p>“One time, I bought something from a company that said it promoted healthy living. But when I looked at the list of</p>
	Harmful Ingredients	OG	
	Delivery Service Issues	HCI	
	Contactless Delivery Discrepancy	HCI	

			chemicals, I saw that it had a lot of fake ones.”  “I thought a certain brand promoted contactless delivery, but when I placed my order, the delivery person insisted on taking cash.”
Themes	Sub-themes	Insights From (Consumer Group)	Significant Statements
Environmental Commitment and Packaging Discrepancy	Eco-Friendly Packaging	NUR	“I bought something from a brand that said it cared about the environment, but when it arrived, there was too much plastic packaging.” It went against their image of being eco-friendly and made me question their business strategy.”  “I tried a brand that said it had zero-waste packaging, but the product inside had parts made of single-use plastic. It was annoying that their attempts to protect the environment didn't seem sincere.”
	Non-Recyclable Elements	ENV	

Legend: Consumer Group Codes NUR = New Urban Residents; OG = Older Generations; HCI = Health Conscious Individuals; ENV = Environmentalists; TS = Tech-savvy

The interview with consumers also included the question, “Were there any moments where you found the alignment between the brand's strategy and your experience confusing or conflicting? Could you elaborate on these instances?” Consumers across all demographics shared their experiences with

misalignments between brand strategy and customer experience. A recurring theme was the **discrepancy between quality and brand promises**. Older adults, for instance, felt a disconnect when a product's taste did not live up to claims of high-quality ingredients, or when their overall experience fell short of the



brand's premium image and promises. This could lead to a loss of trust in the brand. Health-conscious consumers raised concerns about brands promoting health benefits or natural ingredients but using undisclosed or unknown substances in their products. Transparency in ingredient labeling was seen as crucial. Additionally, a mismatch arose when brands emphasized freshness but consumers perceived the products as not being as fresh as advertised, or when companies failed to offer desired customization options. Environmentalists highlighted instances where sustainable brands were criticized for harming endangered species, or when promises of zero-waste packaging clashed with the use of non-recyclable materials. Similarly, confusion arose when environmentally friendly products lacked clear recycling instructions or support, or when companies promoting eco-friendly transportation relied heavily on non-environmentally friendly vehicles. Tech-savvy consumers encountered misalignments when apps malfunctioned despite marketing campaigns, or when promotions were difficult to redeem, creating frustration and a gap between advertised benefits and user experience. The inability to customize products as expected, technical glitches compromising virtual experiences with innovative brands, and broken or irrelevant links on platforms were all seen as factors that damaged brand credibility. Finally, new urban residents echoed concerns about discrepancies between a brand's quality promises and the actual product quality. This gap could erode brand trust, loyalty, and customer engagement.

Likewise, consumers highlighted several areas where **discrepancies between health and sustainability claims** and their experiences created confusion.

Health-conscious individuals pointed out that slow, unreliable delivery services could undermine a brand's focus on healthy living. Similarly, a disconnect arose when companies advertised contactless delivery but failed to consistently follow through, leaving customers feeling the service did not match the brand's strategy. New urban residents encountered instances where health-focused brands offered menu options that contradicted their healthy image, causing confusion for health-conscious consumers. Older adults emphasized the importance of transparent ingredient sourcing and communication for health brands, particularly when concerns arose about accidental inclusion of harmful or synthetic chemicals. This transparency was seen as essential for maintaining customer confidence.

The final theme explored challenges related to **inconsistencies between environmental commitments and packaging practices**. Consumers, particularly those concerned with environmental issues, were attuned to discrepancies between a brand's stated commitment to sustainability and its execution, specifically in packaging. New urban residents encountered situations where eco-friendly features were not consistently implemented, or where packaging failed to meet sustainability criteria. Similarly, an environmentalist respondent pointed out instances of companies promoting eco-friendliness while using non-recyclable packaging, further highlighting the gap between brand promises and consumer experience.

*Consumer Recommendations on Enhancing Brand-Customer Alignment*

**Table 5. Thematic Analysis: Consumer Suggestions for Improved Brand-Experience Alignment**

Themes	Sub-themes	Insights From (Consumer Group)	Significant Statements
	Eco-Friendly and Sustainable Practices	NUR	“Companies that make food should put more

Environmental Sustainability and Health-Conscious Focus	Natural and Organic Products	HCI	<p>money into packaging that is better for the environment and sustainable sourcing.”</p> <p>“It would be great to have a bigger range of natural and organic products.”</p> <p>“Brands should put safety and quality control first, especially when it comes to health products.”</p>
	Safety and Quality Control	HCI	
	Eco-Friendly Practices	ENV	
	Recycling Initiatives	ENV	
	Transparency in Green Practices	ENV	
	Environmental Involvement	ENV	
	Incentives for Sustainability	ENV	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Insights From (Consumer Group)</b>	<b>Significant Statements</b>
			<p>“Implementing recycling programs or providing reusable packaging options could demonstrate a brand's commitment to sustainability.”</p> <p>“Offering incentives, such as discounts or loyalty programs for customers who make sustainable choices, would encourage more people to support eco-friendly brands and contribute to a greener future.”</p>
Consumer-Centric Technology Integration	User-Friendly Technology (apps and websites)	TS	<p>“Businesses should spend money on mobile apps and websites that are easy for people to use</p>
	Cutting-Edge Technology	TS	
	Personalization	TS	
	Social Media Engagement	TS	

			and have smooth interfaces.”  “Companies should use cutting-edge technologies to make online shopping more engaging.”
Convenience, Customization, and Engagement	Convenience	NUR	“Food companies could improve their brand strategy by coming up with new, time-saving ways to make meals, like healthy options that come pre-packaged or fast delivery services.”  “Companies that make products for fun and relaxation could work with local culture events or run deals for older people.”
	Customization	NUR	
	Educational Content	HCI	
	User-Friendly Packaging	OG	
	Meal Delivery	OG	
	Local Culture Events	OG	

Legend: Consumer Group Codes NUR = New Urban Residents; OG = Older Generations; HCI = Health Conscious Individuals; ENV = Environmentalists; TS = Tech-savvy

The consumer groups were also asked the question, “based on your experiences and observations, what practical suggestions or changes would you recommend to enhance the alignment between food production companies’ brand strategy and customer experience?” The different consumer groups provided significant recommendations regarding alignment of brand strategy and customer experience particularly in the context of food production companies. The first theme that was brought up is regarding **environmental sustainability and health-conscious focus**. Health-conscious individuals emphasized the importance of companies using natural and organic ingredients while maintaining strict food safety and quality control standards. Environmental concerns were a major

focus for this group as well. Consumers expressed a desire for companies to embrace eco-friendly practices throughout their operations, including utilizing energy-efficient buildings, implementing waste management strategies, and adopting other green initiatives. Recycling efforts were seen as a positive step, with suggestions for clear recycling programs, recyclable packaging options, and consumer education on proper disposal methods. Transparency regarding sustainability efforts was also crucial for consumers, who wanted companies to openly communicate their environmental commitments. Additionally, participation in local environmental initiatives, collaboration with environmental organizations, and rewarding customer choices that benefit the environment

(through loyalty programs or other incentives) were all viewed favorably. New urban residents echoed these concerns, emphasizing the need for food producers to actively implement and promote eco-friendly and sustainable practices throughout the supply chain and manufacturing process, with a focus on minimizing environmental impact.

Consumers, particularly tech-savvy individuals, highlighted the importance of **consumer-centric technology integration** in improving brand alignment. Their recommendations focused on creating user-friendly mobile applications and websites for smooth online interactions. Additionally, they emphasized the need for companies to embrace cutting-edge technology to remain competitive, and to personalize offerings through customization features, ultimately enhancing the individual customer experience. Social media was viewed as a valuable tool for marketing, direct engagement with consumers, gathering feedback, and fostering a sense of community – a strong social media presence resonated positively with this demographic.

Another key theme revolved around **convenience, customization, and engagement**. New urban residents stressed the importance of a seamless customer experience, including features like easy online ordering, fast delivery, and convenient packaging – convenience being a major factor in customer satisfaction. Customization options were also seen as a way to cater to individual preferences. Older adults provided valuable insights as well. They suggested that package design should be considered as part of the overall experience, with easy-to-use, informative, and brand-appropriate packaging enhancing the perceived value of a product. Additionally, they expressed a desire for convenient access to fresh, healthy meals delivered to their homes. Furthermore, collaborating with local events and offering promotions tied to cultural holidays were seen as ways to strengthen brand relationships, particularly with older generations. Health-conscious consumers chimed in with their recommendations,

emphasizing the value of brands that go beyond transactional interactions. Providing educational information on nutrition, health, or ingredient origins was seen as a way to intellectually engage consumers and build trust through transparency.

### **Conclusion:**

The previously presented results of the thematic analysis generated significant findings in this study. This study highlights the importance of accessible brand information for consumers. When consumers have a clear understanding of a brand's values and practices, they feel more confident in their purchasing decisions (Nguyen & Gizaw, 2014, as cited in Barijan, Ariningsih, & Rahmawati, 2021). This knowledge can significantly impact brand preference, as familiarity fosters a sense of trust and the belief that a brand aligns with the consumer's standards (Heckler et al., 1994, as cited in Barijan, Ariningsih, & Rahmawati, 2021). In other words, consumers who are well-informed about a brand are more likely to connect with it on an emotional level and choose it over competitors.

Consumers echoed the importance of a holistic brand strategy, as discussed by Clark (2020). This goes beyond just a company's visual identity. For consumers, a strong brand translates to clear and honest communication of a company's values and goals across all platforms, ensuring a consistent and easily recognizable brand experience. Understanding brand image, consumer needs and expectations, and market segmentation allows companies to revisit their core purpose and principles to ensure they continue to resonate with their target audience. This aligns with Dang's (2023) research on restaurant chain brand image, which highlights the importance of prioritizing brand image for customer loyalty and satisfaction. The study suggests a two-way street: When companies focus on creating positive customer experiences and building brand loyalty, consumers respond favorably to a brand that strives to maintain a strong and consistent image. In essence, consumers are more likely to connect with a brand that makes a

genuine effort to retain its values and the positive associations it has built.

Consumers' perspectives aligned with Chacko's (2023) emphasis on user-generated content, social media engagement, and active feedback solicitation. These strategies make consumers feel like valued parts of the brand, fostering a sense of ownership and community. The theme of quality and sustainability resonated with the concept of green food development in China (Xu et al., 2020). Consumers showed a high level of recognition for "green food", positioned as a middle ground between organic and safe food. This approach benefits consumers by enhancing food industry competitiveness, boosting agricultural income, and promoting environmentally friendly practices that ensure long-term agricultural sustainability. Consumers emphasized the importance of companies living up to their brand promises, echoing Motta-Filho's (2021) concept of "practice what you preach." Empty brand promises were seen as worse than no promises at all. Internal and external factors, along with how companies handle them, all influence consumer perceptions. This aligns with Kotler, Armstrong, and Opresnik (2020) which highlights the link between happy and loyal customers. Businesses that are honest about their capabilities and strive to exceed customer expectations are more likely to cultivate a loyal base. Satisfied consumers do not just return for repeat business, they are more likely to recommend the brand to others and even become enthusiastic brand advocates (Kotler, Armstrong, & Opresnik, 2020) when they have consistently positive experiences.

Consumers offered valuable recommendations that shed light on what constitutes a positive brand experience in the food production industry (Kotler et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2022). These insights are crucial for companies that want to meet the high expectations of their target audience. Consumers emphasized the importance of companies understanding their needs and wants, likely achieved through effective marketing data management.

Meeting or exceeding sales targets relies on companies developing marketing strategies that adapt to real-world conditions, not just theoretical plans.

The consumer perspective highlights the importance of the brand experience itself, encompassing all aspects of customer interaction (Brakus et al., 2009, as cited in Van de Sand et al., 2019). This goes beyond just a company's messaging or branding – it's about the subjective feelings and behavioral responses consumers have as a result of their interactions with the brand. A positive brand experience is ultimately shaped by the customer's perception, based on the sum of their experiences.

Consumers prioritize alignment between a food company's strategy and the actual customer experience, particularly regarding transparency, quality, and sustainability. Mixed messages, especially around health and environmental initiatives, can lead to confusion. The research also identifies several key touchpoints that significantly impact the customer journey. Experiences with online ordering, shipping procedures, and customer care – including the use of eco-friendly materials, honest interactions, and intuitive online interfaces – all play a major role in shaping a customer's perception of whether a brand lives up to its promises.

Given these analyses, comparing the insights across consumer groups is a fitting presentation of the conclusion of this study. The next table presents a detailed comparison of the insights from five consumer groups: New Urban Residents (NUR), Health-Conscious Individuals (HCI), Older Generations (OG), Environmentalists (ENV), and Tech-Savvy (TS) regarding the alignment of brand strategy and customer experience particularly in food production companies. These insights are categorized based on the research questions being addressed in this study, such as familiarity, personal experience, resonating aspects of interaction, experiences on misalignment, and consumer recommendations. The thematic analysis of the



interview data that addressed the research questions revealed several matching themes across all five consumer groups, indicating some universal expectations for brand messaging and its reflection

in the customer journey. These shared themes include transparency, quality, health and sustainability, and convenience.

**Table 6. Comparison of Consumer Insights on Aspects of Improved Brand-Experience Alignment**

	<b>New Urban Residents (NUR)</b>	<b>Health-Conscious Individuals (HCI)</b>	<b>Older Generations (OG)</b>	<b>Environmentalists (ENV)</b>	<b>Tech-Savvy (TS)</b>
<b>Familiarity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of value and easy-to-use products</li> <li>• Focus on health and environmental concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority on natural and organic ingredients</li> <li>• Strict food safety and quality control standards</li> <li>• Desire for transparency about sustainability efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on tradition, taste, and authenticity</li> <li>• Interest in companies that support local initiatives</li> <li>• Value clear communication on packaging and easy-to-use features</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on eco-friendly practices throughout the supply chain</li> <li>• Importance of clear recycling programs and recyclable packaging</li> <li>• Preference for companies that reward sustainable choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire for user-friendly mobile applications and websites</li> <li>• Importance of companies embracing cutting-edge technology</li> <li>• Interest in social media for marketing, engagement, and feedback</li> <li>• Recognition of the value of personalized experiences</li> </ul>
<b>Personal Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on quality and convenience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on health and quality</li> <li>• Emphasis on transparency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on alignment of personal values, such as tradition, quality, and local sourcing.</li> <li>• Emphasis on trust and quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on companies with eco-friendly practices and commitment to sustainability</li> <li>• Emphasis on clear communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on positive customer experience</li> <li>• Focus on engagement and personalization</li> </ul>

	<b>New Urban Residents (NUR)</b>	<b>Health-Conscious Individuals (HCI)</b>	<b>Older Generations (OG)</b>	<b>Environmentalists (ENV)</b>	<b>Tech-Savvy (TS)</b>
<b>Resonating Aspects of Interaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance placed on product quality and safety assurances.</li> <li>Focus on sustainability and environmental responsibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on organic and natural ingredients</li> <li>Focus on transparency in labeling and sourcing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on traditional recipes and quality</li> <li>Focus on features of convenience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance placed on local sourcing and conservation support</li> <li>Emphasis on eco-friendly packaging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on embracing technology</li> <li>Emphasis on Social Media Engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Experiences on Misalignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on health and sustainability claims</li> <li>Focus on delivery service issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finding unhealthy options despite a brand's focus on health and wellness.</li> <li>Focus on delivery service issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on quality discrepancy</li> <li>Focus on Freshness Discrepancy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on non-recyclable packaging</li> <li>Focus on lack of recycling options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on app functionality issues</li> <li>Focus on digital marketing discrepancy</li> </ul>
<b>Consumer Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transparency in pricing and sustainability</li> <li>Improved delivery services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer more natural and organic options</li> <li>Clear labeling on ingredients and sourcing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on consistent quality or maintaining consistently high-quality products</li> <li>Simpler and user-friendly packaging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce packaging waste</li> <li>Increase transparency in sustainability efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop user-friendly mobile apps</li> <li>Align social media with customer experience</li> </ul>

**Transparency** is a key concern for all consumer groups. This translates to a desire for clear

information on a variety of factors, including product pricing, ingredients, sourcing practices, and the

company's commitment to sustainability. Likewise, this focus on transparency can further strengthen consumer confidence and satisfaction. For instance, NUR group specifically mentioned a need for transparency in both pricing and the company's sustainability efforts. Similarly, the HCI group expressed a desire for clear labeling of ingredients and sourcing information. ENV participants prioritized transparency in sustainability efforts, while TS consumers highlighted the importance of social media messaging that aligns with the customer experience. The emphasis on transparency shows that consumers across all demographics want to make informed choices. It also underscored that transparency is very significant in terms of aligning brand strategy and customer experience, hence, it highlights the need for brands to adopt open and honest communication strategies to thrive in the modern market.

Product **quality** is another theme that resonates with all consumer groups. This focus on quality is particularly important for OG consumers who value consistent quality in order to maintain brand trust. For the NUR group, they also prioritize quality, but their focus is balanced with a desire for convenience and value. Consumers who are HCIs link quality to healthfulness, prioritizing fresh, high-quality ingredients and production practices. Emphasis on quality shows that it remains to be a cornerstone of consumer expectations, cutting across demographic boundaries. It represents a baseline standard that all consumers expect, irrespective of their specific preferences or values. High-quality products are essential for building trust and ensuring customer satisfaction, making it a non-negotiable aspect of brand strategy.

Similarly, the findings of the research also highlights the growing importance of **health and sustainability** concerns for consumers. This is most evident in the responses from HCIs and ENVs who prioritize organic ingredients, healthy options, and environmentally friendly practices. While not the

sole focus for all groups, both health and sustainability are increasingly influencing consumer choices. For instance, NURs appreciate companies that prioritize environmental responsibility, and OG consumers may be drawn to companies that emphasize healthy ingredients. This shows that health and sustainability are critical themes that increasingly influences consumer choices. Brands that prioritize sustainability not only appeal to environmentally and health conscious consumers but also enhance their overall brand image and reputation. Thus, transparent communication about sustainable practices is essential in meeting the growing demand for healthy and environmentally responsible products.

Finally, based on the results of the study, **convenience** is another key factor influencing consumer's purchasing decisions. NUR group often lead busy lifestyles and prefer products that are easy to use and save time without sacrificing quality. HCIs value the convenience of easy-to-read labels and accessible health information, seeking products that are both nutritious and easy to prepare. OG consumers appreciate simple, user-friendly packaging and easy-to-prepare products that maintain traditional quality. ENVs prioritize sustainability but also seek the convenience of readily available eco-friendly products and easily recyclable packaging. TS consumers demand digital convenience, including user-friendly mobile apps, efficient online shopping, and personalized recommendations. This shows that convenience is a significant driver of consumer behavior. It reflects the need for time-saving and hassle-free solutions in today's fast-paced world. Brands that successfully combine convenience with quality and sustainability are well-positioned to meet the diverse needs of modern consumers.

Given the findings and the comparative analysis of the various insights of each consumer group, the following can be deduced:

- (1) Customers see a food business' strategy as aligned with their experience when it acts in accordance with its stated principles, especially those pertaining to transparency, quality, health and sustainability, and convenience.
- (2) Consumers develop a stronger affinity for brands that demonstrate consistency between their brand image and the actual customer experience.
- (3) Several touchpoints that substantially impact a consumer journey. Experiences that are in keeping with the brand strategy are greatly influenced by interactions that pertain to online ordering, shipping procedures, and customer care.
- (4) Consumers underscored inconsistencies between a brand's promises and their experience, emphasizing the importance of companies living up to their brand image to avoid confusing customers.
- (5) Quality, sustainability, and engagement mechanisms are some of the practical suggestions made by consumers as regards brand strategy and customer experience alignment.

This study can further contribute to the theory of brand strategy and customer experience alignment within the food production industry. First, it reinforces the idea that consumers prioritize consistency between a company's stated principles and their actual experiences. This highlights the importance of brand strategy reflecting core values that resonate with the target audience. Second, it strengthens the link between a consistent brand image and customer loyalty. When a company's brand promises translate into a cohesive customer experience, it fosters stronger consumer affinity. Likewise, it also expands the understanding of touchpoints impacting the customer journey that goes beyond just product quality to encompass online interactions, shipping procedures, and customer care practices. Finally, by highlighting consumer sensitivity to inconsistencies, the study

emphasizes the importance of "walking the walk, not just talking the talk."

Thus, future research can build on these findings by quantifying the precise impact of alignment between brand strategy and customer experience on factors like customer loyalty and brand advocacy; investigating how these dynamics differ across specific food production sectors (e.g., organic, processed foods); and conducting studies to track how consumer perceptions evolve over time and how companies can adapt their strategies accordingly.

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