

# From Regional Kitchens to Digital Carts: E-Commerce, Brand Management, and Innovation in India's Blended Spices and Seasonings Sector

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## Abstract

The study explores the transformation of India's blended spices and seasonings sector from traditional regional kitchens to modern digital commerce platforms. It aims to examine how e-commerce adoption, brand management strategies, and product innovations are reshaping the growth trajectories of both legacy and emerging brands in this sector. Utilizing a qualitative research framework, the present study employs a systematic thematic analysis methodology. Primary data were obtained via comprehensive interviews with brand managers, founders, and industry specialists, whereas secondary data were sourced from corporate reports, e-commerce platform analytics, and industry-related publications. The thematic analysis procedure was informed by *Braun & Clarke's (2006)* six-phase framework.

*The research uncovers five critical themes:*

- (1) Digitization of traditional spice brands,
- (2) Brand positioning challenges in digital marketplaces,
- (3) Innovation in product development and packaging,
- (4) Balancing act between regional authenticity and global scalability, and
- (5) Shifts in consumer perception driven by online brand experiences. These insights reveal that innovation-led brand management combined with strategic digital adoption is pivotal for sustainable market penetration in the seasoning category.

This study bridges the research gap between traditional FMCG branding and emerging e-commerce strategies in the Indian context. A new conceptual framework to link brand innovation, e-commerce integration and consumer behaviour in the context of spices and seasonings is presented. It thus offers actionable inputs to marketers, brand strategists and policymakers geared towards enhancing digital competitiveness of traditional FMCG categories.

**Keywords:** E-commerce, Brand Management, Innovation, Blended Spices, Seasonings, India, FMCG, Digital Transformation

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## Introduction

### *Background Context*

Traditionally, the Indian spices and seasonings sector is entrenched with regional culinary practices which have undergone an impressive transformation with digital commerce. As a consequence of the evolution in consumer purchasing patterns toward digital platforms, there exists an unparalleled demand among consumers for genuine, conveniently packaged, and creatively branded spice products within the local marketplace. The rise of e-commerce has not solely enhanced market accessibility for prominent national brands but has also engendered exceptional opportunities for regional and niche enterprises to engage with a wider demographic. The intersection of digital retailing, brand management, and product innovation is thus redefining competitive dynamics in the Indian blended spices and seasonings industry.

### Research Gap

Despite the evident growth of this sector, two major gaps persist in the academic and practitioner literature:

- There is a lack of integrated research examining how e-commerce, brand innovation, and the traditional spice sector interact to drive growth and transformation. Existing research frequently examines these components in a fragmented manner, failing to provide a comprehensive perspective.
- Insufficient academic inquiry has been allocated to exploring how regional spice brands, many of which embody rich cultural and culinary legacies, are managing the complexities and prospects associated with the transition to digital platforms. Consequently, understanding the strategies that either promote or obstruct this transformation remains inadequately developed.

### Research Objectives

To address these gaps, the present study pursues the following objectives:

- To explore the ways in which regional seasoning brands in India are adapting to the evolving e-commerce ecosystem.
- To examine the role of brand management practices and innovation strategies in enabling these brands to sustain and scale their presence in digital marketplaces.

### Research Contribution

This research offers meaningful contributions across three dimensions:

#### *Theoretical Contribution:*

By linking theories of brand management, digital marketing, and innovation in an emerging market context, the study advances existing academic understanding of FMCG sector transformations.

*Practical Contribution:*

It provides actionable insights for brand managers, entrepreneurs, and marketers on how to effectively leverage e-commerce channels, rebrand traditional products, and innovate to meet new-age consumer expectations.

**Methodological Contribution:**

By employing a qualitative thematic analysis approach, the study introduces a nuanced lens to capture the dynamic strategies employed by brands, thereby enriching methodological approaches in emerging market research.

**Literature Review***E-Commerce Growth and Strategic Enablers in India's FMCG Sector*

The past decade has witnessed exponential growth in India's e-commerce ecosystem, catalysed by widespread smartphone penetration, affordable internet access, and government-led digitalization initiatives. Platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, Big Basket, Blinkit, and Zepto have democratized access to FMCG products beyond Tier-I cities, creating new consumption hubs in Tier-II and Tier-III regions (KPMG, 2022; IBEF, 2023).

*Singh et al. (2023)* highlight that small businesses thrive on three synergistic pillars: digital marketing strategies, online customer engagement, and robust technology infrastructure. These not only enhance operational efficiency but also drive performance by fostering deeper customer connections and real-time responsiveness. Their findings provide a foundation for examining how similar digital pillars influence traditional FMCG brands, such as blended spice and seasoning manufacturers, in their shift to e-commerce.

*Evolution of the Blended Spices and Seasonings Market*

Historically dominated by unbranded loose sales, the Indian spice sector has rapidly formalized with the emergence of brands like MDH, Everest, Aachi, and Eastern. These players have established hygiene standards, consistent quality, and strong brand equity through mass media and physical distribution. However, the digital channel has ushered in a new wave of transformation demanding innovative product formats, customized blends, health-oriented variants (e.g., low-sodium or organic spices), and compelling storytelling (Gupta & Singh, 2020; Kotler et al., 2021).

In this context, *Singh and Tripathi (2023)* argue that the integration of big data with digital marketing is no longer optional but essential. It allows traditional FMCG brands to decode customer behaviour, tailor their communication in real-time, and optimize marketing spend through segmentation and predictive insights. These findings are especially salient for regional spice brands attempting to scale without losing their identity.

### *Brand Management in Regional Food Categories*

Regional food brands often build loyalty through deep-rooted cultural relevance, localized Flavors, and legacy trust. However, digitization requires re-contextualization of these legacy values into the language of digital storytelling, optimized visuals, influencer marketing, and search visibility (*Chadha & Sood, 2018*). The challenge lies in achieving authenticity while adopting a scalable digital narrative.

*Singh et al. (2023)* emphasize that trust-building in digital channels via consumer reviews, UX design, and technology infrastructure is critical to brand performance. Their framework aligns with *Keller's (1993)* brand equity theory, underscoring that perception, association, and trust are dynamic constructs especially in digital-first categories like e-commerce spices.

Furthermore, *Tripathi and Jaiswal (2023)* underscore the influence of loyalty-building mechanisms (e.g., rewards, perceived value, and trust) on impulsive purchase behavior—an emerging consumer pattern in digital spice purchases. This highlights the relevance of e-loyalty strategies in building both brand recall and spontaneous conversions.

### *Innovation Strategies in Traditional FMCG Categories*

Innovation in spices is no longer limited to taste profiles; it now spans eco-friendly packaging, D2C subscription models, QR-code storytelling, and digital-first product launches. *Kotler et al. (2021)* advocate for “glocalization” and “frugal innovation” as strategic frameworks in emerging markets.

*Singh and Tripathi (2023)* argue that leveraging big data enables real-time campaign optimization, customer segmentation, and hyper-personalization—capabilities that are transforming the nature of FMCG innovation from reactive to anticipatory. For spice brands, this means tailoring products for dietary niches, integrating sustainability cues, and iterating packaging based on consumer feedback—all validated through digital analytics.

### *Theoretical Underpinnings: Diffusion of Innovations & Brand Equity*

*Two theoretical constructs frame this study:*

•

*Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 2003):*

This model helps explain the pace and pattern of adoption of e-commerce technologies among traditional spice brands, shedding light on why some brands leap ahead while others stagnate.

•

*Brand Equity Models (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993):*

These frameworks are essential for assessing how online branding efforts shape consumer perception, loyalty, and switching behavior. *Singh et al. (2023)* empirically validate that digital marketing and technology infrastructure significantly contribute to brand visibility and performance.

In addition, the application of big data marketing models as described by *Singh & Tripathi (2023)* and *Kartikeya Singh & Veeresh Tripathi (2023)* provides a lens to understand how data analytics transforms brand decisions, improves targeting accuracy, and drives measurable growth in digital FMCG categories.

## Conceptual Framework and Research Model

### *Proposed Model*

This research introduces a comprehensive conceptual framework that investigates the intricate interactions among E-commerce Adoption, Brand Management Strategies, and Innovation Performance within the specific context of India's sector for blended spices and seasonings. The framework posits that the successful transition of traditional spice brands into the digital marketplace depends on the synergistic application of brand management strategies and innovation initiatives, mediated by the degree of e-commerce adoption.

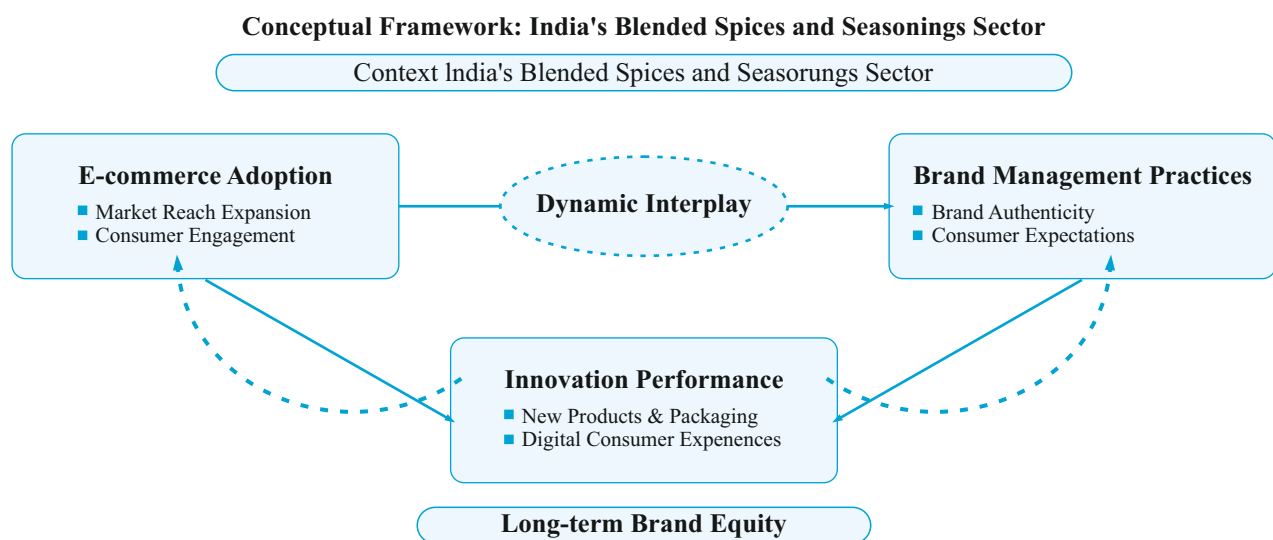
*Specifically, the model suggests:*

*E-commerce Adoption* acts as a catalyst for expanding market reach, enhancing consumer engagement, and enabling faster innovation cycles.

*Brand Management Practices* ensure that the transition to digital platforms preserves core brand authenticity while adapting to evolving consumer expectations.

*Innovation Performance* reflects how well brands can introduce new products, packaging formats, and digital consumer experiences to sustain competitive advantage.

The model further proposes that *Innovation Performance* not only drives short-term digital success but also reinforces long-term brand equity in the seasoning market.



**Fig 1 : Conceptual Framework Diagram**

*E-commerce Adoption* impacts Brand Management Practices and directly accelerates Innovation Performance.

*Brand Management Practices* influence how innovation strategies are perceived and adopted by consumers.

*Innovation Performance* leads to increased Market Penetration and Brand Growth in the blended spices sector.

*Hypothetical Propositions (for future empirical studies)*

Although the current study is qualitative in nature, the following propositions are suggested for future empirical validation:

*P1: Higher levels of e-commerce adoption positively influence the effectiveness of brand management practices in the spices and seasonings sector.*

*P2: Effective brand management practices positively mediate the relationship between e-commerce adoption and innovation performance.*

*P3: Strong innovation performance enhances market penetration and strengthens brand equity in the spices and seasonings sector.*

*P4: Brands that successfully balance traditional authenticity with digital innovation achieve superior consumer trust and loyalty in online marketplaces.*

These assertions possess the potential to establish a foundational framework for forthcoming quantitative investigations that incorporate structural equation modeling (SEM) or regression analysis.

## Methodology

### *Research Approach*

This research employs a qualitative, exploratory methodology to acquire comprehensive understanding regarding the intricacies of e-commerce adoption, brand management tactics, and innovation efficacy within the blended spices and seasonings industry in India. Digital transformation within traditional FMCG categories is progressing and so a qualitative method is most appropriate to capture the richness and complexity of brand experiences, strategic decisions and market challenges.

### *Research Design*

The methodological framework of this research is predicated on the development of a systematic thematic analysis. The organization of the inquiry adheres to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model, wherein it initially identifies patterns (themes) within the data in a systematic manner; subsequently, it engages in an

analysis of these patterns through the lens of existing research literature; and finally, it disseminates the findings in a manner that is both rhetorically coherent and aligned with discussions grounded in practical application. This method guarantees a serious assessment of how brands face their digital transitions preserving their authenticity and enhancing creativity.

### *Sampling Technique*

Participants are purposively sampled in this study to have rich, relevant and diverse insights of the transformation of the spices and seasonings sector. This sample involves regional brands with actual associations within culinary traditions and there are also national brands with a wider reach in the market. Conversely, purposive sampling guarantees that the views are in agreement with the research needs and span a broad collection of brand maturity and digital adoption levels.

### *Units of Analysis*

The units of analysis of this study are primary.

- Digital Strategy, Product Innovation and Market Expansion initiatives lead role on behalf of Brand Managers.
- They are regional spice brand founders and they have seen the offline journey turning online.
- Brand repositioning and consumer engagement through digital platform under Marketing Heads.

The multi-perspective analysis allows us to gain a holistic view of the strategic shifts of the sector and provides insights into both operational and visionary elements.

## **Data Sources and Collection**

### *Primary Data*

In the study primary data were collected for the study through the means of in depth interviews of the key stakeholders in the Indian spices and seasonings sector. Industry experts, brand managers, heads of marketing of regional and national spice brands were its participants. These interviews focused on understanding the strategic shifts towards e-commerce, brand innovation practices, and the challenges faced during digital transformation. The qualitative nature of the interviews allowed for rich, detailed accounts of both operational and strategic perspectives, enabling the identification of emergent themes across different organizational contexts.

### *Secondary Data*

Secondary data were sourced to triangulate and enrich the findings derived from primary data. The key sources included:



*Company Reports:*

Annual reports, marketing strategy presentations, and publicly available brand documentation.

*E-commerce Platform Data:*

Product listings, consumer reviews, pricing strategies, and promotional activities on major online platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, and Big Basket, Zepto, Blinkit.

*Industry Reports:*

Reports and white papers published by reputed industry bodies such as ASSOCHAM, FICCI, IBEF, and Technopak, providing macro-level insights on the growth of e-commerce and FMCG trends in India.

This combination of primary and secondary data ensured a comprehensive understanding of both the micro (brand-specific) and macro (industry-wide) dynamics shaping the sector.

*Data Collection Tools*

*The following tools were utilized for data collection:*

*Semi-structured Interviews:*

A semi-structured interview framework was formulated to guarantee uniformity throughout the interviews while simultaneously permitting the exploration of salient topics of interest in greater depth.

*Document Analysis:*

Systematic review of corporate documents, industry reports, and e-commerce platform data was conducted to extract relevant information on market trends, brand performance, and innovation initiatives.

The use of multiple data sources and collection methods contributed to the validity, depth, and richness of the research findings.

**Data Interpretation and Thematic Analysis***Coding Framework*

The methodology for data interpretation was meticulously organized around the establishment of a comprehensive coding framework. Initially, primary codes were formulated through a detailed analysis of the interview transcripts, focusing on the recognition of significant 'terms, phrases, and concepts articulated by the participants'. Nevertheless, these codes primarily reflected a superficial comprehension of the data. Second, the emergence of second-order themes was facilitated by the aggregation of related first-order codes and the analytical interpretation of overarching patterns in accordance with the established research objectives. This process removed any top level detail from the specific persona the study is applied to but allowed for the unification of underlying ideas such as brand repositioning strategies, innovation drivers and



challenge of integrating e-commerce, layering a high thematic analysis structure.

### *Analytical Method*

To bring about a systematic and rigorous interpretation of the qualitative data, the study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six-Phase Thematic Analysis approach. The six phases included:

- Having transcripts or notes to refer to repeatedly as you read through the data in order to familiarize yourself with it.
- Legacy control creation by generating initial codes to systematically capture interesting features across the entire dataset.
- To search and look for themes you need to collate codes' in to potential thematic categories.
- Reviewing the coded data to make sure the themes represent the coded data, as well as the overall dataset.
- In order to clearly articulate the essence of each theme, define and name the themes.
- The report was produced by integrating into the analytic narrative with the other narrative that answered the research questions with vivid data extracts.
- It gave me a flexible framework free form of a structure for bringing out complex patterns and relationships from the data.

### *Validation*

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, two key validation techniques were applied:

#### *Member Checking:*

To determine the accuracy and resonance of the findings with the participants' lived experiences and perspectives, preliminary interpretations and thematic summaries were shared with a subset of participants.

#### *Peer Debriefing:*

Critical discussion with independent researchers and academic peers regarding the coding process, thematic interpretations, as well as the development of possible researcher biases was ongoing. This provided external feedback that refined the themes and made the analysis even more rigorous.

Combination of both these validation strategies enhanced the reliability, authenticity and the academic robustness of the thematic analysis.

## Thematic Discussion & Insights

Finally, there were five interconnected themes that in combination can elucidate the interplay of e-commerce integration, brand management, and innovation in India's blended spices and seasonings category.

### *Theme 1: Digitization of Traditional Brands*

It emphasizes that digitalization of traditional spice brands has come into vogue because today it is not just optional but important for survival in the market and to grow. Leading e-commerce platforms like Amazon are seeing brands that have always been invested in regional offline markets and are trying to increase spending on digital storefronts, social media marketing, and optimising their presence online. Activities of digitization include launching brand owned websites to taking part in online marketplaces' flash sales and brand campaigns. Although, brands are battling on two fronts to continue their existing identity and update their brand aesthetics and communication for the digitally aware consumers.

### *Theme 2: Challenges in Brand Positioning on E-Commerce Platforms*

Positioning traditional brands in e-commerce is a challenge. With physical retail spaces, trust is driven on legacy and familiarity whereas in online platforms trust needs to be built immediately through visuals, consumer reviews and search optimization. Traditional brands have problems defining their unique selling propositions (USPs) in the crowded online marketplace. Finally, given the above, e-commerce settings lack any tactile experience, which in turn intensifies the requirement of compelling brand storytelling, detailed product descriptions and consumer education in order for customer conversions to take place.

### *Theme 3: Innovations in Product and Packaging*

Moreover, innovation became one of the key drivers for brands to stand out digitally. This includes creating region specific spice blends for the diaspora markets, organic and preservative free health variants, and eco friendly packaging ideas. Smaller pack sizes and combo offerings of online sales dynamics are being invested by brands as well. In the e-commerce context, packaging innovations become all the more crucial since the appearance, durability during transit, and the convenience of use are key factors in purchase decisions.

### *Theme 4: Regional Authenticity vs. Global Scalability*

Brands embarking on online expansion face a fundamental strategic choice of how much to localize versus seek the benefits of scale. Regional brands gain strength from their roots as local cuisine and a heritage, but to scale such brands regionally or internationally, they are forced to standardize some of the product attributes, branding style and marketing narratives. Cultural integrity has to be balanced with the appeal to wider markets. Those brands that manage to straddle this tension usually develop a hybrid approach to their voice, championing the regional distinctiveness that brings alive a sense of authenticity and uniqueness but also with a universal pitch that defines themselves as purveyors of purity, tradition and taste.

*Theme 5: Consumer Perception Shifts due to Online Presence*

The online presence of spice brands has dramatically changed how consumers perceive brands. E-commerce platforms and digital marketing have helped e-com players to get visible very easily among younger, urban consumers who want to discover brands mostly looking at convenience over authenticity. Moreover, the role of online ratings, influencer endorsements and user generated content has also become central to determining the reliability of brand's credibility. Consequently, brand conscious purchase behaviour, a phenomenon observed in such traditionally low involvement purchase categories as spices in the context of traditional sales, exists in the digital channel as well.

*Managerial Implications*

The results derived from this research present numerous significant ramifications for brand managers, entrepreneurs, and strategic decision-makers within the Indian spices and seasonings industry:

*Practical Recommendations for Optimizing Digital Strategies**Strengthen Digital Presence:*

Traditional spice brands must prioritize building a strong and consistent digital presence through brand-owned websites, marketplace optimization, and social media engagement.

*Content-Led Engagement:*

Rich content like recipe videos, usage tips and stories around brand heritage can establish emotional ties and inspire loyalty in the digital space.

*Leverage Consumer Reviews and Influencer Marketing:*

Managing online reviews actively and working with credible food influencers helps Building immediate trust among potential buyers who put such a heavy reliance on peer recommendations online.

*Brand Positioning Models Adapted for E-Commerce Ecosystems**Storytelling-Based Positioning:*

Brands must craft authentic narratives that connect cultural heritage to modern consumer values such as health consciousness, sustainability, and convenience.

*Visual Identity Optimization:*

High-quality visuals, attractive packaging photography, and clear product information are essential for influencing e-commerce purchase behaviour where sensory experiences are absent.

*Micro-Targeting and Personalization:*

Brands can create personalised campaigns targeting different consumer segments based on regional preferences, dietary requirements and purchasing behaviour by using e commerce platform analytics and digital advertising tools.

*Innovation Pathways for Sustaining Competitiveness**Product Innovation:*

All brands should diversify their spice portfolio with new spice blends that are at once innovative to fit with current needs like organic, low sodium ready to cook blends or diet specific variants (i.e. keto friendly spices).

*Packaging Innovation:*

Investing in packaging that ensures freshness, ease of use, and eco-friendliness will enhance consumer satisfaction and loyalty, especially among environmentally conscious buyers.

*Business Model Innovation:*

Exploring direct-to-consumer (D2C) models, subscription boxes for spices, and customized blend offerings can create differentiation and deeper customer relationships.

If traditional and regional spice brands implement these strategic recommendations systematically, it will not only help these brands survive but win in the increasingly competitive and digital world of FMCG.

**Future Research Directions**

Building upon the insights of this qualitative exploration, several avenues for future research are suggested to deepen the understanding of e-commerce integration, brand management, and innovation in the spices and seasonings sector:

*Empirical Validation of the Conceptual Model*

Future studies could undertake quantitative research to empirically validate the conceptual model proposed in this study. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares (PLS) techniques can be employed to test the relationships between e-commerce adoption, brand management practices, innovation performance, and market penetration outcomes. Such empirical validation would strengthen the theoretical robustness and generalizability of the proposed framework.

*Comparative Studies Between Indian and Global Seasoning Brands*

Comparative research analysing the strategies of Indian seasoning brands vis-à-vis their global counterparts

could yield rich insights into how cultural context, consumer behaviour, and digital maturity influence brand transformation. Studies could explore similarities and differences in digital marketing tactics, innovation adoption rates, and brand storytelling approaches across diverse markets such as India, Southeast Asia, and Western economies.

#### *Longitudinal Studies on the Impact of Digital Transition on Brand Equity*

Given that brand equity evolves over time, longitudinal studies tracking the brand journeys of traditional spice brands through their digital transition would offer valuable contributions. Researchers could assess how consumer perceptions, loyalty, and brand value shift across different stages of digital adoption—from initial online entry to mature digital brand presence.

#### *Investigation into Consumer Ethnography in Digital Spice Markets*

Ethnographic studies focusing on consumer behaviour in digital spice marketplaces would provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of purchasing motivations, decision-making processes, and brand interaction patterns. Immersive, consumer-centric research could reveal hidden cultural drivers and psychological factors influencing spice purchases online, offering granular insights that go beyond survey-based methods.

By pursuing these directions, future research can extend the knowledge base on digital transformation strategies for traditional FMCG categories, contributing both theoretically and practically to the evolving field of marketing in emerging economies.

### **Conclusion**

The objectives of this study are to understand how India's blended spices and seasonings industry is transforming itself in its path from the traditional offline markets to the dynamic digital marketplaces. This research used a qualitative thematic analysis to investigate how regional and national brands are adapting to the intricate relationship between the adoption of e commerce, brand management strategies and innovation performance in an effort to facilitate the penetration of markets and consumer engagement.

Three key findings were the fact that traditional brands are digitizing, brand positioning challenges on ecommerce platforms, product and packaging innovations, the need to balance regional authenticity with global scalability, and consumer perception shifting evisceration.

This is further strong evidence that in the e commerce era, innovation and brand management play a critical role in capturing the value arising from their complementarities. The day of heritage and legacy for the traditional brands is no longer about success; it is now in addition to innovative product offerings, the brand narrative adaptation on digital fronts and smart collaborations with the digital savvy new generations of consumers. These days, the digital marketplace is all about agility, creativity and a very delicate balance between authentic and newer, but also equally authentic.

Last, the study urges for more powerful academia business cooperation to research into digital transformation in spicy and flavour industry, among other rising FMCG sectors. Not only does collaborative

effort can create more practice-oriented research but also traditional brands with data driven strategy, consumer centric innovation, and sustainable growth in a digital age with growing competition.

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