

Design and Validation of a Branding Model for Project-Oriented Organizations Toward Creating Brand Equity

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Abstract: This study was conducted with the aim of designing and validating a branding model for project-oriented organizations. The research method was quantitative-descriptive using structural equation modeling (SEM), and in terms of purpose, it was applied research. The statistical population included users and project managers involved in the implementation of projects within project-oriented organizations, as well as marketing and sales managers. Based on the number of variables in the model, the sample size was determined to be 405 individuals. The research instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire, the face validity and reliability of which were confirmed. Data were analyzed using the structural equation modeling method through Smart PLS software. The findings indicated that causal conditions had an effect on the core category with a coefficient of 0.799, contextual conditions with a coefficient of 0.819, and intervening conditions with a coefficient of 0.519. It can be concluded that the proposed model is generalizable and can respond to the expected outcomes of organizations, especially project-oriented ones.

Keywords: Competitive advantage, project-oriented companies, branding, brand equity

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary competitive business landscape, the importance of brand equity as a strategic intangible asset has grown exponentially. Organizations, particularly those operating in project-oriented contexts, increasingly seek to establish and sustain distinctive brand identities that resonate with stakeholders, including clients, investors, and communities. The core challenge lies in building a coherent and reliable branding model that aligns with the dynamic operational nature of project-based organizations. Unlike traditional firms, project-oriented organizations operate within temporary structures, decentralized teams, and highly variable outputs—conditions that complicate the establishment of stable, long-term brand equity strategies [1]. Therefore, there is a growing need to conceptualize a branding model tailored specifically to project-driven firms that addresses the dynamic interaction of internal, contextual, and environmental factors.

Brand equity has traditionally been conceptualized as the value added to a product or service through the brand name [2]. It encompasses components such as brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and proprietary brand assets [3]. However, in project-oriented organizations—where product lifecycle,

stakeholder engagement, and delivery outputs are episodic rather than continuous—traditional models often fail to capture the full complexity of branding phenomena. The fragmentation and uniqueness of each project pose constraints on establishing consistent brand experiences [4]. Thus, an adaptive and context-sensitive branding framework becomes essential for enhancing brand equity within such organizational settings.

To address these gaps, researchers have sought to identify core organizational, strategic, and contextual factors that influence brand performance. For instance, internal capabilities such as human capital, knowledge management, and leadership have been identified as significant drivers of brand equity formation [5, 6]. Additionally, market orientation, innovation capacity, and customer engagement practices have been linked to sustained brand development in fluctuating project environments [7, 8]. These findings point to the importance of a multidimensional understanding of branding in organizations whose success depends not on continuous production but on the delivery of distinct, often custom-designed, outcomes.

From a theoretical standpoint, the integration of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) frameworks with project management principles offers a novel analytical lens for understanding branding in such organizations. The CBBE model, originally developed for product-based industries, emphasizes how brand perception in the minds of customers contributes to brand value [9, 10]. Yet, in project-oriented organizations, customer-brand interaction is not sustained over time but occurs during intense periods of project execution. This alters the process by which brand equity is built, requiring firms to prioritize brand authenticity, transparency, and relational trust in short-term engagements [11]. Branding strategies thus need to be agile, project-responsive, and reputation-centric to create favorable brand associations during these limited windows of client interaction.

One of the emerging approaches in branding for project-based firms involves focusing on emotional and cognitive customer-brand connections, often referred to as brand love [10]. These connections stem not from repeated consumption but from the significance and perceived excellence of project outcomes. For example, branding in large-scale engineering or construction firms hinges on public trust, social proof, and perceived reliability, all of which contribute to intangible brand assets [12]. Therefore, organizations must develop mechanisms for translating project-based performance into long-term brand equity, often through storytelling, stakeholder engagement, and visual identity systems.

Another important consideration is the role of contextual variables—economic, political, technological, and cultural—in shaping brand equity. For instance, the institutional environment of project-based firms in developing economies may affect both customer expectations and brand perception [13]. Brands operating in such settings must develop resilience and adaptability to external shocks while reinforcing their core brand values through consistent messaging and ethical conduct. Furthermore, the significance of cultural branding is particularly salient in global projects, where the perception of brand values may vary significantly across stakeholders [14]. As such, brand strategists must calibrate their communication and branding mechanisms to maintain coherence across diverse project geographies and stakeholder ecosystems.

Digital transformation has further redefined the terrain of branding, especially in project-centric firms. Social media, digital content platforms, and virtual client interfaces have enabled firms to communicate their brand narratives beyond the life of individual projects [7]. Effective digital branding practices can create a sense of continuity and presence, enabling clients to experience a brand even when not actively engaged in a project. Moreover, co-creation strategies that involve clients in project ideation and execution can generate emotional investment and elevate perceived brand value [15]. Customer participation enhances both the transparency of the project process and the memorability of the brand, ultimately leading to stronger brand equity outcomes.

Scholars have also pointed to the need for integrating strategic brand management with organizational learning in project environments. Each project serves as a microcosm for testing, refining, and showcasing brand values. By institutionalizing post-project evaluations, firms can leverage lessons learned to adjust their brand positioning strategies [8]. Moreover, the branding process itself should be iterative, incorporating stakeholder feedback, market signals, and internal assessments to improve future brand encounters [16]. Branding in such organizations is not a static marketing function but an ongoing, adaptive organizational capability linked to broader corporate strategy.

Furthermore, research has revealed that brand equity in project-oriented firms is closely tied to organizational culture and leadership orientation. Brands that project innovation, trust, and client-centricity tend to outperform those that rely solely on technical credentials or historical legacy [1, 17]. The alignment of leadership behaviors with brand values can have a profound impact on how clients and the public perceive the firm's credibility. Therefore, branding models in this context must go beyond surface-level communications and embed branding principles into strategic decision-making, project planning, and human resource development.

Despite these advances, there remains a lack of validated, context-specific branding models that can be empirically tested in project-oriented firms. While much of the existing literature draws on theoretical extrapolation or isolated case studies, there is a growing call for integrated models that consider causal, contextual, and intervening factors within a coherent framework [18, 19]. Such models must also be sensitive to industry-specific branding requirements—whether in infrastructure, software development, consulting, or construction—and allow for customization while preserving core strategic elements.

This study responds to the identified gaps by proposing and empirically validating a structural branding model tailored to project-based organizations.

2. Methodology

The present research employed a quantitative-descriptive methodology utilizing structural equation modeling (SEM), and it was categorized as applied research in terms of purpose. The statistical population included users and project managers involved in implementation within project-oriented organizations, as well as marketing and sales managers. Based on the number of variables in the model, the sample size was determined to be 405 individuals. Using proportional stratified sampling, a total of 450 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 427 were returned. Among the returned questionnaires, 13 contained inconsistent and unreliable data and were thus excluded. Ultimately, 414 fully completed questionnaires were collected, and 405 were included in the analysis. The research instrument was a researcher-designed questionnaire, which was confirmed for face validity and reliability. Data analysis was conducted using the structural equation modeling method with Smart PLS software.

3. Findings and Results

To analyze the collected data, both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. Initially, descriptive statistics were used, followed by inferential statistical analysis to examine the causal relationships among the variables of the conceptual model using *PLS3* and *SPSS 24* software.

Table 1. Descriptive Indicators of Research Variables

Variable	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig
Causal Conditions	0.183	0.314	3.249	0.670	7.485	0.000
Contextual Conditions	0.312	0.439	3.376	0.651	11.612	0.000
Intervening Conditions	0.556	0.686	3.621	0.666	18.771	0.000

Core Category	0.250	0.395	3.322	0.738	8.793	0.000
Strategies	0.354	0.480	3.417	0.644	13.039	0.000
Outcomes	0.314	0.462	3.388	0.757	10.325	0.003

Using a five-point Likert scale to measure research variables, the median value is 2.5. The results indicate that all research variables are in a favorable condition, as their means exceed 2.5 and *Sig* values are less than 0.05.

Given the non-normal distribution of the data, it was concluded that non-parametric tests and structural equation modeling via *Smart PLS*—which is not sensitive to data normality—are appropriate for use in this research.

The factor loadings for all questionnaire items exceeded 0.40, indicating strong construct validity of the instrument. The following table (Table 2) presents the internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha), composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) values.

Table 2. Internal Consistency and Composite Reliability Coefficients

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Strategies	0.854	0.882	0.791
Contextual Conditions	0.883	0.902	0.685
Causal Conditions	0.901	0.915	0.678
Intervening Conditions	0.871	0.895	0.719
Core Category	0.889	0.909	0.759
Outcomes	0.892	0.911	0.665

As shown, all Cronbach's alpha values are above 0.70. Based on these coefficients, it can be inferred that the model has strong internal consistency. All composite reliability values also exceed 0.70, indicating good overall model reliability. The AVE values for all research variables are above 0.50, confirming acceptable convergent validity.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Variables

	Strategies	Contextual Conditions	Causal Conditions	Intervening Conditions	Core Category	Outcomes
Strategies	0.889					
Contextual Conditions	0.825	0.827				
Causal Conditions	0.619	0.659	0.823			
Intervening Conditions	0.804	0.708	0.677	0.847		
Core Category	0.729	0.864	0.686	0.663	0.871	
Outcomes	0.661	0.699	0.737	0.846	0.840	0.815

According to the data analysis algorithm in the PLS method, after confirming the fit of the measurement models, the next step is evaluating the structural model. In the PLS approach, structural model fit is assessed using the R^2 (coefficient of determination), *t-values*, predictive relevance (Q^2), and Goodness-of-Fit (*GOF*) indices. The *t-values* were extracted from the graphical output of *Smart PLS*. The following table presents the R^2 , Q^2 , and *GOF* values.

Table 4. R^2 and Q^2 Indices

Construct	R Square	Q^2
Strategies	0.777	0.287
Contextual Conditions	–	0.302
Causal Conditions	–	0.303
Intervening Conditions	–	0.321

Core Category	0.770	0.367
Outcomes	0.437	0.373
Average	0.661	0.325

Based on the reported results, the structural model demonstrates relatively strong fit. The Q^2 values also indicate favorable predictive relevance. Finally, the overall model *GOF* (Goodness-of-Fit) index was calculated at 0.46, reflecting a satisfactory overall model fit.

The *GOF* index ranges between 0 and 1. According to Wetzels et al. (2005), values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.35 are respectively considered weak, moderate, and strong for evaluating model fit. Given the obtained value of 0.463, the research model demonstrates a strong degree of goodness-of-fit.

Using the *PLS* software, factor loadings of the measurement model were calculated for the constructs of strategies, contextual conditions, causal conditions, intervening conditions, the core category, and outcomes. Based on the measurement model, items with factor loadings below 0.40 were deemed insufficient in measuring their intended variable and were excluded from the final model. All factor loading coefficients were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, the factor loading results confirm the high construct validity of the model.

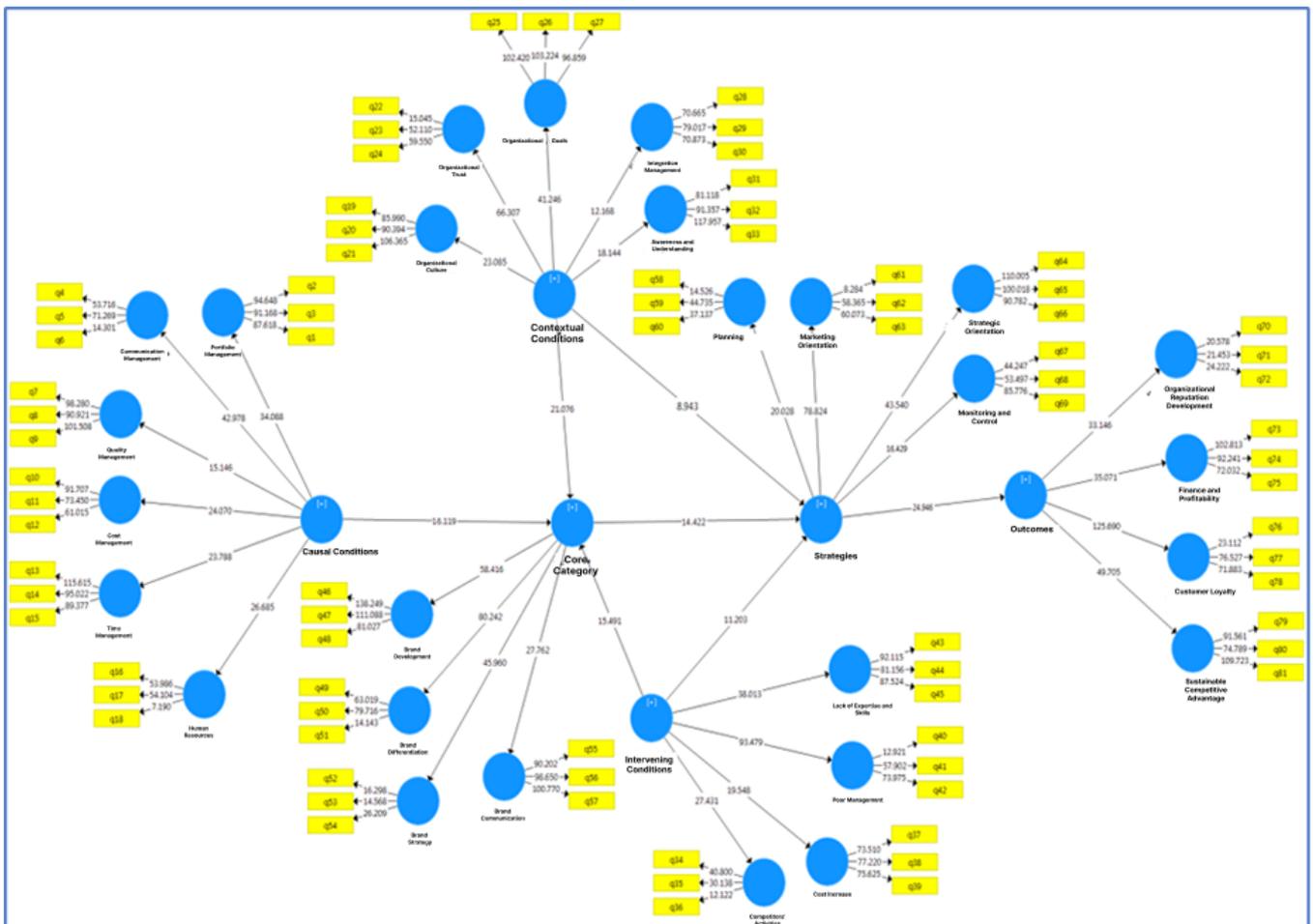


Figure 1. Structural Equation Modeling in Standardized Coefficient Mode

Figure 1 presents the research models with standardized coefficients (β values). According to the model, a path coefficient or factor loading is considered statistically significant at the 95% confidence level if its t -value falls outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96. If the t -value lies within this range, the coefficient is not considered significant. At the

99% confidence level, the significance threshold corresponds to *t-values* outside the range of -2.58 to +2.58. According to the results obtained from the *t-test*, all factor loadings and the final tested model are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level and meaningfully contribute to the measurement of their respective constructs.

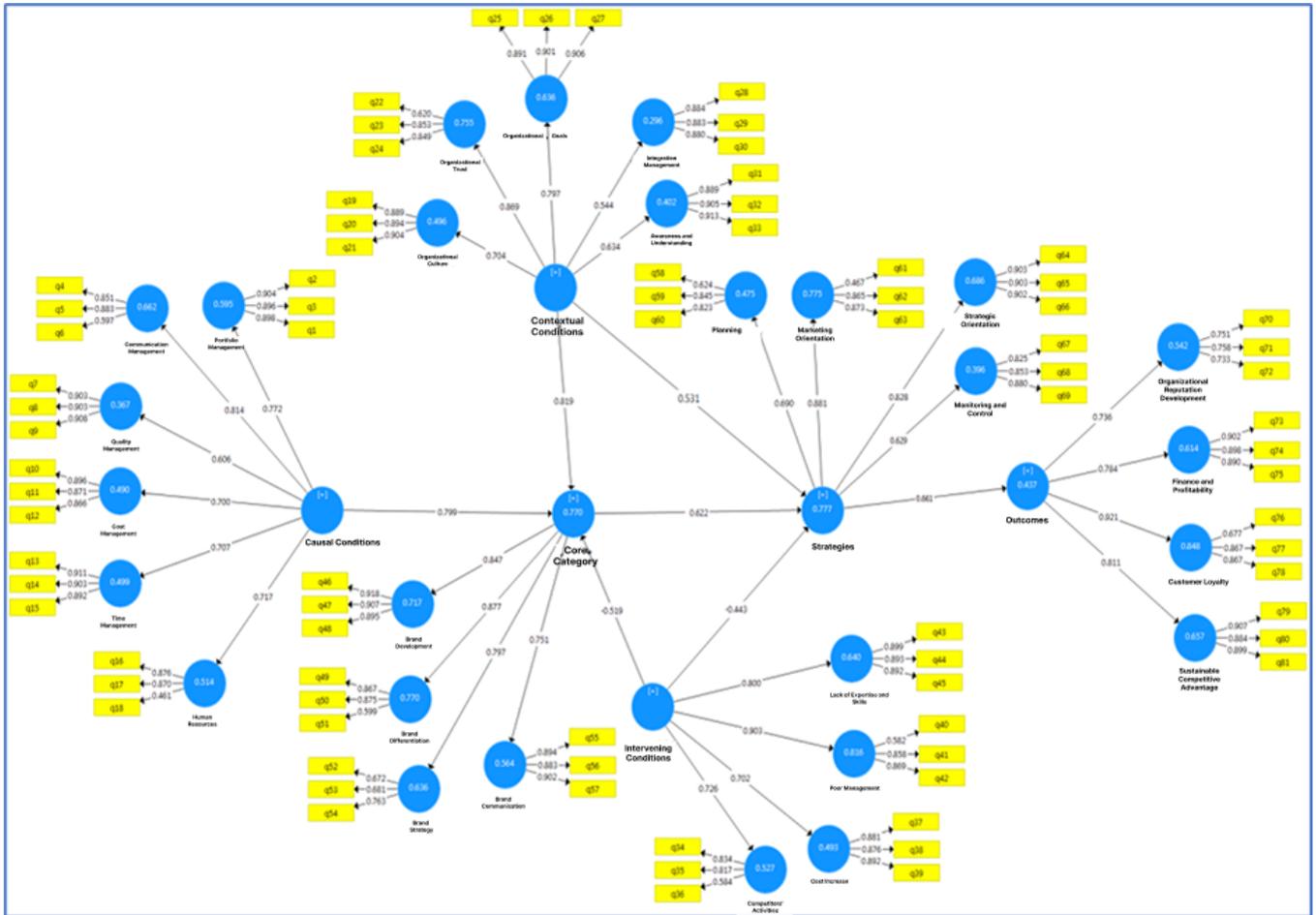


Figure 2. Structural Equation Modeling in t-value Mode

According to the measurement model, the *t-values* of all items exceed 1.96 or are lower than -1.96. Therefore, the items effectively measure the constructs under study.

Table 5. Direct Effects, t-values, and Hypothesis Testing Results

Research Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	Hypothesis Result
Causal Conditions → Core Category	0.799	16.119	Confirmed
Contextual Conditions → Core Category	0.819	21.076	Confirmed
Intervening Conditions → Core Category	-0.519	-51.491	Confirmed
Contextual Conditions → Strategies	0.531	8.943	Confirmed
Intervening Conditions → Strategies	-0.443	-11.203	Confirmed
Core Category → Strategies	0.622	14.442	Confirmed
Strategies → Outcomes	0.661	24.946	Confirmed

Based on the results derived from path coefficients and *t-values* in the diagrams (research model and significance of hypothesis coefficients), the following conclusions can be drawn:

Causal conditions have a significant effect on the core category (*t-value* outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96).

Contextual conditions significantly affect the core category (*t-value* outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96).

Intervening conditions have a significant effect on the core category (*t-value* outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96).

Contextual conditions significantly influence strategies (*t-value* outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96).

Intervening conditions significantly affect strategies (*t-value* outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96).

The core category has a significant impact on strategies (*t-value* outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96).

Strategies significantly influence outcomes (*t-value* outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to design and validate a comprehensive branding model for project-oriented organizations with the ultimate goal of enhancing brand equity. The findings of the structural equation modeling (SEM) confirmed the significance of multiple causal, contextual, and intervening factors on the formation and implementation of branding strategies, which in turn had a positive and significant effect on brand equity outcomes. The research model demonstrated strong goodness-of-fit with a GOF index of 0.463, surpassing the threshold for a strong model as established in prior studies [4]. Furthermore, all path coefficients between latent variables were statistically significant at the 95% and 99% confidence levels, affirming the empirical robustness of the proposed model.

The first major result of the study revealed that causal conditions—including organizational reputation, resource capabilities, and project experience—had a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.799$, $t = 16.119$) on the core category of branding mechanisms. This finding is in alignment with earlier studies that emphasized the foundational role of internal organizational competencies in shaping brand value [5, 6]. Organizational capacity, encompassing technological capabilities, human capital, and knowledge assets, equips project-oriented firms to deliver consistent value despite operating in fragmented and temporary structures. This consistency fosters brand credibility and enhances perceived reliability among stakeholders [1]. The result also resonates with research highlighting that reputation, accumulated expertise, and demonstrated performance history constitute essential brand capital in industries where the product is essentially a project outcome [12].

The model also confirmed the significant influence of contextual conditions—including legal, political, economic, and cultural environments—on branding frameworks ($\beta = 0.819$, $t = 21.076$). These findings corroborate studies showing that contextual variables play a critical role in brand formation and perception, particularly in dynamic and volatile project environments [13, 14]. The influence of external factors necessitates a high degree of strategic flexibility in branding approaches. For example, in projects delivered across different geographies or regulated sectors, brand messages must be localized without diluting the core values of the organization. Contextual sensitivity thus becomes a source of competitive advantage, allowing firms to resonate with diverse stakeholders while maintaining brand coherence [11, 16].

Interestingly, the study found that intervening conditions, such as stakeholder expectations and project types, had a negative effect on the core category ($\beta = -0.519$, $t = -51.491$). This inverse relationship suggests that complexity and heterogeneity in project environments may introduce brand inconsistency or messaging noise. Previous research has pointed to the difficulties in aligning short-term project goals with long-term brand strategies, especially when clients have divergent expectations or when organizational processes are not sufficiently mature to integrate brand thinking across all levels [8, 15]. These findings indicate the need for organizations to actively manage stakeholder engagement processes and ensure that branding is embedded within project planning and execution, not treated as a post-hoc communication activity.

Another critical finding pertains to the impact of the core branding mechanisms on strategic initiatives, where the path coefficient was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.622$, $t = 14.442$). This outcome reinforces the theoretical argument that strategic branding decisions—such as brand extension, client co-creation, and communication planning—are not isolated tactical exercises but stem from foundational brand identity constructs [3]. Firms that can align their branding strategies with core organizational values and stakeholder needs are more likely to sustain brand equity over time. This is particularly true for project-based firms, where each project functions as a brand experience in itself and influences the overall perception of the organization [10].

The relationship between strategies and brand equity outcomes was also confirmed ($\beta = 0.661$, $t = 24.946$), supporting a well-established body of literature that highlights the importance of branding strategy implementation in shaping consumer perceptions and loyalty [2, 18]. Brand equity outcomes in project-oriented organizations are influenced not only by the successful completion of technical tasks but also by the emotional and relational dimensions of the brand experience [10]. These include trust, satisfaction, perceived authenticity, and brand engagement—constructs that have increasingly gained attention in modern branding research [9, 11]. Therefore, the strategic emphasis on these dimensions can yield substantial returns in the form of customer retention, market share, and increased willingness to pay.

Another notable insight from the study is the strong positive influence of contextual conditions on strategy development ($\beta = 0.531$, $t = 8.943$), further affirming the need for context-aware brand strategies. This finding is in line with prior scholarship suggesting that successful brand strategies must evolve in response to legal constraints, market demand, and socio-cultural values [16]. Organizations that fail to incorporate contextual intelligence into brand decision-making often risk misalignment, reputational damage, or loss of competitive positioning.

On the other hand, the intervening conditions negatively influenced strategic implementation ($\beta = -0.443$, $t = -11.203$), underscoring that variability in project characteristics and stakeholder behaviors can disrupt branding consistency. These results resonate with the warnings expressed by project branding scholars about the threat of operational complexity and fragmented communication in multi-project firms [1]. It becomes imperative for such organizations to develop standardized branding toolkits and training mechanisms to ensure consistency across diverse teams and settings [8].

Collectively, the findings of this study align with the multidimensional perspective of brand equity articulated in earlier models, which argue for the integration of internal, external, and relational dimensions in branding strategy [3, 19]. However, the distinct contribution of this research lies in its adaptation and empirical validation of these components within a project-oriented organizational context. By identifying and quantifying the relationships between structural branding components—causal, contextual, and intervening factors—and strategic and outcome variables, the model presents a systematic and scalable framework for brand management in dynamic project ecosystems.

Despite the strength of its conceptual framework and empirical methodology, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample is drawn primarily from project-oriented organizations within a specific national context, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other industries or geographies. Second, while the use of structural equation modeling offers a robust statistical tool for evaluating complex models, it is inherently limited by the quality of self-reported data collected through questionnaires. Potential biases in respondent perceptions or interpretation of branding constructs may have influenced the results. Third, the model focuses on high-level strategic and contextual factors and does not fully capture micro-level operational elements such as team branding

behavior, client-brand interaction dynamics during project delivery, or the influence of emergent digital branding technologies.

Future research could enhance the current model by incorporating longitudinal data to examine how brand equity evolves across multiple project cycles. This would allow for the exploration of brand durability and temporal consistency in project environments. In addition, comparative cross-industry or cross-national studies could be conducted to test the adaptability of the model in different institutional settings. Future research could also integrate digital branding metrics and behavioral analytics to enrich the understanding of brand engagement, especially in hybrid or virtual project delivery formats. Finally, qualitative case studies could be employed alongside quantitative methods to deepen insights into the social and narrative dimensions of brand construction in project-based contexts.

For practitioners, the findings underscore the importance of adopting an integrated branding strategy that aligns organizational capabilities with market realities and stakeholder expectations. Project-oriented organizations should invest in developing branding guidelines that are adaptable yet consistent, and ensure that branding responsibilities are embedded into project management roles. Training programs can enhance awareness of brand value among project teams, while branding KPIs can be integrated into performance evaluations. Moreover, organizations should prioritize stakeholder engagement and feedback systems during and after project completion to reinforce brand perception and leverage successful project experiences into long-term brand equity.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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