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TCS controversy tests brand muscle: Will marquee sports bets like marathons hold firm?



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Article Content:

TCS faces controversy over alleged religious conversion in Nashik, testing the Tata brand reputation even as the IT giant reports strong deals and business momentum

For more than a decade, the name of IT services giant Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has travelled far beyond boardrooms and balance sheets, stamped instead across marathon bibs, finish lines, and city streets from Mumbai to New York.

However, trust, once settled, does not move at the same steady pace.

In recent days, TCS has found itself at the centre of controversy tied to allegations of religious conversion in Nashik, prompting scrutiny that has spread quickly across social media and into public discourse.

Company executives have said an inquiry is being expedited, yet the episode has raised a question that goes beyond the specifics of the case: what happens when a brand built patiently over decades is forced to respond in real time?

'The weight of a name'

TCS is not merely a company; it's an extension of the Tata Group, a name that for many Indians carries an institutional familiarity. The salt-to-steel conglomerate's presence runs quietly through everyday life, lending all its firms a degree of inherited credibility.

That credibility has been carefully expanded, with TCS's growing presence in global sports, from marathons to its partnership with Jaguar Racing. In India, the group's imprint is even broader, spanning events like the Tata Mumbai Marathon and headline sponsorships in cricket leagues such as the Indian Premier League (IPL).

These are not fleeting marketing exercises, but long-term bets on visibility and values.

"Building a brand is not a sprint, it's a marathon," TCS's chief marketing officer, Abhinav Kumar, said in an earlier interview with Storyboard18, describing a philosophy rooted in consistency rather than spectacle.

Brand strategist Harish Bijoor described companies like TCS as possessing multiple "reputational shields". The first is lineage- the Tata name itself. The second is longevity and scale. The third, less tangible but increasingly important, is presence: in sports, in culture, in the shared spaces where companies seek to be seen as more than commercial entities.

Those layers can absorb shock, but they are not impermeable. According to Lloyd Mathias, an investor and corporate adviser, "Every day resets perception. You cannot rely only on what you have built in the past". Mathias added, "Anything that hurts a brand's reputation is difficult, and it remains to be seen how the Nashik issue evolves".

The concern is not simply about the controversy , but about velocity- the speed at which narratives now form. What once unfolded over weeks now takes shape in hours.

However, there is another counterweight - performance. Even as questions circulate, TCS has reported a strong business momentum during the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2026. The company signed large deals and sustained demand in areas like cloud and digital transformation. For investors and clients, these signals often carry more immediate weight than reputational tremors.

Analysts argue that this duality of operational strength alongside reputational pressure is where companies like TCS tend to find equilibrium.

Devroop Dhar of Primus Partner said that the company's brand rests on decades of performance, the credibility of the Tata name, and leadership associated with stalwarts like FC Kohli, S Ramadorai, and N Chadrsekaran.

"The Tata brand's everyday relevance in consumers' lives creates a sense of reliability and stability. At this moment, that goodwill is a key support," Dhar noted.

For now, the current controversy surrounding TCS revolves around how the IT brand navigates challenging periods without losing its direction. In marathons, as in reputation, the decisive moments are rarely at the start. They come later, when fatigue sets in and the path ahead is less certain. TCS is still running for now.