Research Article

Decoding How Brand Love for Spiritual Gurus Endorsed Products in India Leads to Brand Sacredness and Brand Fidelity

Deepti Verma[*1], Dr. Aruna Dhamija[2]

1Research Scholar, Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India

revert2deepti@gmail.com

2Professor, GLA University, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author: Deepti Verma

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Purpose: This paper aims to test a model based on cognition, affection and behaviour theory that shows how brand love for the products that are sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus in India results in the formation of brand sacredness and brand fidelity through brand trust. **Methodology:** The conceptual model and hypotheses were tested with a sample of 718 consumers. PLS-SEM was performed for analysis using SmartPLS software(version 4.2). **Findings:** According to the result brand trust exerts a direct positive effect on brand love, and in turn, brand love shows a direct positive effect on brand sacredness and brand fidelity, respectively. Moreover, brand trust has an indirect positive impact on brand sacredness and brand fidelity through mediating effect of brand love. **Practical Implications:** From a managerial perspective, this study will help brand managers to create strong emotional bonds with users by focusing on creating trustworthy brands, which will help in maintaining long-term relationships. Moreover these Spiritual Leader Brands of India are threat to domestic and multinational firms signifying that social and cultural context can also disrupt things apart from technological changes suggesting brand managers to create right marketing strategies. **Originality/Value:** This study is first to empirically explore cognitive driver of brand love for Spiritual Gurus-endorsed FMCG brands and the consequences of this brand love is in the form of brand sacredness and brand fidelity. **Keywords:** Brand Trust, Brand Love, Brand Sacredness, Brand Fidelity, Cognition-Affection-Behaviour Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

India has always been known for its spiritual gurus, who have not only helped to bring the nation together but also helped to spread peace and serve humanity. In recent years, India has seen the emergence of spiritual gurus like Baba Ramdev, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Mahant Swami Maharaj, and Jaggi Vasudev, who are very influential and these leaders have started associating their names with FMCG products by entering into the business world . These gurus have become celebrities and brands by becoming the new faces and endorsers of their FMCG brands. The consumption of their products is increasing in India because they are Ayurvedic products, and there is no

adulteration in them. These spiritual gurus are not only influencing their followers' behaviour but also prompting them to change their consumption habits (Sardana *et al.* 2018) by conveying and promoting their brands in a manner that connects them with consumers. This has opened up a new market for FMCG in India, providing a competitive edge to large multinational corporations and domestic companies, which have had a long-standing presence in the country.

Moreover Sri Sri Tattva by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Patanjali Ayurved Limited by Baba Ramdev and Isha Foundation by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev are also a competition among themselves. Previous researchers have mentioned 'FMCG brands that are sold and endorsed by spiritual gurus' as 'Spiritual Brands' (Sardana *et al.*, 2021; Sharma *et al.,* 2022; Rathore and Bhatia, 2020; Bhatia and Rathore,2020; Sardana *et al.,* 2018) and are different from other religious societies which follow kosher rules(Jews) or halal rules(Muslim) because these Spiritual brands are not bound nor dictated by any particular set of religious beliefs or practices.

There are few countable number of studies contributing to literature for the factors leading to purchase intention of products sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus in India focusing on aspects like - Intrinsic Religiosity, Extrinsic Religiosity, Pragmatism, Normative Community Pressure, Value Perception (Sardana *et al.,* 2021); Spiritual Orientation (Spiritual Psychology, Spiritual Experience), Product Orientation (Product Attributes, Wellness Product ,Product Loyalty) (Chib *et al.,* 2021); Normative Community Pressure, Perceived Brand Credibility, Perceived Value (Sharma *et al.,* 2022); Brand Positioning, Consumer Awareness, Consumption Pattern (Bhatia and Rathore, 2020); Consumer Satisfaction, Brand Loyalty (Rathore and Bhatia, 2020); Consumers' Propensity to Purchase in Environmentally Sustainable product (Bagga et al., 2024) Cultural Dimensions Variables (Power distance, Individualism-Collectivism, Masculinity-Femininity, Orientation, Uncertainty Avoidance based on Hofstede Model 2011) (Gnanakumar, 2020) Spirituality, Intrinsic Religiosity, Extrinsic Religiosity (Sardana *et al.,* 2018). All these studies' major focus was on how these leaders are establishing relationships with the consumers for their Spiritual Brands. However, none of the studies focus on maintaining sustainable relationships with these brands. Therefore it is important to understand the role played by these spiritual leaders/gurus in disrupting the Indian FMCG markets and how they will have sustainable relationships with their followers' base, who have turned into their customers' base, thereby enriching the literature in the field of Asian management culture. The current research fills this gap by addressing the key question of whether consumers are interested in maintaining a relationship with a brand or not.

Maintaining and retaining a loyal customer base is a key factor in a company's long-term success as it helps to reduce marketing costs, boost competitiveness, increase market share, generate positive brand awareness, and open up new growth opportunities for expansion. To establish a strong relationship between the consumer and the brand, the attributes that should be taken into consideration are the durability of the relationship, stability of the relationship, and exclusivity of the relationship. Such an emotional connection should be developed with the brand so that in times of performance variations or in times of price fluctuations, consumers support a brand, take on a sense of ownership for the brand, and feel connected to it. Marketers must avoid myopic views towards branding concepts and examine the affectionate association between the consumers and the brand, as brands today play on our emotions (Valette and Valette, 2020). According to the 2022, Brand Intimacy Study (BIS, 2022), major brands are cultivating strong emotional ties with their customers, and Disney topped the list of brands with the strongest emotional bonds with consumers, followed by Tesla and Apple, competing with 600 of the world's leading brands, based on emotional connection. Moreover, new customer acquisition may not be as profitable as retaining existing customers(Chiu *et al.,* 2012).

Marketing practices and research focus on building a strong brand-consumer relationship (Shokri and Alavi, 2019; Sichtmann *et al.,* 2019) that even when competitors encourage customers to move to their brands, customers tend to stick to the same brand and refuse to switch(Farahdiba, 2023). Therefore, it is important to create an emotional connection beyond satisfaction to maintain long-term relationships with brands such that there is "zero separation" and "undivided brand loyalty"(Unal and Aydin, 2013) toward the brand in this highly competitive environment consumers have a wide range of choices regarding products along with the knowledge of the market(Raziq *et al.,* 2018; Russo, 2014). As a result, there is a need to find out the precursors of sustainable relationship maintenance in the context of Spiritual brands.

Brand trust has always played an important role in relationship marketing (Navaneethakrishnan and Sathish, 2020; Huang, 2017) and is seen as a key factor in building a long-term customer relationship with a brand,

which leads to consumers' commitment to the brand (Wu and Liu, 2022). Further, Brand love, which is basically the emotion attached to the product(Farahdiba, 2023), is also a key factor in creating long-term, sustainable relationships between consumers and brands(Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh, 2021). Studies have shown that brand love can only be developed with trusted customers(Marmat, 2023; Nawaz *et al.,* 2020) and that trust is the major factor in developing a love for brands in consumers(Khan *et al.,* 2021).

With brand trust and love, relationships can be built with the customers, but continuing those relationships is just as important. Therefore, the crucial question is whether or not the consumer wants to keep associating with the brand or not. Hence, to continue the relationship with the brand, it is essential to develop brand sacredness and brand fidelity (Joshi and Garg 2022), which has been tested in the Halal brands context and needs to be extended in other brands' contexts to check its validity. Previous research has shown that Brand Sacredness can harness positive brand relationships (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2022) and generate strong positive feelings about the brand (Schindler and Minton, 2022; Abbas and Mohammed, 2023). Moreover, brand fidelity also leads to brand relationship maintenance with consumers (Wijayanti *et al.,*2023) and can be increased by focusing on emotional value (Faridi and Naushad, 2021). In the FMCG industry, Spiritual Gurus have the ability to build strong and emotional connections with users, which increases the level of sacredness and fidelity.

Since there is a lack of research on brand trust with respect to love in relation to spiritual brands, this paper complements the existing literature on brand trust in the FMCG segment and provides evidence of brand love on brand sacredness and brand fidelity. Brand sacredness triggers cult-like emotions, so it is important to extend the effect of brand sacredness to emotions, and Brand Fidelity helps to understand how consumers show their love and commitment to the brand by engaging, unconsciously or otherwise, in relation to the maintenance of cognitions and behaviors. Further, this study enriches the previous research that has overlooked the topic and examines it through the lens of cognition, affection/emotional, and behavioral theory(Ma *et al.,* 2022; Li and Xie, 2020; Claffey and Brady, 2017) and proposes a relationship maintenance mechanism.

As emotional reflexes have a cognitive underpinning (Wen *et al.,* 2019), in this research, the cognitive characteristics of brand trust, as well as the affectionate characteristics of brand love, have been deployed to create a theoretical framework for the transformation of brand trust(a cognition which is related to rational "cold" argumentation) into brand love (an emotion which is related to passionate "hot" persuasion) as previous researches have suggested to study this interaction in different other contexts (Zmigrod and Goldenberg 2021; Alić and Mujkic 2023; Marmat, 2023).To further evaluate the role of brand love, as an emotional component, in sustaining a relationship, it is necessary to assess post-consumption behaviour (Huang, 2017), which will be measured by brand sacredness (resultant emotional behaviour) and brand fidelity(resultant cognitive behaviour) (Joshi and Garg 2022). The study also explores the mediating effect of brand love, as there is still little research using emotional factors as a mediating variable (Ding *et al.,* 2022).

The integration of cognitive-affection/emotion-behavior theory has opened up a new perspective on the relationship between brand love and brand trust, which could assist in strengthening brand sacredness and brand fidelity in an unexplored industry - related to goods sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus – in the Indian context thereby providing a theoretical contribution and the psychological understanding will help brand managers, marketers, policymakers, researchers other stakeholders in strategic decision making.

Specifically, the authors consider three objectives of the study and examine their empirical linkages-

● Firstly, this research examines the association between the cognitive attributes of brand trust and emotional attributes of brand love from previous literature and has developed a theoretical framework for conceptualizing the transition between brand trust (cognition) and brand love (emotion) in relation to the "products sold and endorsed by spiritual guides" in the Indian context.

● Secondly, the framework is extended to study post-purchase behaviour by examining whether brand love for "products that are sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus" leads to Brand Sacredness and Brand Fidelity

● Thirdly, this study examines the mediating effect of brand love by studying the indirect effect between brand trust and brand sacredness and between brand trust and brand fidelity.

By addressing these questions, the study responds to the concern about the lack of investigation in the context of Spiritual Gurus who are also playing the role of capitalist entrepreneurs and how they can build sustainable relationships with their devotees for their Spiritual Brands.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL DEVELOPMENT

2.1. COGNITION-AFFECTION-BEHAVIOUR THEORY

This research is based on the model of affect, i.e., cognition-affection-behavior (CAB), given by Russell (1980) and investigates the hierarchy of effect of the affective(emotional) elements between cognitive antecedent and behavioral outcomes. This model had been applied successfully in various contexts (Cristofaro, 2020; D'Arcy and Lowry, 2019; Lent *et al.,* 2019) and is often referred to as cognition-emotion-behaviour (CEB) theory by some researchers (Ding *et al.,* 2022; Liu *et al.,* 2018; Breitsohl and Garrod, 2016; Moors *et al.,* 2013) or as cognitive appraisal theory(Choi and Choi, 2019; Watson and Spence, 2007). Cognitive processing involves the assumption of rational thoughts associated with a brand(Acciarini *et al.,* 2021) and serves as a stimulus for triggering an affective response. Furthermore, prior research suggests that cognition provokes emotional responses(Reisenzein, 2009; Alić and Mujkic, 2023). The cognitive dimension is what a person thinks about in response to a specific stimulus, person, or situation(Sjöblom and Hamari, 2017; Gámez Gutiérrez *et al.,* 2017). Affect is a degree of positive, conscious emotion(Dessart *et al.,* 2015)   related to outcome of stimuli, which is regulated by cognitive experience(Gámez Gutiérrez *et al.,* 2017; Kappas, 2011, a,b).

Behaviour can be conceptualized as a reflection of an individual's intentional or involuntary behaviour in a particular situation(Gámez Gutiérrez *et al.,* 2017; Dolan *et al.,* 2012; Dolan, 2002). Research suggests that behavioural features can trigger customers' cognitive abilities and evoke feelings (Palusuk *et al.,* 2019; Bleier *et al.,* 2019). Cognition influences an individual's emotional states, and these experienced emotions lead to behavioral responses (Cristofaro' 2020; D'Arcy and Lowry, 2019; Lent *et al.,* 2019; Ahn and Back, 2018; Watson and Spence, 2007). The relationship between reason and emotion has long been a source of fascination to researchers, and this choice between "the brain" (reason) and "heart" (feelings) remains unresolved. During the buying process, the consumer often makes an emotional choice based on an Emotional Selling Proposition that has been supported and interpreted by logical information based on Unique Selling Proposition(Racer Marketing, 2022). Brand love is a concept that's becoming increasingly important in today's marketing world, where marketers focus less on selling unique products and more on creating an emotional connection with their customers(Trivedi, 2019).

Therefore, it is important to consider the functional interaction between cognitive and affective dispositions to elucidate the psychological underpinning of Spiritual Brands. Past research says cognitive and emotional regulation shape performance behaviour(Ma *et al.,* 2022; Zmigrod and Goldenberg, 2021; Araújo *et al.,* 2020), and emotional considerations must be integrated into the philosophical discussion of action(Habib and Qayyum, 2018). The current study proposes a new branding model by integrating previously explored variables in different contexts under the cognition-affect-behavioral model for Spiritual Brands. This study enriches the existing literature on the cognitive traits of brand trust and on the emotional traits of brand love (Marmat, 2023; Farahdiba,2023; Khanna *et al.,* 2019) to develop a conceptual framework to measure post-consumption behaviour, i.e., Brand Sacredness and Brand Fidelity. Brand love is a deep affectionate connection between the product consumed and the customer(Nawaz *et al.,* 2020; Junaid *et al.,* 2019), which arises because of the customer's contentment with the brand and they perceive the brand as their extension (Unal and Aydin, 2013). The cognitive aspect of Brand Trust(Nguyen, 2022) is faith in the brand, which leads to customer confidence in the firm and claims made by the brand (Heinrich *et al.,* 2012), which generates affectionate responses to that brand (Song *et al.,* 2019; Huang, 2017) in the shape of brand love (Kashif *et al.,* 2021; Lv and Wu, 2021). When it comes to brand love, many rational reasons and advantages come into play because brand love isn't blind (Tsiotsou and Goldsmith, 2017; Langner *et al.,* 2015). The proposed model of the study is shown in figure 1.

2.2.LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

2.2.1. Brand Trust As A Cognitive Antecedent Of Brand Love

Brand Trust is a fundamental factor in sustaining long-term relationships (Huang, 2017), which has cognitive characteristics(Marmat, 2023). The customer relies on a brand when they perceive that the brand has established characteristics and attributes that are consistent and reliable (Zehra and Arshad, 2019; El *et al.,* 2017). The

satisfaction a consumer gets when the brand performs its promised functional value is brand trust, leading to building a close relationship with the brand (Navaneethakrishnan and Sathish 2020). If the consumers trust a particular brand, they will not switch over to another brand (Carnevale *et al.,* 2018). Brand Trust literature has emphasized that it is a vital construct to have loyal consumers (Hasan *et al.,* 2014), which will help in creating a strong brand(Kotler and Keller, 2016) because a feeling of brand love will be developed in consumers (Khan *et al.,* 2021). Previous literature has shown that the more an individual trusts a brand, the more likely he/she will love it(Joshi and Garg, 2022; Madadi *et al.,* 2021; Zhang *et al.,* 2020; Nawaz *et al.,* 2020) and has come out to be significant predictor of Brand Love (Na *et al.,* 2023; Navaneethakrishnan and Sathish, 2020). Therefore, the study forms the hypotheses given below-

- H1: Does Brand Trust directly and positively impact Brand Love for the 'products that are sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus'?

2.2.2. *Brand Sacredness And Brand Fidelity As Behavioral Consequences Of Brand Love*

When customers form an emotional connection with a brand, they are more inclined to act positively toward that brand. Past studies say consumers' devotion to a brand leads to sacredness and fidelity.

Brand Sacralization is a psychological process and is observed when a focal brand attains sacred status (Lu Wang, 2017) over other profane brands (Cutright *et al.,* 2014). There are very few empirical studies on the psychology of how consumers consider brands as religion(Shachar *et al.,* 2011; Wang *et al.,* 2018). Brand Sacredness is where consumers consider the brand as sacred as religion (Sarkar *et al.,* 2015) and is a contemporary construct of consumer-brand relationships. It is the intention to defend the brand where consumers display cult-like emotions (Wang *et al.,* 2019) and have faith in brand superiority over its rivals. When consumers sacralize a particular brand, they give extraordinary importance to the brand (Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007) that is beyond cognitive understanding and highly irrational (Belk *et al.,* 1989; Marshall, 2010), and they become adherent to the brand (Das and Mandal, 2016). Brand love leads to Brand Sacredness (Wang *et al.,* 2019; Joshi and Garg, 2022). Therefore, the study forms the hypotheses given below-

- H2: Does Brand Love directly and positively impact Brand Sacredness 'for the products that are sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus'?

Brand Fidelity is an emerging concept in the field of consumer-brand relationships, proposed by Grace *et al.* (2018) which focuses on behavioral aspects of consumer behavior, including cognitive effort to maintain a relationship as an indicator of emotional attachment(Wijayanti *et al.,* 2023). Grace *et al.,* 2020, further specifies that Brand Fidelity is observed when

- consumer demonstrate loyalty and forgiveness to a brand in terms of performance and price fluctuations,

- consumer take ownership of a brand and

- consumer focuses on the brand's advantages and its competitors' weaknesses.

A person is more adherent to something they love(Quezada *et al,* 2022; Junaidi, 2022). Brand Fidelity can be considered a superlative degree of customer loyalty (Faridi and Naushad, 2021) and is the key indicator of brand sustainability. According to previous literature, brand love leads to brand fidelity (Joshi and Garg, 2022; Afridawi and Rasool, 2022; Quezada *et al.,* 2022; Grace *et al.,* 2020). Therefore, the study forms the hypotheses given below-

- H3: Brand Love directly and positively impacts Brand Fidelity 'for the products that are sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus'?

2.2.3.*Brand Love As A Mediator*

Researchers in the last few years have considered brands as relationship partners (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015; Wong, 2023). Further, they are considered to express themselves. The emotional connections, as well as symbolic consumption that is established with brands by consumers, signify Brand love, a crucial marketing concept of the consumer-brand relationship (Huber *et al.,* 2015; Batra *et al.,* 2012), which further plays a strategic role in building and maintaining consumer relationships with the brands (Nawaz *et al.,* 2020). Brand Love is a multidimensional, valuable instrument to measure post-consumption consumer behaviour (Joshi and Garg, 2020). Scholars have

analyzed its categorizations, drivers, and results and given their own twist to the definition of brand love (Thalhath, 2022; Huang, 2017). The role of brand love in mediation has been extensively explored in previous research and has proven to be a powerful mediator (Babić-Hodović *et al.*, 2023; Huang, 2017). Literature on the mediating role of brand love has led researchers to explore various frameworks that include the chain effect of brand love (Han *et al.*, 2020). There is a relationship between brand trust with sacredness(Joshi and Garg, 2020) and brand fidelity (Wijayanti *et al.*, 2023), respectively, which is mediated by brand love. Therefore, the study proposes the hypotheses given below-

H4: Brand Love mediates the relationship between Brand Trust and Brand Sacredness for the product 'that are sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus'.

H5: Brand Love mediates the relationship between Brand Trust and Brand Fidelity for the product 'that are sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus.'
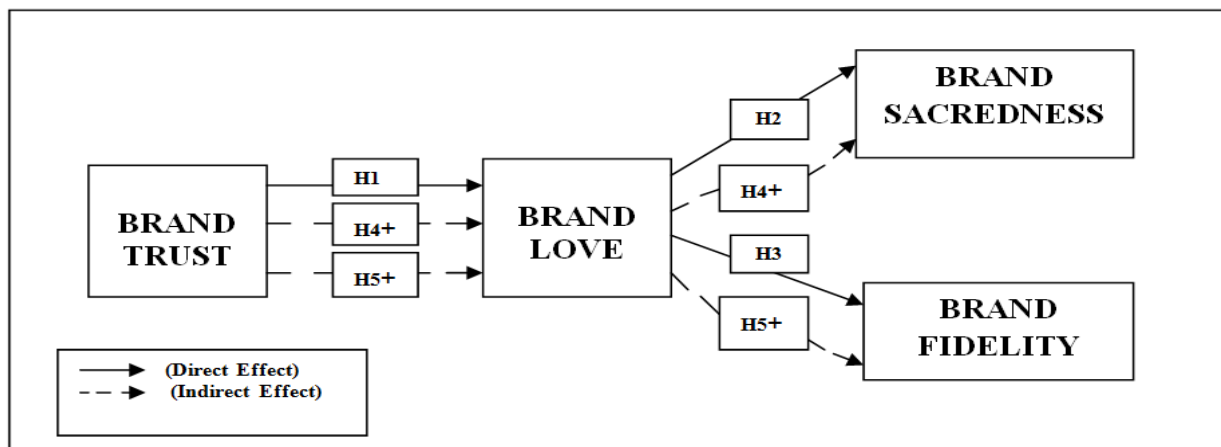
(Source-Conceptualized Model by Authors)

Figure 1:Conceptual Model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH SETTINGS

As mentioned before, the context of the study is the FMCG products that are sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus in India. The popularity of Ayurvedic products has been boosted by the support of well-known spiritual leader like Baba Ram Dev(Bhatia and Rathore, 2020), which has also helped to promote the popularity of their Spiritual Brands(Sharma *et al.,* 2022). Patanjali Ayurved Limited(PAL) is among the top companies in India which deals with consumer goods. Baba Ramdev is Patanjali's founding father and is a Hindu Spiritual Guru who is also the driving force behind the brand's rapid expansion (Singh and Gopal 2016). Patanjali deals with products such as foods, beverages, cleaning agents, personal care products, and Ayurveda medicines. If Baba Ramdev had not been the brand ambassador for Patanjali, it might not have been as popular as today. At the initial level, Patanjali's customers were his followers, who not only served as customers but also helped in marketing by providing positive reviews. As of August 2023, Baba Ramdev has 11 Million followers on Facebook, 2.1 Million followers on Instagram, 2.6 Million followers on Twitter/X, and 10 Million subscribers on YouTube. Moreover, research has revealed that the most influential aspect in influencing customers' decisions to buy Patanjali products is the brand image of Baba Ramdev (Jaggi & Ghosh,2017). further, people buy Patanjali products due to the Swadeshi factor, reasonable prices, and consumers' trust in herbal products (Pandey & Paul, 2020). While the whole world is creating theme-based ads, Brand Patanjali has stayed away from this and also does not rely on entertainers and sportsmen to promote its products. Baba Ramdev is the face of the firm and endorses its products via yoga camps, television programs, and social media. The face value of Baba Ramdev acts as a trust stamp for consumers; thereby, adopting an image-driven branding strategy(Prasad, 2019) has led to its brand push. According to the 2018 TRA Brand Trust Report, Patanjali has surpassed approximately one thousand of India's leading FMCG brands to become the most trustworthy brand in the industry(Business Standard, 2018).

3.2 QUESTIONNAIRE AND PILOT STUDY

The data for this cross-sectional study was collected from consumers visiting Patanjali Ayurved Limited Stores in Tier 2 cities of North India. The methodology used in the study was judgmental sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method. Judgmental sampling involves the researcher selecting the most suitable sample to respond to the research questions. Further, in order to reduce sampling biases, different days and times were selected to collect data. A structured questionnaire with four latent variables, namely Brand Trust, Brand Love, Brand Sacredness, and Brand Fidelity, was constructed. After a detailed literature review, all measures used in the study were chosen. We have eight items, Brand Trust, adapted from Portal *et al.,* 2019 & Chaudhuri and Holbrook., 2001. The 7 items Brand Love scale used in the study has been adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). Brand Sacredness was measured by a 3-item scale adapted from a study conducted by Das and Mandal (2016). The Brand Fidelity scale consists of 3 items adapted from Grace *et al.* (2020). The instrument was pretested by obtaining data from 50 customers, and minor language corrections were made. The questionnaire had an initial screening question to know whether the respondent had been using Patanjali Products for a minimum of six months or not in order to qualify for the survey. The final questionnaire comprised two sections. The first section contains demographic details, and the second consists of dimensions proposed in the model using 5-point Likert Scale with a rating ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree. The data was collected from 750 respondents, out of which 718 responses were usable. The time period of the study was from November 2022 to March 2023.

The demographic characteristics is shown in Table I.

Table I: Demographic Characteristics (N=718)

	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	527	73.4
Female	191	26.6
Age (in years)		
Below 20 year	105	14.6
21-30	123	17.2
31-40	196	27.3
41-50	89	12.4
51-60	120	16.7
Above 60 year	85	11.8
Education		
Under Graduate	85	11.84
Graduate	243	33.8
Post Graduate	331	46.1
Other	89	12.4
Annual Family Income(INR Per Annum)		
Below 5,00,000	314	43.7
5,00,000-7,50,000	225	31.3
7,50,000-10,00,000	106	14.8
Above 10,00,000	73	10.2
Marital Status		
Married	489	68.1
Single	229	31.9

(Source:Authors)

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling) has been used for data analysis as it further advances the propositions of theoretical models (Ringle *et al.,* 2023; Hair *et al.,* 2017). A dual-stage analytical approach was applied to examine a proposed model of the study. The first was measurement model assessment, which describes the measurement of the construct, and the second was structural model assessment, which defines the relationship among constructs (Hair *et al.,* 2021). Smart PLS(version 4.2) application was used for the measurement of this dual analytical approach (Ringle *et al.,* 2022). Further, all the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values of items of constructs are lower than 5, indicating the absence of multi-collinearity (Ringle *et al.,* 2023) and common method variance in the study (Hair *et al.,* 2017) respectively.

4.1. ASSESSMENT OF MEASUREMENT MODEL

In order to assess the measurement model, the reliability of the measures was evaluated by examining their Factor Loading, Cronbach alpha coefficient, and Composite Reliability. Hair *et al.* (2023) proposed that a value of 0.70 offers sufficient evidence for both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Further, he also suggested when an item has a factor loading more than 0.70 on its corresponding construct, it is considered reliable. The loading of all items was greater than 0.7 except for item BT1, which was 0.69. This value was retained in the study as, according to Hair et al., 2019 factor loadings above 0.5 can be retained if the composite reliability and average variance extracted values are greater than 0.5. For testing convergent validity, Average Variance Extracted values were taken into consideration, and the values were greater than 0.5(Ab Hamid, 2017). Table II shows the constructs and their respective reliability and validity statistics. The discriminant validity was tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) method, and Table III depicts that all values of HTMT are below 0.90(Ab Hamid, 2017), confirming discriminant validity among the constructs.

Table II: Reliability and Validity Statistics of Measurement Model

Construct	Measurement Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Brand Trust	BT1	0.690	0.904	0.910	0.598
	BT2	0.727			
	BT3	0.812			
	BT4	0.839			
	BT5	0.791			
	BT6	0.791			
	BT7	0.774			
	BT8	0.751			
Brand Love	BL1	0.791	0.930	0.933	0.705
	BL2	0.829			
	BL3	0.859			
	BL4	0.859			
	BL5	0.863			
	BL6	0.849			
	BL7	0.826			
Brand Sacredness	BS1	0.895	0.888	0.891	0.818
	BS2	0.880			
	BS3	0.876			
Brand Fidelity	BF1	0.884	0.877	0.867	0.802
	BF2	0.911			
	BF3	0.892			

(Notes: n=718. BT-Brand Trust, BL-Brand Love, BS-Brand Sacredness, BF- Brand Fidelity)

(Source: SmartPLS software-version 4.2)

Table III: Discriminant Validity of measurement model-Based on Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) - Matrix

	BF	BL	BS	BT
BF				
BL	0.626			
BS	0.809	0.733		
BT	0.416	0.639	0.486	

(Source: SmartPLS software-version 4.2)

4.2 STRUCTURAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

After meeting the basic requirements for the measurement model, the next step in the analysis was to evaluate the structural model with respect to the relevance and significance of model paths, R2, and model fit test. Figure 2 depicts path analysis.

The bootstrapping methodology (with 5000 re-samples) was conducted to test the structural model for all direct and mediation effects by looking at path coefficients and t-statistics. These t-statistics were used to test the hypotheses formulated in order to determine whether or not they were supported. To validate the hypotheses, the standard value for t statistics must be greater than (or equal to) 1.96.

The results in table IV showed that all of the proposed hypotheses suggesting a direct relationship between the constructs which were empirically confirmed(all t-values greater than 1.96 with a significant level of 5%). The results signifies Brand Trust as a driver of Brand Love ($\beta_{BT \to BL}$ = 0.594, t = 18.484, p < 0.05) and Brand Sacredness($\beta_{BL \to BS}$ = 0.675, t = 24.280, p < 0.05) was a good predictor of Brand Love than Brand Fidelity($\beta_{BL \to BF}$ = 0.569, t = 16.874, p < 0.05)

Table IV: Results of direct effects among constructs.

	Path-Coefficient	Standard deviation (SD	t-value	p-values	Result
H1:BT->BL	0.594	0.032	18.484	0.000	Supported
H2:BL->BS	0.675	0.028	24.280	0.000	Supported
H3:BL->BF	0.569	0.034	16.874	0.000	Supported

(Source: SmartPLS software-version 4.2)

Table V showed that Brand Love played a mediating role between Brand Trust and Brand Sacredness with a t-value of 10.769 and p < 0.05 and between Brand Trust and Brand Fidelity with a t-value of 12.684 and p < 0.05 respectively at significance level 0.05(Hair *et al.,* 2017).

Table V :Results of indirect effects between each constructs

	Path-Coefficient	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value	p-values	Result
H4: BT -> BL -> BS	0.338	0.031	10.769	0.000	Supported
H5: BT -> BL -> BF	0.401	0.032	12.684	0.000	Supported

(Source: SmartPLS software-version 4.2)

One of the essential components for the evaluation of an SEM is the assessment of the predictive accuracy of the research model which is evaluated using the R^2 value, and it represents the degree of variance explained in each endogenous construct(Hair *et al.,* 2019). The R^2 values were 0.353 for BL, 0.456 for BS, and 0.324 for BF which were significantly higher than the 0.10 recommended benchmark (Chin, 1998) confirming the good explanatory power of the research model.

The results showed that the value of SRMR was 0.060 and NFI was 0.833 suggesting that the proposed structural model was a good fit to the date with an SRMR value lower than the threshold value of 0.08 and NFI value above the suggested value of 0.8 (Henseler *et al.,* 2016).
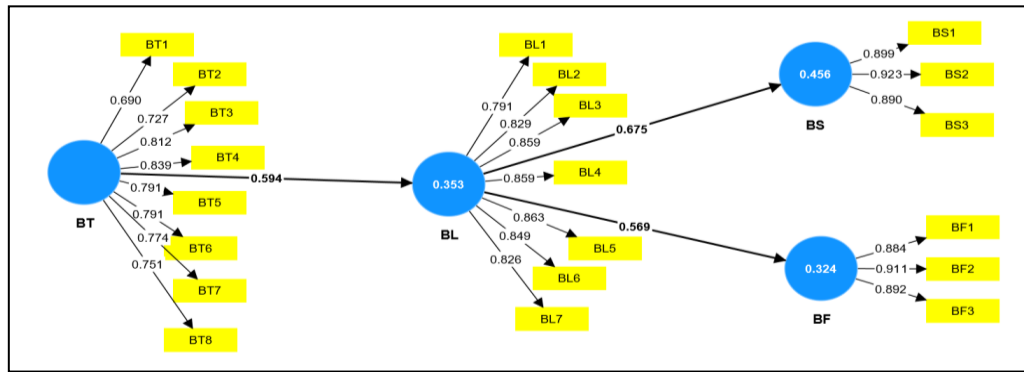
(Source: SmartPLS software-version 4.2)

Figure 2: Path Diagram

5. DISCUSSION

This research brings a new understanding of brand trust and brand love based on cognition, affection and behaviour theory and how emotional connection in the form of brand love for the 'product sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus' reinforces brand sacredness and brand fidelity behaviour among the brand devotees. We suggest that the brand managers should assess how their brands are being perceived by stakeholders and rethink what strategies can be adopted that can favor long-term relationships with the brand. The result of each hypothesis is discussed below in more detail-

Hypothesis 1 predicted that brand trust has a direct positive influence on brand love for Spiritual Brands. The results confirmed the studies by Marmat, 2023 & Farahdiba, 2023, demonstrating that because of brand trust, a feeling of brand love is developed in consumers. The cognitive characteristics of brand trust help in maintaining long-term relationships (Huang,2017) by affectionately connecting with the brand, thus developing brand love (Song et al., 2019), which helps protect the brand from any kind of negative information and brand-switching (Carnevale et al., 2018).

Hypothesis 2 confirmed a direct and positive association between brand love and brand sacredness (Joshi & Garg, 2022), signifying that the brands possess sacred properties and are perceived as religion (Sarkar et al., 2015) by customers. Consumers become fanatical followers of brands due to their love for them, and the brand is seen as a holy object with characteristics similar to those of religion(Das & Mandal, 2016). When brand love is fostered, ordinary consumption objects are perceived as special by associating them with a sacred status, which distinguishes a brand from others in the minds of a group of brand enthusiasts giving extraordinary importance to the brand(Wang et al., 2018).

Hypothesis 3 confirmed a direct and positive association between brand love and brand fidelity, confirming that affection towards brands leads to adherence, thereby developing loyalty. The result is in line with previous studies (Afridawi & Rasool, 2022; Quezada et al., 2022).

Hypotheses 4 and 5 tested the mediating the effect of brand love. The results confirmed the mediation effect of brand love between brand trust and brand sacredness(Wang et al., 2019; Sarkar & Sarkar, 2022) and between brand trust and brand fidelity (Wijayanti et al., 2023). The concept of trust is fundamental to the development of a relationship with a brand. The consumer tends to feel secure when purchasing a product from a brand as it meets their expectations. When the customer is content with the brand, a strong emotional bond is formed, resulting in brand love which leverages a long-term sustainable relationship with the brand in the form of Brand Sacredness and Brand Fidelity.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. CONTRIBUTION

From theoretical perspective this study contributes to and advances the existing research literature based on brand trust and brand love which will help in maintaining sustainable relationship with the brand in the form of brand sacredness and brand fidelity. This study has presented novel theoretical perspective based on Cognitive Affection and Behaviour(CAB) to explain psychological mechanism on the basis of hierarchy of effects that how brand trust a rational construct leads to develop brand love an emotional construct which will be helpful in retaining customers and maintaining long term relationship. Last but not least this study has tested these parameters for the FMCG products that are sold and endorsed by Spiritual Gurus in India which is something that hasn't been studied before.

From managerial point of view the research will provide pointers to marketers, practitioners and academicians on how to have long-term relationship with the brands. Further it provides valuable insights for brand managers to think about when creating brand love strategies and using them in their marketing to boost market share and retain customers . This study affirms the fact that cognitive attributes of the brand leads to developing an effective relationship with the brand leading to display cult-like emotion and long-term commitment for the brand . The organizations should shift their focus from unique selling proposition to emotional selling proposition as more or less all products are same. This study may motivate Spiritual Gurus and other brand managers to inculcate love quotient for their brands by adopting suitable communication strategies that will serve as "form of insurance" and help in building long-term relationship with the brand. Marketers should plan marketing strategies that develop deep emotional relationship with the customer and in order to do that they should target the rational drivers. Brand Managers should develop feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, which can be created based on the perceptions of brand communities that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interest and welfare of the consumers. Brand managers should built trust by presenting logical and rational brand stories and communicating differentiating elements over time. The concept of brand trust is based on the idea that a brand's attributes and characteristics are consistent, reliable, and trustworthy. When consumers trust a brand, the psychological process, including their commitment to the brand and their preference for it, changes, and this changes how they perceive the brand. These findings could be used by marketers to increase brand trust by offering a strong guarantee, sustainable and reliable service products. The adaptability and positive consciousness towards the brand can be enhanced by brand love. Brand managers should know how to use integrated marketing communications to create an emotional connection with their brand.

As the consumers become more connected to the brand emotional dependency on the brand increases that will lead to long-term committed relationship with the brand. Brand sacredness leads customers to be submissive towards the brands and they will endow brands with humility. As consumers are getting devoted to the brand and consider them as 'sacred' entities therefore practitioners and business firms should focus more on promotional efforts through various channels of communications as there are higher chances of having long-term relationships with the brand. Brand sacredness can be used as a powerful measure to assist marketers in capturing the strength of their brand by taking into account consumer perceptions of brand sanctity. It can also be used to foster customers' transcendent experiences, protect the brand, and promote brand advocacy. Brand love hits consumers' psyche such that they focus on brand strength and competitors weaknesses. A brand which is loved by consumers tends to have more faithful devotees. As tastes and preferences of consumers are dynamic, business enterprises should focus on advertisement strategies and campaigns that focus more on building loyalty. Those customers who are faithful to the brands are unlikely to turn to competitive brands and will also try to convince others to buy or use that brand. Brand fidelity leads to generating stable revenue and the cost of maintaining such customers are lower, moreover they are not attracted by negative advertisement. The consumers who are fidel to the brand show their brand preference and attract new customers by recommending and suggesting the given brand by verbal communication. In order to have long-term sustainable relationships with customers, brands should devise appropriate loyalty plans, additionally they should be provided with inherent and extrinsic incentive motivations. If the organizations want to build long-lasting relationships with the customer then brand fidelity is the key indicator and these spiritual brands seek to offer higher levels of satisfaction by creating psychological and emotional connections with the customer and thereby customers show fidelity to the brands by using money, time and energy(discretionary resources). Consumers who trusted the brand and if the trust is continued then they will irrationally support the brand and will give public appraise for the brand trust giving sacred followers and faithful

customers. Brand managers should focus on the testimonial of brand devotees. Consumers who trust the brand will be loyal to a brand and are going to buy its products at a premium price and repeatedly purchase the brand.

Last but not the least this study shows that these Spiritual Leaders can have a big impact on multinational and local companies. They can make people think their product is natural, pure, healthy ,divine and having cultural essence thereby linking consumption to ideology, and they also have the dominance to label certain products as bad or harmful. This means that it is important to look at different social, economic, and cultural contexts to create the right marketing strategies as technology is not the only thing that can disrupt things - a mature society can also be disruptive due to ongoing social change.

6.2. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE USE

This study has focused on one cognitive driver that is influencing brand love, however, future studies should consider other dimensions of branding such as brand attachment, brand reputation and brand credibility to further enhance the concept of brand love. Gender, spiritual beliefs and generation cohorts can also be used as moderated in future empirical research to enrich literature. Future studies can also study the impact of brand hate for Spiritual Guru on purchase intention. Brand personality scale can also be developed according to the personality of Spiritual Gurus incorporating the dimensions which consumer wants in their Spiritual Gurus and future studies can study the brand personality of different Spiritual gurus based on that individual case studies can be framed. Moreover this study has taken into consideration only tier 2 cities future studies can do a comparative study of tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 cities.

Comparative study between urban and rural customers can be done as rural consumers are less skeptical towards the commercial intent of spiritual leaders as compared to educated higher income urban consumers. Longitudinal studies can also be useful to understand how different generational cohorts reflect age effects i.e. if changes occur as they grow older. The current study had used structured questionnaires and was deductive in nature therefore a future qualitative approach could be used in the form of mixed methods research to identify other factors. The current study has taken into consideration the CAB model. Future researchers can apply other theories like the brand resonance models to add value to the research. Moreover, more mediating variables of emotions can be studied. Lastly, future research could explore the feasibility of a nomological model to be applied in other countries or cultures.

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