

Examining the Lollapalooza Effect: How Endorser Credibility Drives Brand Love for The Products Endorsed by Spiritual Gurus

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Abstract

This study investigates how the endorser credibility of spiritual gurus acting as celebrity business founders influences brand love for the products they sell and endorse in India. Drawing upon Source Credibility Theory and Meaning Transfer Theory, the study proposes that dimensions of credibility i.e. expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness of spiritual gurus generate brand love, which subsequently leads to affective commitment towards products, spread positive word of mouth, and willingness to pay a premium. With a sample of 718 consumers the proposed conceptual model was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.2. The findings indicate that endorser credibility significantly enhances brand love. Brand love, in turn, positively influences affective commitment, willingness to pay a premium, and positive word of mouth. This study highlights key managerial implications for firms operating in culturally embedded emerging markets like India. The findings show that the credibility of spiritual gurus—especially their perceived expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness—acts as a strategic resource that enhances brand love, leading to stronger affective commitment, willingness to pay a premium, and positive word of mouth. As reputational risks can directly impact consumer attachment therefore managers of guru-endorsed brands such as Patanjali Ayurveda Ltd. must carefully safeguard the moral image and authenticity of leaders like Baba Ramdev. For international firms, instead of competing solely on technology, price, or global brand image should adapt to culturally resonant values such as tradition and authenticity is essential. Similarly, domestic players should focus on credible leadership, ethical positioning, and culturally grounded narratives to build sustainable brand love and long-term competitive advantage. This study contributes to the literature by examining spiritual gurus as celebrity business founders, a largely underexplored category in endorsement research. Unlike traditional celebrity or CEO endorsements, this research focuses on culturally embedded spiritual gurus who have turned into corporate honchos in the emerging market

like India. It further advances existing knowledge by positioning brand love as a key mechanism linking endorser credibility to affective commitment, willingness to pay a premium, and positive word of mouth. By linking Source Credibility and Meaning Transfer theories within an emerging market setting, the study offers a novel socio-cultural perspective on how symbolic leadership shapes consumer–brand relationships.

Keywords- Spiritual Gurus Endorsed Brands; Brand love; Affective commitment; Willingness to pay a premium; Positive word of mouth; Endorser Credibility, Emerging markets.

Introduction

Spiritual gurus in India, traditionally associated with ascetic lifestyles and moral authority, have increasingly transitioned into influential business leaders, challenging the dominance of multinational corporations and established domestic firms in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector (Dutta, 2017). In recent years, India has witnessed a significant surge in the sales of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) endorsed and branded by spiritual gurus (Maheshwari, 2017; Mitra, 2017). This unexpected growth has compelled senior management teams across both international and local companies to reassess their competitive strategies, branding approaches, and market positioning (Malviya, 2017).

By embedding yoga, Ayurveda, and Vedic philosophy into their value propositions, they blur the boundaries between spirituality and consumerism. Prominent figures such as Baba Ramdev, through Patanjali Ayurved, Sadh Guru- Isha Foundation and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, through The Art of Living Foundation, have successfully leveraged their spiritual authority and mass followings to disrupt India's mature and highly competitive FMCG market (Maheshwari, 2017; Mitra, 2017).

These spiritual organizations operate at the intersection of faith and marketplace dynamics—maintaining the devotional structure and loyal following of religious communities while simultaneously adopting market-driven strategies, branding practices, and competitive positioning (Verma & Dhamija, 2025). Scholars note that spiritual leaders deliberately project themselves as spiritual—not

strictly religious—figures, broadening their appeal across demographic and religious segments (Jaggi & Ghosh, 2017; Kumar et al., 2014). Their substantial presence in both traditional and social media amplifies their influence, transforming follower bases into customer bases and accelerating market penetration. As a result, the remarkable growth of guru-endorsed brands has unsettled incumbent FMCG players, prompting questions about the drivers behind consumers' favorable disposition toward these products (Malviya, 2017; Sanjai & Pradhan, 2016).

Despite growing scholarly interest, existing research on “spiritual brands” remains limited and fragmented. Prior studies have primarily focused on cognitive and socio-cultural drivers of purchase intention. For instance, Sardana et al. (2018) found that intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity significantly influence purchase decisions for products promoted by spiritual leaders. Expanding on this, Sardana et al. (2021) demonstrated that religiosity, normative community pressure, and pragmatism are key determinants of purchase intent, integrating self-identity and social identity theories. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2021) identified normative community pressure and perceived brand credibility as predictors of purchase intention, mediated by perceived value. Other studies have examined factors such as spiritual orientation and product orientation (Chib et al., 2021), brand positioning and consumer awareness (Bhatia & Rathore, 2020), customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Rathore & Bhatia, 2020), and cultural dimensions based on Hofstede's framework (Gnanakumar, 2020).

While these contributions provide valuable insights, several gaps persist. First, most studies emphasize rational, cultural, or normative influences, with limited focus on emotional constructs. Second, the underlying socio-psychological mechanisms through which spiritual leaders—acting as celebrity business founders—transfer their personal credibility to brands remain underexplored. Third, although perceived credibility has been acknowledged as important, insufficient attention has been given to understanding how it fosters deeper consumer–brand relationships beyond immediate purchase intention. With spiritual leaders diversifying into consumer product markets (such as FMCG, personal care, and wellness), understanding customer sentiment becomes crucial (Chaudhary et al. 2023).

To address these gaps, the present study examines how spiritual gurus function as celebrity business founders and brand endorsers, and how their credibility influences consumer behavior through the mediating role of brand love. Drawing on Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian 1990) and Meaning Transfer Theory (McCracken, 1989), this research proposes that perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of spiritual leaders serve as influential cues that shape consumers' emotional responses. Endorser credibility is expected to enhance brand love—conceptualized as a deep emotional attachment integrating the brand into consumers' identity (Batra et al., 2012). This experiential perspective aligns with Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) & Behrens (2025) view that consumption involves affective and symbolic dimensions, not merely functional evaluations.

Brand love has emerged as a crucial construct in contemporary branding literature, reflecting the extent to which consumers develop passionate, self-defining relationships with brands (Das, 2015). When consumers “love” a brand, they exhibit stronger affective commitment, positive word of mouth, and willingness to pay a premium (Batra et al., 2012). However, the antecedents of brand love in culturally embedded endorsement contexts—particularly those involving spiritual authority—remain largely unexplored. This research addresses these gaps by examining how spiritual gurus function as celebrity business founders and brand endorsers, and how their endorser credibility influences consumer behavior. Drawing upon Source Credibility Theory, Meaning Transfer Theory, the study proposes that the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of spiritual gurus serve as influential cues that foster brand love. Moving beyond purely rational evaluations, this experiential perspective aligns with the view that consumers relate to brands not only through functional assessments but also through symbolic and emotional attachments. Brand love, conceptualized as a deep emotional bond integrating the brand into consumers' self-identity, is posited to lead the relationship between endorser credibility and key behavioral outcomes such as affective commitment, positive word of mouth, and willingness to pay a premium. The study addresses three

key gaps in the literature. Firstly it extends endorsement research beyond traditional celebrities and corporate CEOs by examining spiritual leaders as culturally grounded celebrity business founders. Secondly it integrates cultural meaning transfer with psychological credibility mechanisms, offering a holistic socio-cultural explanation of endorsement effectiveness as well as focuses on emotional selling proposition dimension i.e. Brand Love. Lastly it shifts the outcome focus from purchase intention to post-consumption relational constructs, including affective commitment, premium willingness, and positive word of mouth.

By situating the analysis within emerging market like India, which is a culturally and religiously diverse market, this study contributes to both branding and celebrity endorsement literature. It extends understanding of how symbolic authority, socio-cultural meaning, and endorser credibility interact to create emotional bonds and sustainable competitive advantage. Furthermore, it enriches Asian management and emerging market scholarship by examining a unique form of celebrity entrepreneurship where spirituality, nationalism, and consumerism intersect. Through a comprehensive socio-psychological framework, this paper seeks to explain how endorser credibility translates into brand love and, subsequently, into long-term relational and behavioral outcomes in the context of Spiritual Guru-endorsed FMCG brands.

Conceptual Model & Hypothesis Development

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Development

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives—Source Credibility Theory and the Meaning Transfer Theory—to explain how spiritual celebrity business founders influence brand love and subsequent post-consumption behavioral outcomes. By integrating these frameworks, the research provides a comprehensive socio-psychological explanation of how endorser characteristics translate into enduring consumer–brand relationships, particularly within culturally embedded emerging markets.

Source Credibility Theory has long been central to endorsement research (Ohanian, 1990; Kamins, 1990; Till,

2000; Schouten et al., 2021). The theory posits that the effectiveness of a communication source depends on audience perceptions of the source's attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. According to Ohanian (1990), attractiveness refers not only to physical appeal but also to personality-based appeal; expertise captures perceived knowledge and competence relevant to the endorsed product; and trustworthiness reflects perceptions of honesty, integrity, and reliability. These dimensions significantly influence consumers' acceptance of marketing messages and brand evaluations.

Subsequent research confirms that credibility attributes are decisive drivers of endorsement effectiveness (Rungruangjit et al., 2022) and this framework has been widely applied in influencer marketing contexts (Kong & Fang, 2024). However, although celebrity CEOs and business founders increasingly endorse their own brands, findings remain mixed. Some studies suggest no significant difference between CEOs and celebrities in shaping purchase intention (Sardana et al., 2018), whereas others demonstrate that CEO-identified endorsements enhance perceived credibility, particularly for new products (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2019). Despite these contributions, prior research largely focuses on corporate CEOs and does not sufficiently examine spiritual leaders as a distinct and culturally embedded form of celebrity business founder (Sardana et al., 2018). Moreover, much of the literature emphasizes direct persuasion outcomes such as purchase intention, without exploring deeper relational constructs such as brand love and affective commitment. To address these limitations, this study also draws on the Meaning Transfer Theory proposed by McCracken (1989). This theory conceptualizes endorsement as a cultural process through which meanings flow from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods and finally to consumers. Cultural symbols, ideologies, and values are encoded in media and advertising representations and endorsers act as symbolic carriers who transfer these meanings to the product. Consumers appropriate these meanings through consumption and integrate them into their self-identity (Williams, 2017).

Empirical research demonstrates that celebrities transfer symbolic attributes to brands, thereby shaping consumer

perceptions and influencing behavioral responses (Choi et al., 2005; Parmar et al., 2020). Influencers extend this process through interactive and personalized engagement, enhancing authenticity and relatability (Varsha & Subhadip, 2016). Cultural congruence between endorsers and consumers deepens identification and strengthens meaning internalization (Balaban et al., 2022). While Source Credibility Theory effectively captures persuasive attributes at the individual level, Meaning Transfer Theory provides a broader cultural lens explaining how symbolic meanings circulate across society, endorsers, products, and consumers (Aliyev, 2025). Together, these theories offer a multidimensional understanding of endorsement effectiveness.

Within this broader relational context, emotional attachment emerges as a crucial mechanism linking endorser characteristics to long-term consumer outcomes. Contemporary marketing scholarship highlights the importance of strong affective bonds between consumers and brands in fostering durable relationships (Trivedi, 2019). Unlike purely transactional evaluations, emotional attachment reflects identity-based connections that influence sustained behavioral responses and Brand love has emerged as a critical construct in contemporary marketing scholarship, reflecting deep emotional attachment and long-term relational bonds between consumers and brands (Verma & Dhamija 2025). Emotional and psychological mechanisms play a vital role in shaping consumer responses and behavioral performance (Ma et al., 2022; Zmigrod & Goldenberg, 2021; Araújo et al., 2020), underscoring the importance of integrating emotional dimensions into branding frameworks (Habib & Qayyum, 2018).

Prior research largely concentrates on corporate CEOs rather than founder-owners and pays insufficient attention to spiritual leaders as a distinct form of celebrity business founder (Sardana et al., 2018). Moreover, existing studies emphasize direct relationships between endorser type and consumer responses without fully unpacking the underlying socio-psychological mechanisms. The present study addresses these shortcomings by proposing an integrated framework that proposes that the perceived attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness of spiritual

celebrity founders enhance brand love. In turn, brand love fosters affective commitment, encourages positive word of mouth, and increases consumers' willingness to pay a price premium. By linking credibility attributes to emotional attachment and post-consumption outcomes, this framework moves beyond immediate persuasion effects toward long-term relationship metrics.

By combining Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990; Knoll & Matthes, 2017) and the Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989), this research develops an integrated branding model that explains how spiritual celebrity founders transfer culturally embedded meanings that cultivate brand love and downstream loyalty-related behaviors. By empirically examining consumers within an emerging market context, the study responds to calls for greater contextual diversity in marketing research and enriches the literature on endorser credibility, brand love, and culturally embedded branding strategies. The proposed model is given in figure 1.

Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

Celebrity endorsement (CE) has been widely examined in marketing literature as a persuasive communication strategy that enhances brand evaluations and consumer responses (Rocha et al., 2020; Dey et al., 2021). Celebrities not only increase brand awareness and reach target audiences but also contribute to deeper emotional connections between consumers and brands (Clara, 2023). Beyond representing competence or attractiveness, celebrities embody rich cultural meanings that shape how brands are interpreted and consumed (Lazăr, 2020; Zsila et al., 2018). This symbolic dimension becomes particularly salient when endorsers are culturally embedded figures such as spiritual gurus, whose public personas extend beyond commercial appeal to moral authority and value-based leadership.

Endorser Credibility as an Antecedent of Brand Love

Source Credibility Theory identifies attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness as the three primary dimensions influencing endorsement effectiveness (Ohanian, 1990; AlFarraj et al., 2021). These credibility dimensions significantly shape brand evaluations (Spry et al., 2011,) and generate favorable attitudes, attention, and

recall (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). In contexts where endorsers are spiritual leaders, credibility attributes may carry even stronger symbolic implications due to their perceived authenticity, moral integrity, and cultural authority.

Spiritual leaders who endorse their own products often emphasize culturally resonant themes such as purity, tradition, and naturalness. As suggested by Meaning Transfer Theory (McCracken, 1989), the symbolic traits of the endorser—such as honesty, virtue, and competence—can be transferred to the endorsed brand. When these traits align with consumers' self-concept and cultural identity, they can foster favorable attitudes and deeper emotional connections (Dwivedi et al., 2014; Mishra et al., 2015).

Brand love, defined as a deep emotional attachment and passionate bond between consumers and brands (Joshi & Garg, 2021; Palusuk et al., 2019), reflects this enduring relational outcome. Consumers can develop affection for brands similar to interpersonal love, demonstrating attachment, positive affect, and commitment (Gumparathi & Patra, 2020; Coelho et al., 2019). Emotional attachment has been shown to influence resilience against negative information (Coelho et al., 2019; Verma, 2021) and stimulate positive behavioral outcomes such as loyalty and word of mouth (Gumparathi & Patra, 2020). Therefore, examining how spiritual guru credibility dimensions foster brand love becomes theoretically and practically significant.

Endorser Credibility Dimension Perceived Expertise as an Antecedent of Brand Love

Expertise refers to the perceived knowledge, skill, and competence of an endorser in relation to the product category (Chekima et al., 2020). Endorsers with higher perceived expertise are considered more persuasive (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017), and their competence enhances message credibility (Masuda et al., 2022; Chekima et al., 2020). In the case of spiritual gurus who promote health, wellness, or natural products, their perceived knowledge of traditional practices and holistic living can reinforce their expert status. Prior research suggests that expertise positively affects brand evaluations and engagement (Jun et al., 2023). When consumers perceive spiritual leaders as

competent and knowledgeable about the products they endorse, this perception can strengthen emotional attachment and admiration, which are key components of brand love (Joshi & Garg, 2021; Palusuk et al., 2019).

H1A: The perceived expertise of spiritual gurus positively influences consumers' brand love toward the products endorsed by them.

Endorser Credibility Dimension Perceived Trustworthiness as an Antecedent of Brand Love

Perceived trustworthiness refers to the extent to which an endorser is viewed as honest, reliable, and believable (Sari et al., 2021). When consumers perceive a source as trustworthy, they are more likely to accept the communicated message as credible (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017). In influencer marketing contexts, trustworthiness has been identified as a crucial predictor of future consumer behavior (Cho et al., 2022; Ooi et al., 2023).

Spiritual gurus, often perceived as morally upright and value-driven, may be seen as highly trustworthy figures. Their endorsements may therefore carry stronger emotional weight than conventional celebrity endorsements. Empirical findings indicate that trustworthiness positively impacts the development of brand love (AlFarraj et al., 2021). When consumers believe that a spiritual leader genuinely supports and stands behind a product, this perception may translate into emotional attachment and identification with the brand.

H1B: The perceived trustworthiness of spiritual gurus positively influences consumers' brand love toward the products endorsed by them.

Endorser Credibility Dimension Perceived Attractiveness as an Antecedent of Brand Love

Attractiveness is a multidimensional construct encompassing physical appeal, likeability, familiarity, and perceived similarity (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021; Jun et al., 2023). It represents one of the three core dimensions of source credibility (AlFarraj et al., 2021; Chekima et al., 2020). Attractive endorsers enhance message effectiveness (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2017) and positively influence brand perceptions (Jun et al., 2023).

Influencer attractiveness extends beyond physical appearance to include personality, charisma, and admirable

qualities (AlFarraj et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2019). Research indicates that perceived similarity and idolization strengthen consumer–brand relationships (Grohmann et al., 2013). In social media contexts, influencers who appear relatable and authentic foster stronger emotional bonds (Hudders et al., 2021; Ooi et al., 2023).

For spiritual gurus, attractiveness may derive from charisma, moral appeal, and perceived alignment with followers' values rather than conventional glamour. Such perceived similarity and admiration can facilitate emotional identification and deepen brand attachment. Empirical evidence indicates that attractiveness significantly influences brand love (Çelik, 2022).

H1C: The perceived attractiveness of spiritual gurus positively influences consumers' brand love toward the products endorsed by them.

Brand Love Leads to Willingness to Pay Premium

Extant literature consistently demonstrates that brand love plays a decisive role in shaping consumers' economic behaviors, particularly their willingness to pay a premium price (WPP). Willingness to pay a premium is defined as “the highest price level at which the consumer is willing to pay for the goods or services” by Homburg, et al. (2005), and it reflects the strength of brand preference and attachment. When consumers develop deep emotional bonds with brands, those brands become psychologically irreplaceable, leading individuals to make financial sacrifices to maintain the relationship (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Supporting this view, Sarkar, et al. (2021) demonstrate that brand love functions as a central psychological mechanism linking identity-based self-brand connection to willingness to pay a premium. Similarly, Bairrada, et al. (2019) find that brand love positively influences consumers' readiness to pay higher prices in the fashion industry, while Santos and Schlesinger (2021) confirm that brand love enhances premium price tolerance in online streaming services. More recent evidence from Thalhath and Velmurugan (2025) and Saragih (2025) further reinforces the argument that emotionally bonded consumers demonstrate a higher willingness to pay more.

Beyond functional product attributes, intangible and

affective factors significantly contribute to premium pricing. Although brand equity and performance-based evaluations influence price tolerance (Dwivedi et al., 2018; Sari et al., 2024), emotional constructs such as brand engagement and brand love exert a stronger effect by embedding the brand into the consumer's self-concept. Hedonic and experiential categories are particularly conducive to the development of brand love, as they provide emotional gratification rather than purely utilitarian value. In such contexts, consumers do not merely purchase a product; they invest in a relationship (Thalhath & Velmurugan, 2025).

Within the Indian marketplace, brands sold and endorsed by spiritual gurus represent a distinctive consumption domain where emotional, moral, and identity-based factors converge. Spiritual leaders often embody trust, authenticity, purity, and moral authority, and their endorsement extends beyond commercial signaling to spiritual alignment. For followers, consuming such brands may symbolize devotion, shared values, and identity congruence. When a brand endorsed by a spiritual guru becomes intertwined with a consumer's belief system, it fosters profound emotional attachment, transforming into brand love. This emotional bond strengthens perceived irreplaceability, reducing price sensitivity and increasing justification for premium payments. In such cases, willingness to pay a higher price is not purely an economic decision but a manifestation of loyalty, faith-driven trust, and symbolic value alignment.

Therefore, drawing from prior empirical evidence and contextualizing it within spiritually endorsed brands in India, it can be proposed that

H2: Brand love positively influences consumers' willingness to pay a premium price for brands sold and endorsed by spiritual gurus in India.

Brand Love Leads to Affective Commitment

Affective commitment refers to an individual's emotional attachment to an institution, characterized by a strong sense of belonging, loyalty, and desire to maintain association due to positive identification with institutional values (Resa & Sandi, 2026). It reflects a psychological bond in which individuals remain connected not out of obligation, but

because they genuinely want to.

Brand love, defined as a deep emotional attachment and connection toward a brand (Wang & Binti, 2023), has been identified as a key antecedent of relational outcomes such as affective commitment. When consumers experience brand love, they tend to internalise the brand's values and identity, leading to stronger psychological bonding. This emotional attachment fosters identification with the organisation and strengthens affective commitment (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Garg et al., 2016).

Further, brand love enhances consumers' sense of belongingness and emotional closeness, which translates into long-term commitment and loyalty (Mittal et al., 2022). In the context of FMCG products endorsed by spiritual gurus in India, this relationship becomes particularly significant. Such brands often extend beyond functional utility and embody ethical values, cultural traditions, and spiritual beliefs. As a result, consumers may not only evaluate these products based on quality or price, but also on the perceived alignment with their moral and spiritual identity. Therefore, brand love may play an even more powerful role in developing affective commitment. As consumers align their personal identity with the brand's symbolic meaning, emotional commitment becomes stronger and more enduring.

H3: Brand love positively influences consumers' affective commitment for brands sold and endorsed by spiritual gurus in India.

Brand Love Leads to Word of Mouth

Word of Mouth (WOM) refers to informal, non-commercial communication among consumers regarding a brand's products or services and is generally perceived as credible and influential (Dam, 2020). Positive WOM enhances brand image and serves as an effective, low-cost promotional tool, whereas negative WOM can significantly damage organizational reputation (Khraim, 2011). Therefore, understanding the drivers of positive WOM is strategically important for brands.

Brand love, defined as the perceived strength of emotional attachment and deep connection that consumers develop toward a brand (Wang & Binti, 2023), has emerged as a powerful determinant of consumer behavior. Consumers

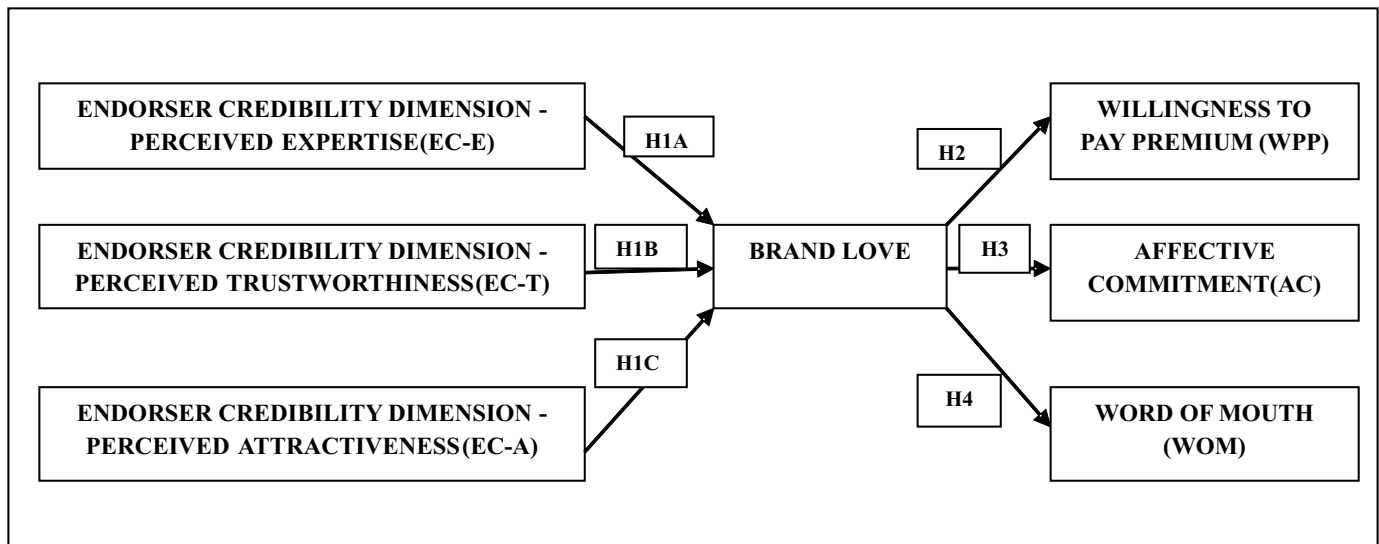
who love a brand demonstrate long-term commitment, repeat purchases, and advocacy behaviors, even in the presence of competitive alternatives (Song & Kim, 2022). Research suggests that brand love functions as an organic promotional force by encouraging voluntary positive word-of-mouth communication (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Hsu, 2023).

In the context of brands endorsed by spiritual gurus in India, brand love may be particularly influential. Such brands often carry symbolic, moral, and spiritual meanings that

extend beyond functional benefits. Consumers may perceive alignment between the brand and their personal beliefs, values, and identity. This emotional and ideological attachment strengthens brand advocacy, making consumers more likely to recommend and defend the brand within their social networks (Rahman et al., 2021; Setiyati et al., 2025). Therefore, brand love becomes a crucial mechanism linking endorsement to positive WOM.

H4: Brand love positively influences consumers' willingness to spread word of mouth for brands sold and endorsed by spiritual gurus in India.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



(Source-Conceptualized Model by Authors)

Research Methodology

Research Context

As stated earlier, the context of this study is the FMCG sector in India, specifically focusing on products that are sold and endorsed by spiritual gurus. The increasing popularity of Ayurvedic and herbal products in India has been significantly influenced by the endorsement of renowned spiritual leaders such as Baba Ramdev (Bhatia & Rathore, 2020), which has simultaneously strengthened the market presence of spiritually associated brands (Sharma et al., 2022).

For the purpose of this study, the spiritual guru considered is Baba Ramdev, founder of Patanjali Ayurved Limited (PAL). Patanjali is one of the leading FMCG companies in

India, offering a wide range of products including food items, beverages, cleaning agents, personal care products, and Ayurvedic medicines. The rapid expansion of the company has been closely linked to the spiritual credibility, public influence, and personal brand image of Baba Ramdev (Singh & Gopal, 2016). His association with the brand serves as a key driver of consumer trust and acceptance, and it is widely acknowledged that the brand's growth trajectory might have been significantly different without his active endorsement. Prior research indicates that the brand image of Baba Ramdev plays a dominant role in influencing purchase decisions related to Patanjali products (Jaggi & Ghosh, 2017). Additionally, factors such as the "Swadeshi" appeal, affordable pricing, and trust in herbal formulations contribute to consumer preference

(Pandey & Paul, 2020). Unlike many FMCG brands that rely on thematic advertising and celebrity endorsements from film stars or athletes, Patanjali adopts an image-driven branding approach centred exclusively on its spiritual founder. Baba Ramdev promotes the products through yoga camps, television programmes, and social media platforms, with his persona functioning as a symbolic trust seal for consumers (Prasad, 2019).

The convergence of health-oriented products, nationalistic sentiment, and the charismatic image of a yoga guru has generated strong consumer appeal. This synergistic combination has produced a cumulative persuasive impact—often described as the “Lollapalooza Effect”—thereby strengthening Patanjali's position within the Indian FMCG market and making it a relevant and meaningful context for the present study.

Survey Design And Data Collection

The data for this cross-sectional study were collected from consumers visiting Patanjali Ayurved Limited exclusive stores located in Tier-II cities of North India. A judgmental sampling technique, which is a non-probability sampling method, was employed. This approach involved the deliberate selection of respondents who were considered most appropriate to address the research objectives. To minimise potential sampling bias, data were collected on different days of the week and at varied time slots.

Prior to the main survey, the instrument was pre-tested with 50 customers to assess clarity and reliability. Based on the feedback received, minor modifications were made to improve language precision and comprehension. The questionnaire began with a screening question to ensure that only respondents who had been using Patanjali products for a minimum of six months were eligible to participate in the study.

A structured questionnaire comprising five latent variables—Brand Love (BL), Word of Mouth (WOM), Willingness to Pay Premium (WTPP), Affective Commitment (AC), and Endorser Credibility—was developed based on established scales. Brand Love was measured using a 7-item scale adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). WOM was assessed with 4 items adapted from Gremler and Gwinner (2000) and Ismail and Spinelli

(2012). WTPP was measured using a 3-item scale from Casidy and Wymer (2016) and Sahin et al. (2011). Affective Commitment was assessed using a 4-item scale adapted from Fullerton (2003). Endorser Credibility was measured with an 11-item scale based on Ohanian (1990), grounded in McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer model. It comprises three core dimensions: Expertise (EC-E) (qualified, knowledgeable, expert, experienced), Trustworthiness (EC-T) (trust, honest, reliable, sincere), and Attractiveness (EC-A) (elegant, persuasive, and capable of recall). In the context of spiritual gurus endorsing FMCG brands in India All items were measured on a Likert scale.

The final questionnaire comprised two sections: the first captured demographic information, while the second measured the constructs proposed in the conceptual model using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). A total of 750 responses were collected, of which 718 were deemed usable for further analysis.

The demographic profile of the respondents (N = 718) indicates that the majority were male (73.4%, n = 527), while females constituted 26.6% (n = 191) of the sample. With regard to age distribution, the largest segment of respondents belonged to the 31–40 years category (27.3%, n = 196), followed by 21–30 years (17.2%, n = 123) and 51–60 years (16.7%, n = 120). Respondents below 20 years accounted for 14.6% (n = 105), those aged 41–50 years represented 12.4% (n = 89), and participants above 60 years comprised 11.8% (n = 85), indicating a fairly balanced representation across age groups.

In terms of educational qualification, a significant proportion of respondents were postgraduates (46.1%, n = 331), followed by graduates (33.8%, n = 243). Undergraduate respondents constituted 11.84% (n = 85), while 12.4% (n = 89) reported other educational qualifications. Regarding annual family income, a large proportion of respondents reported earnings below INR 5,00,000 per annum (43.7%, n = 314), followed by those in the INR 5,00,000–7,50,000 bracket (31.3%, n = 225). Approximately 14.8% (n = 106) fell within the INR 7,50,000–10,00,000 category, and 10.2% (n = 73) reported income above INR 10,00,000 per annum.

With respect to marital status, the majority of respondents

were married (68.1%, n = 489), while 31.9% (n = 229) were single.

Empirical Analysis and Findings

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the data, as it is well suited for theory development and predictive research models (Hair et al., 2017; Ringle et al., 2023). A two-step analytical procedure was followed. In the first stage, the measurement model was evaluated to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs. In the second stage, the structural model was examined to test the hypothesized relationships among the constructs (Hair et al., 2021).

The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.2 software. Additionally, variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all indicators were found to be below the recommended threshold of 5, indicating no issues of multicollinearity. The results also suggest that common method bias does not pose a significant concern in the study (Hair et al., 2017; Ringle et al., 2023).

Measurement Model Results

To evaluate the measurement model, the reliability of the constructs was assessed through factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability. According to Hair et al. (2017), threshold values of 0.70 or higher for both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability indicate satisfactory internal consistency. They also suggest that item loadings exceeding 0.70 on their respective constructs demonstrate adequate indicator reliability.

Convergent validity was examined using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with values above 0.50 considered acceptable, as recommended by Ab Hamid (2017). Table 1 presents the constructs along with their corresponding reliability and convergent validity results.

To establish discriminant validity, the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was applied. As reported in Table 2, all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.90 (Ab Hamid, 2017), thereby confirming adequate discriminant validity among the constructs.

Table 1 Measurement Model Reliability and Validity Assessment

Construct	Measurement Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Endorser Credibility Dimension- Expertise	EC1E	0.700	0.83	0.89	0.67
	EC2E	0.864			
	EC3E	0.883			
	EC4E	0.857			
Endorser Credibility Dimension- Trustworthiness	EC1T	0.842	0.90	0.93	
	EC2T	0.909			
	EC3T	0.909			
	EC4T	0.860			
Endorser Credibility Dimension- Attractiveness	EC1A	0.867	0.83	0.90	0.75
	EC2A	0.904			
	EC3A	0.833			
Brand Love	BL1	0.799	0.93	0.94	0.70
	BL2	0.832			
	BL3	0.860			
	BL4	0.863			
	BL5	0.860			
	BL6	0.845			
	BL7	0.821			
Willingness to Pay Premium	WPP1	0.917	0.89	0.93	0.82

Construct	Measurement Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Affective Commitment	AC1	0.874	0.91	0.93	0.78
	AC2	0.924			
	AC3	0.859			
	AC4	0.895			
Word of Mouth	WOM1	0.895	0.92	0.945	0.81
	WOM2	0.890			
	WOM3	0.909			
	WOM4	0.905			

(Source: Smart PLS 4.2)

Table 2: Discriminant Validity Assessment Using HTMT Criterion

	AC	BL	EC A	EC E	EC T	WOM	WPP
AC							
BL	0.586						
EC-A	0.375	0.463					
EC-E	0.339	0.483	0.614				
EC-T	0.283	0.467	0.485	0.783			
WOM	0.813	0.523	0.405	0.375	0.310		
WPP	0.766	0.524	0.329	0.318	0.294	0.616	

(Source: Smart PLS 4.2)

Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis Evaluation

Once the adequacy of the measurement model was established, the analysis proceeded to the assessment of the structural model. This stage involved examining the significance and relevance of the hypothesized relationships, the coefficient of determination (R^2), and overall model fit indices. The path relationships among the constructs are illustrated in Figure 2.

To evaluate the proposed direct effects, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was employed. The structural paths were assessed based on their corresponding path coefficients and t-values. These t-values were subsequently used to determine whether the proposed hypotheses were empirically supported. A hypothesis was considered significant when the t-statistic met or exceeded the critical value of 1.96, indicating statistical significance at the 5% level.

The structural relationships were assessed by examining the path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values obtained through bootstrapping. Following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2017), a hypothesis is considered supported when the t-

value exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05 at the 5% significance level.

The findings reveal that Brand Love (BL) has a strong and statistically significant positive effect on Affective Commitment (AC) ($\beta = 0.543$, $t = 16.675$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the corresponding hypothesis is accepted.

Similarly, Brand Love (BL) significantly influences Word of Mouth (WOM) ($\beta = 0.486$, $t = 14.021$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the proposed hypothesis. The positive coefficient indicates that stronger brand love enhances consumers' intention to spread positive word of mouth.

The relationship between Brand Love (BL) and Willingness to Pay Premium (WPP) is also positive and significant ($\beta = 0.481$, $t = 13.569$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, this hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that consumers who strongly love a brand are more willing to pay a higher price for it. With respect to the dimensions of Endorser Credibility (EC), the findings indicate that all three components—attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness—exert a statistically significant and positive influence on Brand Love (BL). Specifically,

Endorser Credibility -Attractiveness(ECA) shows a positive effect on brand love ($\beta = 0.239$, $t = 6.056$, $p < 0.001$), followed by Endorser Credibility - Trustworthiness(ECT) ($\beta = 0.228$, $t = 5.560$, $p < 0.001$) and Endorser Credibility - Expertise (ECE) ($\beta = 0.148$, $t = 3.039$, $p = 0.002$). As all t-values are greater than the critical threshold of 1.96 and the p-values are below 0.05, the related hypotheses are supported. These results suggest that when consumers perceive an endorser as attractive, knowledgeable, and trustworthy, their emotional attachment and affection toward the brand are significantly strengthened, thereby enhancing overall brand love.

A critical aspect of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is determining the model's predictive capability, which is commonly assessed through the coefficient of determination (R^2). The R^2 value indicates the proportion of

variance in each endogenous construct that is explained by its predictor variables (Hair et al. 2019). In the present study, the R^2 values were 0.259 for Brand Love (BL), 0.295 for Affective Commitment (AC), 0.236 for Word of Mouth (WOM), and 0.231 for Willingness to Pay Premium (WPP). These values exceed the minimum benchmark of 0.10 suggested by Chin (1998), indicating satisfactory explanatory strength of the proposed model.

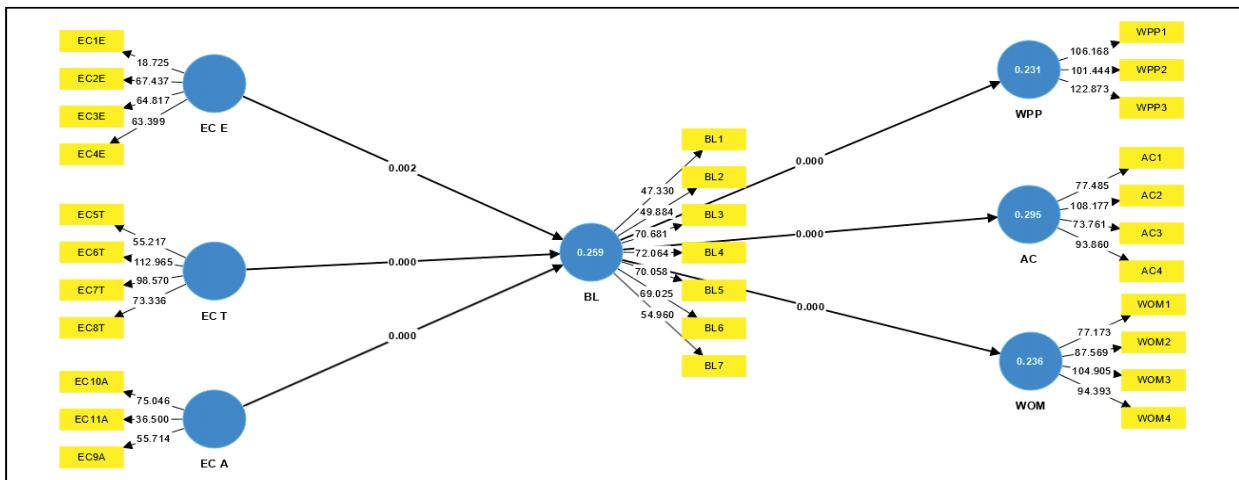
Model fit was further evaluated using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and the Normed Fit Index (NFI). The SRMR value was 0.053, which is below the recommended threshold of 0.08, while the NFI value was 0.834, surpassing the suggested cutoff of 0.80, as proposed by Henseler et al. (2016). These indices collectively demonstrate that the structural model provides an acceptable fit to the observed data.

Table 3: Results of direct effects among constructs.

	Path-Coefficient	Standard deviation (SD)	t-value	p-values	Result
H1A:ECE->BL	0.148	0.049	3.039	0.002	Supported
H1B:ECT->BL	0.228	0.041	5.560	0.000	Supported
H1C:ECA->BL	0.239	0.039	6.056	0.000	Supported
H2:BL -> WPP	0.481	0.035	13.569	0.000	Supported
H3:BL -> AC	0.543	0.033	16.675	0.000	Supported
H4:BL -> WOM	0.486	0.035	14.021	0.000	Supported

(Source: Smart PLS 4.2)

Figure 2: Path Diagram



(Source: Smart PLS 4.2)

Discussion

The present study set out to examine how the credibility of spiritual gurus, acting as celebrity business founders, shapes consumer–brand relationships in India's FMCG sector. Drawing on Source Credibility Theory and Meaning Transfer Theory, the findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed framework.

First, the results confirm that the three dimensions of endorser credibility—expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—positively and significantly influence brand love. Among these, perceived attractiveness exerted the strongest effect, followed by trustworthiness and expertise. This finding aligns with the foundational framework of Ohanian (1990), which conceptualizes attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise as central determinants of endorsement effectiveness. In the context of spiritual gurus such as Baba Ramdev, attractiveness extends beyond physical appeal to include charisma, moral authority, and value congruence. The results further support prior evidence that credibility attributes positively affect relational brand outcomes (Albert & Merunka, 2013; AlFarraj et al., 2021), demonstrating that credibility operates not only at a cognitive level but also at a deeper emotional level by fostering brand love.

Second, brand love was found to significantly influence willingness to pay a premium, affective commitment, and positive word of mouth. The strong positive relationship between brand love and willingness to pay a premium corroborates prior findings by Batra et al. (2012) and Dwivedi et al. (2018), who suggest that emotionally bonded consumers exhibit reduced price sensitivity. In spiritually endorsed FMCG brands, consumption may symbolize alignment with moral and cultural values, making premium payments a reflection of identity congruence rather than purely economic reasoning.

Similarly, the positive effect of brand love on affective commitment is consistent with relationship marketing literature (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Garg et al., 2016), which posits that emotional attachment enhances long-term psychological loyalty. Consumers who internalize the symbolic meanings associated with guru-endorsed brands demonstrate stronger emotional bonds and a desire to

maintain association with the brand.

Finally, the significant influence of brand love on word of mouth supports prior research highlighting brand love as a driver of advocacy behavior (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Hsu, 2023). In culturally embedded contexts, such as India, recommending a spiritually endorsed brand may also reflect value-sharing within social networks, amplifying the advocacy effect.

Overall, the findings validate the role of brand love in translating endorser credibility into long-term relational and behavioral outcomes. The integration of credibility cues and cultural meaning transfer helps explain why guru-endorsed brands can successfully challenge established FMCG competitors.

Implications of The Study

This study offers several important theoretical contributions. First, it extends Source Credibility Theory beyond traditional celebrity and corporate CEO contexts by examining spiritual leaders as culturally embedded celebrity business founders. While prior research has focused largely on film stars, athletes, or CEOs, this study demonstrates that spiritual authority represents a distinct credibility configuration combining moral, cultural, and symbolic dimensions. Second, by integrating Meaning Transfer Theory proposed by McCracken (1989), the study advances endorsement research from a purely persuasive communication framework to a socio-cultural meaning framework. It shows that spiritual gurus function as carriers of cultural and moral symbolism, which consumers internalize through brand love. Third, the research shifts the outcome focus from immediate purchase intention to post-consumption relational outcomes such as affective commitment, word of mouth, and willingness to pay a premium. This enriches branding literature by positioning brand love as a central mechanism that bridges credibility perceptions and long-term loyalty-related constructs. Finally, the study contributes to emerging market scholarship by providing empirical evidence from India, where spirituality, nationalism, and consumerism intersect in unique ways. This contextual contribution responds to calls for greater cultural diversity in marketing theory development.

The findings offer valuable insights for managers in the FMCG and wellness sectors. First, firms collaborating with spiritual or value-based endorsers should strategically cultivate all three credibility dimensions—expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Communication strategies should emphasize the endorser's knowledge and authenticity, particularly in product categories such as Ayurveda, wellness, and natural products. Second, marketers should focus on building brand love rather than solely driving short-term sales. Emotional storytelling, community engagement, and value-based branding can strengthen identity alignment and deepen attachment. As the results show, brand love significantly enhances premium willingness, affective commitment, and advocacy behaviors—key drivers of sustainable competitive advantage.

Third, organizations should recognize that consumers of spiritually endorsed brands may interpret purchasing as an act of identity expression. Managers can reinforce this by integrating themes of cultural authenticity, ethical values, and social responsibility into branding strategies.

Finally, in highly competitive markets, emotional differentiation may be more powerful than price-based competition. By leveraging symbolic authority and credibility, brands can reduce price sensitivity and increase relational loyalty.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research context is limited to one spiritual founder, namely Baba Ramdev, and one brand category within the Indian FMCG sector. Future studies could examine other spiritual leaders such as Sadhguru or Sri Sri Ravi Shankar to enhance generalizability. Second, the cross-sectional research design limits causal inference. Longitudinal studies could explore how brand love evolves over time, particularly in response to controversies or credibility shocks. Third, the study relies on self-reported measures, which may introduce response bias. Future research could incorporate behavioral data or experimental designs to validate the findings. Fourth, while the model explains a meaningful proportion of variance, additional moderating variables—such as religiosity, national

identity, or consumer skepticism—could be examined to deepen understanding of boundary conditions. Future research may also compare spiritual founders with corporate CEOs or film celebrities to investigate differences in meaning transfer mechanisms across endorsement types.

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