

# The Moderating and Mediating Roles of Self-Esteem and Susceptibility to Normative Influence in the Relationship Between Brand Love and Brand Loyalty

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The objective of this investigation is to evaluate the role of Self-Esteem (SE) and Susceptibility to Normative Influence (SNI) in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty within the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry in Sri Lanka. Specifically, this study aims to determine whether SE and SNI act as moderators or mediators in this relationship. Since there is an unambiguously identified gap in the literature, there still exists insufficient agreement and acceptance in the existing literature about the correct role of Self-esteem and SNI in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty, and previous researchers' findings are contradictory. Examining the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty across cultures and industries is another well-stated necessity.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This investigation used a quantitative methodology and thus, a self-administered survey was distributed to the 390 participants in the sample who are consuming FMCG products in Sri Lanka. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique. Regression analysis was carried out to test the hypothesized relationship between dependent, independent, mediating, and moderating variables.

**Findings:** Researchers concluded that in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka, SE and SNI do not exert significant moderation on the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. However, it was observed that SE and SNI do play a partial mediating role in this relationship.

**Originality:** Despite a clearly identified gap in the literature, there remains insufficient consensus regarding the role of SE and SNI in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Existing studies present contradictory findings, highlighting the need for further investigation to clarify these roles. This research is the first to clarify whether SE and SNI function as moderators or mediators in the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Loyalty, with a specific focus on the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods industry in Sri Lanka. It makes a substantial and original contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

**Implications:** This research addresses a gap in empirical knowledge by clarifying the precise roles of SE and SNI as evidenced by the findings. Additionally, the study contributes to the literature by examining the brand love-loyalty relationship in the Asian context and the FMCG industry, offering a more generalized theoretical conclusion applicable worldwide. The findings support the Brand Resonance Model's emotional path, particularly in Sri Lanka's FMCG industry.

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Loyalty, Self-esteem,  
Susceptibility to  
Normative Influence

## Introduction

Relationship marketing is a method of connecting with customers to build connections that are mutually beneficial and increase customer value (Fernando & Wijekoon, 2020). As per Oliver in 1999, brand loyalty is a very important concept that comprises the intention of buying and repeatedly purchasing a brand, the readiness to expend a premium price, the reluctance to make the switch to alternative brands in the market, and the act of recommending the brand to other people (Oliver, 1999). Current research highlights the numerous marketing benefits of brand loyalty, such as lower marketing costs, increased new customer acquisitions, and a higher frequency of significant transactions (Cuong, 2020). Customers are more loyal to a brand when they develop a loving relationship with it (Ahuvia & Carroll, 2006). Brand love is a desirable degree of emotional attachment that a satisfied customer has to a specific trade name (Ahuvia & Carroll, 2006). Today's marketers focus on creating distinctive and unforgettable brand experiences that will bind the customer to an emotional connection that results in brand love to develop a dominant brand (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020).

Consumers enhance their love for a specific brand by aligning their self-expression and self-esteem with the brand's values and identity (Albert et al, 2008). The perception an individual holds about themselves whether favorably or unfavorably is referred to as their self-esteem (Brannen & Frisby, 2017). Self-esteem is a paramount concept for any kind of business. Because SE contributes to encouraging consumers to consume more (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). Further, the susceptibility to normative influence strengthens the relationship between a brand and its customers and boosts brand love (Algesheimer & Herrmann, 2005). The concept of susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) describes how much people influence a person's decisions about what to buy in their life (Bearden et al, 1989). Determining the functions of these four elements is crucial for any company hoping to establish enduring relationships with its clients.

Limited studies have been done in the literature regarding the interaction of SE and SNI with the relationship between brand love and loyalty, and also the findings consist of contradictory results. According to the Minh (2021) study, SE and SNI play a mediating role in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. But, according to the same article, there is a moderating impact from SE and SNI on the bond between brand love and brand loyalty (Minh, 2021). Further Sierra et al (2016) and Algesheimer & Herrmann (2005) confirmed the moderating impact of two variables in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Finally, Minh (2021) mentioned there is a lack of agreement in the literature regarding the role of SE and SNI in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (Minh, 2021). According to previous research, it is clear that SE and SNI play different roles depending on context and factor relationships. In some situations, they can act as mediators, while in others, they can act as moderators. So, there is a defined requirement to check the same relationship in the Sri Lankan context.

On the other hand, much research has been conducted on high-involvement and luxury goods by analyzing brand love and loyalty relationships. However, there is a lack of knowledge about the FMCG sector. Understanding the relationship between beloved brands and their consumers is very important in the FMCG sector because consumers will interact with the FMCG brands regularly rather than other product categories (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020).

Considering above all empirical and practice gaps, in this study, the aim is to investigate the role (mediating and moderating) of Self-esteem and Susceptibility to Normative Influence in the connection between brand love and brand loyalty, with a specific focus on the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods industry within Sri Lanka. To address this specific gap, the following research questions are considered,

1. Does Self-esteem moderate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka?
2. Does Susceptibility to Normative Influence moderate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka?
3. Does Self-esteem mediate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka?
4. Does Susceptibility to Normative Influence mediate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Brand Loyalty***

According to Jacoby (1978), brand loyalty refers to the consistent biased behavioral responses that customers develop over time towards one or more alternative brands (Jacoby et al, 1978). As stated, (Fernando & Wijekoon, 2020), brand loyalty is often denoted as the tendency of customers to constantly purchase a particular brand, and brand loyalty is inextricably linked to the desire and connection of the customer to the brand. Oliver mentioned that the intention to consistently purchase and repurchase a specific brand, a willingness to pay a higher price for it, a reluctance to switch to alternative brands available in the market, and actively recommending the brand to others are all components of brand loyalty (Oliver, 1999). Customer loyalty is simply explained as the connection between how much a person likes a brand and how frequently they purchase from it (Dick & Basu, 1994). Brand loyalty has been further defined as a measurement of consumers' attachment to a brand (Aaker, 1997).

Brand loyalty is a paramount concept for any kind of business. Building brand loyalty drives the growth of the business. As per Oliver in 1999, brand loyalty comprises the intention of buying and repeatedly purchasing a brand, the willingness to pay a premium price, the reluctance to make the switch to alternative brands in the market, and the act of recommending the brand to other people (Oliver, 1999). Positive word-of-mouth, willingness to pay a premium, and commitment to the brand are the positive

consequences of brand loyalty (Amine, 1998). Brand loyalty is one of the three key concepts in the customer-brand relationship paradigm. This paradigm places a strong emphasis on creating enduring connections that benefit both clients and businesses (Cuong, 2020).

Brand loyalty develops as a key result of brand love (Albert et al, 2008). Brand love is important in developing a powerfully beneficial link between customers' brand experience and brand loyalty (Fernando & Wijekoon, 2020). Customers are more loyal to a brand when they develop a loving relationship with it (Ahuvia & Carroll, 2006). According to the study, satisfied consumers who love their brands generate higher loyalty than those who do not love their brands (Roy et al, 2012).

### ***Brand Love***

The idea of brand love comes from social psychology (Huang, 2017). Ahuvia (1993) was the first to empirically study and introduce the concept of brand love to the literature of marketing (Ahuvia, 1993). Brand love is defined as a desirable degree of emotional dependence that a satisfied customer has on a specific trade name (Ahuvia & Carroll, 2006). Brand love is a broad concept that encompasses a wide range of perceptions, emotions, and behaviors. They define brand love as the level of excitement and emotional attachment that a delighted client has to a specific brand name (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). Despite becoming a popular marketing discipline, the term "brand love" does not yet have a widely accepted definition (Ahuvia et al, 2012). Simply brand love is defined as "a satisfied consumer's passionate commitment to a specific brand" (Bennett & Thiele, 2001).

Brand love, as a marketing concept, is a crucial and emerging concept for any organization to practice relationship marketing. Today's many organizations place a great deal of emphasis on building a strong brand to stand out in the highly competitive market of today. Today's marketers focus on creating distinctive and unforgettable brand experiences that will bind the customer to an emotional connection that results in brand love to develop a dominant brand (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). The term "brand love" was first established by (Ahuvia & Carroll, 2006) by referencing how brands might increase customers.

The biggest beneficiaries of the study's findings on the relationship between love and loyalty will be those involved in the FMCG sector who need to develop marketing strategies in the highly competitive marketing environment of today. To stand out in today's crowded market, retail brands such as those that sell fast-moving consumer goods give developing a strong brand a lot of thought. Therefore, this study is crucial for achieving the main goal (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). Today's marketers are concentrating on creating distinctive and unforgettable brand experiences that will bind the customer to an emotional connection that results in brand love to develop a dominant brand. Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) brands are more frequently encountered by

consumers than brands from other product categories, highlighting the importance of brand love and brand loyalty in this industry. The importance of these relationships is highlighted by the fact that the FMCG industry heavily relies on the emotional bonds that consumers form with the brands they adore (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). This focus on brand loyalty emphasizes how crucial nurturing is.

On the other hand, much research has been conducted on high-involvement goods and luxury goods by analyzing brand love and brand loyalty relationships. A study conducted in 2020 from a strategic marketing standpoint tested the impact of brand relationship types on brand loyalty, as well as the effects of brand love and brand trust for tablet PCs (Chen et al, 2020). Khyati Shetty (2022) investigated the impact of brand personality congruence, brand attachment, and brand love on loyalty among Henry in the luxury branding sector (Shetty & Jason, 2022) and Asif Iqbal (2022) examined predictors and outcomes of brand love: an assessment of customers' favorite neo-luxury brands (Iqbal et al, 2022).

Even though there is a lack of knowledge about FMCG. This research is a highly important study in terms of the economy, society, community, and policy worldwide contexts as well as local contexts. Understanding the relationship between beloved brands and their consumers is very important in the FMCG sector because consumers will interact with the FMCG brands regularly rather than other product categories (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). Also, this research helps to improve customer experiences, build and retain relationships, and foster beneficial interactions within communities and societies around the world by looking at the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector globally. There is a clear requirement to check the Brand love and loyalty relationship in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry.

According to (Sarkar, 2014), the Asian market lacks appreciation for brand love. Relationship marketing research has also been conducted in developed countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; however, studies on this concept are lacking in developing countries such as Vietnam and Sri Lanka (Minh, 2021).

Therefore, more research is needed to determine how cultural differences affect the relationship between brand love and Loyalty (Minh, 2021). As a result, the findings of this study will assist foreign and domestic companies operating in Sri Lanka in gaining a better understanding of Sri Lankan consumers' brand love. There is a clear requirement to check the Brand love and loyalty relationship in the Sri Lankan context (Minh, 2021).

For FMCG companies operating in Sri Lanka, understanding the effects of brand love, SE and SNI on brand loyalty is particularly valuable. Given the unique cultural dynamics and consumer behavior in Sri Lanka, these insights are crucial for tailoring marketing strategies that resonate with local consumers. According to Pansari and Kumar (2017), these findings can guide Sri Lankan decision-makers in crafting effective marketing strategies encompassing product decisions, pricing strategies, placement, and

promotional activities that not only enhance consumer brand loyalty but also bolster their brand's competitive edge within the local market (Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

This study provides compelling evidence for Sri Lankan brand managers, demonstrating that augmenting a brand's unique features is essential for sustaining brand equity and deepening the emotional connection between the brand and its Sri Lankan customers (Lafreniere et al, 2011). In the context of Sri Lanka's competitive FMCG sector, where consumer preferences are often influenced by cultural and social norms, highlighting the distinctive qualities of products relative to competitors is key. By doing so, brand managers can improve user experience (SE) and indirectly strengthen customer loyalty, which is crucial for achieving differentiation in a crowded market.

In the Sri Lankan market, strong brand loyalty offers significant competitive advantages, including enhanced perceived brand quality, leadership positioning, the ability to command premium pricing, higher customer satisfaction, better customer retention, and increased revenue generation (Çelik & Gösterimi, 2022). These advantages are particularly critical in Sri Lanka's fast-evolving FMCG industry, where brands must constantly adapt to changing consumer expectations and market conditions.

### ***Self Esteem***

According to Brannen and Frisby, self-esteem refers to an individual's perception of themselves, whether favorable or unfavorable (Brannen & Frisby, 2017). Self-esteem is distinct from self-concept, or how people perceive themselves positively or negatively. It entails assessing one's self-concept, whether positively or negatively (Albert et al, 2008). As Galanou and others state the degree to which a person feels either positively or negatively about themselves is known as their self-esteem (Galanou & Galanakis, 2014).

Self-esteem is a paramount concept for any kind of business. SE contributes to encouraging consumers to consume more (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). Individuals with higher self-esteem are more loyal to and emotionally attached to a brand than those with lower self-esteem (Brown & Dutton, 1995). This is consistent with previous findings that people with higher self-esteem are more likely to have strong emotional connections (Love) and brand loyalty (Brown & Dutton, 1995).

### ***Relationship among SE, Brand Love, and Brand Loyalty***

Individuals with higher self-esteem are more loyal and emotionally attached to a brand than those with lower self-esteem (Brown & Dutton, 1995). This is consistent with previous findings that people with higher self-esteem are more likely to have strong emotional connections (Love) and brand loyalty (Brown & Dutton, 1995). By aligning their self-expression and self-esteem (SE) with the brand's identity, consumers establish a profound connection with brand love (Albert et al, 2008). As a consequence of this, as consumers combine their self-expression and self-esteem with the brand's identity, brand love grows (Albert et al, 2008). The connection of these personal aspects with the brand

strengthens emotional bonds, which contributes to loyalty. Therefore, it is evident that brand love, brand loyalty, and self-esteem are all interconnected.

### ***Susceptibility to Normative Influence***

Customers' purchasing decisions are frequently influenced if they believe that their friends, colleagues, or family members will purchase similar products, as a result of the impact of reference group influence (Khare et al, 2011). Friends are also among the most significant peer groups. "The social comparison theory" identifies how an individual's opinions and abilities are influenced by others (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). SNI is a concept that refers to the extent to which someone's purchase decisions are influenced by others in their lives (Bearden et al, 1989). The impact of peer groups is significant in consumer engagement (Kaur et al, 2020), purchasing decisions (Childers & Rao, 1992) and brand loyalty (Kim & Lee, 2020).

The degree to which a person is susceptible to influence in one circumstance will determine how easily that person can be moved in a variety of circumstances. Individuals' need for acceptance from groups has an impact on their desire to submit to social group pressures. Consumers' susceptibility to influence is a personality trait that differs according to their social status (Khare et al, 2011).

The concept of normative influence susceptibility is crucial for any type of business. Social influence has long been acknowledged as a significant factor influencing a person's purchasing decisions. Peer influence strengthens the bond between a brand and its customers and increases brand love (Algesheimer et al, 2005). SNI and SE both contribute to encouraging consumers to consume more (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). The normative influence of the community encourages consumers to keep their purchase intentions (Chiou & Chieh, 2016). SNI contributes to the development of a loyal relationship with favorite brands (Hur et al, 2011). SNI is a key player in the brand community (Marzocchi et al, 2013) and consumers tend to act in the same way as others in their immediate community (Kuo & Feng, 2013).

### ***Relationship among Brand Loyalty, Brand Love, and Susceptibility to Normative Influence***

SNI contributes to the development of a loyal relationship with favorite brands (Hur et al, 2011). SNI increases brand loyalty and emotional brand attachment (Ruane & Wallace, 2015). Peer influence strengthens the bond between a brand and its customers and increases brand love (Algesheimer et al, 2005) and explains the positive relationship with SE (Sierra et al, 2016). SE and SNI both contribute to encouraging consumers to consume more (Bandyopadhyay, 2016).

Peer influence enhances the bond between a brand and its customers and increases brand love (Algesheimer et al, 2005). Consumers are more likely to purchase products if they believe their friends, colleagues, or family will approve or purchase the same type of product, as influenced by reference group influence (Algesheimer et al, 2005).

### ***The Role of Self-Esteem and Susceptibility to Normative Influence***

Previous researchers, such as (Ahuvia & Carroll, 2006) and (Minh, 2021), have conducted numerous studies into the relationships between various marketing factors. They placed a premium on self-esteem and social influence. Their findings show a landscape of contradictory results regarding the interaction between self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence (SNI). In some cases, both self-esteem (SE) and susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) have been observed to function as moderating factors, whereas in others, they have been observed to function as mediating factors.

When we acknowledge the role of self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence, the (Minh, 2021) research study is of the utmost importance. The findings throughout the research are also critical. Minh initiated a study in 2021 to investigate the moderating role of SE and SNI in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. There are three research findings. The first finding suggests that self-esteem SE and SNI both play a role in mediating the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Secondly mentioned there is a link between consumers' brand loyalty and their levels of SE and SNI. Particularly, the interaction of SE and SNI has a significant impact on the strength of the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (Minh, 2021). However, finally, Minh suggests there is a lack of agreement in the literature regarding the role of SE and SNI in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty when considering SE as a tool to mediate loyalty levels through the emotional attachment channel (Minh, 2021).

According to Michael Schreane's research, some cultures are more susceptible than others to the moderating effect of brand self-esteem on the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (Schreane, 2020). As stated above, it is very difficult to distinguish between the roles played by SE and SNI in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Because the results are in contradiction and there isn't enough knowledge to make a broad conclusion about the roles of SE and SNI (Minh, 2021).

Beyond the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty, the following results can be observed concerning the role of SE and SNI. According to theoretical perspectives, Self-esteem has been impacted as a moderating factor in some situations levels have major and moderating effects on job performance (Ferris et al, 2010). Khan and Kashif investigate the moderating role of self-image congruence between perceived coolness and brand love (Khan & Kashif, 2023). Furthermore, in 2018, researchers investigated the effect of brand personality self-congruity (BPC) on brand engagement and purchase intention on Facebook, as well as how self-esteem moderates the relationship between BPC and brand engagement and purchase intention (Kyun et al, 2018). Hong Ye investigated the impact of consumer status on their self-brand connection with luxury brands in 2015, as well as the regulating moderating effect of self-esteem and vanity from the perspective of Chinese cultural background (Hong et al, 2015).



On the other hand, Self-esteem has an impact as a mediating factor in some circumstances, such as the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between the family environment and adolescent compulsive buying (Singh & Nayak , 2016). Bharti & Suneja have investigated the mediating roles of self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and normative influence in the relationship between mindfulness as an antidote to conspicuous consumption (Bharti & Suneja, 2016).

When it comes to Susceptibility normative influence, which in some circumstances serves as a moderating factor. Joe and Hui investigate moderating effects of susceptibility to normative influence and susceptibility to brand prestige in the relationship between brand credibility and perceived value (Joe et al, 2016). On the other hand, Susceptibility normative influence has had an impact as a mediating factor in some circumstances. Bharti & Suneja have investigated the mediating roles of self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and susceptibility to normative influence in the relationship between Mindfulness as an antidote to conspicuous consumption (Bharti & Suneja, 2016). From prior research, it is clear that SE and SNI play different roles depending on context and factor relationships. In some situations, they can act as mediators, while in others, they can act as moderators.

According to Minh (2021), both SE and SNI appear to play a mediating role in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Although this study adds valuable insights to the marketing literature, it does have some limitations. First, the information was gathered solely in Vietnam, which has its own culture (Minh, 2021). This limits its cross-cultural applicability and relevance to various economic contexts. To improve generalizability in consumer-brand relationships, similar research should be conducted across diverse cultures and economies (both developing and developed countries) (Minh, 2021). According to Sarkar (2014), the brand Asian market lacks appreciation for brand love (Sarkar, 2014). So, there is a defined requirement to check the same relationship in the Sri Lankan context.

Relationship marketing research has also been conducted in developed countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; however, studies on this concept are lacking in developing countries such as Vietnam and Sri Lanka (Minh, 2021). Therefore, more research is needed to determine how cultural differences affect the moderating and mediating roles of brand self-esteem and SNI. As a result, the findings of this study will assist foreign and domestic companies operating in Sri Lanka in gaining a better understanding of Sri Lankan consumers' brand love. Even though there are lack of knowledge about FMCG. (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). This research is a highly important study in terms of the economy, society, community, and policy worldwide contexts as well as local contexts. Understanding the relationship between beloved brands and their consumers is very important in the FMCG sector because consumers will interact with the FMCG brands regularly rather than other product categories (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020).

According to Kotler, the majority of FMCG products fall into the category of convenience goods because people frequently, conveniently, and easily buy them. Food, drink, home goods, personal care products, and over-the-counter (OTC) items are the four main categories into which FMCG products are typically broken down (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). The FMCG industry provides a significant contribution to the global economy by creating employment opportunities and a lot of money. Rising consumer demand, a growing global population, and urbanization have all contributed to the FMCG market's consistent expansion (Statista, 2021). Also, this research helps to improve customer experiences, build and retain relationships, and foster beneficial interactions within communities and societies around the world by looking at the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector globally (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020).

In this study, the aim is to investigate whether SE and SNI act as moderators or mediators in the connection between brand love and brand loyalty, with a specific focus on the FMCG industry within Sri Lanka. It is necessary to examine each of the moderating and mediating roles of self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence separately to complete this investigation. Considering above mentioned facts, evidence, and gaps in this study, the second and third research question aims to investigate,

*Does Self-esteem moderate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka?*

*Does Susceptibility to Normative Influence moderate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka?*

The following hypotheses have been established to test the moderating roles of SE and SNI separately based on the previously mentioned research questions.

*H1: SE moderates the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka*

*H2: SNI moderates the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka*

Given the facts provided above and the gaps that exist in this study, the 4th and 5th research questions seek to determine

*Does Self-esteem mediate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka?*

*Does Susceptibility to Normative Influence mediate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka?*

The following hypotheses have been established to test the mediating roles of SE and SNI separately based on the previously mentioned research question.

*H3: SE mediates the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka*

*H4: SNI mediates the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka*

Throughout the study, the primary objective is to first investigate the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka. Subsequently, the study will explore whether self-esteem (SE) and susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) function as moderators or mediators in the connection between brand love and brand loyalty, specifically within the context of the FMCG industry in Sri Lanka. The research will involve testing for both mediated and moderate effects, as depicted in the conceptual frameworks below. Figure 1 illustrates the moderating impact, while Figure 2 depicts the mediating impact as mentioned in the study.

1. Self-Esteem and SNI moderate the relationship of brand love and brand Loyalty.

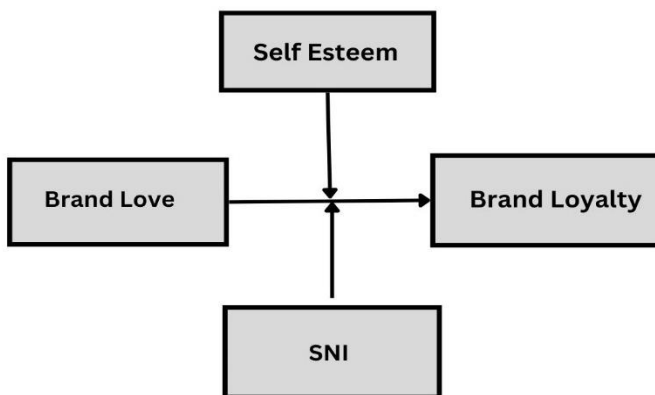


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework – Moderating Effect  
Source. Prepared by Author

2. Self-Esteem and SNI mediate the relationship of brand love and brand Loyalty.

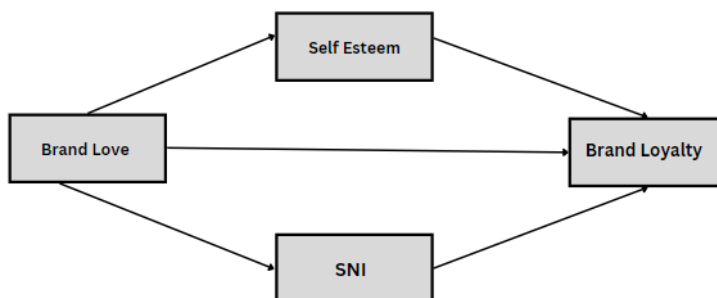


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework – Mediating Effect  
Source. Prepared by Author

## Research Methodology

The research philosophy underlying this study is based on a set of beliefs and assumptions about the nature of the research. Conducted as quantitative research, this study follows a positivist philosophy. It began with a theory and was followed by a comprehensive review of academic literature. A research strategy was then designed to test the theory through relevant hypotheses. As such, the study employs a deductive approach to determine whether SE and SNI act as moderators or mediators in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. The focus is on the FMCG industry in Sri Lanka, with hypotheses developed from established theories and tested using a large sample. Consequently, the survey method will be used as the research strategy for this study. Additionally, because the study will be gathering quantitative data, the Survey method enables the collection of quantitative data and their statistical analysis. The study was carried out in a natural setting with little interference from the researcher from the regular course of business in the research environment.

The primary method for gathering information involves using self-administered questionnaires with our chosen group of participants. Here the researcher delivers the questionnaire using three methods which are printed questionnaire (hard documents), online web-based questionnaire (Google form), and, telephone interviews. Each respondent will receive a questionnaire under the above three methods and need to provide answers individually under the given guidance. Additionally, there are several reasons why researchers use self-administered questionnaires to gather primary data: they are cost-effectiveness, anonymity, ease of use, large sample size, standardization, time efficiency, generation of quantitative data, and ease of analysis.

The target population for this study comprises all male and female customers in Sri Lanka who use FMCGs. This group represents the entire set of individuals, events, or elements of interest that the researcher aims to investigate. To determine the sample size from the population the researcher has considered previous scholars and established statistical methods. Minh (2021) identified a sample size of 230 individuals from the target population, which included both males and females with a preference for specific favorite brands (Minh, 2021). Similarly, Wijekoon and Fernando (2020) conducted a study involving 300 respondents from the targeted population (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). Building on these insights, the researcher determined the appropriate sample size for the current study. Additionally, the Krejcie and Morgan table was consulted to ascertain the sample size from the large known population, which indicated that a minimum of 384 respondents would be necessary.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = \frac{3.8416 \cdot 0.25}{0.0025} = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384.16$$

Figure 3. Sample Calculation - Krejcie and Morgan Function for Large Unknown Sample

By recommendations from previous scholars and established statistical methods, this study proposes a sample size of 390 individuals to account for potential non-responses.

A survey was conducted among customers of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs) in Sri Lanka, including both male and female individuals. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants, as it focuses on those who are directly relevant to the study specifically, individuals who use FMCGs. This approach ensures that the sample consists of respondents with the necessary experience and insights into these products, thereby enhancing the relevance and accuracy of the information gathered. Before completing the questionnaire, participants received a brief explanation of the survey's objectives and procedures. Likert scale-type questions with five alternative answers were used to measure the dependent, independent, moderating, and mediating variables. To analyze the direct impact between Brand Love and Brand Loyalty and to obtain expected outcomes, this study used regression analysis. Additionally, regression analysis was expected to be the primary data analysis method to examine the impact of self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence.

### **Operationalization**

The operationalization of the study delineates four key variables, each measured using specific indicators based on Likert scales, Brand Loyalty, Brand Love, Self-Esteem, and Susceptibility to Normative Influence. Notably, no dimensions have been identified within these variables. Brand Loyalty, as per the framework provided by Mrad and Cui (2017), is measured using four distinct indicators (Mrad & Cui, 2017). Brand Love, following the work of Batra (2012), is evaluated through five indicators (Batra, R et al., 2012). Self-esteem is measured according to the established methodology by Rosenberg (1965), utilizing five indicators (Rosenberg, 1965). Susceptibility to Normative Influence is assessed through four indicators, as outlined by Bearden et al. (1989). These indicators collectively offer a consistent and reliable framework for measurement, thereby ensuring the robustness of the study's findings.

### ***Validity and Reliability***

At the end of the analysis, all validity and reliability criteria were met. Factor loading values for all four indicators consistently exceeded 0.7. The Cronbach's alpha values for all significant variables were higher than the standard threshold of 0.7, indicating that all variables in the questionnaire were reliable. Additionally, all KMO values and AVE values were higher than 0.5, and all significance values for Bartlett's Test were less than 0.05. The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable also exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlations, further confirming the validity of the constructs.

### ***Results***

The analytical outcomes, below clearly mentioned the evaluation of the hypothesis and research findings.

### ***Moderating Effects***

*H1: SE moderates the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.*

Table 1  
Moderating Effect – Self-Esteem

Model		Coefficients	Std. Error	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.4306	0.0370	92.6345	0.000
	IV	0.5978	0.0528	11.3139	0.000
	SE	0.2101	0.0696	3.0180	0.003
	Int_1	0.0591	0.0568	1.0401	0.299
R <sup>2</sup> -Change:		0.002			
F Stat:		1.082			
P-Value:		0.299			

The moderation analysis results (Table 1) for SE show a positive coefficient for the interaction term (Int\_1 = 0.0591) with a p-value of 0.299. Since the p-value exceeds the significance threshold of 0.05, the moderation effect is not statistically significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 (H1) is rejected, indicating that self-esteem does not significantly moderate the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector in Sri Lanka.

*H2: SNI moderates the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.*

Table 2  
Moderating Effect - SNI

Model		Coefficients	Std. Error	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.4396	0.0349	98.5145	0.000
	IV	0.6130	0.0463	13.2461	0.000
	SNI	0.1509	0.0343	4.3962	0.000
	Int_1	0.0227	0.0361	0.6295	0.529
R <sup>2</sup> -Change:	0.001				
F Stat:	0.396				
P-Value:	0.529				

The results of the moderation analysis (Table 2) for SNI show a non-significant interaction term (Int\_1 = 0.0227) with a p-value of 0.529. The alpha level used for determining statistical significance was set at 0.05. Since the p-value is greater than this threshold, the moderation effect is not statistically significant. As a result, Hypothesis 2 (H2) is rejected. This indicates that susceptibility to normative influence does not significantly moderate the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.

**Mediating Effects**

*H3: SE mediates the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.*

Table 3  
Linear Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
	(Constant)	1.077	0.163		
	IV	0.669	0.045	0.602	
R-Squared:	0.363				
F-Stat:	220.8				
Sig. Value:	0				

According to Table 3, which describes the direct effect between Brand Love and Brand Loyalty, the linear regression model reveals a significant positive coefficient (B = 0.669, p < 0.001) for Brand Love (IV). This indicates that as Brand Love increases, there is a corresponding increase in Brand Loyalty (DV). The p-value is well below the standard

significance threshold of 0.05, suggesting a strong and statistically significant positive impact of Brand Love on Brand Loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.

Table 4  
Mediating Effect – Self-Esteem

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval	
				LB	UB
IV → SE → DV	0.669	0.590	0.078	0.021	0.138
	0.000	0.000			

According to Table 4, the results revealed a significant indirect effect of the impact of brand love (IV) on brand loyalty (DV) ( $b = 0.078$ ), with a confidence interval (CI) from 0.021 to 0.138. As the CI does not include zero ( $p < 0.05$ ), this indicates a significant mediating effect of SE in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty, accepting H3. Furthermore, the direct effect of brand love on brand loyalty in the presence of the mediator was also found significant ( $b = 0.590$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hence, SE partially mediated the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.

*H4: SNI mediates the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.*

Table 3, describes the direct effect between Brand Love and Brand Loyalty. The significant positive coefficient ( $B = 0.669$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) for brand love (IV) in the linear regression model indicates.

Table 5  
Mediating Effect – SNI

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval	
				LB	UB
IV → SNI → DV	0.669	0.610	0.059	0.024	0.105
	0.000	0.000			

According to Table 5, the results revealed a significant indirect effect of the impact of Brand Love (IV) on Brand Loyalty (DV) ( $b = 0.059$ ), with a confidence interval (CI) from 0.024 to 0.105. As the CI does not include zero ( $p < 0.05$ ), this indicates a significant mediating effect of SNI in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty, accepting H4. Furthermore, the direct effect of brand love on brand loyalty in the presence of the mediator was also found significant ( $b = 0.610$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hence, Susceptibility to Normative (SN) partially mediated the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.



## Hypothesis Summary

Table 6  
Hypothesis Summary

Hypothesis	Accept/ Reject
H1: SE moderates the impact of brand love on brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.	Rejected
H2: SNI moderates the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.	Rejected
H3: SE mediates the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.	Accepted
H4: SNI mediates the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka.	Accepted

## Discussion

The general finding of the study indicates a significant positive impact of brand love on brand loyalty within the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka. This conclusion is supported by the outcomes of several studies conducted by previous scholars. These findings further validate the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the context of Sri Lanka's FMCG industry. Huang (2017), a prominent researcher, proposed the theory that brand love exerts a positive impact on brand loyalty. This study was developed based on a study conducted in the Chinese context, specifically focusing on mobile phone brands (Huang, The impacts of brand experiences on brand loyalty: mediators of brand love and trust, 2017). In 2020, Wijekoon and Fernando also investigated this relationship within the FMCG sector, further supporting the connection between brand love and brand loyalty (Wijekoon & Fernando, 2020). As part of the research, Minh (2021) tested the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty within the context of Myanmar (Minh, 2021). Ultimately obtained the same result from his findings that there is a significant positive impact of brand love on brand loyalty.

The first and second findings of the study suggest that self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence do not significantly moderate the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka. Minh (2021) aimed to examine whether self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence have a moderating impact on the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the Myanmar context. However, the study did not identify a significant moderating effect of either SE or SNI on the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (Minh, 2021). Similarly, Wibowo and Yasri (2023) were also unable to find a significant moderating impact of self-esteem and SNI on the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (Wibowo & Yasri, 2023). This finding is contradictory to Algesheimer and Herrmann (2005), who found that the influence of peers strengthens the relationship between a brand and its customers, thereby boosting brand love, and to Sierra et al. (2016), who identified that self-esteem moderates the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty.

The third and fourth findings of the study suggest that self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence significantly mediate the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector of Sri Lanka. These findings are consistent with the results of Wibowo and Yasri (2023), who also identified significant mediation effects of self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence on this relationship (Wibowo & Yasri, 2023). Minh (2021) also found that self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence significantly mediate the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (Minh, 2021). Following that it can give a general idea of the role of self-esteem and susceptibility to normative influence in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

This study offers a theoretical framework for comprehending how brand love affects brand loyalty, an area of research that is still lacking in the marketing literature (Huang, The impacts of brand experiences on brand loyalty: mediators of brand love and trust, 2017). Brand Love and brand loyalty relationship is mostly checked in underdeveloped countries, there are lack of agreement regarding the developing countries (Minh, 2021). Another point is this relationship has changed related to the high involvement of goods and industries. Not related to FMCG industries (Algesheimer et al, 2005). Because of these reasons, scholars are unable to give a more generalized theoretical conclusion for the entire world. While this research addresses the theoretical issues discussed, it is particularly situated within the context of the FMCG industry in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, this study used the higher-order brand love scale developed to assess brand love as a higher-order construct with multiple, complex emotions (Batra et al, 2012).

The study's findings support the validity of that scale in measuring brand love and offer useful guidance for measuring brand love in the FMCG industry. As a result, this study adds to the body of research validating the brand love concept across cultural boundaries and expands on the theories already in place, demonstrating the concept's relevance in the Asian market and, more specifically, in the FMCG industry.

According to previous research, it is clear that SE and SNI play different roles depending on context and factor relationships. In some situations, they can act as mediators, while in others, they can act as moderators. Minh mentioned there is a lack of common agreement in the existing literature regarding the correct role of SNI and SE in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (Minh, 2021). This research fills this gap in theoretical knowledge. Finding exactly mentioned the correct role of SE and SNI in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. These results will be extremely important for the advancement of knowledge in relationship marketing in the future. According to Jayputra et al. (2019), SE is associated with self-congruence and self-identity and these are essential components to feed customers to forge a deep emotional bond with the brand. Seeking assistance to advance the current theoretical understanding of

Self-esteem. As a whole, this study's findings add to the consumer-brand relationship literature.

According to studies currently accessible, SNI suggests that consumers are affected by their peers' reviews before purchasing brands (Reed & Wooten, 2004). The results of this study also demonstrate that SNI influences customer loyalty to a preferred brand. Furthermore, because the majority of research on the relationship between a consumer and a brand has been done in developed nations, the findings from studies done in developing nations contribute to our understanding of the brand relationship construct. The research also includes SNI and SE mediating the causal connection between brand love and brand loyalty. (Albert et al, 2013).

The brand resonance model was proposed by Keller (2013) and offers both emotional and logical paths to brand resonance (Keller, 2013). This study followed the emotional path to brand resonance by identifying brand love as a means of achieving brand resonance. This study supports the brand resonance model by providing additional evidence of its applicability, particularly in Sri Lanka's FMCG industry. The final implication is as one of the most well-liked theories in the customer brand relationships paradigm, the brand relationship quality model is further validated by this study (Aaker, 1997). Through confirming brand relationship quality theory specifically in the FMCG sector, brand love recognized as the key element of the brand relationship quality model acts as an excellent indicator of both emotional and attitudinal loyalty.

### ***Practical Implications***

This study offers practical information and guidance for marketers. First, there is a connection between SE and self-image congruence (Campbell, 1990), and this has a clear impact on brand loyalty (Kressmann et al, 2006). According to (Browning, 2015), SE plays a significant part in strengthening brand value. Advertising that promotes ideal self-congruence is a good way for brand managers to influence brand attachment, which in turn boosts brand value and loyalty. As an example, a global tea company develops cutting-edge gourmet meals with superfood ingredients to figure out the point of differentiation (POD) and frame of reference (FOR), draw in consumers, and strengthen the value of the brand (Shah, 2020).

This study shows how consumer loyalty to FMCG products is determined by peer influence (Susceptibility to Normative Influence). With an understanding of these insights, brand managers can create specific brand communities that have loyalty and loving relationships with their specific brands. As an example, "Elephant House Cream Soda" which is a well-established carbonated soft drink brand in Sri Lanka has created a young community who are loved by the brand using the effect of peer influence.

Social interactions within the brand community have a big impact on customers' intentions to make a purchase. According to this study, SNI enhances consumers' loyalty

to focus brands positively. To help devoted customers, choose products and share ideas, brands should create brand communities through the use of fan accounts, and pages, brand Instagram profiles, and websites where they may share up-to-date reliable product knowledge and information (Flavian et al., 2009).

The primary objective of most companies, especially FMCG manufacturers, is to achieve brand loyalty because it leads to numerous benefits like “repeat purchases”, “positive recommendations (WOM)”, and the “ability to claim price premiums”. The initial results of the study showed that brand loyalty is significantly positively impacted by brand love. The second to fifth findings discussed how self-esteem and SNI impact to above relationship. Here, brand loyalty is the highly focused factor. (Oliver, 1999). To grab these opportunities the insights and findings are very important for decision-makers inside to achieve brand loyalty. For example, Sunlight is a well-known brand of laundry soap in Sri Lanka that is distributed by the Unilever Company. With its exceptional products, Sunlight has captured the hearts and minds of millions of Sri Lankans and is the industry leader in the laundry category (Unilever, 2023). The most crucial factor is that consumers are requesting cleaning soaps by referring to the product name (Sunlight) rather than the phrase “cleaning soaps”.

For FMCG companies operating in Sri Lanka, it is very insightful to understand the effects of brand love, SE, and SNI impact on brand loyalty. According to (Pansari & Kumar, 2017), these findings can assist decision-makers in developing effective marketing strategies (Product decisions, price decisions, place, and promotion decisions) that will boost consumer brand loyalty and their brand's competitive advantage.

This study provides substantiated proof for brand managers, indicating that augmenting a brand's unique features sustains brand equity and elevates the emotional bond between the brand and its customer (Lafreniere et al, 2011). To improve user experience (SE) and, indirectly, boost customer loyalty, brand managers can highlight the distinctive qualities of their products in comparison to those of their rivals. This leads to differentiating our brand and products from the rest of our competitors and ultimately can take sustainable competitive advantages. Strong brand loyalty should be anticipated to offer a competitive advantage in the areas of perceived brand quality, perceived brand leadership, premium pricing, customer satisfaction, retaining existing customers, and generating revenue (Çelik & Gösterimi, 2022).

According to (McAlexander et al, 2002), these brand communities aim to increase the number of loyal consumers by promoting positive word-of-mouth channels and peer reviews. Through the use of SNI, brand managers can run ads alongside review content to boost customer satisfaction (Lin, 2015). Managers can also incorporate reviews and ads with brand prestige. This can ensure a brand's reputation, gain acceptance within its network, and leave customers feeling extremely satisfied with their purchase.

Because their cars express their unique style and self-identity and set them apart from other car enthusiasts, brand loyalists are willing to shell out a premium price of money for their vehicles (Algesheimer et al, 2005). Customers fall in love with brands at the brand love level because of their passion and sense of self-brand connection (Batra et al, 2012). Managers need to identify the customer thinking and behavioral patterns of customers and should apply them to take competitive advantages and ensure long-term success.

### **Limitation and Future Research**

For the first time, the current study explains the correct role of SNI and SE in the relationship between brand loyalty and brand love. This research is done in the Sri Lankan context related to FMCG customers. The data was only gathered in Sri Lanka, a country with a distinct culture. This causes limitations on its cross-cultural applicability and the economic environment. To improve generalizability in consumer-brand relationships and provide a more global conclusion, the study should be carried out in a variety of cultures and economies, including both developed and developing nations.

Most of the research has been done on high-involvement goods and luxury goods such as luxury vehicle brands, home appliances, and jewelry brands by analyzing brand love and brand loyalty relationships (Algesheimer et al, 2005). This research is limited to fast moving consumer goods industry. Data was collected only from FMCG consumers. Yet, there exists a lack of common agreements in researching the relationship in service industries such as the Telecommunication industry, Hotel Industry, and other low-involvement industries. On the other hand, there is still little in the way of research on brand communities like Apple, Gucci, Rolex, Adidas, and Nike. Further studies ought to be conducted within niche brand communities like Gucci, Harley-Davidson, and Apple (Algesheimer et al, 2005). This could eloquently illustrate the role that SE plays in the relationship between brand loyalty and brand love.

This study was carried out at a particular moment and is cross-sectional in nature. Since the relationship between a consumer and a brand is dynamic, future research could employ longitudinal methods to examine how this relationship changes over time and record the most recent developments in consumer psychology (Rindfleisch et al, 2008). This study strongly reminds respondents of the FMCG products they prefer to buy on a daily basis, and the rest of the questionnaire is based on that information. Which created a diversity of brand names. Future research may incorporate a particular brand that is capable of fully capturing the various effects of SNI and SE in the research model.

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