



The Relationship Between Corporate Citizenship and Purchase Intention: Fear of COVID-19 Across the South Asian Region

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ABSTRACT

The empirical evidence reveals that there is a significant lacuna in ascertaining the relationship between corporate citizenship and purchase intention within the fear of covid-19 context in the South Asian region. This is a timely and opportune study carried out under pandemic conditions in the South Asian region where millions of people were affected. Hence this paper focuses the direct relationship between Perceived corporate citizenship and purchase intention, along with the mediating role of brand trust, brand love, brand-consumer identification and the moderating effect of COVID-19 fear appeal across the South Asian region. The study was underpinned, based on Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Fear Appeal Theory (FAT). The research was carried out under the positivist research paradigm using the quantitative research methodology, where the unit of analysis was an individual consumer. The data was analysed using SPSS and SMART PLS. The findings reveal that there is a significant positive impact of perceived corporate citizenship on purchase intention (Direct path), and a partial mediation for the indirect approach. In addition, COVID-19 fear appeal has a significant impact on the relationships between Perceived Corporate Citizenship and Purchase Intention, Brand Trust and Purchase Intention, Consumer-Brand Identification and Purchase Intention, and Brand Love and Purchase Intention. This study is perhaps the first to investigate the impact of Perceived Corporate Citizenship on Purchase Intention along with brand trust, consumer-brand identification and COVID-19 fear appeal in the retail industry, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study finally discusses the theoretical implications,



managerial implications under the “pandemic context” for the region along with the suggested areas for future research.

Keywords: *Brand Love, Brand Trust, Consumer-Brand Identification, COVID-19 Fear Appeal, Perceived Corporate Citizenship, Purchase Intention, Retail, Social Responsibility*

1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 spread rapidly throughout the world during the past two years. The contagious nature of the virus was quite evident as the entire world witnessed and experienced disruptions in many areas of public and private life. The retail business and consumer retail purchasing were no exception. The pandemic created an extraordinary degree of reformation in consumer habits and in supply networks (Wang *et al.*,2020). However, (Beckers *et al.*,2021) found that the COVID-19 pandemic directly impacts the global retail sector and consumer buying habits globally (Goswami and Chouhan, 2021; Fernandes,2020). Therefore, the impact of COVID-19 and the fear-of-COVID-19 are important research areas and very few studies have been conducted to ascertain the way consumer offline and online grocery shopping patterns have changed during the COVID-19 crisis (Wang *et al.*,2020).

Companies embrace corporate citizenship because it reduces obstacles and delivers services and products to people who need them. Therefore, it is appropriate that companies double their involvement in corporate citizenship during the present COVID-19 epidemic (SemiColonWeb,2021: Peters,2020). When it comes to COVID-19, Corporate Citizenship (CC) initiatives must have the appropriate approach and the tone (Peters,2020). Measures of CC reflect that an increasing number of firms are engaged in CC and consider it as a strategic cornerstone and as a strategic tool for an organisation's sustainability (Lin and Liu, 2017) (Newman *et al.*, 2014). However, no empirical studies have been carried out so far to examine the relationship between CC and consumer purchase intention during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since CC refers to "a company's social obligations", it involves the concept of corporate social responsibility and reflects how well companies satisfy shareholders' legal, ethical, and economic obligations (Hayes,2021). Corporate citizenship (CC) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are synonyms (Valor, 2005; Tsai *et al.*, 2014; Hayes,2021). As stated by Lin and Liu, (2017), Corporate citizenship is vital for organisations' sustainability, and such activities create an impact on consumer behaviour (Fernández Ferrin *et al.*, is 2020) and purchase intention. This has an impact on brand trust, brand love and brand identification (Marin and Ruiz 2007; Tsai *et al.*, 2014; Delgado-Ballester *et al.*,2017).

Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Emerson,1976) explains reciprocal interactions between engaging parties (Prentice *et al.*,2019). SET is the outcome of an exchange procedure. Unfortunately, academic studies have not contributed adequately from the theoretical perspective to explain the link between SET and CC. As a result, this lack of theoretical rigour restricts the usefulness of SET (Cropanzano *et al.*,2017). Based on the current literature, this study's primary research question is:

RQ1. Is there a relationship between corporate citizenship and purchase intention during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The important mediators between corporate citizenship and purchase intention are consumer-brand identification (CBI), brand trust (BT) and brand love (BL). Empirical research reveals that organisations benefit from creating consumer trust and identification, which in turn influences behavioural intentions. (Keh and Xie,2009), argued that sustainable customer–firm relationships are improbable. However, as stated by Karjaluoto *et al.* (2016), sustainable customer–firm relationships are improbable only without a strong emotional bond between the two entities. This emotional bond is called brand love, and it is considered an important construct in customer behaviour studies. CSR activities enhance the emotional bond between consumer, brand trust and brand love. Furthermore, brand trust impacts on brand love and influences consumer purchase intention (Aureliano-Silva *et al.*,2022). However, Javed and Khan (2020), suggest that new studies are needed to investigate

the underlying mechanism that facilitates the creation of this emotional link with brands, going beyond the existing state-of-the-art technology, in order to describe how brand love is created. CBI is viewed as the extent to which the customer cognitively observes a relationship between his/her personal identity and the brand's identity (Davvetas and Diamantopoulos, 2017; Kumar and Kaushik, 2018).

Furthermore, this research examines the antecedents and dynamics of impulse buying patterns during the increase of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the consequences of impulse buying behaviour during this fear-based period (Eger *et al.*, 2021). These social interpretations of COVID-19 pandemic fear appeals are believed to lead to impulsive buying among customers, which was not the sole intention of COVID-19 pandemic fear appeals. Thus, the main objective of this study is to investigate the evolution of customer buying behaviour during the uncertain, anxious and fearful period covered by the COVID-19 pandemic (Naeem, 2020). Apart from the reality of the deadly COVID-19 virus, there is the 'fear' component, which is fuelled by hedonic and utilitarian motivations. While Fear Appeal Theory (FAT) dominated marketing studies in the past, only one or two studies have been conducted recently to examine whether fear of COVID-19 impacts on consumer purchase intention (Wang and Chou, 2020). Therefore, this study focuses on FAT to examine the “fear of COVID-19”. To this end, the following research question was developed to fill the gaps in the current literature.

RQ2. Do brand trust, consumer-brand identification and brand love have a mediating influence on the relationship described by RQ1 and

RQ3 Does the fear of the COVID-19 pandemic have a moderating impact on the relationship described by RQ1?

The objectives of this study are based on aforesaid research questions. In order to attain these research objectives, the current study was conducted using the theoretical lenses of the social exchange and fear to appeal theories.



2. A SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

2.1 The COVID-19 Crisis

Since the COVID-19 virus was discovered in late December 2019, practically, it has had an impact on every area across society and the global economy, including the retail, food and agriculture industries (Wen *et al.*,2021). Worldwide concern has focused on the discovery of the most mutated coronavirus variety discovered up to now. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this new variation has been dubbed Omicron (B.1.1.529) (Daria *et al.*,2021). Furthermore, Daria *et al.* (2021) stated that South Asian countries have not yet fully recovered from the wave of the Delta variant of the coronavirus. Densely populated South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka reported the *delta* variant among their populations. Therefore, the pandemic crisis took a drastic turn due to record-breaking new cases and deaths in South Asian countries (WHO 2021).

The COVID-19 epidemic was threatening nearly two billion individuals in the South Asian Region which placed all other activities on the back burner as a result of the extent and the speed to which the pandemic was spreading. Thousands of workers were laid off as a result of many governments' efforts to stop the further development of COVID 19 by shutting down businesses involving personal connections. Consequently, newly unemployed people also cut back on their overall spending and consumer behaviour (Khan *et al.*,2021).

2.2 Corporate Citizenship

In the 1980s, a new phrase for the business-society interaction was coined. Globally, the notion of corporate citizenship has steadily evolved into a collection of business practices beneficial not only to society in general but also to business enterprises (Maignan and Ferrell,2000). Corporate citizenship, as per (Lin *et al.*,2010), is often referred to as corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate duty, or ethical business. Since it is a sort of corporate self-regulation that is integrated into a company strategy (Lin *et al.*,2010), corporate citizenship is considered a more

accurate terminology when discussing the 'social' components of corporate responsibility (Waddock and Smith,2000).

Corporate citizenship has five dimensions which are critical to this study, namely, economic, legal, philosophical, strategic and normative (these responsibilities should extend beyond the mere generation of wealth) (Küskü and Zarkada-Fraser,2004; Tasi *et al.*,2014). Corporate citizenship has garnered both academic and practitioner interest in recent decades (Lin and Liu, 2017), and yet, there is limited empirical evidence related to corporate citizenship in the retail sector in the COVID-19 pandemic scenario.

2.3 Corporate Citizenship and the Impact Of COVID-19 on the Retail Sector

COVID-19's substantial alterations to the external environment have had a variety of effects on the retail industry's global operations (Abeam,2021). Covid-19, as a pandemic, has the potential to influence the development of social responsibility actions in marketing, and it represents an excellent opportunity for businesses to embrace more genuine and authentic forms of social responsibility, and contribute to resolving urgent global, social and environmental challenges (He and Harris,2020).

Accordingly, retail firms must prioritise social responsibility to overcome the worldwide COVID-19 dilemma, as social responsibility efforts highlight the importance of donations of all forms. These range from product and monetary donations to community support through access to counselling and at-home activities, or even sharing content on engaging ways to use a company product at home, creating limitless opportunities. Additionally, retailers can demonstrate their concern for society which will increase retail brand trust, identification, and purchase intention (Pantano *et al.*, 2020).

2.4 Brand Trust

Brand trust (BT) has emerged as a vital component of the retail business during the COVID-19 crisis. It helps to create an emotional connection between the brand, society, and the client (MacKenzie and Rathore,2020). The notion of trust, in general,



has been researched in detail since the 1960s, if not earlier. The topic has attracted an enormous amount of attention in a range of areas such as psychology, sociology, economics, management and marketing (Hernandez-Fernandez and Lewis,2019). Brand trust, which is really a psychological state, is defined as "accumulated presumptions regarding the brand's validity, integrity, and virtue" (Gurviez and Korchia,2002). The literature shows that corporate citizenship affects trust (Tsai *et al.*, 2014), but not brand trust. Trust appears to be required for long-term consumer-brand relationships (Abid *et al.*,2019). Consumers trust brands because they believe that they would not be exploited (Anderson and Weitz,1992).

A customer's faith in a company's brand affirms that the brand will benefit the consumer (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman,2001). Customers who trust a brand generate positive feelings about its goodness, honesty, and integrity. This strengthens the brand's relationship with the consumer and his/her buying intention (Frasquet *et al.*,2017). Socially responsible acts also assist customers to establish a positive brand trust and consumer-brand identity (Du *et al.*,2007; Coelho *et al.*,2018). Due to this fact that customer brand recognition is a critical component of this study, no literature was available to confirm how it works during a pandemic.

2.5 Brand Love

In recent years, there has been growing interest in a novel concept that characterizes consumer–brand relationships: Brand love (Wang *et al.*,2019; Zhang *et al.*,2020; Madadi *et al.*,2021). Empirical studies reveal that Fournier (1998) was the first to develop the notion of “love” to describe how customers may feel about a brand. Since then, the study of the consumer–brand relationship in terms of love has resulted in a plethora of research that has used various theoretical perspectives (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Delgado-Ballester *et al.*,2017). Attachment to a brand, which is a prerequisite for brand love, develops over time and necessitates emotive memories that link brand love to the self (Baena,2018). Brand love is discovered to be built on a variety of affective-laden perceptions, including self–brand integration, passion-driven behaviours, positive emotional connections, a long-term relationship, a positive



overall attitude (attitude certainty and confidence), and separation distress (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Baena, 2018). This study aims to introduce brand love as a mediator of the CC–purchase intention relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because the pandemic emerged in 2019, and the literature revealed that no prior study has investigated the mediating role of brand love on these relationships (Baena, 2018).

2.6 Identification of Consumer Brands

Consumer–brand identification (CBI) is critical to comprehend as to how, when, and why businesses assist customers in articulating their identities (Stokburger-Sauer *et al.*, 2012). CBI demonstrates how a brand reflects who a consumer is to himself/herself (Johnson *et al.*, 2011; Ma, 2020) and contributes to the development of the consumer's self-concept in a variety of ways (Ma, 2020). Consumers are more likely to form and maintain relationships with a brand if they experience a stronger sense of self, as well as social and psychological advantages associated with that brand (Park *et al.*, 2010; Elbedweihy *et al.*, 2016), which increase purchase intention (Kumar and Arun, 2018). Consumers with a low level of brand recognition, on the other hand, may show lower purchase intention (Marin *et al.*, 2018). However, according to several empirical studies, brand recognition does not directly correlate with purchase intentions (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Stokburger-Sauer *et al.* 2012,). According to Stokburger-Sauer *et al.* (2012), brands are increasingly concerned with social benefits; hence, a brand is considered to be a driver of CBI. Brand identification. Therefore, it is a critical tool for discovering and building long-term consumer-brand ties (Arachchi *et al.*, 2022),

2.7 Purchase Intention

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted consumer lifestyles and purchasing behaviour (Verma and Naveen, 2021). Additionally, the COVID-19 epidemic has altered the purchasing intentions of consumers worldwide (Intelligence, 2021). Intentions can be defined as "a person's subjective judgments of a certain item to respond with a specific behaviour" (Moon *et al.*, 2017). According to Gordon (2021), corporate citizenship refers to a corporation's standards that demonstrate its commitment to

corporate social responsibility (Arachchi *et al.*,2022). These standards are a critical component of the path to achieving corporate citizenship. Social responsibility activities have a direct and indirect effect on purchase intention (Lee and Lee, 2018; Arachchi and Mendis, 2021).

Retailers' socially responsible actions have the potential to influence consumer attitudes and behaviour (Arachchi and Samarasinghe,2022). Consumers may place their faith and confidence in such retailers (Tofighi and Bodur,2015). Additionally, consumers may have favourable attitudes and hopeful ideas towards these businesses, since they feel the latter attempts to offer goodwill and advantages to the whole of society (Dang *et al.*,2020). Additionally, Souza-Monteiro and Hooker, 2017; Bianchi *et al.*,2019, stated that social responsibility perceptions influence brand images and brand trust (Kim *et al.*, 2018) of retail businesses, which may affect customer purchases and loyalty, impacting the financial performance of retail organisations in the long run (Souza-Monteiro and Hooker, 2017).

2.8 Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (SET) is combined with dialectical theory to create a framework for investigating corporate social business alliances (Domenico *et al.*,2009). SET is founded on the notion that human contact and social behaviour are an exchange of physical or intangible activity depending on the benefits or costs acquired from the encounter (Adongo *et al.*, 2019).

In addition, according to Blau (1994), individuals invest in relationships depending on the reward-cost ratio. Thus, people only invest in relationships when the benefits surpass the drawbacks of the connection and are willing to be benevolent towards charity projects and social activities when the rewards or benefits surpass the cost, but are hesitant to donate when the cost outweighs the benefit. As a result, self-benefit appeals that allow donors to gain self-benefits from their donation are more effective than other-benefit appeals.

2.9 Fear of COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic led to lockdowns across the world (Ullah *et al.*,2022), and affected consumer intentions related to retail, this enhanced consumer fear of COVID-19 (Arachchi *et al.*,2022). The city of Shanghai in China was under lockdown for more than a month, and it was expected that it will continue for another month (throughout May) due to fear-of-Covid-19 (Aljazeera,2022). Fear is defined as “a basic, intense emotion aroused by the detection of imminent threat, involving an immediate alarm reaction that mobilizes the organism by triggering a set of physiological changes” (Quadros *et al.*,2021). Fear and uncertainty during the Covid-19 pandemic inevitably influenced consumer behaviour, demonstrating that customers began to worry more about their health and the environment (Sajid *et al.*,2022) This has seriously affected the living conditions of the populations of many countries (Rodríguez-Hidalgo *et al.*,2020). Therefore, Fear of COVID-19 has become an inevitable concern in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as it worsens emotions, fears and behavioural responses (Quadros *et al.*,2021) and impacts on retail sale volumes and consumer purchase intentions (Addo *et al.*,2020).

2.10 Fear Appeal Theory (FAT)

Threat information, according to fear appeal theories, can considerably influence individuals' threat appraisal and emotions such as fear and anxiety, which can also be influenced by individuals' personalities and prior experience (Floyd *et al.*,2000). Furthermore, the fear appeal theory was used to investigate the dynamics of buying behaviour in the aftermath of the deadly 2019 coronavirus epidemic, since it is the most appropriate theory for the study of consumer purchase behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic (Addo *et al.*,2020).

3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The process of corporate citizenship is "much more participatory" than earlier types of social responsibility and charity. Companies develop their own capacities to define and outline their obligations and place a value on their social and environmental

duties (Burchell and Cook, 2006). This realisation and care for environmental and societal activities have resulted in purchasing intention, which refers to customers' readiness to purchase relevant products (Joshi and Rahman, 2015). FAT was used to investigate the dynamics of buying behaviour in the aftermath of the deadly 2019 COVID pandemic (Addo *et al.*, 2021). Based on these observations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁. Perceived corporate citizenship is positively related to consumer purchase intention

Corporate citizenship has a substantial impact on brand trust, since brand trust is a calculative process based on an object's or party's ability to perform its duties (i.e. corporate citizenship) and an evaluation of the costs vs. benefits of remaining in the connection (Tsai *et al.*, 2014). Recent empirical research (Tsai *et al.*, 2014) has affirmed that brand trust has an impact on perceived corporate citizenship. Trust appears to be required for long term consumer brand relationships (Abid *et al.*, 2019). FAT, as per Floyd *et al.*, (2000) pointed out that trust can considerably influence individuals' threat appraisal and emotions. The following hypothesis is developed based on these arguments.

H_{2a}. Perceived corporate citizenship is positively related to brand trust

Implementing socially responsible activities results in more visible actions, such as those engaging consumers or the community (Bravo *et al.*, 2011), as the brand outcomes lead to consumer-brand identification (Coelho *et al.*, 2018). According to Stokburger-Sauer *et al.* (2012), brand social benefits are primarily concerned with boosting the social interaction possibilities and rewards provided by a brand. Researchers believe that brand social benefits are a driver of CBI. Arachchi *et al.*, (2022) stated that brand identification is critical for discovering and building long term consumer-brand ties. Based on these observations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_{2b}. Perceived corporate citizenship is positively related to consumer-brand identification

Ethical CSR is the obligation of firms to execute (without legal requirements) the best practices demanded by society members. Such behaviours are indicative of a company's healthy social traditions, adherence to ethical standards, and good corporate citizenship (Lee *et al.*,2020). SET is founded on the notion that human contact and social behaviour are an exchange of physical or intangible activity. Corporate citizenship activities actively enhance the consumer experience (Arachchi and Mendis, 2022) and brand love (Nikhashemi *et al.*,2019). However, there is a dearth of empirical studies that examine the direct relationship between corporate citizenship and brand love. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H_{2c}. Perceived corporate citizenship has a positive influence on brand love.

In general, trust is known to be a predictor of purchase behaviour (Chae *et al.*,2020). Brand trust has a beneficial influence on purchase intention because it fosters highly valued trade interactions. Brands that make customers cheerful, joyous, or friendly increase buying intent (Matzler *et al.*, 2008). According to Tsai *et al.* (2014), brand trust reduces uncertainty and increases customers' purchase intent. Furthermore, it has been confirmed that purchase intention is usually influenced by brand trust. Brand trust can have a positive effect on purchase intention and buying, reducing the risk of uncertainty and inducing purchasing (Chae *et al.*,2020). FAT confirms that due to fear to appeal, consumers may change their purchase intention. Based on the above, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₃. Brand trust is positively related to consumer purchase intention

In CBI, a brand symbolises who a consumer is to himself/herself (Johnson *et al.*,2011; Ma,2020) and aids in developing his or her self-concept in various ways (Ma,2020). Marketing scholars (Johnson *et al.*,2011) agree that consumers are more likely to develop and maintain relationships with a brand if they feel a stronger sense of self and social and psychological benefits from that brand (Park *et al.*,2010; Elbedweihy *et al.*,2016), and this increases purchase intention (Arachchi, 2022). Thus, brand is

considered to be a driver of consumer brand identification (Arachchi et al, 2022). FAT says that due to fear, behaviour can be adjusted or changed. As a result of the above reasoning, the following hypothesis emerges:

H₄. Consumer-Brand Identification is positively related to consumer purchase intention

The well-established predictor of customer behaviour is purchasing intention. Purchase intention is influenced by cognitive elaborations of brand involvement and quality information of brand love. Of course, actual buying behaviour and purchase intentions differ (Verma,2020). Recently, research has revealed that brand love has a favourable and significant effect on the purchase intentions of luxury companies (Rodrigues and Rodrigues, 2019). However, current research is limited in its focus with regard to analysing this link from the perspective of a growing retail industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though FAT affirms that consumer behaviour changes due to fear, whether this was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic remains doubtful. As a result, the study seeks to examine the influence of brand love on retail sector purchase intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following hypothesis has been constructed on this basis.:

H₅. Brand love is positively related to consumer purchase intention

Furthermore, the impact of social responsibility ratings on customer brand identification has previously gained empirical support (Du *et al.*, 2007; Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2004). Brand identification provides psychological advantages to customers by increasing their self-esteem, making people more likely to form favourable attitudes and behaviours toward the brand (Abid *et al.*, 2019). SET confirms that individuals invest in relationships depending on the reward-cost ratio. In this sense, a firm's participation in socially responsible activities may confer customers with high self-esteem in terms of their social and ethical images (Agyei *et al.*,2021). (Kuenzel and Halliday,2008). Taking these facts into account, the following hypothesis is proposed to test the mediating effect.

H₆. The relationship between Perceived corporate citizenship and Purchase intention is positively mediated by Consumer-brand identification

According to Hur *et al.* (2014), actions of socially responsible companies have a considerable and positive effect on one or two dimensions of customers' confidence related to brand credibility (Swaen and Chumpitaz, (2008). Furthermore, retailers' social responsibility limitations have a significant and favourable impact on customers' trust (Louis *et al.*, 2019), and influences consumer buying intention in stores (Chen *et al.*, 2015; Frassetto *et al.*, 2017). Both SET and FAT theories focus on these aspects. Based on the above studies, it is proposed that brand trust has a mediating effect on the link between perceived corporate citizenship and purchase intention:

H₇. The relationship between perceived corporate citizenship and purchase intention is positively mediated by brand trust

Brand love has been used as the mediator in this research study (Algharabat ,2017; Kumar *et al.*,2021). Corporate citizenship seeks to ensure that every person associated with an organisation is empowered to be able to contribute to it creatively. One dimension of corporate citizenship is related to transparency (Windsor, 2001) and transparency enhances stakeholder satisfaction and emotions (Post and Berman,2001), when it is developed over a period of time. Emotional memories link the product or service and the self and that link is called brand love (Baena,2018). FAT says that due to feat of appeal, behavioural changes occur which would change the intentions of buying. Limited research has examined the mediating role of brand love (Huang, 2017), and no studies have looked into it as a mediator in CSR purchase intentions (Javed and Khan, 2020) and the relationship between CC and purchase intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been formulated.

H₈. The relationship between perceived corporate citizenship and purchase intention is positively mediated by brand love.

When a brand maintains and establishes a durable trade connection with its clients, (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), it would meet the emotional requirements of customers.

As a result, the brand can trigger favourable customer behaviour. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) believe that when a customer interacts with a brand and considers it as a representation of their self-identification, the connection between the customer and the brand will go from contentment to love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Unal and Aydin, 2013). Because the consumer feels the brand is trustworthy and believes that brand's promises, brand trust can minimize uncertainty about customers' purchases and reinforce the emotional antecedents (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). According to Song *et al.* (2012), brand affect impacts brand trust. This is in contrast to FAT. Brand trust drives brand excitement, which is one of the components of brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013), and brand trust influences brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2020; Madadi *et al.*, 2021). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₉: Brand trust has a positive influence on brand love.

In terms of social responsibility, personal standards appear to be the primary rationale for individuals' proclivity towards supporting initiatives (Stern, 2000). Beyond the reality of the deadly COVID-19 is the 'fear' component, which is driven by hedonic and utilitarian motivations. Fear appeals, based on FAT, are persuading statements intended to transmit facts or to frighten people by presenting or exaggerating the negative consequences of disregarding a specific warning. Marketers frequently employ this method to entice clients to purchase their items. A fear appeal can be divided into two parts: risk control and fear control (Witte & Allen, 2000; Addo *et al.*, 2020). FAT has significant relevance to these two dimensions. However, lack of empirical evidence related to these factors proves the worthiness of formulating the following hypotheses.

H_{10a}. COVID-19 fear appeal moderates the relationship between perceived corporate citizenship and purchase intention

H_{10b}. COVID-19 fear appeal moderates the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention

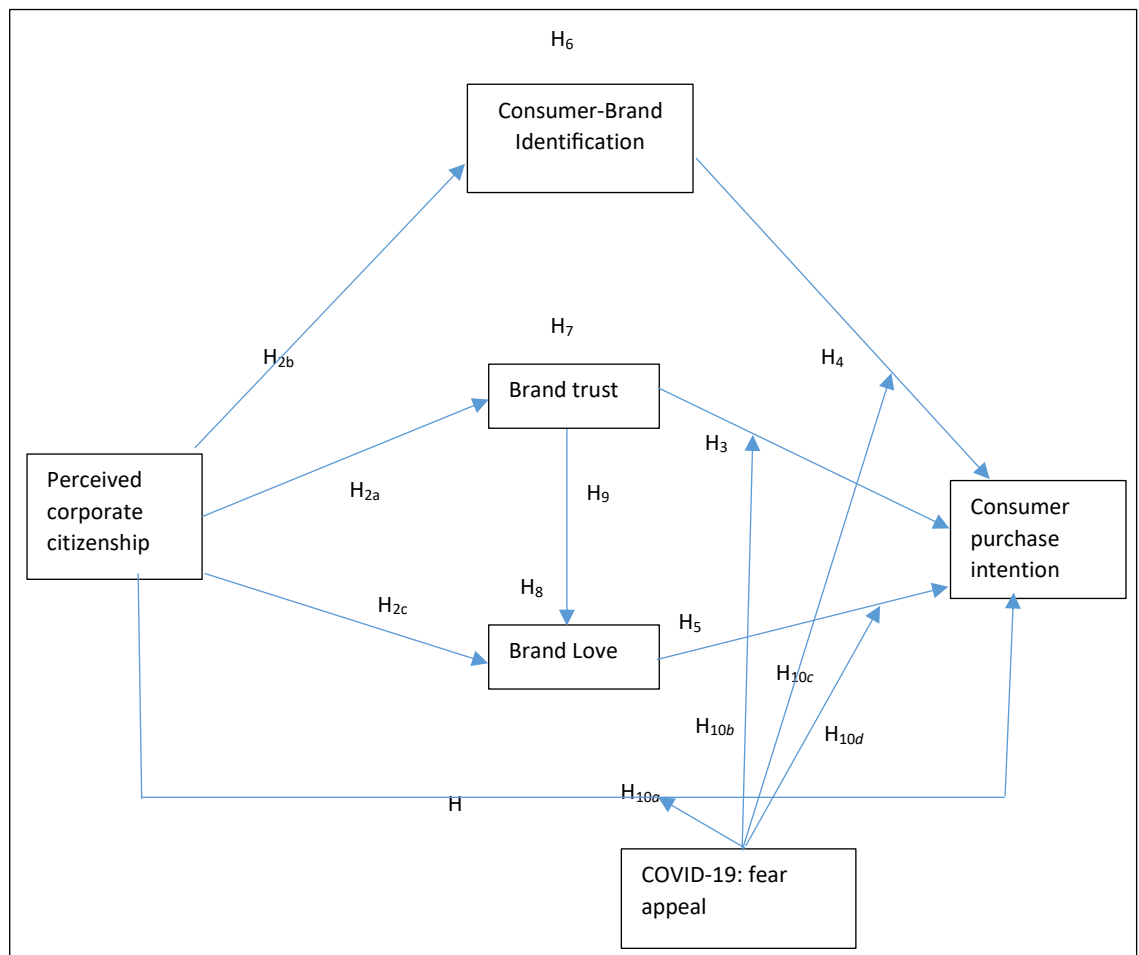
H_{10c}. COVID-19 fear appeal moderates the relationship between consumer-brand identification and purchase intention

H_{10d}. COVID-19 fear appeal moderates the relationship between brand love and purchase intention.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

Based on the hypotheses formulated above, Figure 1, presents the conceptual framework of this study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Source: Author Generate

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 General Research Methodology

In order to meet the research objectives, and to address the research questions a survey was carried out among regular consumers who work for national retail brands through mass and medium level retail sectors (textile and food) based on market shares and the number of outlets (Schramm-Klein *et al.*, 2013; Arachchi *et al.*, 2022, ²Arachchi, 2022). These consumers were chosen from Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Homogeneity of the sample in these countries is comparatively high. Hence the outcome of the study can be generalized. The study is based on grounded positivism (Saunders *et al.*, 2011) and is a non-contrived study (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The researcher adopted a quantitative research design as the methodology of the study with a deductive approach. A questionnaire was administered to collect quantitative data through the online survey method via WhatsApp, Facebook and email (Gupta & Wadera, 2020; Arachchi & Samarasingha, 2023). The data for the study was collected during July to October, 2021. This period was the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in the South Asian Region (Statista Research Department, 2021). The researcher used a self-administered questionnaire method to collect the relevant data through a "stratified random sampling" technique (Gschwend, 2005).

The sample size was selected through subjective methods and comprised 1550 individuals who were retail consumers from Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and the study was performed using SPSS and Structural Model analysis using Smart PLS. Especially, India Pakistan and Bangladesh were selected as these three countries represent over 1.5 billion population and key countries in the South Asian region along with Sri Lanka.

The unit of analysis was an individual retail consumer. Out of the 1550 questionnaires that were distributed, 1152 respondents (Sri Lanka- 173, India - 489, Pakistan-301 and Bangladesh-189) returned completed questionnaires, and these responses were entered into SPSS and treated for missing values. The effective rate of response after discarding ineligible and unreachable respondents from the sample (Saunders *et*

al.,2011) was 74%. However, 54 outliers were detected via analysis of the residual scatter plot, and four hundred and eleven (n=1098 including Sri Lanka- 162, India - 471, Pakistan-293 and Bangladesh-172) questionnaires were used for the final analysis, as per the Krejcie and Morgan estimation (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970).

4.2 Measurements

One of the measures used in this study was Corporate Citizenship, which was measured via the five perspectives of economic citizenship, legal citizenship, ethical citizenship, general philanthropic citizenship and strategic philanthropic citizenship, based on the study by Tsai *et al.* (2014), through 20 items. Brand trust was measured using the three perspectives of Integrity, Benevolence and Credibility, according to Abid *et al.*(2019), through 7 items. Consumer-Brand Identification was measured using five items based on Davvetas and Diamantopoulos (2017). Referring to a study by Martínez-Lorca *et al.* (2020) & Kim *et al.*(2021), COVID-19 fear appeal was measured using four items, and, in addition,, Brand Love was measured using three items while Purchase Intention was measured based on Tsai *et al.*(2014), through three items. The initial items were included in English and then, they were translated into the native languages of Tamil, Marathi, Malayalam, Telugu, Urdu and Bengali which were the languages of the relevant regions. The items were modified as per applicable to the current pandemic.

The constructs in this study were measured using a 7-point Likert scale based on the literature. The pilot study was carried out primarily to assess the extent of reliability and validity of the research questionnaire (Kothari, 2004), and it was conducted on 20% of the overall research sample (300 respondents). The pilot test confirmed that the survey items had reliability scores above 0.70 (as measured by Cronbach's alpha), indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency (Nunnally,1978) reliability, where the values were 0.890 (Perceived Corporate Citizenship), 0.830 (Brand Trust), 0.814 (Consumer-Brand Identification), 0.847 (Brand Love), 0.745 (COVID-19 Fear Appeal) and 0.756 (Purchase Intention).

5. RESULTS

The data analysis and the findings of the study initially assessed the measurement model (SPSS) and then examined the structural model to test the hypotheses. First, data screening part was conducted by using SPSS software and upon analysis of the multi variate assumptions, moved to SMART PLS for model analysis (Arachchi and Samarasinghe,2023). The hypotheses were tested using a structural equation model (SEM). The measurement model and the structural model are the two phases in the analysis procedure. The measurement model assesses the theoretical model's reliability and validity, whereas the structural model assesses the constructs' predictions (Santos and Schlesinger,2021). The measurement scales of the study were adopted from past studies and all first order and second order latent constructs had reflective measurement scales.

5.1 Measurement Model Assessment

Data analysis was carried out commencing with the data screening process. Elimination of incomplete responses resulted (Arachchi *et al.*,2022) in a sample size of 1098. In line with Hair (2011), items which had factor loading values less than 0.5 were removed (BRC2, SDC1 & SDC2), and the model was re-tested for validity. Thereafter, statistics for validity and reliability were calculated with the standardised factor loadings. The results of the reliability and validity testing are given in Table 1.

Table 1 - Reliability, validity, and CFA measurements

Indicators	Indicators	Standardized loading	Mean	SD	α	Discriminant validity							
						CR	AVE	BRT	CBI	CVD	PCC	BL	PI
Brand Trust			4.890	1.347	0.863	0.889	0.576	0.759					
[The name of the company/ Brand] is a company that can ... during COVID-19													
Integrity													
This brand is always honest with its consumers.	BRI1	0.894	4.850	1.300									
This brand is always sincere with consumers.	BRI2	0.912	4.820	1.270									
This brand expresses an interest in its consumers.	BRI3	0.899	4.810	1.390									
Benevolence													
I think this brand renews its products to take into account advances in research.	BRB1	0.914	4.910	1.360									
I think that this brand is always looking to improve its response to consumer needs.	BRB2	0.905	5.070	1.360									
Credibility													
I trust the quality of this brand's products	BRC1	0.909	4.880	1.400									
Consumer-brand identification (CBI)			4.900	1.388	0.819	0.839	0.517	0.612	0.719				
[The name of the company/ Brand] is a company that can ... during COVID-19													
I feel a strong sense of belonging to this brand	CBI1	0.516	4.430	1.470									

I identify strongly with this brand	CBI2	0.590	4.480	1.620									
This brand embodies what I believe in	CBI3	0.870	5.040	1.310									
This brand is like a part of me.	CBI4	0.927	5.070	1.300									
This brand has a great deal of personal meaning to me.	CBI5	0.896	5.010	1.320									
COVID-19 fear appeal			4.765	1.240	0.83	0.831	0.554	0.899	0.671	0.744			
When thinking about the COVID-19, to what extent do you feel... – Fearful	CVD1	0.784	5.020	1.140									
I am most afraid of coronavirus-19	CVD2	0.829	5.000	1.100									
When thinking about the COVID-19, to what extent do you feel... – Afraid	CVD3	0.830	4.870	1.170									
When thinking about the COVID-19, to what extent do you feel... – Scared	CVD4	0.812	4.660	1.310									
Perceived corporate citizenship			4.995	1.353	0.921	0.925	0.514	0.906	0.601	0.893	0.644		
Perceived economic citizenship													
[The name of the company/ Brand] is a company that can ... during COVID-19													
Ensure to offer competitive prices.	EC1	0.778	4.85	1.39									
Control their production costs strictly.	EC2	0.869	5.07	1.27									
Always strive to lower their operating cost	EC3	0.875	5.14	1.35									
Always improve service and reduce its fare.	EC4	0.749	4.92	1.4									

Perceived legal citizenship			4.855	1.410									
[The name of the company/ Brand] is a company that can ... during COVID-19													
Ensure that its employees act within the standards defined by the law.	LE1	0.788	5.23	1.15									
Refrain from putting aside its contractual obligations.	LE2	0.822	5.27	1.3									
Refrain from bending the law even if this helps improve performance.	LE3	0.812	4.91	1.37									
Always submit to the principles defined by the regulatory system.	LE4	0.819	4.8	1.45									
Perceived ethical citizenship			5.170	1.403									
[The name of the company/ Brand] is a company that can ... during COVID-19													
ET1. Have ethical concerns which transcend the concerns of economic profits.	ET1	0.826	4.83	1.58									
ET2. Ensure that the respect of ethical principles has priority over economic performance.	ET2	0.808	5.22	1.37									
ET3. Be committed to well-defined ethical principles.	ET3	0.928	5.18	1.41									

ET4. Avoid compromising ethical standards in order to achieve corporate goals.	ET4	0.904	5.11	1.43									
Perceived general philanthropic citizenship			4.797	1.343									
[The name of the company/ Brand] is a company that can ... during COVID-19													
DI1. Gives adequate donations to charities.	DI1	0.820	4.82	1.41									
DI2. Gives adequate donations to local schools, hospital or institutions.	DI2	0.850	4.73	1.42									
DI3. Sponsors to improve the public well-being of society	DI3	0.836	4.78	1.27									
DI4. Establishes foundations for social welfare (Special COVID-19)	DI4	0.832	4.88	1.34									
Perceived strategic philanthropic citizenship													
[The name of the company/ Brand] is a company that can ... during COVID-19			4.635	1.320									
SDC3. Never use prohibited hazard for its production or service.	SDC3	0.919	4.64	1.33									
SDC4. Support employees to appropriately utilize information technology to upgrade overall service efficiency (e.g. e-document or e-consulting service).	SDC4	0.907	4.63	1.31									

Brand Love			4.87	1.293	0845	0.742	0.531	0.689	0791	0.765	0.71	0.73	
[The name of the company/ Brand]													
] is a company that can ... during COVID-19													
I love CC related retail brands	BL1	0.680	4.73	1.43									
I am enthusiastic about this retail brands	BL2	0.752	5.23	1.13									
I like this retail brands more than others	BL3	0.652	4.65	1.32									
Purchase intention			4.513	1.513	0.728	0.757	0.528	0.701	0.794	0.776	0.72	0.65	0.727
The likelihood that I would pay for (or continue buying) [the name of the company]'s product is high.	PI1	0.889	4.740	1.420									
My willingness to buy (or continue buying) [the name of the company]'s product is very high.	PI2	0.891	4.180	1.730									
In the near future, I would consider purchasing (or continuing buying) [the name of the company]'s product.	PI3	0.613	4.620	1.390									

Note: (1) CBI- Consumer-Brand Identification; (2) BT-Brand Trust; (3) PI-Purchase Intention; (4) PCC- Perceived Corporate Citizenship; (5) CVD - COVID-19 fear appeal, (6) BL – Brand Love

Source: Developed by authors based on literature survey

Hair (2010) designated the standards of convergent validity criteria as follows: average variance extracted (AVE) higher than 0.5, and composite reliability (CR) higher than 0.7. Additionally, discriminant validity for all constructs was also established as demonstrated by AVE values exceeding corresponding squared correlations for all construct pairs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The Model Fit (Standardised Root Mean Square Residual -SRMR) value was 0.097 which is accepted as it is less than 0.10. (Byrne and Hilbert, 2008). The R^2 value is 0.691 and this is substantial as well (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The Cronbach's alpha of all variables ranged from 0.728 to 0.921, ensuring each construct's reliability. The analysis revealed that the validation statistics were within the accepted statistical parameters.

5.2 Sample Description

The sample's statistical data revealed that 49% of the surveyed respondents were males, while 51% were females. Among the respondents, 31% belonged to the age category of 20–30 years, followed by 43% belonging to the categories 31 to 40 and 26% belonging to the categories 41 to 55. Among the respondents, 22% were single, and 78% were married.

5.3 Assessment of Direct Relationships

First, the direct effects were tested, and the significance of the direct paths were checked. The direct effect of PCC → PI, BRT → PI, PCC → CBI, CBI → PI, PCC → BL, BL → PI, BRT → BL and BRT → PI were the direct hypotheses advanced in the study. Standardised regression weights and *p*-values of these direct effects are given in Table 2.

Table 2 - Standardized Regression Weight And P-Value

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
H1	PCC → PI	0.245	0.245	0.077	3.157	0.002**	Supported
H2a	PCC → BRT	0.838	0.838	0.018	45.637	0.000**	Supported
H2b	PCC → CBI	0.527	0.528	0.044	12.109	0.000**	Supported
H2c	PCC → BL	0.532	0.535	0.046	8.543	0.000**	Supported



H3	BRT -> PI	0.338	0.338	0.047	7.155	0.000**	Supported
H4	CBI -> PI	0.490	0.490	0.044	11.111	0.000**	Supported
H5	BL -> PI	0.389	0.289	0.068	4.542	0.011**	Supported
H9	BT-> BL	0.482	0.345	0.054	9.462	0.012**	Supported
H10a	MOR CVD PCC -> PI	0.786	0.785	0.023	34.365	0.000**	Supported
H10b	MOR CVD BRT -> PI	0.088	0.087	0.037	2.400	0.016**	Supported
H10c	MOR CVD CBI -> PI	0.093	0.090	0.035	2.618	0.009**	Supported
H10d	MOR CVD BL- > PI	0.086	0.087	0.047	3.623	0.007**	Supported

Note: (1) PCC- Perceived Corporate Citizenship; (2) PI-Purchase Intention; (3) BRT- Brand Trust, (4) CBI- Consumer-Brand Identification; (5) CVD- COVID-19 fear appeal; (6) BL – Brand Love
Significant level; * $P < 0.1$; ** $P < 0.05$

As given in Table 2, the p -value of the direct path (Standardised estimates of direct effect) is less than 0.05, and hence, the direct effect is significant. Therefore, the above mentioned direct effect was found to be statistically significant.

5.4 Assessment of Indirect Relationships – Mediating Impact

To understand the role of the mediator (full/ partial), the significance level of both direct and the indirect effects should be assessed. According to Table 3, the effect of PCC -> PI through BRT, CBI, BL is significant as the p -value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Also, as shown in Table 3, the direct effect PCC -> PI, after inserting the mediators, BRT, CBI and BL, is still significant (p -value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05). Baron and Kenny (1986) stated that if both direct and indirect paths are significant, the variable is a partial mediator. Hence, according to the findings of the analysis, BRT, CBI and BL are found to be partial mediators. The alternative hypotheses (H_6 , H_7 and H_8) are accepted, and it can be concluded that, BRT, CBI and BL significantly mediate the effect of PCC on PI.

Table 3 - Standardized regression weight and p -value – Mediated Impact (H_6 , H_7 and H_8)

Hypothesis		P-Value	Decision
PCC -> PI		0.002**	Supported
PCC -> BRT	Direct effect	0.000**	Supported
BRT -> PI	Indirect effect	0.000**	Supported
PCC -> CBI	Direct effect	0.005**	Supported



PCC -> PT		0.002**	Supported
CBI -> PI	Indirect effect	0.000**	Supported
PCC -> BL	Direct effect	0.001**	Supported
PCC -> PT		0.000**	Supported
BL-> PI	Indirect effect	0.000**	Supported

Note: (1) PCC- Perceived Corporate Citizenship; (2) PI-Purchase Intention; (3) BRT- Brand Trust, (4) CBI- Consumer-Brand Identification; (5) CVD- COVID-19 fear appeal; (6) BL – Brand Love
Significant level; * $P < 0.1$; ** $P < 0.05$

Furthermore, the mediating impact is examined by using the ‘decision tree’ of Zhao *et al.* (2010). The mediated effect or indirect effect ($a \times b = 0.378$) and the direct effect ($c=0.234$) both exist and point in same directions. These are statistically significant. Since both effects are in the same direction, one can affirm that there is a complementary partial mediation. Hence, a ‘complementary partial mediation’ can be observed between PCC and PI in this model. Thus, H6, H7 and H8 are accepted. This result supports a conclusion that BRT, CBI and BL partially mediate the relationship between PCC and PI (Baron and Kenny ,1986). There is also a complementary mediation (Zhao *et al.*, 2010) that builds the relationship between PCSR and PI.

5.5 Assessment of Indirect Relationships – Moderating Impact

As per Table 2, COVID-19 fear appeal moderates the relationships between PCC -> PI ($\beta=0.786$, $p<0.05$) BRT -> PI ($\beta=0.088$, $p<0.05$), CBI -> PI ($\beta=0.093$, $p<0.05$) and BL -> PI ($\beta=0.089$, $p<0.05$) respectively, and all these relationships are appeared to be significantly positive.

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Discussion

This study is part of a larger investigation of the favourable influence of PCC on PI in the retail business during the COVID-19 outbreak. PCC has a strong positive direct relationship with PI (H1). This proves that firms may employ socially responsible actions to build long-term connections with customers and gain a competitive advantage. Customers desire socially responsible businesses (Agyei *et al.*,2021).



Consumption and social responsibility are defined as an exchange of physical or intangible activity based on encounter incentives, which affirms SET (Adongo *et al.*,2019). According to this claim, social interactions between firms and customers do occur during the pandemic.

The second set of analysis demonstrated that PCC had a large and beneficial influence on BRT (H2a). Blau (1994) stated that understanding the importance of social incentives like authority and trust above economic concerns has been extended to business partnerships. Brand trust is a calculative process based on an objector party's capacity to execute its obligations and an evaluation of the costs vs benefits of continuing in the relationship, as per Tasi *et al.* (2014). This finding will have the largest future influence on SET.

This study also found a significant positive correlation between PCC and CBR (H2b). The consumer-brand relationship theory describes how customers form relationships with brands (Malär *et al.*, 2011). Brand social benefits are expected to be a driver of CBI, according to Stokburger-Sauer *et al.* (2012) and to drive overall corporate association for excellent brand recognition (Fatma *et al.*,2016). Furthermore, it was proved that there is a high positive correlation between PCC and BL (H2c). Hence, this finding fills the “gap” in the empirical literature. Thus, corporate citizenship activities enhance the consumer experience (Arachchi & Mendis,2022) and brand love (Nikhashemi *et al.*,2019).

Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) claim that brand trust influences purchase intentions positively, while brand identification does not. However, the study found that BRT and brand awareness boosted purchasing intent (H3, H4 and H5). This is because trust allows highly valued trade relationships, and brands that make customers happy, cheerful, or loving, and evoke increased levels of buying intention (Matzler *et al.*,2008;Torres *et al.*, 2017).

In this study, BRT was regarded as a major partial mediator of the association between PCC and PI. Furthermore, customers identify with socially responsible enterprises and are motivated to purchase goods and services from them (Dang *et*

al.,2020). In addition, this study found CBI and BL to be substantial partial mediators of the PCC-PI relationship. Hence H6, H7 and H8 were supported. This bolsters the conclusion that BRT, CBI and BL partially mediate (Baron and Kenny ,1986) the above relationship. A complementary mediation (Zhao *et al.*, 2010) that builds the relationship between PCSR and PI. Tasi *et al.* (2014) and Arachchi *et al.* (2022) found that the PCC and PI relationship has been significantly mediated by BRT, while Arachchi and Mendis (2022), found that PCC and PI was partially mediated by CBI.

In addition, this study also examined the relationship between BRT and BL, and found that there is a high positive correlation. As per (Carrroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Unal and Aydin, 2013), when a customer interacts with a brand and considers it a representation of their self-identification, the connection between the customer and the brand will go from contentment to love. According to Song *et al.* (2012), brand affect impacts brand trust and brand trust drives brand excitement, which is one of the components of brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013), whereby brand trust influences brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Zhang *et al.*,2020; Madadi *et al.*,2021).

Based on the sliver of evidence in the existing literature on how fear appeal influences buying behaviour, this study further affirms the previous findings of Laros & Steenkamp, 2005; Lin & Chen, 2012; Addo *et al.*,2020. This study also examined the influence of COVID-19 fear appeal on the relationship between PCC, BRT, CBI and BL and engaged with fear appeal theory to evaluate how COVID-19 fear appeal impacts consumer PI in the retail industry. As a result, this study found significantly moderating effects of (H10a, H10b, H10c and H11c): PCC -> PI, BRT -> PI, CBI -> PI and BL -> PI by COVID-19 fear appeal.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

The first contribution of this work is the use of the BRT, CBI, BL and PI perspectives in PCC research. Many academic research studies have not contributed adequately towards explaining the link between PCC and PI (Tsai *et al.*,2014). Nothing much is known about the relationship between CC and PI as of yet, and few empirical studies



have been carried out on PCC, BT and the lack of CBI and BL. Inadequate attention has been paid to the mediating effects of BRT, while there is a lack of empirical evidence related to CBI and BL as well. Another contribution is the moderating influence of fear appeal related to COVID-19 in explaining the relationship between PCC and PI.

The second and most crucial contribution is that this study found that PCC causes CBI and that CBI can partially mediate the impacts of PCC on PI. This aspect has received limited attention in the literature. The current study discusses the way CBI mediates the link between PCC and PI by engaging with Social Exchange Theory.

Furthermore, the authors discovered a constraint that is compatible with social exchange theory but has not been stated previously. It was found that PCC generates social values, establishes a consumer-brand tie as an intangible aspect, and leads to purchase intent as a rewarding aspect. In addition, brand love generates motivation towards consumer purchase intention. This motivation took place in part through customer relationships with brands. Future scholars in this field may incorporate this component into their studies. This study also confirms and concludes that BT components (Integrity, Benevolence, Credibility) facilitate the exchange of intangible and more gratifying activity between PCC and PI.

Moreover, individuals often expect reciprocal benefits moderated by fear appeal of COVID-19 such as fear appeal, trust, love and brand relationship behaviours. Accordingly, this study found a moderating impact of fear-of-COVID-19 which is another noteworthy finding. In addition, Fear appeal theory, as per this study, underpins SET, which rests on the notion that human contact and social behaviour are an exchange of physical or intangible activity depending on the benefits or costs acquired from the encounter. This study also found that the relationships between CBI, BRT, BL and PI changes with the fear of COVID-19 which is a novel theoretical implication and contribution of this study.

6.3 Managerial Implications

6.3.1 Common Implications

Besides theoretical contributions, this study has important practical implications for marketers, decision makers and emerging markets. This research displays the importance of marketing in formulating a “social responsibility policy” (Maignan et al., 2005) and a brand policy (Lindgreen et al., 2009) because consumers consider social responsibility when choosing brands. Studying social responsibility at the brand level is crucial since many companies use mixed or multi-brand strategies (Abid et al., 2019).

More importantly, the findings proved the moderating role of FA caused by COVID-19 and indicated that FA positively influenced the relations between BT, BL and CBI. Consequently, managers and marketers of retailers should pay attention to their marketing strategies and advertising to reinforce and enhance customers' trust and love, particularly in times of crises. Moreover, these urgent measures affect businesses' internal and external environments. Thus, companies have sought to safeguard their employees by allowing remote work (speech recognition, chat boxes), reducing business visits and meetings, with the increased usage of Information Technology.

As a result, CC retail leaders should focus more on meeting immediate needs at the regional, local, and international levels, as well as on actions taken to design and manufacture much-needed protective gowns, goggles, one-of-a-kind masks, ventilators, respirators, and other critical supplies and medical equipment for health care workers, first responders, and patients fighting COVID-19. This demonstrates the product gaps in the retail sector.

To increase brand trust and brand love, business managers should help employees and customers with their economic, legal, and strategic philanthropic citizenship. Retail brands also seek to protect staff and consumers by providing safe health benefits. Affordability of important consumer goods should also be promoted. Retailers can also set up "mobile retail outlets" and "mobile social welfare" services



to reduce customer travel during lockdowns to avoid virus transmission during pandemics.

Arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, corporate citizenship strategy will boost future resilience and sustainability of retailers and the global community. The pandemic would, most probably, educate and enlighten companies to be better corporate citizens who can help solve global issues.

Finally, the study proves the exigency for Asian countries to implement and redesign their social responsible regulations and policies to not only overcome the impact of COVID-19 on social and consumer buying behaviours but also future pandemics, if any, in the future.

6.3.2 Regional Implications

In the South Asian context, urban and rural areas should be studied related to the fear of COVID-19 (Suri & Chakrabarty, 2022). Therefore, retail industries have to consider enhanced connectivity, infrastructure facilities and smartphones. Generally speaking, rural populations still rely on basic mobile phones, being without means to purchase smartphones. Therefore, retail industries have to introduce online purchasing processes and minimize consumer gathering. This strategy will enhance brand trust, love and identity of related retail brands.

In addition, there will be a need to implement training programs and welfare activities on COVID-19 prevention methods as part of CC. This will help to reduce the fear of COVID-19 and improve brand love, trust and brand engagement. Furthermore, retailers will be able to develop their promotional and advertising strategies, including communicating the manner in which the fear of COVID-19 can be mitigated and methods of prevention in future.





7. LIMITATIONS, SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Limitations of The Study

This study has been carried out focusing only on retail industries in the South Asian Region. Therefore, the application of the study's outcomes in other geographical contexts could be a limitation. Furthermore, many retail companies were closed due to the lockdowns prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a result, this served as a setback during data collection.

Since the data was collected online, there can be different segments in the region without online and internet facilities. Targeting such segments in the region and gathering data from them also might fill in a few research and literature gaps.

7.2 Directions for Future Research

This study provides ample scope for future research in multiple dimensions. Firstly, the study was based on COVID-19, and future research can focus on how to examine the PCC and consumer PI of the Post-COVID-19 era and how it impacts on brand engagement and brand relationships. Furthermore, conducting a comparative study /analysis of South Asia and East Asia and other regions would contribute to academia as well as to practitioners. Secondly, it is necessary to address one of the limitations, which is of taking a sample only of 1098 persons, due to time limitations and other practical constraints. Therefore, future research is needed, with a broader sample taken from the South Asian region focusing on different industries. (such as fashion retail, hospitality, and banking).

Finally, future researchers will be able to make a comparative analysis of the country-wise impact of fear of COVID-19 and on gender basis. This might provide more opportunities for future research as culture varies from country to country, and because such research can be used for comparison purposes and for policy formulation purposes.

8. CONCLUSION

Drawing inspiration from the social exchange theory and the fear appeal theory, this study examined the swings in PCC, BT, CBI, BL and PI behaviour in the wake of the deadly 2019 coronavirus pandemic in the South Asian Region. This is one of the very few studies that has focused on the given research area during COVID-19. Almost no literature or very limited literature in this field proved the importance of this study, when viewed not only from the academic perspective but also from the managerial perspective. Therefore, it is assumed that this study would help and provide a basis for companies to formulate policies and make decisions on CSR, CC and PI during pandemics.

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