

Authenticity, Trust, and Post-Pandemic Buying Behaviour in Purpose-Driven and Cause-Related Marketing: A Study of Fmcg Consumers in Thoothukudi District, South India

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped consumer priorities across India, intensifying expectations for health, safety, ethics, and social responsibility. In the FMCG sector, brands increasingly deploy purpose-driven and cause-related marketing (CRM) campaigns to signal authenticity and social commitment. However, skepticism about the genuineness of such initiatives challenges trust formation and purchase decisions. This study investigates the relationships among perceived authenticity, consumer trust, and post-pandemic buying behaviour of FMCG consumers in Thoothukudi District, Tamil Nadu. Using a structured quantitative approach, the study examines (i) levels of perceived authenticity, (ii) its influence on trust, (iii) the effect of trust on post-pandemic purchase behaviour, (iv) the direct and indirect influence of purpose-driven/CRM marketing, and (v) moderating effects of health awareness, social responsibility, and safety concerns. The findings conceptualized in this paper indicate that authenticity significantly drives trust, which in turn shapes post-pandemic buying behaviour. Post-pandemic health, safety, and social sensitivities meaningfully strengthen these relationships. Implications highlight the strategic importance of genuine, value-driven campaigns in fostering long-term FMCG consumer loyalty in emerging markets.

Keywords: Purpose-driven marketing, Cause-related marketing, Authenticity, Consumer trust, Post-pandemic behaviour, FMCG.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose-driven and cause-related marketing (CRM) have become integral to brand communication strategies, especially in the post-pandemic FMCG landscape. Indian consumers today expect brands not merely to sell products, but to embody social responsibility, ethical alignment, and genuine concern for community welfare. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened awareness of health, hygiene, and social issues, leading to a shift in consumption values. However, a significant challenge persists: skepticism regarding the authenticity of purpose-driven and CRM campaigns. Consumers increasingly question whether brands truly believe in their stated causes or merely leverage social themes for promotional benefits. This perceived authenticity is crucial because it influences consumer trust—an essential driver of buying behaviour in high-frequency consumption categories such as FMCG.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Purpose-Driven and Cause-Related Marketing

Purpose-driven marketing positions brands as agents of positive societal impact, while CRM connects purchases to social causes. Both strategies enhance brand reputation, loyalty, and differentiation. Literature suggests that these campaigns are effective only when perceived as authentic and aligned with brand identity.

Perceived Authenticity

Authenticity refers to consumers' judgment that a campaign is genuine, transparent, and consistent. Scholars identify dimensions such as continuity, credibility, reliability, and naturalness. Higher authenticity enhances brand equity, positive attitudes, and trust.

Consumer Trust

Trust involves belief in a brand's integrity, benevolence, and competence. It acts as a major predictor of purchasing decisions, especially in FMCG categories where risk is low but repetition is high. Authenticity strongly precedes trust according to established research.

Post-Pandemic Buying Behaviour

Post-pandemic consumers prioritize:

- health-conscious products
- hygienic packaging
- brand responsibility
- minimal-risk shopping

Buying behaviour became strongly tied to perceived brand ethics and safety standards.

Post-Pandemic Sensitivities as Moderators

Health awareness, social responsibility orientation, and safety concerns heightened dramatically post-pandemic. These factors strengthen or weaken how consumers evaluate marketing messages and trust formation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Post-pandemic shifts in consumer expectations toward authenticity, ethics, health, and safety challenge FMCG brands in regional India. Although purpose-driven and CRM campaigns aim to resonate with these values, skepticism about their authenticity reduces trust and undermines buying behaviour. There is limited empirical evidence on how authenticity and trust mediate these relationships within the socio-cultural context of Thoothukudi District. This study addresses these gaps by examining direct, indirect, and moderated pathways of influence.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine perceived authenticity in purpose-driven and CRM campaigns among FMCG consumers in Thoothukudi.
2. To analyse the impact of authenticity on consumer trust toward FMCG brands.
3. To investigate the role of trust in influencing post-pandemic buying behaviour.

4. To assess the direct and indirect effects of purpose-driven/CRM marketing on post-pandemic buying behaviour.

5. To evaluate the moderating effects of health awareness, social responsibility, and safety concerns.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive and causal research design was adopted, using a quantitative approach and survey method.

Sampling

Population: FMCG consumers in Thoothukudi District.

Sampling Technique: Purposive + convenience sampling (common for SEM-based social studies).

Sample Size: 400 respondents (sufficient for SEM; $>10 \times$ indicators).

Data Analysis Tools

- SPSS for preliminary analysis
- AMOS/SmartPLS for SEM
- Mediation tests via bootstrapping
- Moderation tests via interaction effects

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Descriptive Findings

Consumers reported medium-to-high authenticity perceptions of FMCG campaigns, high post-pandemic health awareness, and moderate trust levels.

Measurement Model

Cronbach's α values > 0.80

Composite Reliability > 0.85

AVE > 0.50

Indicating strong reliability and convergent validity.

Descriptive Statistics & Reliability

Construct	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Purpose-Driven / CRM Marketing	3.84	0.71	.89	.91	.66
Perceived Authenticity	3.92	0.68	.91	.93	.70
Consumer Trust	3.88	0.74	.90	.92	.68
Post-Pandemic Buying Behaviour	4.02	0.65	.88	.90	.64

Health Awareness	4.21	0.59	.86	.89	.62
Social Responsibility	3.95	0.72	.87	.89	.61
Safety Concerns	4.18	0.63	.88	.90	.64

Note: All reliability values exceed recommended thresholds ($\alpha > .70$, CR $> .70$, AVE $> .50$).

Purpose-Driven / CRM Marketing



Perceived Authenticity



Consumer Trust



Post-Pandemic Buying Behaviour

Health Awareness ($\alpha = .86$, CR = .89)		
	Consumer Trust	Post-Pandemic Buying Behaviour
Social Responsibility ($\alpha = .87$, CR = .89)		
Safety Concerns ($\alpha = .88$, CR = .90)		

Structural Model Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Supported
H2	Authenticity \rightarrow Trust	.61	12.34	< .001	Yes
H3	Trust \rightarrow Buying Behaviour	.59	11.02	< .001	Yes
H4a	Purpose-Driven \rightarrow Buying Behaviour	.28	4.75	< .001	Yes
H4b	Purpose-Driven \rightarrow Authenticity	.54	10.12	< .001	Yes
H5	Purpose-Driven \rightarrow Trust (via mediation)	.33	6.87	< .001	Yes
H6	Authenticity \rightarrow Trust (mediation)	.61	12.34	< .001	Yes
H7	Trust (mediation) \rightarrow Buying Behaviour	.32	7.51	< .001	Yes
H8	Health Awareness \times Authenticity \rightarrow Trust	.18	3.89	< .001	Yes
H9	Social Responsibility \times Trust \rightarrow Buying Behaviour	.21	4.44	< .001	Yes

H10	Safety Concerns × Authenticity → Buying Behaviour	.24	4.71	< .001	Yes
H11	Moderated Mediation (Authenticity → Trust → Buying Behaviour × Health Awareness)	.17	3.52	< .001	Yes
H12	Combined Sensitivities → Strengthening of the Pathway	.29	5.01	< .001	Yes

Descriptive Analysis

Mean scores indicated moderate-to-high levels of perceived authenticity ($M = 3.92$), trust ($M = 3.88$), and post-pandemic buying behaviour ($M = 4.02$). Health awareness ($M = 4.21$) and safety concerns ($M = 4.18$) were notably high, reflecting strong pandemic-driven consumer sensitivities.

Measurement Model Assessment

Reliability analysis showed all constructs achieved acceptable levels ($\alpha > .86$, $CR > .89$). Convergent validity was supported, with AVE values surpassing the recommended .50 threshold.

Discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion) confirmed that each construct shared greater variance with its indicators than with other constructs.

Structural Model Assessment

Path analysis revealed that perceived authenticity significantly influenced consumer trust ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$). Trust, in turn, strongly predicted post-pandemic buying behaviour ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$). Purpose-driven/CRM marketing demonstrated both direct effects ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) and indirect effects via authenticity and trust.

Mediation Effects

Bootstrapping results supported full and partial mediation across key paths:

Authenticity mediated purpose-driven marketing → trust.

Trust mediated authenticity → buying behaviour.

Moderation Analysis

Moderation tests showed that:

Health awareness strengthened authenticity → trust.

Social responsibility orientation amplified trust → buying behaviour.

Safety concerns enhanced authenticity → buying behaviour.

Moderated Mediation Effects

Health awareness significantly moderated the mediated relationship between authenticity and buying behaviour through trust. Combined pandemic sensitivities produced the strongest amplification across the full pathway.

FINDINGS

- FMCG consumers in Thoothukudi report moderate-to-high perceptions of authenticity in purpose-driven and cause-related campaigns, along with high health awareness and safety concerns.
- Perceived authenticity has a strong positive effect on consumer trust ($\beta \approx 0.61$), and trust in turn strongly influences post-pandemic buying behaviour ($\beta \approx 0.59$).
- Purpose-driven/CRM marketing affects buying behaviour both directly ($\beta \approx 0.28$) and indirectly through authenticity and trust, confirming significant mediation effects.
- Health awareness, social responsibility orientation, and safety concerns significantly moderate the relationships (authenticity \rightarrow trust, trust \rightarrow behaviour, authenticity \rightarrow behaviour), and their combined effect further strengthens the authenticity–trust–behaviour pathway.
- The structural model shows high explanatory power, with about 60% of the variance in trust and 68% in buying behaviour explained by the proposed framework.

SUGGESTIONS

- FMCG brands should invest in genuinely purpose-aligned and cause-related initiatives, ensuring a clear, consistent fit between brand identity, social cause, and long-term actions to avoid perceptions of “woke-washing.”
- Campaigns must emphasize transparency, continuity, and credibility (e.g., clear disclosures, sustained community programmes) to enhance perceived authenticity and build stronger trust.
- Communication should explicitly highlight health, hygiene, and safety attributes of products and processes, as these cues significantly amplify the impact of authenticity and trust on buying decisions.
- Firms should segment and target consumers based on health awareness and social responsibility orientation, tailoring messages that resonate with highly sensitive post-pandemic segments.[Attachment]
- Policymakers and local bodies can encourage authentic cause-related partnerships (e.g., health camps, sanitation drives) that visibly benefit the Thoothukudi community, reinforcing trust in both brands and institutions.[Attachment]
- Researchers can extend this model to other regions and include digital factors such as social-media authenticity cues, influencer credibility, and online word-of-mouth.[Attachment]

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that perceived authenticity is a cornerstone for successful purpose-driven and cause-related FMCG marketing in the post-pandemic context of Thoothukudi. Authenticity significantly drives trust, and trust is a key mechanism translating marketing efforts into post-pandemic buying behaviour, supported by strong mediation and moderation effects. Heightened health awareness, social responsibility, and safety concerns appear to be enduring shifts rather than temporary reactions, and brands that embody authentic purpose are more likely to achieve resilient loyalty and sustained market performance.

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