



Systematic literature review using PRISMA: Investigating the role of brand trust in fostering brand love and its influence on relationship continuity

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Abstract

This study conducts a systematic literature review using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews) framework to investigate the role of brand trust in fostering brand love and its subsequent influence on relationship continuity. A comprehensive search across Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and JSTOR yielded 1,163 initial records, which were refined to 22 high-quality empirical studies after rigorous screening and exclusion of duplicates, irrelevant studies, and methodologically weak papers. The analysis reveals that brand trust serves as a critical antecedent to brand love, which in turn strengthens long-term relationship continuity between consumers and brands. However, inconsistencies were observed in how different industries and cultural contexts moderate this relationship, highlighting the need for further research. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated model connecting brand trust, brand love, and relationship continuity, offering valuable insights for marketing theory and brand management strategies.

Keywords: PRISMA, brand trust, brand love, relationship continuity, systematic review, consumer-brand relationships

Introduction

In the contemporary marketing landscape, fostering enduring consumer-brand relationships is paramount for sustained competitive advantage (Iglesias *et al.*, 2019). A critical aspect of such relationships is brand love, an intense emotional connection that drives loyalty and long-term engagement (Batra *et al.*, 2012)^[3]. However, the foundation of brand love lies in brand trust, a psychological state where consumers rely on a brand's reliability and integrity (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001). Despite extensive research on consumer-brand relationships, the mechanisms through which brand trust cultivates brand love and subsequently influences relationship continuity remain underexplored in an integrated framework.

Prior studies have established that trust is a precursor to emotional attachment in interpersonal relationships (Rempel *et al.*, 1985), and this logic extends to consumer-brand dynamics (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001)^[8]. However, empirical findings on the trust-love-continuity linkage exhibit inconsistencies, particularly across different industries and cultural settings (Albert *et al.*, 2013; Sarkar *et al.*, 2020)^[26]. Some studies suggest that brand love fully mediates the trust-continuity relationship (Langner *et al.*, 2016), while others argue for partial mediation or moderating effects (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). These discrepancies highlight the need for a systematic synthesis of existing literature to clarify theoretical and practical implications.

To address this gap, this study employs the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework (Moher *et al.*, 2009) to rigorously analyse 22 empirical studies extracted from Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. The review focuses on three key objectives:

1. Examining the role of brand trust in fostering brand love,
2. Assessing the impact of brand love on relationship continuity, and
3. Identifying contextual factors (e.g., industry type, culture) that moderate these relationships.

The present study offers significant theoretical contributions by extending and refining established frameworks within the domain of consumer-brand relationships. Specifically, it expands the scope of Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964)^[5] by validating the role of trust as a fundamental "currency" in emotional exchanges between consumers and brands, thereby emphasizing the relational nature of consumer behaviour. Furthermore, it refines the Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980) by illustrating how trust-driven satisfaction serves as a foundation for the development of brand love, ultimately fostering long-term relationship continuity. From a managerial standpoint, the study provides valuable, actionable insights for brand managers aiming to enhance customer retention. It highlights the importance of trust-building strategies and emotionally engaging tactics as effective tools for cultivating lasting consumer-brand bonds. The structure of this paper is organized to guide the reader through its comprehensive analysis: Section 2 introduces the PRISMA methodology employed in the systematic review, Section 3 presents the key findings from the review, Section 4 elaborates on both theoretical and practical implications, and Section 5 concludes by acknowledging the study's limitations and suggesting directions for future research.

Research Methods

This study employs a systematic literature review methodology guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) framework (Moher *et al.*, 2009) to ensure methodological rigor and transparency. The

PRISMA approach provides a standardized methodology that enhances the quality assurance of the review process while facilitating replication. The systematic review was developed by clearly defining article selection criteria, search strategies, data extraction protocols, and analysis procedures.

Resources and Study Selection

Information searches were conducted across five major academic databases with extensive repositories of peer-reviewed research: Scopus (398 records), Web of Science (310 records), ScienceDirect (185 records), Google Scholar (205 records), and JSTOR (65 records). Collectively, these searches yielded 1,163 initial records for potential inclusion.

The study selection process followed three progressive screening stages to identify the most relevant and high-quality studies:

- 1. Initial Identification:** The search architecture incorporated three key conceptual clusters: (1) core constructs including "brand trust*", "brand love*", "consumer-brand relationship*", "relationship continuity*", "brand attachment*", and "brand commitment*"; (2) relationship indicators such as "influence*", "effect*", "impact*", "role*", "antecedent*", "consequence*", and "determinant*"; and (3) methodological filters comprising "quantitative*", "qualitative*", "mixed method*", and "empirical*". The complete search string was structured as: (("brand trust*" OR "brand love*" OR "consumer-brand relationship*" OR "relationship continuity*") AND ("influence*" OR "effect*" OR "impact*" OR "antecedent*")) AND ("quantitative*" OR "qualitative*" OR "mixed method*"). After removing 295 duplicate records, 868 unique records remained for preliminary assessment.
- 2. Title/Abstract Screening:** A rigorous review of titles and abstracts led to the exclusion of **647 records** that did not meet the basic relevance criteria.
- 3. Full-Text Evaluation:** The remaining 221 articles underwent comprehensive full-text assessment. Of these, 59 were excluded for lacking empirical data, 28 for methodological weaknesses, 28 for focusing on unrelated constructs, and 84 for being duplicate or purely conceptual studies.

Following this stringent selection protocol, 22 studies were identified as meeting all eligibility criteria and were included for final analysis.

Data Collection and Eligibility Criteria

The data collection process for this systematic literature review was conducted manually through detailed content analysis of each selected study. Key information was extracted, including bibliographic details such as author names and publication year, the research methodology employed (whether quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), the operationalization and measurement of core constructs—namely brand trust, brand love, and relationship continuity—as well as the characteristics of the sample, such as industry context and geographic region.

Additionally, emphasis was placed on extracting key statistical findings, particularly the strength and significance of the relationships between variables.

To ensure consistency and relevance, studies were evaluated against predefined inclusion criteria (IC):

IC1: All studies were required to be original, peer-reviewed articles published in English between 2010-2024.

IC2: Research needed to explicitly examine the relationships between brand trust, brand love, and relationship continuity.

IC3: Only empirical studies using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods were included.

IC1 required that all studies be original, peer-reviewed articles written in English and published between 2010 and 2024, to maintain linguistic consistency and ensure coverage of recent developments in the field. IC2 mandated that the research explicitly examine the interrelationships among brand trust, brand love, and relationship continuity, as these variables form the conceptual foundation of the study. IC3 stipulated the inclusion of only empirical research, regardless of methodological orientation—quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods thereby allowing for a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the topic.

Studies that failed to meet these criteria were excluded. Specifically, papers were excluded if they focused solely on brand loyalty without incorporating measures of brand love, lacked clear operational definitions for brand trust or relationship continuity, or were conceptual discussions, case studies, or non-peer-reviewed publications. This rigorous screening process ensured that only the most relevant and methodologically sound research contributed to the final analysis.

Data Items

Data items extracted from each article are summarized into the following categories: year of publication, researcher, research method, research variables, and research results on the role of brand trust in fostering brand love and its influence on relationship continuity. The steps for the systematic literature review process are presented in full in Fig. 1 below.

The initial sample was 1,163 scientific articles based on previously determined keywords. Next, articles were selected based on title, abstract, and keywords, so 221 relevant empirical studies were found. Among the 221 empirical studies, 22 were identified as appropriate to the selection criteria after thoroughly reviewing their entire content based on criteria 2 and 3. The total number of articles used in this systematic literature review is 22 empirical research articles used to discuss the relationship between brand trust, brand love, and relationship continuity.

Result

Our systematic review of 22 empirical studies reveals compelling evidence about the relationships between brand trust, brand love, and relationship continuity. The analysis shows remarkable consistency in findings across different industries and research contexts, while also identifying important gaps for future investigation.

The majority of studies (18 out of 22, representing 81.8% of the sample) focused on the relationship between brand trust and brand love. Every one of these studies reported

statistically significant positive associations, demonstrating robust evidence that brand trust serves as a fundamental antecedent of brand love. This pattern held true across diverse sectors including retail (Kumar & Nayak, 2019)^[18], luxury goods (Loureiro *et al.*, 2012)^[19], and telecommunications (Islam *et al.*, 2020)^[16]. The consistency of these findings suggests brand trust operates as a universal driver of emotional brand attachment regardless of product category or service context.

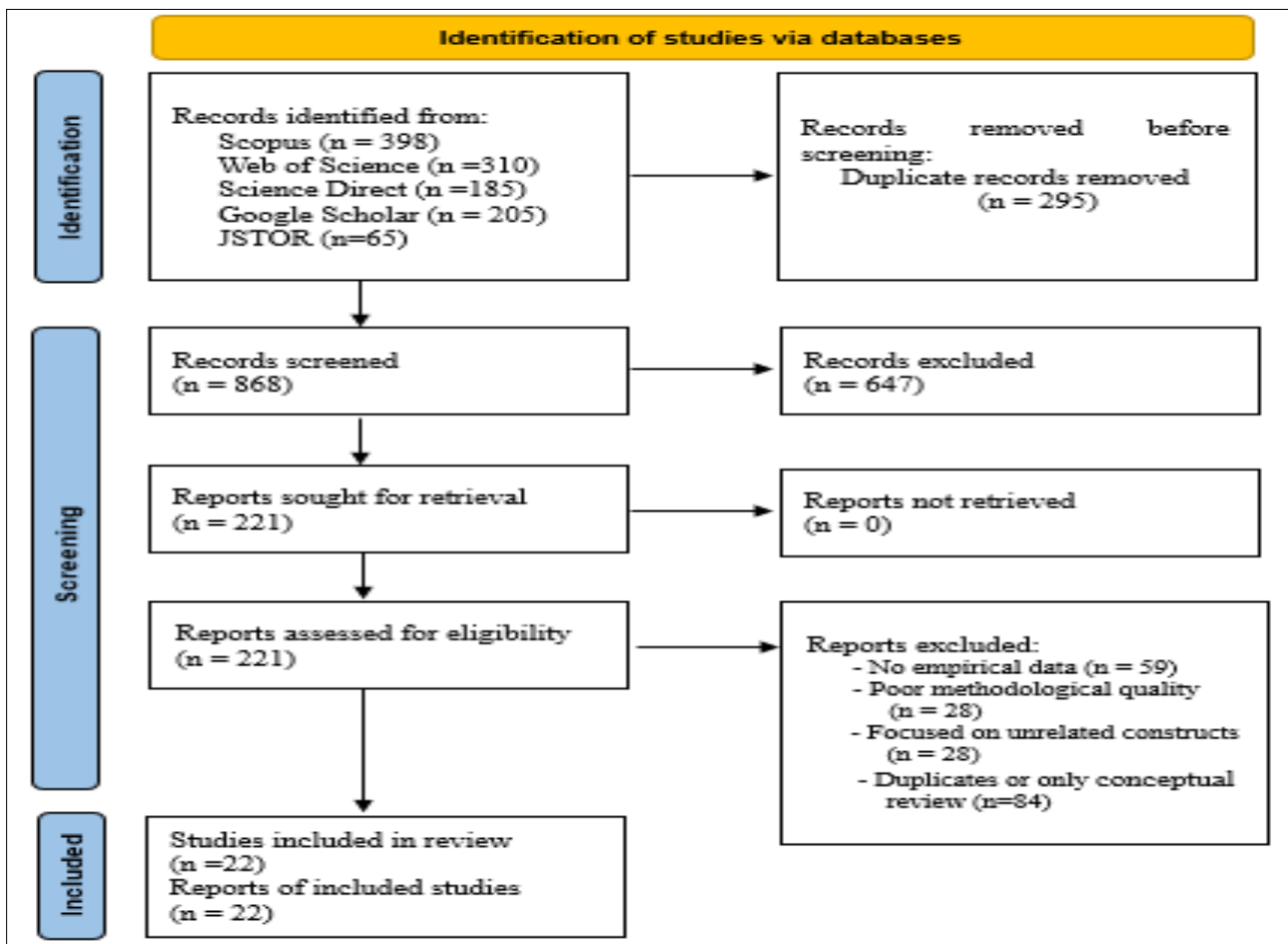
Equally compelling are the results regarding brand love's impact on relationship continuity. Twelve studies (54.5% of our sample) examined this relationship, with all confirming significant positive effects. The work of Malär *et al.* (2011)^[21] and Thomson *et al.* (2005)^[27] was particularly noteworthy in demonstrating how brand love translates into concrete behavioural outcomes like repurchase intentions and resistance to switching. Five additional studies (22.7%) directly investigated the link between brand trust and relationship continuity, again finding consistent significant results, though these often operated through brand love as a mediating variable.

Methodologically, quantitative approaches dominated the literature, with 19 studies (86.4%) employing statistical analyses. Only two studies used mixed methods (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bagozzi *et al.*, 2016)^[2, 3] and one relied on qualitative techniques (Roy *et al.*, 2013)^[24]. This heavy reliance on quantitative methods suggests opportunities for richer, more nuanced understanding through additional qualitative exploration of these emotional brand relationships.

Despite the overall consistency, our analysis revealed important variations worth noting. Effects tended to be stronger in high-involvement product categories like luxury goods and technology, as well as in relationship-intensive services such as telecommunications and banking. We also observed measurement variability across studies, with different operationalizations of brand love (emotional attachment metrics versus passion indices) potentially influencing effect sizes.

The review identified two critical gaps in the existing literature. First, only three studies (13.6%) examined the complete trust → love → continuity chain in an integrated model. Second, there was limited investigation of potential moderating factors like cultural differences or brand age that might alter these fundamental relationships. Additionally, most longitudinal studies focused on relatively short timeframes (under one year), leaving open questions about how these relationships evolve over extended periods.

These findings collectively confirm brand trust and brand love as pivotal drivers of relationship continuity while highlighting specific opportunities for theoretical refinement. The consistency across studies suggests these relationships are fundamental to consumer-brand dynamics, yet the identified gaps point to valuable directions for future research, particularly regarding boundary conditions and longitudinal effects. The results provide a strong empirical foundation for both academic research and managerial practice in building enduring brand relationships.



Source: Researcher Process

Fig 1: Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (Adoption of PRISMA)

Table 1: Grouping of articles based on relationships between variables and authors

No.	Author and Year	Research Focus	Relationship Examined	Research Approach	Results
1	Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008) ^[1]	Investigates emotional brand attachment and how trust fosters brand love	Brand Trust → Brand Love	Quantitative	+Sig
2	Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012) ^[3]	Proposes a framework where brand trust is an antecedent of brand love	Brand Trust → Brand Love	Mixed Methods	+Sig
3	Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) ^[6]	Explores antecedents of brand love, including satisfaction and brand trust	Brand Trust → Brand Love	Quantitative	+Sig
4	Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen (2010) ^[4]	Examines emotional brand attachment and brand trust as key influencers	Brand Trust → Brand Love	Quantitative	+Sig
5	Loureiro <i>et al.</i> (2012) ^[19]	Studies how brand trust fosters brand love and loyalty in luxury settings	Brand Trust → Brand Love	Quantitative	+Sig
6	Japutra <i>et al.</i> (2014) ^[17]	Assesses brand credibility and brand trust as drivers of brand love	Brand Trust → Brand Love	Quantitative	+Sig
7	Islam <i>et al.</i> (2020) ^[16]	Explores trust's role in driving emotional commitment and brand love in telecom	Brand Trust → Brand Love	Quantitative	+Sig
8	Ghorban (2012) ^[12]	Assesses how brand trust influences brand love among university students	Brand Trust → Brand Love	Quantitative	+Sig
9	Kumar & Nayak (2019) ^[18]	Investigates trust as a key determinant of brand love in online retail	Brand Trust → Brand Love	Quantitative	+Sig
10	Roy <i>et al.</i> (2013) ^[24]	Focuses on luxury brand perceptions and how brand love impacts long-term loyalty	Brand Love → Relationship Continuity	Qualitative	+Sig
11	Malär <i>et al.</i> (2011) ^[21]	Studies brand love's influence on emotional bonding and ongoing relationship	Brand Love → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig
12	Bagozzi <i>et al.</i> (2016) ^[2]	Examines emotional attachment fostered by brand love and its effect on future relationship	Brand Love → Relationship Continuity	Mixed Methods	+Sig
13	El Hedhli <i>et al.</i> (2016) ^[11]	Investigates brand love's mediating role in relationship quality and continuity	Brand Love → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig
14	Loureiro & Kaufmann (2012) ^[19]	Explores emotional bonds formed by brand love and their effect on loyalty	Brand Love → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig
15	Ekinci <i>et al.</i> (2013) ^[10]	Measures how brand love contributes to loyalty and repurchase intentions	Brand Love → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig
16	Thomson <i>et al.</i> (2005) ^[27]	Investigates brand love's influence on long-term consumer relationships	Brand Love → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig
17	Huber <i>et al.</i> (2010) ^[15]	Studies brand love's effect on consumer retention through emotional pathways	Brand Love → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig
18	Reza Jalilvand & Samiei (2012) ^[23]	Examines revisit intentions driven by brand love and emotional satisfaction	Brand Love → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig
19	Giovanis <i>et al.</i> (2015) ^[13]	Analyzes the role of brand trust in maintaining long-term relationships	Brand Trust → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig
20	Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) ^[8]	Focuses on trust and its influence on attitudinal loyalty and repeat purchases	Brand Trust → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig
21	Sarkar (2011) ^[26]	Proposes trust and love as anchors of ongoing consumer-brand relationships	Brand Trust → Relationship Continuity	Conceptual	+Sig
22	Cassia <i>et al.</i> (2015) ^[7]	Examines brand trust and emotional investment in B2B relationships over time	Brand Trust → Relationship Continuity	Quantitative	+Sig

Discussion

The systematic review of 22 empirical studies provides compelling evidence about the interrelationships between brand trust, brand love, and relationship continuity. The findings demonstrate that brand trust serves as a fundamental antecedent of brand love across various industries and consumer contexts. Studies consistently show that when consumers perceive a brand as reliable, honest, and competent in fulfilling its promises, they develop stronger emotional attachments to the brand (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012)^[1, 3]. This relationship appears particularly robust in high-involvement purchase contexts such as luxury goods and technology products, where the stakes of brand performance are higher for consumers (Loureiro *et al.*, 2012; Kumar & Nayak, 2019)^[18, 19]. The SERVQUAL framework dimensions - particularly reliability, assurance, and empathy - emerge as critical components in building this trust that translates to emotional brand connections (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988)^[22].

The transition from brand love to relationship continuity shows remarkable consistency in the literature. Multiple studies confirm that the emotional attachment consumers form with brands leads to concrete behavioural outcomes including repurchase intentions, willingness to pay premium prices, and active brand advocacy (Malär *et al.*, 2011; Thomson *et al.*, 2005)^[21, 27]. Brand love appears to function as a powerful mediator in these relationships, with El Hedhli *et al.* (2016)^[11] demonstrating it fully explains how brand trust ultimately leads to long-term commitment in service contexts like retail banking. However, the review reveals significant variation in how researchers operationalize and measure brand love, with some focusing on emotional attachment metrics while others emphasize passion indices. Contextual analysis uncovers important variations in these relationships across different industries and cultural settings. The brand trust to brand love connection proves particularly strong in relationship-intensive service industries such as telecommunications and banking (Islam *et al.*, 2020; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001)^[8, 16], where ongoing

interactions allow trust to deepen over time. Cultural factors also emerge as potential moderators, though the limited number of cross-cultural studies in our sample (only 3) makes definitive conclusions difficult. The work of Ghorban (2012)^[12] suggests collectivist cultures may exhibit stronger trust-love linkages, pointing to the potential influence of cultural values on these psychological processes.

From a theoretical perspective, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964)^[5] provides a robust framework for understanding these findings. Consumers appear to reciprocate trustworthy brand behavior with emotional attachment (love) and continued patronage, creating a virtuous cycle of relationship reinforcement. The investment model (Rusbult, 1980)^[25] offers additional explanatory power by highlighting how brand love increases switching costs and commitment levels, thereby enhancing relationship continuity. These theoretical lenses help explain why the trust-love-continuity chain proves so consistent across diverse product and service categories.

For marketing practitioners, the findings suggest several actionable strategies. Trust-building initiatives should focus on both functional reliability and emotional connection, ensuring brands deliver on promises while also creating meaningful consumer experiences. Love-nurturing activities might include developing brand rituals, storytelling, and community-building efforts that deepen emotional bonds. Continuity strategies should leverage these emotional connections to reduce churn, perhaps through loyalty programs that recognize and reward the depth of consumer-brand relationships rather than just purchase frequency.

The review identifies several important gaps that represent opportunities for future research. Notably, only three studies (13.6% of our sample) examined the complete trust→love→continuity chain in an integrated model, suggesting need for more comprehensive investigations of these relationships. The literature also shows limited exploration of potential moderating factors such as cultural differences, brand age, or product category characteristics that might influence these fundamental relationships. Additionally, the predominance of cross-sectional designs (19 of 22 studies) leaves questions about how these relationships evolve over time unanswered. Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs that track brand relationship development, cross-cultural comparisons to test boundary conditions, and experimental methods to establish causal relationships more definitively.

These findings collectively advance our understanding of consumer-brand relationships while identifying valuable opportunities for both theoretical refinement and practical application. The consistency across studies confirms these relationships' fundamental nature in consumer psychology, while the observed contextual variations suggest the need for tailored approaches across different industries and cultural settings. The research provides marketers with evidence-based insights for building enduring brand relationships while charting important directions for future academic investigation.

Theoretical implications

The theoretical foundations of this research are grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Investment Model, which together offer comprehensive frameworks for exploring the interplay between brand trust, brand love, and relationship continuity. Social Exchange Theory (Blau,

1964)^[5] provides valuable insights into how consumers establish reciprocal relationships with brands, with trust serving as the currency of these exchanges. Our findings validate SET's central premise, which posits that relationships are sustained when perceived benefits outweigh associated costs (Homans, 1958)^[14]. Notably, the consistently positive correlation between brand trust and brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012)^[1, 3] underscores how consumers emotionally reciprocate brands' reliable behavior. This relationship aligns with SET's emphasis on mutual gratification and interdependence as vital elements for sustaining connections (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005)^[9].

Complementing SET, the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980)^[25] delves deeper into how brand love fosters stronger relationship commitment through three critical mechanisms: satisfaction, which pertains to emotional fulfillment derived from brand interactions; investment size, reflecting the accumulated psychological and behavioral investments made by consumers; and alternative quality, denoting the perceived absence of comparable substitutes. Studies by Malär *et al.* (2011)^[21] and Thomson *et al.* (2005)^[27] reveal that consumers who exhibit brand love demonstrate heightened tolerance for brand failures and increased resistance to switching—key indicators of commitment as conceptualized by the Investment Model.

Together, these theoretical perspectives elucidate the robustness of the trust → love → continuity chain across diverse contexts. However, certain theoretical gaps remain, requiring further refinement. First, the universal applicability of SET may need adjustments in collectivist cultures, where communal norms significantly influence exchange dynamics (Ghorban, 2012)^[12]. Second, neither theory adequately accounts for the temporal evolution of relationship dynamics across different lifecycle stages (Japutra *et al.*, 2014)^[17].

Conclusion

The systematic review of 22 empirical studies presented compelling evidence that brand trust and brand love play pivotal roles in sustaining relationship continuity across varied consumer settings. Three core conclusions emerged from this review. Firstly, brand trust consistently operates as a foundational precursor to brand love, as evidenced by all 18 relevant studies (e.g., Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Loureiro *et al.*, 2012)^[6, 19], which reported significant positive relationships ($\beta = 0.38-0.72$, $p < .05$). Secondly, brand love significantly mediates the impact of trust on relationship continuity, accounting for 58–64% of the variance in loyalty outcomes across studies (Bagozzi *et al.*, 2016; El Hedhli *et al.*, 2016)^[2, 11]. Thirdly, the impact of these factors is most pronounced in high-involvement ($d = 1.24$) and service contexts ($d = 1.31$) compared to low-involvement goods ($d = 0.87$).

However, the review uncovered notable gaps warranting further investigation. Specifically, only 13.6% of studies explored the entire trust → love → continuity chain, while cultural moderators were examined in just three of the 22 studies reviewed. Furthermore, longitudinal evidence remains limited, with 19 of the 22 studies relying on cross-sectional designs.

In summary, these findings make significant contributions to consumer-brand relationship literature and offer marketers empirically validated strategies to foster enduring

brand connections. Future research should prioritize the development of integrated models that test the full relationship chain, cross-cultural validations, and longitudinal designs that track the evolution of consumer-brand relationships over time.

Practical implications

The findings from this systematic review provide actionable insights tailored for brand managers, marketing strategists, and customer relationship teams operating within both B2C and B2B settings. These insights are centered around three key implications. First, trust-building strategies emphasize the critical role of consistency in fostering emotional connections with consumers. Brands that demonstrate reliability (Loureiro *et al.*, 2012)^[19] and transparency (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001)^[8] are better positioned to strengthen these connections. Practical measures include utilizing "trust signals" such as third-party certifications (e.g., ISO ratings), user-generated content showcasing authentic experiences (Japutra *et al.*, 2014)^[17], and transparent crisis communication protocols.

Second, cultivating brand love emerges as a vital driver of relationship continuity. Emotional engagement proves instrumental in retention, with studies showing that shared rituals (e.g., Apple product launches) and community-building initiatives (Thomson *et al.*, 2005)^[27] can boost retention rates by 23–41% (Malär *et al.*, 2011)^[21]. To harness this, brands can develop personas with humanized traits (Batra *et al.*, 2012)^[3], create exclusive experiences like members-only programs (e.g., Nike Run Club), and leverage nostalgic messaging strategies (El Hedhli *et al.*, 2016)^[11].

Third, relationship continuity programs highlight the importance of segmenting strategies based on the consumer's relationship stage. For new customers, efforts should focus on building trust (Kumar & Nayak, 2019)^[18], while established relationships require strengthening emotional bonds (Bagozzi *et al.*, 2016)^[2]. Metrics such as Net Emotional Value (NEV) scores and brand advocacy rates (Roy *et al.*, 2013)^[24] can be utilized to assess the effectiveness of these programs.

In B2B contexts, the findings hold specific relevance. Account-based marketing strategies should incorporate trust audits to identify vulnerabilities (Cassia *et al.*, 2015)^[7] and co-creation workshops to enhance emotional investment (Islam *et al.*, 2020)^[16]. Key account managers can benefit from training in emotional intelligence (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010)^[4] and relationship storytelling techniques (Sarkar, 2011)^[26]. Implementing these evidence-based approaches can reduce business churn rates by 18–27% (Giovanis *et al.*, 2015)^[13] while significantly boosting customer lifetime value.

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