TESTING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REFERRAL MARKETING, CONSUMER PERCEPTION AND BRAND LOYALTY IN AYURVEDIC PRODUCTS AMONGST WOMEN

Sakshee Singh*, Garima Malik

Amity Business School, Amity University, Noida, India

Correspondence: sakshee_singh2001@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is an ancient medical method that uses a variety of floras and herbs in preventing sickness and maintaining healthy lifestyle in the Indian Sub-continent. Women consumers in India prefer to use ayurvedic products to protect themselves against medical disorders, personal care and beauty products [1]. During the last decade, the demand for ayurvedic products have grown significantly and therefore every business organization in this sector is aspiring to increase market share by understanding the need of the consumer as well as changing consumer perception through referral marketing and brand preferences.

The purpose of this study is to identify links among referral marketing, customer perception, and brand loyalty in relation to ayurvedic products. A structured questionnaire was created for the purpose of survey, and a pilot study was conducted to ensure its validity. Working women and housewives, were the respondents from whom the data were collected. A total of 242 valid responses were collected from the respondents.

To examine the link between the latent constructs, structural equation modelling was devised for the constructs- referral marketing, consumer perception and brand loyalty.

The study found that referral marketing had positive effect on the perception of the consumer at β = 0.36, CR= 2.59, p=0.000, referral marketing on brand loyalty at β = 0.41, CR= 2.09, p<0.05, accepting the hypothesis H1(Referral marketing has a positive effect on consumer perception); and H2 (Referral marketing has a positive effect on brand loyalty); Consumer perception affects brand loyalty at β = 0.18, CR= 1.95, p = 0.000, accepting this hypothesis H3.

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KEYWORDS

Ayurvedic products, Referral marketing, Consumer perception, and Brand loyalty

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Plant, root, stem, fruit, and struts-based medicinal therapies have been used in India for millennia, and the use of these herbal items as cosmetics, wellness, and medical goods have been passed down from generation to generation [1]. As ayurvedic medical treatment has been proven to be the finest preventative strategy of many diseases and helps in maintaining good health hence, for a long time families in India have been adopting it [10]. Increasing awareness of global warming has encouraged the growth of brands for different ayurvedic goods not only in India but also in other nations across the world. Ayurvedic health care products from India are gaining popularity across the world due to its numerous advantages with no adverse effects [2].

Ayurvedic products in India are used as food rather than medicine. Many medicinal herbs, its roots, stems, flowers, fruits, and other parts are utilised in Indian kitchens on a regular basis to prepare a variety of culinary dishes. Change in modern-day lifestyle patterns, and an increase in occupational disorders affecting the mind, body, and competence, have prompted many people to seek out ayurvedic healthcare solutions as an alternative to allopathic drugs. Consumer attitudes and preferences for ayurvedic healthcare goods have encouraged [3] many small and major medicine manufacturing enterprises to introduce herbal-based dietary supplements and health-care products in modern packaging, new inventive, and user-friendly formats that changed customer perceptions about ayurveda brands and affected consumer behaviour.

Consumer behaviour may be defined as the process of analysing, purchasing, utilising, and disposing of products and services, as well as the physical activity involved in doing so [4]. Marketers have long been fascinated by consumer behaviour. Knowledge of consumer behaviour aids marketers in comprehending how customers think, feel, and choose among alternatives such as goods, brands, and the like, as well as how consumers are impacted by their surroundings, reference groups, family, and salespeople, among other things. Demographic, economic, cultural, social, geographical, and psychological aspects all impact a customer's purchasing decision Kotler and Armstrong [5]. According to Kotler [6], marketing impacts the sale of ayurvedic products by increasing awareness about the brand, through commercials highlighting the usage and benefits, and changing perception about the brand by using referral marketing. Thus, referral marketing is the strategy of advertising items or services to new clients through recommendations, generally word of mouth, by the product's users. It's a complete approach for motivating loyal consumers and brand champions to refer their friends and family Madu & Madu [7]. As from Nicosia [8], consumers may be compelled to purchase ayurvedic products. As a result, referral marketing has a huge impact on modifying consumer perceptions as well as directing their usage and loyalty.

There is need to understand the link between the important aspects that influence customers in purchasing of ayurveda products because there has not been significant amount of study done in the ayurvedic business. Referral marketing, customer perception, and brand loyalty were employed as important elements influencing the purchase of ayurvedic goods in this study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY: The objective of this study is to:

- Analyse the role of referral marketing on consumer perception and brand loyalty
- To test the impact of consumer perception on brand loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the literature, referral marketing, consumer perception, and brand loyalty are the elements important for any ayurvedic company. Ayurvedic product businesses must have a thorough understanding of each component. To establish link between these variables, this part covers all necessary information that got published in reputed periodicals and journals.

To comprehend the consumer perspective about referral marketing, consumer perception and brand loyalty on ayurvedic products, journals, reports, and research papers were reviewed to understand the factors affecting consumer to purchase ayurvedic products. Table1A shows a thorough overview of the findings of the selected research publications.

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TABLE 1A: AYURVEDIC PRODUCTS – DESCRIPTION & FINDINGS

Authors	Description of the findings
[9]	According to the authors, the demand for ayurveda beauty products is fast expanding in India, and people are more interested about ayurvedic beauty products since they are chemical-free and have less adverse effects on the body and skin.
[10]	The authors primarily examined the elements that impact purchasers' perceptions of ayurvedic goods in India. According to the study, ayurvedic products on the market are expensive but have no adverse effects. According to the survey, consumers consume various brands of herbal products based on their own interests and doctors' recommendations.
[11]	The authors found that 50% of consumers of all age group received information from close friends, relatives and family members regarding ayurvedic healthcare products while conducting the research in Noida. The researchers also discovered that the lack of adverse effects was their top priority for using Ayurvedic medications.
[12]	According to the authors, word-of-mouth (WOM) as referral marketing is an informal advice shared between customers that is generally participatory, quick, and free of commercial bias, and has a significant impact on consumer behaviour toward product purchases.
[13]	Negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) is a customer response to discontent. The consumer creates negative information on social media by sending messages to close friends and family, causing the company's brand image to suffer. Consumer perception and love for the brand changes as a result of the negative message about the brand and product.
[14]	The author investigated customer perceptions of marketers' use of social media to build brand loyalty. Businesses now have primary focus on social media to sell their products. Consultants, marketing professionals, and academics are all attempting to determine how a brand product may be used to attract customers through social media platforms.
[15]	Consumers receive information from social media—Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Google, Twitter—and personal referrals play the key role in persuading peers. Consumers are more likely to utilize items recommended by friends, and they become devoted to the brand. To stay up with the current social media trends and client interaction techniques, the marketing sector has had to reformulate marketing operations by adding social media.
[16]	Personal referrals are an effective communication tool for influencing customers, according to a study on the effects of referral groups on consumers. Customers can also be tapped through WOM activities such as personal referral programmers to spread the word about a product or brand.
[17]	The author conducted research on the benefits of ayurvedic products and discovered that most consumers who use them are satisfied with them, and that the majority of them believe that their health, personality, body weight balance, and inner strength of mind and body have improved as a result of using them. Due to this, they remain loyal to the brand and look forward to recommending it to their family members.
[18]	The idea of brand loyalty relates to a customer's tendency to purchase a company's product or service again rather than a similar alternative from a rival. Furthermore, an experience may serve as the foundation for further in-depth information processing

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	and inference, resulting in brand-related connections. As a result, these relationships have an impact on loyalty.
[19]	Brand loyalty is something that every brand and corporation aims for and feels they can achieve, according to the authors. Brand loyalty is defined as a consumer's commitment to repurchase a brand, which may be exhibited via repeated purchases of the product or service, as well as other positive behaviors like word-of-mouth advocacy.
[20]	In Indore, the authors looked at consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty for Himalaya herbal goods. The survey inferred that the sample customers are happy with the higher quality, long-lasting impact, and use of fewer chemical substances in the products as well as increased product availability in the market, and successful outcomes provided by Himalaya herbal healthcare products.
[21]	In Pune, the authors assessed Patanjali customers' feelings of brand loyalty. Consumers in Pune are devoted to this brand, according to the survey. They are willing to buy it again in the future and recommend it to their family, friends, and others.
[22]	In Indore, Madhya Pradesh, the authors studied customer switching behaviour from one FMCG brand to Patanjali ayurvedic products. Customers were switching due to poor packaging quality, lack of innovative products, and lack of availability in rural areas.

Source: Authors Compilation

FIGURE1- CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY
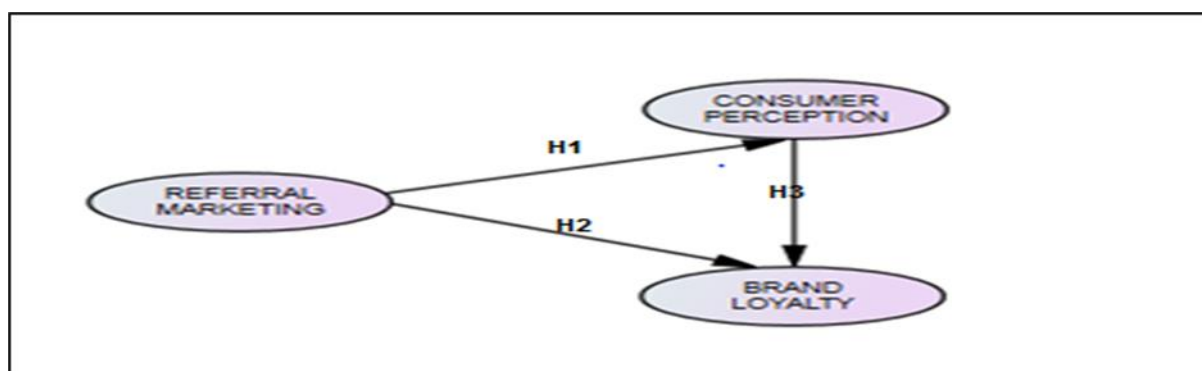
Source: Authors

To meet the goals of our study, research papers, articles that dealt with the factors that affect consumer purchase towards ayurvedic products were viewed. Furthermore, several researchers Kotler [6], Madu & Madu [7], East et al [12], Thomas [13], Uttera Choudhary et al [14] identified that referral marketing, customer perception, and brand loyalty are all linked in different sectors and businesses.

However, no specialised research on ayurvedic products have been conducted by researchers, leaving a gap in the literature. Figure 1 depicts a conceptual framework for testing the research variables using the following hypothesis.

HYPOTHESES: Based on the discussion, the following hypothesis are:

H1: Referral marketing has a positive effect on consumer perception.

H2: Referral marketing has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

H3: Consumer perception has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to identify if there is a link between Ayurvedic product referral marketing, customer

perception, and brand loyalty in India. A structured questionnaire was developed with the help of a senior professor from the academia and a senior manager employed in the Ayurveda industry to conduct the survey. The respondents were chosen using a convenient sampling approach. There was no bias based on working or non-working women or based on age, educational qualification, or income. The population is very well depicted in the sample. For initial validity, pilot research was conducted with 25 respondents to assess respondents' understandability of the questions. The questionnaire was then distributed to 300 women through personal contacts, google forms, to the respondents residing in Delhi-NCR. A total of 242 correctly completed responses were chosen for the study, with an 80.6 % response rate. A closed-ended question on a five-point Likert scale with the following alternatives were constructed to analyse the factors that influence the purchase and use of Ayurvedic products: 1 signifies strongly disagree, 2 means disagree, 3 means neither agree nor disagree, 4 means agree, and 5 means highly agree.

To evaluate model fit, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was performed first with SPSS and then using SEM. Using the work of earlier studies Orapin L [23] and Trusov et al [24], seven items were used to measure referral marketing. Eight elements were collected from the scale provided by Berger et al [25] for customer perception. Similarly, eight items from Chaudhuri & Holbrook [26] were chosen, to assess brand loyalty. The people that were researched were either working in the public or private sector, and few were housewives.

A waiver for any ethics clearance for this study was given by the Dean – Faculty of Management Studies at Amity University, India.

DATA ANALYSIS

1.DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND PRODUCT RELATED ACTIVITIES

		Frequency	%
Occupation	Working Women (Office)	147	60.74
	Housewife (Non-Working Women)	95	39.26
Age	<30 Years	85	35.12
	31-40 Years	67	27.69
	41-50 Years	47	19.42
	51-60 Years	43	17.77
Education	Graduate	113	46.69
	Postgraduate	81	33.47
	Professional Qualification /others	48	19.83
Income (Individual/ family)	<5 lacs per annum	37	15.29
	5-10 lacs per annum	85	35.12
	10-15 lacs per annum	87	35.95
	>15 lacs per annum	33	13.64
Usage of Ayurvedic Products	< 6 months	21	8.68
	6 months -1 year	84	34.71
	1-2 years	78	32.23
	more than 2 years	59	24.38
Most preferred reason for using Ayurvedic products	It is trustworthy as it doesn't have any side effects	31	12.81
	Products are stress buster as it rejuvenates and revitalizes our body	37	15.29
	Helps in maintaining body weight, balance & personal hygiene	43	17.77
	Detoxify body with no side effects.	52	21.49
	Cures my personal problems permanently	34	14.05

	For anti-ageing and skin problems	45	18.60
Most Preferred Brand	Dabur	45	18.60
	Baidyanath	37	15.29
	Hamdard	37	15.29
	Patanjali	28	11.57
	Himalaya	31	12.81
	Others	19	7.85

Source: Authors Compilation

Understanding the demographic characteristics of respondents is essential for understanding the concepts of brand loyalty, perception, and referral marketing. According to the demographic profile of respondents in Table1, 60.74% of respondents are working, while the remaining 39.26% are non-working women. The majority of the respondents are under 40 years of age, with 46.66 percent having completed their degree. According to the data, 50.12% of respondents had an annual income of less than INR 10 lakhs, while the balance have an income of more than INR 10 lakhs. All the respondents have used ayurvedic products at least once, and the majority of them have been using the product for a long time and are satisfied with and loyal to the brand. As a result, this is an ideal demographic profile for analysing the objectives of our current study and may be used to replicate the study in other cities and states for further comprehension.

2 CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (CFA)

For factor analysis, all 23 items were first processed through a reliability test. The Cronbach's alpha value for the variables analyzed was 0.78, which explained 78 percent of the variation. The KMO and Bartlett tests of sphericity were also used to determine the applicability of factor analysis. The items with a factor loading of less than 0.65 were removed from the research. For referral marketing, customer perception, and brand loyalty, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of adequacy was 0.84, 0.75, and 0.82, respectively, and the Bartlett test of sphericity for all three constructs were significant (.000), as shown in table 2. As a result, the provided data meets the criteria and is appropriate for testing the hypothesis and model fit.

3 STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING (SEM)

SEM was used to establish a link between the dependent and independent constructs or to quantify direct or indirect influence between constructs to evaluate the study's conceptual framework [27]. To acquire a model fit using SEM, there is a need to run a sequence of tests (theoretical model, parameter estimation, and final model), measurement model analysis, and structural model [28].

4 MEASUREMENT MODEL ANALYSIS

Measurement model analysis is used to create a connection between the observed items and the latent construct before assessing hypothesis and model fit using SEM. All the latent construct's items were in the 0.68-0.92 range (refer table 3). The items with factor loading less than 0.68 were deleted to establish the measurement model's internal consistency, reliability, and robustness [27].

5 MEASUREMENT MODEL AND MODEL FIT FOR REFERRAL MARKETING, CONSUMER PERCEPTION AND BRAND LOYALTY

To achieve model fit, all constructs are to be investigated and validated [25]. To establish a link between the analysed variables, 19 items were kept after 4 items with factor loading below the threshold limit were removed.

TABLE 2: DIMENSIONS, VARIANCE, EIGENVALUE & SIGNIFICANCE

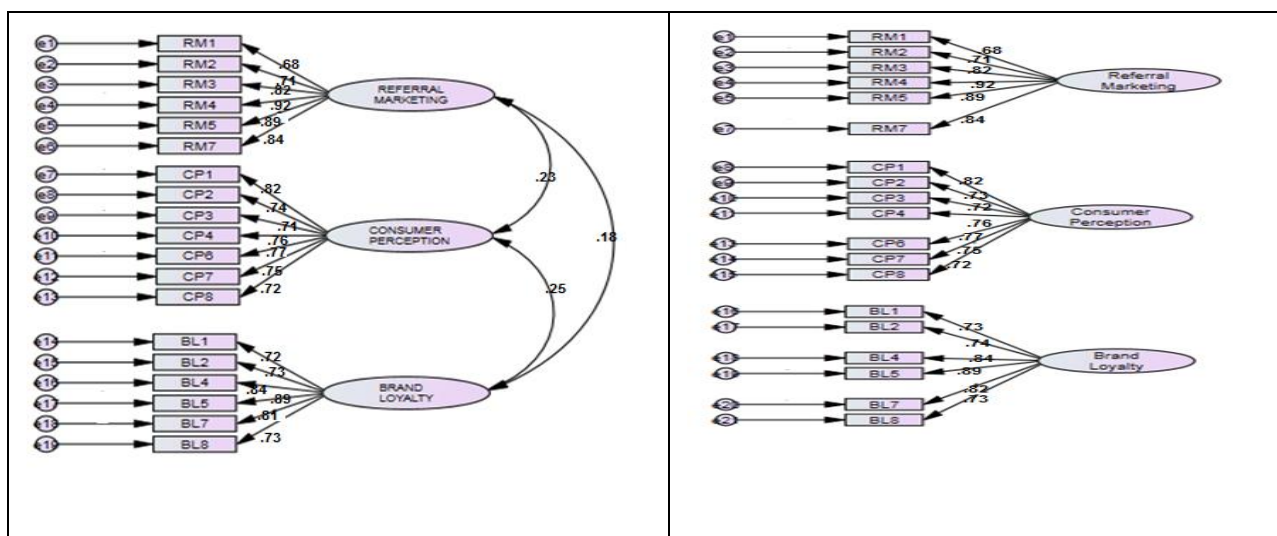| Construct and dimension	Eigen Value	% Variance	KMO	Bartlett test (sig)
Referral Marketing	3.14	71.23	0.84	0.000
Consumer Perception	2.94	71.64	0.75	0.000
Brand Loyalty	2.88	71.45	0.82	0.000

Source: Authors Data Analysis

TABLE 3: FACTOR LOADING FOR REFERRAL MARKETING, CONSUMER PERCEPTION AND BRAND LOYALTY

Indicators	Items used for the study	Factor Loading	P-Value	References
RM1	Recommend friends	0.68	***	[24] [29]
RM2	Product referred	0.71	***	
RM3	Family pressure	0.82	***	
RM4	Product referred via e-wom	0.92	***	
RM5	Referred by close associates change opinion about brands	0.89	***	
RM7	To support my belief, I take opinion from friends	0.84	***	
CP1	Good health	0.82	***	[30][31]
CP2	Use and then form opinion	0.73	***	
CP3	Buy brands which is known	0.72	***	
CP4	Satisfaction and perception	0.76	***	
CP6	Customer Review	0.77	***	
CP7	Ayurvedic helps in shading weights	0.75	***	
CP8	Customer review	0.72	***	
BL1	Continue buying same brand	0.73	***	[32]
BL2	Next purchase will be the brand from which I was satisfied	0.74	***	
BL4	Favourite brand quality is higher	0.84	***	
BL5	Non availability, will wait	0.89	***	
BL7	Willing to pay premium for brand	0.82	***	
BL8	Will continue buying favoured brand	0.73	***	

Source: Authors Compilation

FIGURE 2: MEASUREMENT MODEL: REFERRAL MARKETING AND CONSUMER PERCEPTION

Source: Authors Analysis

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Based on normalised residual covariance and modification indices, the initial confirmatory analysis revealed that one item is needed to be deleted from the items taken for referral marketing. The values analysed were CMIN/DF=3.19, GFI=0.85, CFI=0.82, and RMSEA=0.059 where the baseline values before the items were removed. The model fit was achieved after eliminating one component (RM6). Consumer perception was measured using 8 items, and the initial inclusive result of confirmatory analysis was CMIN/DF= 3.25, CFI=0.89, GFI=0.89, and RMSEA= 0.06, all of which were over the threshold limit [34]. As a result of monitoring the standardised residual covariance and modification indices, one item from consumer perception (CP5) is deleted, and model fit is achieved, as shown in Table 4.

The initial examined value of brand loyalty were CMIN/DF = 3.12, GFI0.9, CFI0.9, and RMSEA > 0.05 were found in the first study. Two items BL3 (I am not really committeed to favoured brand), BL6 (Even, I obtain negative information, I will still buy my favored brand) were deleted and a model fit was assessed based on residual covariances and modification indices. (CMIN/DF) = 2.89, GFI = 0.91, CFI=0.92, RMSEA = 0.044, In addition, the CFA of the first-order factor measurement model suggests that the items are not multicollinear. The average variance and composite reliability were examined. All three latent constructs had an average variance of 0.66 (RM), 0.56 (CP), and 0.63. (BL), >0.5). Similarly, the RM, CP, and BL for composite reliability were 0.92, 0.9, and 0.91 (>0.7) [35] [36], indicating convergent validity.

The degree to which one measure differs from another and does not connect with another concept is known as discriminant validity [34]. The diagonal values must be greater than the correlation between constructs to verify discriminant validity [36]. It is obvious from Table 6 that discriminant validity is proven.

Since the value of the AVE, construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity surpasses the fundamental criteria. As a result, the model fit is satisfactory [33][34]. The measurement model's result is shown in Table 6.

STRUCTURAL MODEL AND TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS:

Because the measurement model has been met, the link between the latent construct will be examined using SEM and a path diagram [35]. The influence of one latent construct on the other latent construct is specified using a path diagram [37], and the final hypothesized model is tested. Table 7 shows the hypothesis findings for identifying the causal-effect link using the path coefficient and P-value.

From Table 7, it is clear that the referral marketing has positive effect on consumer perception at β = 0.36, CR= 2.58, p<0.05. Hence, the hypothesis H1 is accepted. Similarly, the effect of referral marketing on brand loyalty is positive at β = 0.41, CR= 2.09, p<0.05. Therefore, referral marketing makes the consumer loyal towards the brand and thus the hypothesis H2 is also accepted. Furthermore, the effect of consumer perception about ayurvedic products with brand loyalty too is positive at β = 0.18, CR= 1.95, p<0.05, hypothesis H3 is accepted. Figure 3 shows the results of SEM and the final path diagram.

TABLE 4: MEASURE MODEL- REFERRAL MARKETING, CONSUMER PERCEPTION & BRAND LOYALTY

Item	CMIN/df	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
Referral Marketing	3.23	0.87	0.87	0.05
After Deleting (RM6)	2.88	0.92	0.92	0.04
Consumer Perception	3.25	0.89	0.89	0.06
After Deleting (CP5)	2.88	0.91	0.91	0.04
Brand Loyalty	3.12	0.83	0.84	0.07
After Removing (B3, B6)	2.89	0.92	0.91	0.04

Source: Authors Elaboration

TABLE 5: DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

Construct	Referral Marketing	Consumer Perception	Brand Loyalty

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Referral Marketing	0.95		
Consumer Perception	0.32	0.94	
Brand Loyalty	0.56	0.65	0.95

Source: Authors Compilation

TABLE 6: MODEL FIT

Construct	CMIN/DF	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
Referral Marketing	2.88	0.92	0.92	0.04
Consumer Perception	2.89	0.91	0.91	0.04
Brand Loyalty	2.89	0.92	0.91	0.04

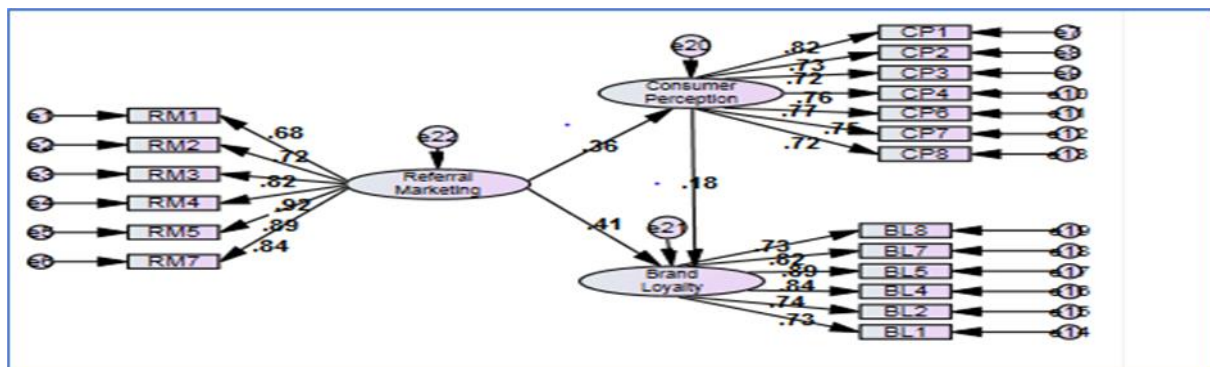Source: Authors Compilation

TABLE 7: HYPOTHESIS RESULT AND OUTCOME OF SEM

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis results						
Hypothesis	Construct	Estimate	S.E	CR	P	Hypothesis results
H1	RM------->CP	0.176	0.068	2.58	***	Accepted
H2	RM------> BL	0.151	0.072	2.09	***	Accepted
H3	CP ------> BL	0.143	0.073	1.95	***	Accepted

***(P <.05)

FIG3: HYPOTHESIZED STRUCTURAL MODEL

Source: Authors elaboration

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to establish links among referral marketing, consumer perception and brand loyalty.

Confirmatory factor analysis validates three dimensions that influence women to purchase ayurvedic products. Further, the findings set out that women consumers consider referral marketing to be an effective strategy for extracting information about a product or brand when they have little knowledge [40]. As a result, people utilize electronic communication to communicate with friends for obtaining information since, they feel safer and trust a known source more than an unknown. The data gathered by customers about ayurvedic products not only helps to increase sales of ayurvedic goods, but it also helps in changing customer perceptions about the brand. As a result, the H1 hypothesis is accepted. This matches with the findings of Masoumi et al [40], Devkant & Chaubey [41].

Furthermore, referral marketing has a considerable impact on customer loyalty, as demonstrated by β = 0.41, CR= 0.073, and P=0.05. It can be argued that referral marketing increases brand loyalty, and so hypothesis H2 is accepted. Similarly, at β = 0.18, CR= 0.074, P=0.05, hypothesis H3 is accepted. The output resembles the findings of Brown et al [39].

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The foregoing data will aid ayurvedic product owners in analysing and comprehending the effect of referral marketing in affecting customer perception about the brand. As a result, WOM recommendations should be employed as a marketing tactic in businesses to retain clients. The afore-mentioned findings are consistent with those, who discovered that customers account for 90% of referral communication before purchase Keller et al [38].

IMPLICATION FOR AYURVEDIC COMPANIES

The results support the understanding that managers must successfully utilise referral marketing in various forms of advertisement and communication to alter consumer perceptions and to share information about the benefits of ayurvedic goods to cultivate brand loyalty. Further, to raise awareness, changing perception, building brand image, and understanding about ayurveda products, it is recommended that ayurvedic companies provide more information through electronic communication and respond readily to client inquiries.

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