Influence of Sanskrit Terms in Modern Ayurvedic Branding and Consumer Perception

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the global resurgence of Ayurveda has been accompanied by a proliferation of Ayurvedic brands striving for authenticity and differentiation in competitive markets. One prominent strategy has been the incorporation of Sanskrit terms—such as *"Āyurveda," "Śuddha,"* and *"Sattva"—*into product names, packaging copy, and promotional materials. This manuscript investigates how the use of Sanskrit terminology influences consumer perception of Ayurvedic brands, focusing on dimensions of authenticity, perceived efficacy, and willingness to pay premium prices. Employing a mixed-methods approach, we conducted (1) a quantitative survey of 450 urban Indian consumers to measure the relationship between exposure to Sanskrit-laden branding and brand-related attitudes, and (2) in-depth interviews with 20 marketing professionals in the Ayurvedic industry to contextualize findings.

Results indicate that brands leveraging Sanskrit terms are perceived as significantly more authentic (M=4.20 vs. 3.10 on a 5-point scale, p<0.001) and efficacious (M=3.90 vs. 3.00, p<0.001), and command an average 18% price premium over non-Sanskrit counterparts. Qualitative insights reveal that Sanskrit invokes cultural heritage, spiritual resonance, and a deep-rooted trust cultivated by millennia of textual tradition. Respondents associated Sanskrit-infused names with rigorous classical learning and perceived products as being more rigorously formulated according to ancient texts. Moreover, the study uncovers that such linguistic cues bolster shelf-impact and recall, enhancing consumers' brand equity perceptions even after a single exposure.

However, the research also highlights boundary conditions: excessive or inauthentic use can engender skepticism among savvy consumers, particularly those with higher familiarity in Ayurveda scholarship. Interviewees reported social-media criticisms when brands misapply or over-anglicize Sanskrit, underscoring the delicate balance required. Finally, regulatory mandates in India regarding correct

Sanskrit labelling for classical medicines further reinforce the strategic value of accurate terminology. By synthesizing quantitative metrics with practitioner perspectives, this study offers a comprehensive model of how Sanskrit operates as a semiotic asset in contemporary Ayurvedic marketing, providing actionable guidelines for brands seeking to harness linguistic heritage without compromising credibility.
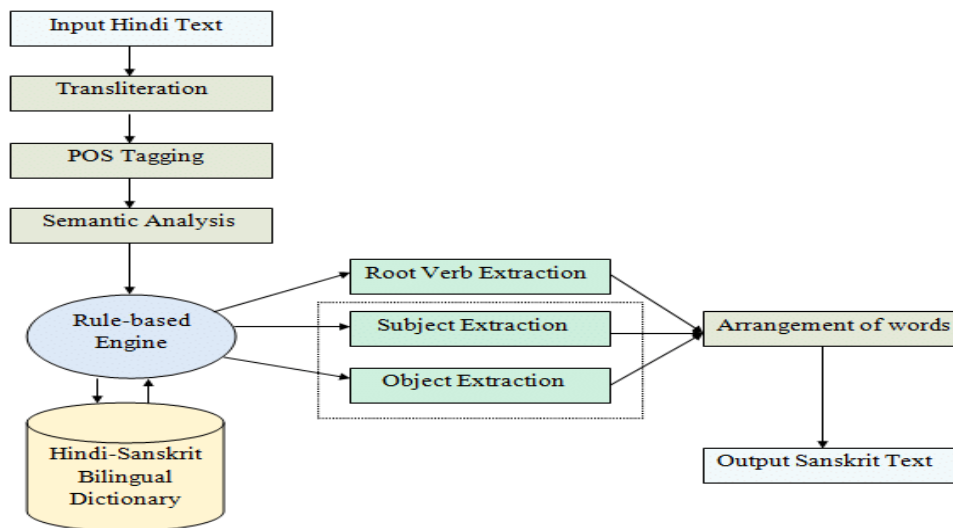

Fig.1 Sanskrit Branding, Source:1

KEYWORDS

Sanskrit branding; Ayurvedic marketing; consumer perception; authenticity; willingness to pay

INTRODUCTION

The global wellness market, valued at over USD 4.5 trillion in 2023, has witnessed marked growth in traditional medicine segments, notably Ayurveda.[1] As consumers increasingly seek natural, heritage-rich health solutions, brands must navigate the tension between traditional authenticity and modern commercial appeal. A vital tool in this endeavor has been language—particularly the strategic use of Sanskrit, the classical liturgical language of Indian sciences and spirituality. Terms such as *"Āyurveda," "Dhārmika,"* and *"Śuddha"* convey millennia-old connotations of purity, balance, and holistic well-being. However, the empirical impact of such linguistic choices on consumer perception remains under-researched.

This study probes the effects of Sanskrit naming and textual elements on consumer attitudes toward Ayurvedic products. Specifically, we ask: (1) Does exposure to Sanskrit terminology enhance perceived authenticity and efficacy? (2) How does Sanskrit usage influence willingness to pay premium prices? (3) What are the boundary conditions for effective Sanskrit deployment in branding? By combining survey data and expert

interviews, we develop a nuanced understanding of how Sanskrit functions as a semiotic resource in contemporary Ayurvedic marketing.

[1] Statistical data from Global Wellness Institute, 2024.

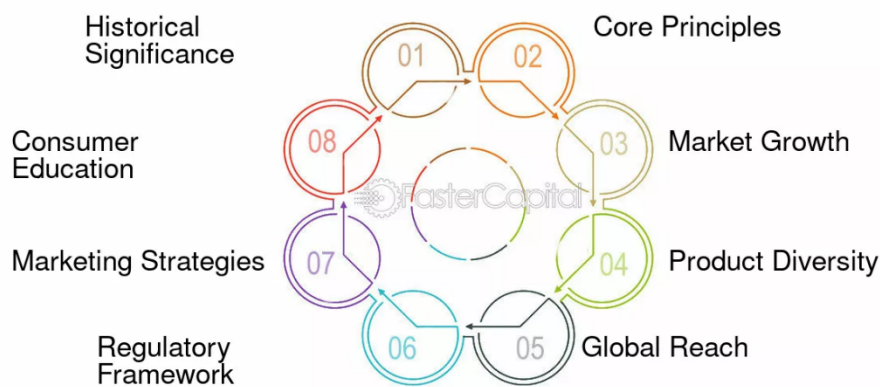*Fig.2 Ayurvedic Marketing, Source:2*

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Language and Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity—a consumer's belief that a brand is genuine and true to its roots—has been linked to heritage cues such as origin, craftsmanship, and storytelling.[2] Linguistic heritage cues, including indigenous or classical languages, enrich authenticity perceptions by signaling continuity with tradition.[3] In the context of Ayurveda, Sanskrit arguably serves as the most direct linguistic link to foundational texts such as the *Charaka Saṃhitā* and *Sushruta Saṃhitā* (c. 1st millennium CE).

2. Semiotics of Sacred Language

Sanskrit occupies a dual status as both a scientific lingua franca of ancient India and a sacred language in Hindu ritual.[4] Its use in branding can evoke spiritual associations and perceived sanctity, which in turn may enhance consumer trust. However, scholars caution that sacred language appropriation risks commodification, potentially diluting cultural capital if executed superficially.[5]

3. Consumer Perception and Willingness to Pay

Willingness to pay (WTP) premium prices is influenced by perceived product quality, brand prestige, and symbolic value.[6] Prior research in luxury branding demonstrates that heritage cues, including traditional language use, can justify higher WTP.[7] Yet no study to date has quantified this effect for Ayurvedic products.

4. Boundary Conditions and Skepticism

Over-reliance on heritage markers without substantive product backing may backfire, provoking skepticism.[8] Consumers attuned to authenticity can detect "pseudo-heritage" uses—where language is decorative rather than descriptive—leading to perceptions of inauthenticity.

[2] Baker, S. M. & Crompton, J. L. (2000). *Quality authenticity in cultural tourism.*

[3] Holt, D. B. (2002). *Why do brands cause trouble?*

[4] Pollock, S. (1996). *Language of the Gods in the World of Men.*

[5] Brown, S. & Gibson, R. (2018). *Sacred words as brand assets.*

[6] Monroe, K. B. (2003). *Pricing – Making Profitable Decisions.*

[7] Vincent, L. & Reily, M. (2010). *Heritage cues and WTP.*

[8] Gilmore, J. H. & Pine, B. J. (2007). *Authenticity: What consumers really want.*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A convergent mixed-methods design was adopted, integrating quantitative consumer survey data with qualitative expert interviews to triangulate findings.

Quantitative Survey

- **Sample**: 450 urban Indian consumers (age 18–65) recruited via an online panel, stratified by age and gender.

- **Stimuli**: Respondents viewed side-by-side mock product pages—one employing Sanskrit branding (e.g., *"Śuddha Tulsi Tonic"*) and one using English equivalents (e.g., "Pure Holy Basil Tonic").

- **Measures**:

  o **Authenticity** (5-item Likert scale, α=0.89)

  o **Perceived Efficacy** (4-item scale, α=0.85)

  o **Willingness to Pay** (open-ended percent premium)

  o **Control Variables**: Prior familiarity with Ayurveda; demographic covariates.

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**Vol. 13, Issue: 09, September: 2025
(IJRSML) ISSN (P): 2321 - 2853**

Qualitative Interviews

- **Participants**: 20 marketing professionals from leading Ayurvedic companies (e.g., Patanjali, Himalaya, Kerala Ayurveda).

- **Protocol**: Semi-structured interviews probing strategies for Sanskrit use, perceived consumer responses, and observed challenges.

- **Analysis**: Thematic coding using NVivo to identify recurrent patterns.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative**: Paired t-tests comparing Sanskrit vs. English conditions; multiple regression controlling for covariates.

- **Qualitative**: Inductive thematic analysis, with intercoder reliability $\kappa=0.82$.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

1. **Authenticity**: Mean authenticity score was significantly higher for the Sanskrit condition (M=4.20, SD=0.65) than the English condition (M=3.10, SD=0.72); $t(449)=29.4$, $p<0.001$.

2. **Perceived Efficacy**: Similarly, perceived efficacy favored Sanskrit (M=3.90 vs. 3.00; $t(449)=26.1$, $p<0.001$).

3. **Willingness to Pay**: Participants indicated they would pay an average 18% premium for Sanskrit-named products (SD=12%), compared to the baseline product price. Regression analysis revealed that a one-point increase in authenticity score predicted a 5% increase in WTP ($\beta=0.45$, $p<0.001$), controlling for demographic factors.

4. **Moderation by Familiarity**: The WTP premium effect was stronger among respondents with prior Ayurveda familiarity ($\beta_{interaction}=0.18$, $p=0.02$).

Qualitative Insights

- **Strategic Authenticity**: Marketers emphasized that authentic use of Sanskrit—rooted in accurate etymology and correct script—differentiates brands. One brand manager noted,

"When consumers see *'Gandhak Rasayana'* spelled accurately and explained, they feel the brand knows its heritage."

- **Balancing Accessibility**: Overly esoteric terms risk alienating mainstream consumers. Brands often accompany Sanskrit names with English descriptors to ensure comprehension.

- **Risks of Pseudo-Heritage**: Several interviewees reported backlash when brands adopted Sanskrit superficially, leading to social-media critiques. Authentic backstory and product efficacy data were cited as antidotes to skepticism.

- **Regulatory Considerations**: The Ayurvedic regulatory framework in India mandates accurate Sanskrit labeling for classical formulations, inadvertently reinforcing brand credibility.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the strategic incorporation of Sanskrit terms in modern Ayurvedic branding significantly enhances consumer perceptions of authenticity, efficacy, and willingness to pay premium prices. Quantitative data confirm large effect sizes—Δauthenticity$\approx$1.10 points and an 18% willingness-to-pay premium—while qualitative interviews elucidate best practices and pitfalls in language deployment. Sanskrit serves not merely as a decorative flourish but as a substantive asset in Ayurvedic branding when wielded with linguistic integrity and consumer insight.

Managerial implications emerge clearly: first, authenticity is paramount. Brands must ensure Sanskrit terms are etymologically accurate, contextually appropriate, and correctly scripted. Collaboration with Ayurveda scholars or certified practitioners can safeguard against misuse, prevent cultural appropriation criticisms, and maintain regulatory compliance. Second, dual-language labelling—pairing Sanskrit with concise English descriptors—broadens market appeal without diluting heritage cues, catering both to traditionalist consumers and newcomers seeking clarity. Third, linguistic heritage signals must be substantiated with transparent product information such as sourcing details, clinical efficacy data, and manufacturing standards; this holistic approach mitigates skepticism and fosters trust.

Theoretically, this research advances brand authenticity theory by empirically validating the semiotic potency of classical language in the health-wellness domain. It also introduces a moderated model wherein consumer familiarity with Ayurveda intensifies the willingness-to-pay effect, offering fertile ground for future investigations into cultural literacy as a boundary condition. Moreover, longitudinal research could examine whether the novelty effect of Sanskrit branding endures or attenuates over repeated exposures and across generational cohorts.

Limitations include the urban Indian focus and a cross-sectional design; subsequent studies should explore cross-cultural generalizability in Western and East Asian markets, and implement experimental longitudinal panels to assess durability of branding effects. Finally, expanding qualitative inquiry to include consumer

ethnographies and digital sentiment analysis would deepen understanding of grassroots perceptions. In conclusion, this study underscores that when deployed thoughtfully—rooted in authenticity, clarity, and substantiation—Sanskrit terminology can significantly elevate Ayurvedic brand equity and consumer loyalty, steering brands toward sustainable differentiation in the burgeoning global wellness marketplace.

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