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*THE MISSING PIECE OF THE PUZZLE:
HOW BRAND AUTHENTICITY DRIVES BRAND ENGAGEMENT*

BY

CHRISTOPHER L. CAMPAGNA

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Of

Doctor of Philosophy

In the Robinson College of Business

Of

Georgia State University

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY
ROBINSON COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

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2022

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the *CHRISTOPER L. CAMPAGNA*'s Dissertation Committee. It has been approved and accepted by all members of that committee, and it has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration in the J. Mack Robinson College of Business of Georgia State University.

Richard Phillips, Dean

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Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to close family members who have recently passed. My father, who spent his career in academia, recommended I get my Ph.D., and whom I spoke with almost every day during the ups and down of this process. I love you Dad.

My brother Glenn was a great scholar, who double majored in math and art history at Duke University. He inspired me to keep growing and reach my potential professionally and academically. He taught me the history of art, including how to spot subtle nuances and stylistic differences in pieces, and the joy of learning about the history and backgrounds of painters and their specific pieces, rather than just focusing on the value of their artwork.

Thank you Dr. Donthu, my wonderful wife Katharine, my dear father, and my brother Glenn. Without you I would not have reached this point.

Christopher L. Campagna

Christopher Campagna

ABSTRACT

THE MISSING PIECE OF THE PUZZLE: HOW BRAND AUTHENTICITY DRIVES BRAND ENGAGEMENT

BY
CHRISTOPHER L. CAMPAGNA

July 14, 2022

Committee Chair: *Dr. Naveen Donthu*

Major Academic Unit: *Marketing*

Academics and practitioners agree that perceived brand authenticity and consumer brand engagement* are each very important areas, whose influence continues to grow. With the acceleration of consumers use of social media platforms in all aspects of life, including interaction with brands, it is essential for firms to provide experiences consumers view as “real” and authentic. Being perceived as authentic is important for members of all generations, who rate authenticity among the top traits that drives buying behavior. Perceived brand authenticity is especially influential to members of generation z and millennials, as ninety percent of these generations cite authenticity as one their top two factors in buying decisions and interaction. With the combined buying power of these two age groups expected to exceed any other generation in 2022, managers and academics are looking for ways to drive perceived authenticity and connect with these individuals. The importance of perceived brand authenticity is wide-ranging in its influence across age-groups and brand segments. Even though researchers have been studying brand authenticity for more than 25 years, an extensive literature review showed disparity in accepted/applied definitions and measurement scales. Also, many extant definitions and scales only address specific facets of brand authenticity, only providing partial coverage of the construct. This has led to stagnated progress in better understanding this key construct. Chapter 2 proposes a new definition and an amalgamated scale that addresses brand authenticity holistically, in a relatable manner. Through a literature review, surveys, and interviews with managers, similar gaps were found in consumer brand engagement research, as advancements in this field have not kept up with the constructs growing importance academically and practically. Proposed antecedents in extant literature have lacked novelty and have failed to keep pace with fast-evolving perceptions and attitudes of today’s consumer. This lack of relevancy had led to challenges for managers in creating and driving brand engagement, and the powerful resulting outcomes, including higher brand loyalty and increased purchase intentions. In Chapter 3 we propose two contemporary pathways to drive high levels of consumer brand engagement. The pathways are part of a theoretical model, with empirically proven theories serving as a strong underlying framework, and antecedents serving as “levers” managers can control to drive desirable outcomes. Structural equation modeling was used to test the hypotheses, consequences, and the full model. The testing led to impactful, significant findings that are predicted to advance the knowledge of perceived brand authenticity and consumer brand engagement, while opening the door for exciting future forward-thinking research.

*The words “perceived brand authenticity” and “brand authenticity; and “consumer brand engagement” and “brand engagement” are used interchangeably in this document, with the same meanings.

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Chapter 1

Executive Summary

There is wide consensus concerning the importance of brand engagement and its numerous positive outcomes in extant literature (Pansari and Kumar 2017; Vivek, Beatty and Morgan 2012). Researchers have proposed several factors for creating higher levels of brand engagement; however, empirical research is equivocal regarding a well-defined, generalizable pathway to best increase brand engagement, leading to disagreements in the field of how to best create brand engagement (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). The number of brand engagement empirical studies are limited and lack clear, comprehensive conceptualization methods (Algharabat et al. 2020). Prior literature includes a diverse group of proposed antecedents to brand engagement, yet still, the pathway to generating significant consumer engagement remains elusive (Lemon and Verhoef 2016).

These issues and problems in brand engagement research exist in a marketplace where the importance of brand engagement continues to grow. As the popularity of interactive technology and social media continues to increase, marketers are challenged to effectively connect with consumers on these platforms in a manner which establishes interactive relationships and two-way communication that builds trust (Kaur et al, 2020). The pandemic crisis reshaped consumer behavior trends and brand perceptions, while shifting the methods and platforms where consumers interact with brands. Companies have been slow to successfully adapt to these shifts and are finding it increasingly difficult to engage with consumers. Brands are becoming less relevant, as they fail to keep up with and engage in trends that matter to today's consumer (Talkwalker 2020) while falling short in their attempts to interact with customers through varied

channels and develop, deep, engaging relationships (Briglia 2020).

The ambiguity and diverse triggers to brand engagement proposed in research, and the slow adoption and understanding from brands, have led to a scenario where managers are in continuous struggles to find ways to create and drive consumer brand engagement. Prior literature includes a diverse group of proposed antecedents to brand engagement, yet still, the pathway to generate significant consumer engagement remains elusive (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Extant brand engagement literature has been criticized for failing to “address the barriers to higher-order customer engagement” (Chathoth et al. 2016, p. 223), while also emphasizing the need for better linkage to engagement outcomes and advanced consumer journey mapping that better engages consumers (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). To address this gap, we propose that the missing link to create powerful brand engagement is brand authenticity. This study is important to both managers and academics, as it will fill significant, existing gaps in the understanding of brand engagement and advance the field of study.

Practitioners have seen and experienced the benefits of brand engagement and remain unequivocal about its significance. The key question for managers is identifying the best pathways to create brand engagement and how to drive the process and triggers most effectively. By controlling the proposed antecedents and triggers of a model that has strong theoretical foundations, managers will be able to generate high levels of perceived brand authenticity and then link brand authenticity with brand engagement, either directly or via commitment-trust theory, thereby leading to the outcomes they desire. Our studies included researching and testing two possible pathways linking brand authenticity to brand engagement, a direct path from brand authenticity to brand engagement, and an indirect pathway, with commitment-brand theory serving as the mediator linking brand authenticity to brand engagement.

The right side of our proposed full theoretical model (Figure 1 in Chapter 3) will apply commitment-trust theory as an underlining framework. Commitment-trust theory is an impetus of the indirect and direct effects. When positioned as mediating variables, relationship commitment and trust are key constructs that play a pivotal role in linking antecedents with impactful outcomes (Morgan and Hunt 1994).

All the constructs in the theoretical model, except the new, amalgamated brand authenticity scale (Campagna, Donthu and Yoo 2022), included in Chapter 2, have theoretical backing proven in prior research. We expect our research, findings, and full model to have significant managerial and theoretical contributions, while assisting advancement in the knowledge and practical applications of brand authenticity and brand engagement.

We recognize extant literature includes important antecedents to brand engagement, and our research sought to identify sets of novel contemporary antecedents to heighten the understanding of the construct. Through surveys, interviews, questionnaires, and SEM, we collected a diverse set of data and tested model pathways. The majority of the hypothesized pathways in each of our three studies were supported (Table 1 in Chapter 3). We propose our research has led to empirically driven findings, including a significant driver, brand authenticity, to create and increase consumer brand engagement. An impetus of our initial research was the heavy stream of brand engagement and brand authenticity research we read in literature reviews, which continue to use aged citations (Barrio-García and Prados-Peña 2019) and cite the continued lack of clarity of key construct areas (Moulard 2022).

The triggers identified engage consumers in a powerful manner which helps heighten the level of perceived brand authenticity, the key pathway to creating consumer brand engagement.

Chapter 2

Brand Authenticity: Literature Review, Comprehensive Definition, and an Amalgamated Scale

Abstract

Amidst a rapidly changing marketplace, sharp behavioral changes, and increased social media usage, brand authenticity, already an important attribute, has become an essential asset for brands. Even though marketing researchers have been studying the topic for more than 25 years, our extensive literature review shows that a widely accepted definition and scale is still lacking. Many extant definitions and scales only address specific aspects of brand authenticity, thus only providing partial coverage. This paper proposes a new definition and amalgamated scale that addresses authenticity holistically in a germane/relatable manner. The disjointed, and often dated, extant definitions and scales require a re-conceptualization of brand authenticity to meet the needs of today's consumer in relevant, meaningful manner.

Introduction

The increased amount of research on brand authenticity since the early 2000s makes intuitive sense from a cultural, consumer and market perspective, as the level of focus on authenticity is closely correlated with the rise in popularity of social media platforms and web-based online review forums, such as; Google Reviews in 2002, Facebook in 2004, Yelp in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, WhatsApp in 2009, Instagram in 2010, Snapchat in 2011 and TikTok and Instagram Stories in 2016. In 2020, three new social media platforms launched that are already garnering significant usage, Clubhouse, Twitter Spaces and Instagram Reels. With the advent, high usage, and growth of these online review and social media platforms, consumers could now, in real-time, communicate with brands. These interactions included online conversations, idea exchanges, and discussions on both brand and product/service topics.

The nature of these platforms also allowed consumers to quickly share and crowd-source their brand interactions with friends and colleagues, potentially influencing aspects of brand identity and future product launches (Appel et al. 2020). Consumers could also rapidly research brands and read brand reviews. The richness and possibilities of this in-depth connectivity caught the eyes of managers and firms, who suddenly had access to droves of consumer comments and data to leverage. Marketers could swiftly analyze and review consumer feedback and extract important, re-emerging themes to help drive more effective marketing campaigns. One such brand-related communication theme that emerged was brand authenticity (Schmidt and Iyer 2015).

Marketing researchers have long recognized brand authenticity as being a linchpin of marketing (Holt 1998), craved for and vitally important for consumers (Audrezet et al. 2020). As academic interest in the field has grown, practitioners have come to “embrace

the notion of perceived brand authenticity in brand positioning and communication efforts (Morhart, et al. 2015, p. 211). For consumers, the importance of brand authenticity continues to grow. Recent research conducted by *The History Factory* showed that 80% of baby boomers, and 85% of generation x, cited brand authenticity as a significant factor when deciding which brands to support consumers. The percentages for millennials and generation x came in at 90% (Konovalova, September 24, 2019). A study by Fabrik Brands showed how brand authenticity helped brands rise above the immense uncertainty, unease and “noise” during the pandemic by forging powerful, emotional bonds with consumers, thereby driving brand loyalty (Harvey 2020).

As the significance of establishing high perceived brand authenticity began to increase in importance, academics delved into studying this key variable. With this rise in research came a considerable breadth of new literature on brand authenticity. Table 1 and Table 2 present a review and analysis of a variety of these articles, including those without and with measurement scales, respectively. Our thorough review, covering a myriad of research fields, revealed a disperse range of definitions and measurement scales. Furthermore, many of the extant definitions and scales only addressed specific aspects of brand authenticity and often include dated interpretations.

Based on the review of past studies, to address these disparities/gaps, this paper introduces a new, holistic brand authenticity definition which accounts for the key aspects of brand authenticity, and a corresponding scale that provides comprehensive and relevant coverage of the construct.

This research contributes to academic literature by summarizing a wide scope of brand authenticity literature, developing a holistic definition of brand authenticity, and

developing an inspired measurement scale which incorporates facets from prior studies to form a comprehensive, contemporary scale. This research contributes to practice by providing managers a comprehensive conceptualization, and deeper understanding, of brand authenticity, as well as a full faceted scale is highly relatable to today's consumer. We used the two brand authenticity literature tables, without and with scales, to drive our research path and as a key motivator in our study.

Systematic Review of Brand Authenticity Literature

Brand authenticity articles without measurement scales

Much of the research on brand authenticity in the 2000s was conceptual, with a focus on developing authentic-centric theories and definitions, while largely neglecting measurement scales and empirically based studies. This period of research on brand authenticity varied greatly in context, as researchers investigated a diverse set of industries, including wineries, tourism, restaurants, and factories and much of the brand authenticity-related studies focused on theory, with minimal scale and model development.

Major re-occurring themes that surfaced in the non-scale brand authenticity articles were psychology, self-identity, self-authentication, and the close relationship between brand authenticity and psychology.

Although in recent years brand authenticity articles have been more prolific in marketing journals, research on this key construct has also been prevalent in non-marketing-centric journals, such as *Organization Science*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology* and *Journal of Cognition*. In these journals, and others with psychology and

self-identity-based themes, definitions often focus on authenticity in terms of an underlying psychological process. Specifically, authenticity is explained in terms of psychological essentialism and as reflecting a valued essence and self-authentication (Newman 2016). Psychological aspects of self-authentication and the importance of essence are prevalent in a variety of areas of research and in the articles reviewed, without and with measurement scales, including research by Newman (2016), Newman and Dhar (2014), Valsesia, Nunes, and Ordanini (2016), and Spiggle, Nguyen, and Caravella (2012).

This theme of a close relationships among brand authenticity, essence, and self-authentication also permeated in sub-culture environments, in which individuals assigned higher levels of authenticity to products, services, and experiences that matched their own “different” and unique identity beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes (Beverland, Farrelly and Quester, 2010). Newman (2016, p. 317), a prominent scholar in the fields of psychology and authenticity, wrote about this trend, arguing that “authenticity should be thought of in terms of psychological essentialism”, as to do so “can generate a set of empirical predictions where we know authenticity is a factor.”

Without this standard, Newman argued that “it becomes quite difficult (if not impossible) to identify meaningful similarities or differences in evaluations of authenticity across domains or contexts.” As essentialism is closely related to cognition and cognitive development and behavior, the importance of authenticity and its relationship to self-identity again comes to the forefront.

Insert Table 1 Here

Brand authenticity articles with measurement scales

Having the benefit of prior methods, testing, and theories, brand authenticity research in the past decade has put forth enhanced models and measurement scales. As brand authenticity became increasingly important for consumers in their purchasing decisions and brand engagement behavior, the interest in this key construct amplified, and significant advancements in the field were made. Not surprisingly, considering the many positive implications for marketers, authenticity-based articles began to appear more predominantly in marketing journals such as *Journal of Marketing*, *European Journal of Marketing*, and *Journal of Marketing Research*. In particular, Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer, and Heinrich's (2012) conceptual framework and scale of brand authenticity made significant contributions to the advancement of the conceptualization and measurement of brand authenticity.

This new wave of articles published in marketing journals served as an important base on which scholars would build, including the development of a variety of new scales to measure brand authenticity (see Morhart, et al., 2015; Napoli, et al., 2014).

While the brand authenticity studies with scales included models with antecedents that marketers could manipulate to drive higher levels of perceived brand authenticity, such as brand heritage (Becker, Wiegand and Reinartz, 2019), reliability (Bruhn et al., 2012), openness, and honesty (Ilicic and Webster, 2014), other indicators were also prevalent in many of the scales that showed a strong linkage with the non-scale studies centered on the importance of self-identity and self-authentication. Such indicators included the ability of brands to identify with everyday people (Davisa, Sheriff and Owen, 2019) and the importance consumers put on brands understanding the “real them” and genuinely caring for them (Ilicic and Webster, 2014), while

also making people feel more connected with a particular product or service (Grayson and Martinic, 2004).

Insert Table 2 Here

In the well-known parable “The Blind Men and the Elephant”, six blind men, each having never previously encountered an elephant, come across the animal and try to figure out just what they have come across. Each of blind men touches a different, singular part of the elephant and proclaims to the others that they know what they have stumbled upon. Each of the blind men’s explanations differs, ranging from a rope (the tail) to a spear (one of the elephant’s tusks), and the six men argue over who is correct, as their descriptions are so diverse. The moral of this parable is that individuals often make proclamations on a subject, item, concept, etc., with the belief that their view represents the complete truth, when in fact, their perspective/experience only provides part of the real, holistic picture (Goldstein 2010; Snyder and Ford 2013).

In a somewhat analogous manner, our systematic literature review provides a picture of researchers only focusing on certain aspects of brand authenticity. Prior literature reveals an assortment of proposed scale items and a variety of different attributes in the conceptualizations of brand authenticity, with authors identifying and “proclaiming” specific facets of the construct, while not providing the full picture.

Clearly, there is a need for a comprehensive and contemporary definition that encompasses the major themes identified in our literature review and accounts for all key aspects of brand authenticity, as well as a full-faceted, forward-thinking measurement scale, both of which we provide. Our new definition and amalgamated, inspired scale flows from our in-depth literature review.

Defining Brand Authenticity

Stern's *International Journal of Research in Marketing* paper (1994), "Authenticity and the textual persona: Postmodern paradoxes in advertising narrative", helped spark deeper examination of brand authenticity in marketing research, while leading to further studies into an area Stern described as increasingly relevant. Subsequent marketing literature, with corresponding brand definitions, soon followed, including a study by Stern, in which she defined brand authenticity as the perceived genuineness of a brand (1996) and Parker et. al (1998) whose context was scotch whisky, with the determining authenticity factor being if the ingredients used were original, true, and real.

As both academic and practical interest in the field increased, brand authenticity literature became more prevalent. Proposed definitions in literature included: uniqueness in craft (Beverland 2005), being genuine and the "real" thing (Beverland and Luxton 2005; Cinelli and LeBoeuf 2020), having a unique identity (Manthiou, et al. 2018), consistency (Becker et al., 2019), essence and self-authentication (Newman 2016) and self-congruency (Moulard, et. al. 2021) and defining brand authenticity from a six-dimensional perspective (accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency), in which the application of the specific dimension can change depending upon the context (Nunes, Ordanini and Giambastiani 2021). Other definitions include Grayson and Martinec's seminal 2004 paper which identified two types of authenticity - indexical and iconic, with definitions such as, being true to self and cultural identity

(Grayson and Martinic 2004, p. 298), being open and honest (Ilicic and Webster 2014) and surviving times and trends (Eggers, et al., 2013).

Practical definitions of brand authenticity followed a similar disperse path of, with definitions ranging from being true to one's values and beliefs (Handley 2018) being genuine and honest (Pettrone, October 16, 2015), following through on marketing claims, being transparent, having consistency in marketing communication, and staying true and honest to core values (Jepson, August 28, 2019).

As prior academic literature, as well as practical conceptualization, includes a variety of diverse definitions of brand authenticity, there is a need for a comprehensive, holistic definition that provides full coverage of this key construct.

We combine these various themes to create one comprehensive definition of brand authenticity. That is, if a definition of brand authenticity is to fully address the complete scope and key areas of this variable, it must not only consider tried-and-true indicators, such as being genuine, open, and honest, it must also be contemporary and include areas that encompass consumers' desire for individualization and customization, as well as the rapidly changing conditions emerging in the marketplace.

Definitions of brand authenticity in prior literature have primarily focused on certain aspects of brand authenticity. For example, Davisa et al. (2019), Manthiou, Kang, Hyun, and Fu (2018), Goldman and Kernis (2004), and Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliouis and Joseph, S. (2008) focus on the self-authentication aspect of brand authenticity, while Beverland (2005), Kadirov (2010) and Manthiou et al. (2018) emphasize the role uniqueness plays in brand authenticity. Honesty is a focal point in definitions proposed by Becker et al. (2019), Boyle (2003) and Price et al. (1995), while Wu and Hsu (2018)

and Ilicic and Webster (2014) put significant importance on the perceived genuineness of a brand and Cayla and Arnould (2008), Holt (2004) and Beverland (2009) cite the importance of longevity, and a brand surviving times and trends.

In conclusion, our review of prior literature on brand authenticity uncovered four major themes consistently cited when defining brand authenticity: (1) self-authentication/empowerment, (2) having a unique identify/originality, (3) genuineness/being true to the brand, and (4) longevity/surviving times and trends.

Additionally, many brand authenticity definitions in extant literature have only been single-faceted. Based upon our literature review and exploratory research, we believe brand authenticity is a multi-faceted construct. Thus, we combined several, singular facets found in prior definitions to develop a new definition that includes key areas of the construct, while providing comprehensive coverage.

In addressing the landscape of extant brand authenticity research, it is important to note significant changes in the marketplace that have occurred over the past few years, including the expanding influence of brand authenticity and social media.

In the United States there were approximately 223 million social media users in 2020, 67% of the population. During the pandemic, there was a surge in digital and social media use in several business segments, including retail, restaurants, and health and wellness, with many of these increases expected to stick post-pandemic (Charm, McKinsey & Company Survey, May 13, 2021). In our evolving marketplace, social media has become a primary source for consumers in a variety of areas, such as research, brand interaction, sharing content and opinions and for daily news and information.

With consumers increasingly gravitating to social media platforms, brands must continuously innovate and introduce new technology to meet consumer needs to stay relevant (Appel et al. 2020).

Therefore, we define brand authenticity as *a genuine brand with a unique style that cares about being open and honest with consumers and will survive times and trends*. This definition identifies brand authenticity in a more comprehensive and contemporary way than definitions proposed in extant literature, as it holistically covers all the significant and relevant areas of the construct. For our new brand authenticity definition, we referenced aspects of four different definitions that authors have used in prior literature.

Our application of “genuine” follows the meaning applied by Napoli et al. (2014), who refer to genuine as reflecting reality and truth and not being fake. The meaning of “unique” is drawn from Kadirov (2010), whose definition focuses on the importance of being perceived as one of a kind and having a distinct, unmatched style. For the “open and honest” facet of our definition, we reference Ilicic and Webster (2014), who emphasize the importance of brands focusing on openness and honesty in their relationships with consumers. Finally, we cite Morhart et al. (2015) for our meaning of “survive times and trends”, as the authors stress the importance of brands having continuity and a rich history, including a pattern of success over long time periods and various trends. It is important to note that in pulling singular facets of prior author’s definitions, we created a comprehensive, contemporary brand authenticity definition that resonates with today’s consumer, which we believe was lacking in extant definitions.

Development of an Amalgamated Scale of Brand Authenticity

Our process of developing and identifying measures of brand authenticity began with our extensive brand authenticity literature review (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenber, 2009), including analysis of more than 100 papers from a diverse group of journals. Research areas covered in our literature review encompassed areas include psychology, hospitality, tourism, culture, ethics, social and behavior sciences, and marketing.

Our literature review led to significant conclusions, mainly that a comprehensive, contemporary brand authenticity scale was still lacking, and important implications, including the need for a fully faceted, relevant scale to assist marketer's understanding and application of brand authenticity.

Before we develop a scale, we conducted in-depth interviews with consumers and focus group discussions with students, asking participants for their definitions of brand authenticity, with responses also showing sharp contrast, including uniqueness, openness, consistency, honesty, sincerity, being true to core values, following your mission statement, fulfilling promises, doing the right thing and being socially responsible. While there was a lack of consensus on the meaning of brand authenticity among participants, we found that there was wide-spread agreement on the importance and influence of the construct.

In our scale development process, we used a modified version of Churchill's (1979) approach, amalgamating facets of scales from four extant papers. This approach is substantially different from those used in other studies in which existing literature and, especially, their scales tend not to be considered, but instead fresh new items are

generated through own interviews or surveys (e.g., Nunes, Ordanini and Giambastiani, 2021).

Our procedure was similar to that used by Bhuian et al. (pp. 12 and 13, 2003) who “adopted and modified the scales of Jaworski and Kohli (1993) and Narver and Slater (1990)”, as well as from Miller and Friesen (1983) and Morris and Paul (1987), in forming their merged scale.

The four studies that inspired our process were Kadirov (2010), Ilicic and Webster (2014), Napoli et al. (2014), and Morhart et al. (2015). We were inspired by each of these studies and their brand authenticity scales, as each paper looked at a different facet of brand authenticity that was, on its own, relevant, while also aligning well with our new brand authenticity definition.

Drawing from the full scales applied in these four papers, our initial list consisted of 47 brand authenticity items. For scale reduction and item purification, we eliminated similar sounding items and those that had comparable meanings. Additionally, through peer interviews, we assessed content and face validity. This process resulted in 15 items being eliminated, reducing the item pool to 32 items.

We then conducted a Qualtrics survey with the remaining 32 items. A seven-point Likert scale was used, anchored by 1 “strongly disagree” and 7 = strongly agree”. We also included Yoo and Donthu’s often cited and applied overall brand equity scale (2001) for planned nomological validity testing. The context of our survey was the sports apparel segment.

Data was collected via email invitations sent to 141 students from three different marketing classes at a large public university in the southeast. As an incentive to participate in the study,

students were informed they would receive bonus points on an assignment if they answered each question, and that the context and overall findings of the survey would be discussed in a future class. Respondents accessed the survey through a link to the online questionnaire, which included general directions on the survey flow and details of the 7-point Likert scale. Our survey context was the sports apparel segment and respondents were first asked to type in a sports apparel brand, with “Adidas, Nike, Converse, etc.” provided as examples.

Data was collected from 121 university students, of these, one survey could not be used due to incomplete responses. The final sample consisted of 120 students. Twenty-one of the respondents were 20 years old or younger, eighty were between 21 and 24, and 19 respondents were between 25 and 40 years old, with a fairly even split between male (41%) and female (59%) participants.

Following Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we conducted a factor analysis with a varimax rotation, a loading condition of ($>.50$) and eigenvalues greater than 1. Our factor analysis revealed that two of the scale items did not exceed $.50$, and components five and six each only had one loading factor. Thus, we eliminated these four items, reducing the item pool to 28 items, revealing a four-factor solution. The significance level was high ($p < .01$).

Seeking a scale with greater parsimony that also provided full and contemporary coverage of brand authenticity, we again reviewed the items, removing redundant sounding items for each of the components. This eliminated 9 items, leaving 19 remaining items.

For further scale purification and to measure reliability, we ran Cronbach alpha tests on each of the 4 dimensions and their items, as well as on all of the 19 items together.

The Cronbach alpha for the 19 items was .93, and the alpha for each of the dimensions was .91, .92, .81 and .74. Eliminating the items with the lowest alpha scores in each of the dimensions left us with 12 items.

We then ran a final factor analysis on the 12 remaining items. The factor analysis, using a loading condition of ($> .7$), revealed a three-component solution, with eigenvalues greater than 1 and variance explained having a value of 70.55%. Reliability was strong, with a Cronbach alpha of .88 for the 12 items. Cronbach alpha for each of the three components also showed strong reliability, coming in at .86, .80 and .82 respectively.

Reviewing the meanings and similarities of each component's items, we accordingly named each dimension. We labeled the first component (five items), conscious. A conscious brand does not compromise on their values, has a unique style which is reflected in their purpose-driven values and the high level of awareness and care they have of world events. Conscious brands continuously strive for self-growth and being "awake" to evolving consumer perceptions. Our second component (four items) is longevity. Brands that have longevity have a pulse on the marketplace and are able to adjust to significant/influential shifts in consumer's attitudes and behaviors. They do so without compromising on their core values and high standards of quality. Their adaptability, including putting a modern twist to a longtime product to align with changing tastes is appreciated by consumers.

The third component (three items) is self-empowerment. Brand's that elicit a sense of self-empowerment do so by connecting with consumers in an emotional manner in which the consumer becomes a "partner" with the brand through active two-way communication.

Importantly, for self-empowerment to drive positive consumer perceptions and behaviors, the communication and dialogue must not be superficial. By connecting with consumers and actively soliciting their feedback brands show that they recognize the importance of constant interaction and consumer communication. Today's consumers are savvy and want to be heard and valued. By communicating and operating in a manner that shows the importance they put on these facets of self-empowerment, brands will establish deeper connections with consumers and increased brand loyalty.

One would expect strong correlation between brand authenticity and brand equity, as each are consumer-centric constructs, whose significance depends heavily on consumers' brand perceptions. The result of our Pearson correlation test, where we computed the correlation of the average scores of our final 12 brand authenticity items and the average survey scores of the 4 brand equity items, proved our intuition was correct, as the results showed a significant correlation of .589, showing strong validity. From a dimensional standpoint, the first component, conscious, had a correlation of .534, the second component, longevity, had a correlation of .223, and the third component, self-empowerment, had the highest correlation, .611. Thus, nomological validity of our amalgamated brand authenticity scale was established.

Our final 12-item 3-dimensional scale has high reliability and validity, covers brand authenticity in a comprehensive and contemporary manner and importantly, re-conceptualizes brand authenticity in a manner which makes the construct relevant and meaningful for today's consumer. The 12 items of the brand authenticity and their factor loadings and reliability are reported in Table 3.

Finally, we used the scale to measure brand authenticity of 10 brands (5 sports and 5 technology) using adult (age above 25) and college student samples in 3 different

countries (United States, India and South Korea) to demonstrate generalizability of the scale. These results are reported in Table 4. Adult samples were obtained using MTurk Masters respondents and college student samples were used. The scale demonstrates very high reliability across various countries, samples, and product categories.

Insert Table 3 and 4 here

Conclusions and Implications

A key motivator of conducting an expansive, wide-ranging literature review was to ensure our analysis was both thorough and inclusive. This process enabled us to have a clear focus and specific objectives in the next stages of our research, including our methods. With our final scale items and dimensions, we feel confident we have achieved our goal of having a comprehensive scale that can be used to advance the field academically, while also serving as a powerful tool for marketers.

We expect our findings and multi-dimensional scale to drive advancements in brand authenticity research, while also having managerial applications. In extant literature, numerous authors have lamented the lack of a full faceted, contemporary brand authenticity scale.

Those expressing unease include Ilicic and Webster, who expressed concern over the lack of depth in the exploration of key facets of brand authenticity and a widely accepted scale (2014), and Davisa et al. who called the low level of understanding of brand authenticity, and the fact there still was no general agreement on a scale “alarming” (2019, p. 18).

In our literature review we found that brand authenticity was a prevalent topic in non-marketing journals, with heavy conceptual focus, rather than providing empirically driven model and applications marketers could use to reach key objectives. Arming marketers with a comprehensive brand authenticity scale that aligns with the behaviors and attitudes of *today's* consumer, is our first step in providing marketers tools they need to thrive in today's rapidly evolving marketplace.

According to McKinsey & Company video presentation "The Next Normal: The Acceleration of Digital", the pandemic triggered a dramatic digital migration, as on average, the adaption of digital components jumped 5 years in a period of just 8 weeks. With this rapid expansion and adoption, plus the enhancements brands have made to their digital and social media platforms, brand authenticity has become more important than ever, as these platforms are often the main interaction consumers have with brands, and content comes that comes across as in-authentic can quickly turn off consumers while negative feedback goes viral.

From a strategic and tactical perspective, brands need to be forward-thinking and stay up to date with behavioral and attitudinal shifts, while also being forward thinking. While perceived brand authenticity certainly has been an important factor for brands for many years, shifts in the marketplace, changes in consumers' perspectives, and the increase in digital and social media usage, has vaulted authenticity to a critical must-have for brands.

Social media is not only a key branding platform where companies can build and evolve their brand's identity and image, it is also a forum for conversations and active conversations which can lead to higher engagement and interaction. The more authentic a

brand's content, images and communication, the higher likelihood of further interest (Scott, January 9, 2020).

While researchers have examined specific facets of brand authenticity, they have primarily focused on specific themes of the construct. Prior literature has included different definitions, as researchers look at different facets of brand authenticity. Our extensive literature review showed a wide range of brand authenticity definitions, with authors looking at different facets of the construct, as well as diverse measurement scales, with a wide range of dimensions and scale items.

Our new definition of brand authenticity and proposed scale flowed from our extensive literature review and studies. There is a need for a comprehensive and contemporary definition that encompasses the major themes identified in our literature review and accounts for all key aspects of brand authenticity, as well as a full coverage, forward-thinking scale, both of which we provide with our inspired definition and scale.

Prior research has shown that a high level of perceived brand authenticity leads to positive consequences for brands, with consumers viewing brands they perceive as authentic as “reflecting ... core values and norms” and “being true to [themselves] and not undermining their brand essence” (Fritz, Schoenmueller and Bruhn, 2017, p. 327); however, the proposed definitions and scales of brand authenticity have been scattered and often outdated. With millennial and generation z consumers having a high level of spending power and given the significance they put on brand authenticity, this importance and impact of this construct will only continue to increase in the future. Millennials and generation z, who highly value brand authenticity, are projected to overtake baby boomers as the dominant spenders in the United States and the importance of brand authenticity is increasing with older generations as well,

including generation x and baby boomers (Morgan Stanley, 2019). Academics and marketing managers must tap into impactful/relevant/meaningful/influential motivators that will drive these younger generations to act and become active consumers of a brand. This new wave of consumers *expects* brands to be authentic, thus all of a brand's touchpoints, communication and imagery must not only be perceived as authentic, brands must follow through on their brand communication which drive perceived authenticity or consumers, especially with the increase in social media usage, will quickly spread harmful news for the brand (Fournier 2017).

Future Research and Limitations

There is a need to research, identify, and test influential antecedents to brand authenticity that managers can manipulate and control, thus increasing authenticity perceptions. Future research should delve deeper into the role of brand authenticity in driving other influential constructs. Additionally, a theoretical model with antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity is needed.

Limitations of this research include the fact that we focus on B2C markets in our studies. In future research, we suggest testing the effectiveness of the model in B2B markets. In the paper "Brand worlds: Introducing experiential marketing to B2B branding", the authors found that brand authenticity was influential in many different areas of B2B relationships (Österle, Kuhn and Henseler 2018). Thus, further research could unearth numerous possibilities and applications for our model in the B2B segment. Furthermore, in a global marketplace, a limitation of our model is that it is very U.S. centric. Future studies testing if the model would work in countries such as China and India would be beneficial. Additionally, for scale validation, future research should include different samples and product categories to test dimensionality and predictability.

As the spending power and influence of millennials, individuals born between 1981-1996, and generation Z, people born starting in 1997 (Dimock 2019) continues to increase, we have seen a growth in brand authenticity research focusing on these two generations (Vitelar 2019; Shirdastian et al. 2019; Djafarova and Bowes 2020). This increase in research has come as a wealth of practical articles detailing the impact brand authenticity has on younger generations has become common place (Scott 2020).

With this shift in buying power, and millennials and generation z expected to overtake baby boomers as the dominant spenders in the United States in the near future (Morgan Stanley, 2019), future research focusing on triggers and pathways which impact the perceptions and shopping behaviors of these age groups could be significant. Indeed, 43% of millennials regard the authenticity of a brand as more important than the content the brand communicates (Fournier 2017).

Along with the importance of studying the impact of our new model on different age-groups, we suggest research be conducted on other potential moderation variables, such as culture, gender, ethnicity, education, and income levels, as well as brand segment, segment consumer involvement (high/low) and pricing.

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TABLES

Table 1: Select brand authenticity articles without measurement scales.

Study	Brand Authenticity Definition	Dimensions	Theory	Sample Size and Context
Nunes Ordanini and Giambastiani (2021)	Consumer assessment, determined by six dimensions; accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency. The role of the dimension adapts accordingly to the consumer context.	6-Accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency	How a consumer conceptualizes just what is an authentic experience depends on how they conceptualize authenticity. Six dimensions; accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency comprise a set of adaptable components that consumers consider when assessing authenticity.	Sample size: 1,928 respondents. Context: A variety of consumption experiences - products vs. services, the primary consumption benefits - hedonic vs. utilitarian, and the life cycle of the products - consumable vs. durable.
Mazutis and Slawinski (2015)	Two core dimensions of authenticity; Distinctiveness and Social Connectedness.	2-Distinctiveness, Social connectedness.	To be perceived as authentic firms must possess both distinctiveness and brand social responsibility. While brand social connectedness or distinctiveness are each essential, a firm must have both dimensions to be perceived as authentic.	A wide range of authenticity, brand social responsibility and distinctiveness literature was reviewed in this conceptual paper. Firms cites in examples include Walmart, a Canadian Mining Company, Chiquita and country music performers
Yuan et al. (2014)	Comprises objective, constructive, and existential elements.	1-Original	Authenticity is an attribute-oriented idea. Consumer-based authenticity constantly evolves. Objective authenticity can be achieved by buying the original or real product, but collective authenticity centers around individuals' brand-related experiences.	Sample size: 253. Context: Manufacturing locations and factories.
Newman and Dhar (2014)	Authenticity encapsulates what is genuine, real, and true.	-Place of Origin	Based upon a belief in contagion, products from a company's original location are perceived as containing the essence of the brand. Consumers view products from the original factory as more authentic and valuable.	Sample size: 328. Context: Consumer products manufactured at the firm's original factory versus identical products made elsewhere.

Beverland, Farrelly and Quester (2010)	Authenticity can be attained by individual authenticating acts or a collective authoritative performance.	2-Self-authentication, Social Identity	Identity benefits, including flow and kinship drive authentic communities, leading to engagement and a variety of brand-related triggers in selecting authentic brand partners.	Sample size: One-hour, in-depth interviews with 21 informants. Context: surfboard, snowboard, and skiing brands.
Beverland and Farrelly (2010)	Prevalent cultural influences lead to the underpinning mechanisms in perceived authenticity to objects, brands, and experiences. These mechanisms are practicality, participation and morality. (Ferrara 1998; Taylor 1991).	1-First-hand experience	The variety of individual's goals and standards lead to people discovering authenticity in objects, brands, and events that others may view as fake. Support is added to Rose and Wood's (2005) notion of hyper-authenticity, in which consumers actively construct personally useful notions of the authentic.	Sample size: In-depth interviews with 21 informants. Context: 100 images, including pictures of day-to-day life, tourist sites, historic figures/events and artifacts, local and foreign brands (new and old versions when relevant), and cultural icons such as sporting paraphernalia.
Kolar and Zabkar (2010)	Tourists' enjoyment and perceptions of how genuine their experiences are.	4-Cultural Motivation, Object-based authenticity, Existential authenticity, Loyalty	Authenticity is a key mediating construct between motivation and loyalty. Cultural motivation is a significant antecedent of object-based and existential authenticity, which impacts tourist loyalty.	Sample size: Personal interviews with 1147 individuals. Context: 25 Romanesque heritage sites in four European countries.
Beverland (2009)	Authenticity is defined subjectively by the consumer, as they decide what is real, genuine and authentic based on their point of view. A brand is considered authentic if it "fits into the individual's desired truth."	2-Can't be copied, Can't be faked	Authenticity leads to numerous positive consequences for brands. Those outcomes include increased brand equity (Napoli et.al., 2014), more favorable perceptions, stronger brand-consumer relationships (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010) and increased loyalty, as well as heightened self-identity for the consumer (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010).	Sample size: N/A. Context: Diverse group of iconic brands (such as Chateau Margaux, Aston Martin and the Rolling Stones) that have survived times and trends.

Alexander (2009)	The authenticity of brands centers on being original, genuine, and unaffected (p. 560)".	6-Heritage and pedigree, Stylistic consistency, Quality commitments, Relationship to place, Method of production Downplaying commercial motives (Beverland 2006).	Authenticity helps develop "moral legitimacy" (Beverland, 2005, p. 460) via marketing initiatives with genuine context.	Sample size: 18 interviews with 2 marketing managers at co-branded organizations. Context: The S.A. Brain Brewery and the Welsh Rugby Union Romanesque heritage sites in four European countries.
Beverland, Lindgreen and Wink (2008)	Three forms of authenticity: Pure (literal) authenticity, approximate authenticity, and moral authenticity.	2-Genuine, Self-Authentic	Advertising plays a role in reinforcing images of. Advertising by communicating pure, approximate and moral authenticity.	Sample size: 23 interviews with 3 sources; consumers, marketers, and business buyers. Context: Consumer responses to beer advertisements.
Rose and Wood (2005)	Consumers negotiate authenticity based on simulation. Authenticity is constructed by means of consumer (the viewer), which is only meaningful in cultural context.	1-Self-Referential	To develop forms of self-referential hyper-authenticity, consumers merge the fantastic components with indexical essentials that are connected to their own life experiences. Many luxury brands reinforce heritage and pedigree by referencing celebrities that have used their products	Sample size: 15 reality television viewers. Context: Reality television programs that aired during 2000-2001. While watching the TV shows the 15 participants wrote their thoughts, feelings and experiences in a journal. Sample Size: 20 established, ultra-premium wine producers, with 39 interviews conducted across these firms. Context: Luxury wines.
Beverland (2006)	Consumers negotiate authenticity based on simulation. Authenticity is constructed by means of consumer (the viewer), which is only meaningful in cultural context.	6-Heritage and pedigree, Stylistic consistency, Quality commitments, Relationship to place, Method of production Downplaying commercial motives	Marketer projections and consumer understanding of authenticity consists of both objective (real) and subjective factors (stylized or fictional).	Sample size: In-depth interviews with 21 informants. Context: 100 images.
Grayson and Martinic (2004)	Iconic Authenticity-Authentic describes something whose physical manifestation resembles something that is indexically authentic. Indexical Authenticity-Authentic describes something that is thought not to be a copy or an imitation.	2-Genuiness, Truth	Iconic cues are more strongly and consistently associated with perceived connections with the past while indexical cues are more strongly and consistently associated with perceived evidence,	Sample size: 77 respondents from both sites. Context: Sherlock Holmes Museum and Shakespeare's Birthplace.

Table 2: Select brand authenticity articles with measurement scales

Study	Items to measure Brand Authenticity	Brand Authenticity Definition	Dimensions	Theory, Alpha, Sample, context	Antecedents
Becker et al., (2019)	<p>With regard to the overall brand image, the ad was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unsuitable/suitable. -Inconsistent/consistent. -A bad fit/a good fit. <p>Indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The ad reflects the brand's heritage. -The ad relates to the brand's traditions. -The ad connects to the brand's past. <p>- Indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The message of the ad was inaccurate. -The message of the ad was exaggerated. 	Genuine, real, and true with regard to some executional element.	4-Preserving the brand essence; Honoring brand heritage; Showing a realistic plot; Presenting a credible message.	An ad congruent with the brand's essence has a positive effect on sales in most cases, while an overly honest advertising message can hurt performance; this is true for hedonic products, where consumers rely on subjective information when making purchase decisions. Alphas: 0.88-0.98. Sample size: 323 tv ads across 67 brands. Context: Six fast-moving consumer goods categories (chocolate bars, yogurt, razors, shampoo, shower gel, and household detergent) sold on the German market.	Empirically Tested: Brand essence Brand heritage Message credibility
Davis, Sheriff and Owen (2019)	<p><i>Iconic:</i> Authentic reproduction of the original time origin (Grayson and Martinic 2004).</p> <p><i>Instrumentality:</i> Practical Self-Authentication (Beverly and Farrelly, 2004).</p> <p><i>Social:</i> Use of product symbolism or self-efficacy to construct authentic personal or social identities (Leigh et al., 2006).</p>	A multidimensional experience, authentic experiences include iconic, identification, practical/impersonal, production/situation, social, moral, pure approximate, and the virtuous self.	2-Iconic/Time of Origin, Self-Identification	Consumers project their values on brand. Brand values help consumer attain moral self-authentication. When consumers feel involved with creators and place of production, authentic consumption experiences are enhanced. Alpha: 0.83. Sample: 491 consumers in New Zealand. Context: Online trading website: Trademe.com	Based on Prior Literature: Sincerity Originality Brand heritage Honest Simple Natural

Wu and Hsu (2018)	-I believe the relationships that have developed through this online game are genuine. -I believe the people, events, and things within this game experience are genuine.	Authenticity is based on player's perception of genuineness and whether players perceive that people, things (virtual items), rituals, and traditions are genuine in the game world.	1-Genuine	Players' perceived authenticity increases their intention to play and purchase virtual items. Alpha: 0.92. Sample size: 393. Context: Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGS).	<i>Based on Prior Literature:</i> <i>Authentic design</i> <i>Avatar identification</i> <i>Co-creation</i>
Liang, Choi and Joppe (2018)	Objective-related authenticity, activity-related authenticity and existential authenticity.	"Authenticity is a social construction that may change due to different evaluators' perceptions and interpretations of the place, situation, person, or object" (Grayson and Martinec, 2004).	1-Real	Perceived authenticity has a strong effect in lowering (Airbnb) consumer' perceived risk and positively influencing perceived value. Composite reliability: 0.820: Sample size: 395. Context: Customers who have used Airbnb.	Empirically tested: Represents local ways of life. Represents the local community. Offers a feeling of a real home. Allows for interaction with the local community.
Tran and Keng (2018)	Brand explains the morality and honesty of the company. Brand includes most functions that are practical in daily usage and authentic value. Products of this brand are made genuinely and honestly.	The qualities of genuineness, truth, and reality (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Real, actual, genuine and bona-fide.	6-Realism, Aesthetics, Control, Connection, Virtue, Originality	Theory: N/A. Alpha: 0.75-0.82. Sample size: 250. Context: Well-known brands, including technology companies (Apple), clothing companies (Nike) and café's (Starbucks).	Based on Prior Literature: Brand heritage; Pedigree, Relationship to place; Method of production; Commitment to quality; Stylistic consistency
Carsana and Jolibert (2018)	Integrity, Credibility, Symbolism and Continuity	Conceptualized with three perspectives (Morhart, et al. 2015), objectivist, constructivist and existentialist.	4-Continuity, Integrity Credibility, Symbolism	Brand-schematic consumers are more likely to perceive private-label brands (PLBs) as authentic and increases willingness to buy PLBs.	Based on Prior Literature: Iconic cues; Indexical cues; Brand schematicity
Manthiou et al. (2018)	Stands for and does not promise anything which contradicts its essence and character. -Considering its brand promise, the luxury hotel does not pretend to be something else. -Considering its brand promise, the luxury hotel doesn't favor its target group.	Authenticity is regarded as self-fulfillment (<i>Guignon, 2004</i>). Personal identity and social pressures are drivers of authentic consumers (Erikson, 1975).	1-Uniqueness	Empirical evidence links authenticity and memory and connects experiences with recall. Perceptions are stored in memory and act as antecedents' behavior (Bozinoff and Roth, 1983). Alpha: 0.797. Sample size: 412 guests. Context: 23 luxury brand hotels.	Based on Prior Literature: Association with personal identity; Genuine; Being true to itself; Self-fulfillment.

Fritz, Schoenmueller and Bruhn (2017)	(Bruhn et al., 2012); <i>Continuity</i> : <i>Brand</i> is consistent over time. <i>Brand</i> stays true to itself. <i>Brand</i> offers continuity. <i>Brand</i> has a clear concept that it pursues. <i>Originality</i> : <i>Brand</i> is different from all other brands. <i>Brand</i> stands out from other brands. <i>Brand</i> is unique. <i>Brand</i> clearly distinguishes itself from other brands. <i>Reliability</i> : Experience of the <i>brand</i> has shown me that it keeps its promises. <i>Brand</i> delivers what it promises. <i>Brand's</i> promises are credible. <i>Brand</i> makes reliable promises. <i>Naturalness</i> : <i>Brand</i> does not seem artificial. <i>Brand</i> makes a genuine impression. <i>Brand</i> gives the impression of being natural.	Perceived consistency of a brand's behavior which reflects its core values and norms, according to which it is perceived as being true to itself. This perceptual process involves two types of authenticity (indexical and iconic).	4-Continuity, Originality, Reliability, Naturalness (Bruhn et al. 2012)	Brand authenticity positively affects relationship quality, which positively influences behavioral intentions. Alpha: 0.897. Sample size: 509. Context: 18 international and national brands covering several industries, including fast-moving and durable consumer goods.	Based on Prior Literature: Brand heritage; Brand nostalgia; Brand communication; Brand clarity; Social commitment; Brand legitimacy; Actual self-congruence; Ideal self-congruence Manthiou et al. (2018)
Shirdastian, Laroche, Richard (2017)	-Only the finest ingredients are used. Has strong connections to a historical time period and culture. Fulfills brand promise in a way very different than competitors. Reflects important values people care about.	Real and genuine, not a copy.	4- Quality commitment, Heritage, Uniqueness, Symbolism	New method to analyze brand sentiment is developed examining how brand authenticity is perceived by consumers and is shared in social media. SVM (Alpha): 0.842. Sample Size: 2,204 tweets. Context: Tweets analyzing brand authenticity and sentiment polarity.	Empirically Tested: Quality commitment: Heritage; Uniqueness: Symbolism
Ilicic and Webster (2016)	-Celebrity acts in a manner values, even if others criticize or reject them for doing so. Celebrity cares about openness and honesty in close relationships with others. Celebrity places a good deal of importance on others understanding who he truly is.	Celebrity brand authenticity is defined as consumer perceptions of the celebrity brand "being true to oneself."	2-Genuine in Relationships, Behave in Accordance with Perceived Values	Validity of celebrity's brand authenticity influences consumer's purchase intention. Alphas: 0.78, 0.96, 0.95. Samples: 160, 169, 96. Context: Authenticity perceptions of popular celebrities.	Empirically Tested: Consumer perceptions of interactions celebrities had with others. How the celebrity made the individual feel.

Valesia et al. (2016)	<p>Level of creative control: Extent that the same entity is responsible for all stages of the creative process; Performers who write their own songs; Extent to which a product is perceived as a faithful execution of the creator's vision.</p>	<p>Authenticity is used when consumers evaluate products they deem worthy of recognition, as consumers value how a product came to be. Higher creative control assures consumers of the creative authenticity of a product.</p>	1-Trustworthy	<p>In some circumstances creative genuineness mediates effect of creative control in parallel with effect on recognition. Consumers rely on peripheral cues (creative control) when forming their appraisals. Alpha: 0.87. Sample size: 992. Context: Music industry: 55 years (1958–2012) of #1 songs from Billboard's Hot 100.</p>	<p>Empirically Tested: Creative control.</p>
Morhart et al. (2015)	<p>Continuity A brand with a history. A timeless brand. A brand that survives times. A brand that survives trends.</p> <p>Credibility A brand that will not betray you. A brand that accomplishes its value promise. An honest brand.</p> <p>Integrity A brand that gives back to its consumers. A brand with moral principles. A brand true to a set of moral values. A brand that cares about its consumers.</p> <p>Symbolism A brand that adds meaning to people's lives. A brand that reflects important values people care about. A brand that connects people with their real selves. A brand that connects people with what is really important.</p>	<p>Brands provide identity-relevant features and means of self-verification, thereby helping brands remain true to themselves and to consumers, while also helping consumers stay true to themselves.</p>	4-Continuity, Credibility Integrity, Symbolism	<p>PBA increases emotional brand attachment, word-of-mouth and brand choice via self-congruence. Alpha: 0.93. Sample size: 254. Context: Consumer brands, including Heinz and Coca-Cola.</p>	<p>Empirically Tested: Indexical cues; Brand congruent behavior. Iconic cues; Communicating style emphasizing brand roots & virtue. Existential cues; Brand anthropomorphism.</p>

Lu, A. C. C., Gursoy, and Lu, C. Y. (2015)	-The overall settings and interior design are authentic to me; The food at this restaurant is authentic; I enjoy the authentic dining experience and service provided by employees.	Authenticity perceptions are shaped by consumer's assessment if the food is truly ethnic. If an ethnic restaurant is very exotic and unique, it is more likely the restaurant will be identified as authentic.	3-Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Perceived Quality	Brand awareness, image and perceived quality will heighten as their levels of perceived authenticity of that restaurant increases.	Based on Prior Literature: Indexical cues: Brand congruent behavior. Iconic cues: Marketing efforts on a brand roots & virtue. Existential cues: Brand anthropomorphism.
Kadirov (2010)	Consumer judgement about the extent to which a brand is considered to be authentic (or inauthentic) Real, Genuine, Superior, Traditional, Sincere, Integrity.	Real, Genuine, Superior, Traditional, Sincere, Integrity.	7-Real, True-Self, Commercialization, Unique, History, Community Link, Empowerment	By offering better deals, national brands increase perceived authenticity and reinforce their image of sincerity. Alphas: 0.90, 0.92. Sample Size: 661 respondents and 1201 observations. Context: 20 different product categories from food, beverage, and household care products in New Zealand.	Empirically tested: Marketing; Product innovation; Distinctive packaging; Advertising-Price; Manufacturing; Private label production by national brand manufacturers. Difficulty of producing the product.
Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland and Farrelly (2014)	Quality is central to the brand: Only the finest ingredients are used in the manufacture of this brand; The brand is made to the most exacting standards	Relational authenticity is the consumer's assessment of the genuineness of the brand.	3- Quality commitment, Brand Heritage, Sincerity	The subjective evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a brand by consumers.	Based on Prior Literature: Heritage, nostalgia, cultural symbolism, sincerity, craftsmanship, quality commitment, design consistency.
Bruhn et al (2012)	Continuity: Brand is consistent over time, stays true to itself. Brand has a clear concept that it pursues. Originality: Brand is different from all other brands and stands out. Brand is unique. Brand clearly distinguishes itself from other brands. Reliability: Brand keeps its promises and delivers what it promises. Brand's promises are credible and reliable. Naturalness: Brand does not seem artificial. Brand makes a genuine impression. Brand gives the impression of being natural.	Genuineness of the brand.	4- Continuality, Originality, Reliability, Naturalness	To enhance a brand's authenticity, companies should aim to create unified brand perception using all communication sources to ensure its reliability. This implies a persistent presentation of the brand name, logo and slogan via all communication tools. Alpha: .90-.96. Context: Variety of well-known brands, such as Coke, Adidas and Lacoste.	Empirically Tested: Brand Perception. Unified Presentation. Consistent Messaging.

Fritz, Schoenmueller and Bruhn (2017)

(Bruhn et al., 2012);
Continuity: Brand is consistent over time. Brand stays true to itself. Brand offers continuity. Brand has a clear concept that it pursues. Originality: Brand is different from all other brands. Brand stands out from other brands. Brand is unique. Brand clearly distinguishes itself from other brands. Reliability: Experience of the brand has shown me that it keeps its promises. Brand delivers what it promises. Brand's promises are credible. Brand makes reliable promises. Naturalness: Brand does not seem artificial. Brand makes a genuine impression. Brand gives the impression of being natural.

Perceived consistency of a brand's behavior which reflects its core values and norms, according to which it is perceived as being true to itself. This perceptual process involves two types of authenticity (indexical and iconic).

4-Continuity, Originality, Reliability, Naturalness (Bruhn et al. 2012)

Brand authenticity positively affects relationship quality, which positively influences behavioral intentions. Alpha: 0.897. Sample size: 509. Context: 18 international and national brands covering several industries, including fast-moving and durable consumer goods.

Based on Prior Literature: Brand heritage; Brand nostalgia; Brand communication; Brand clarity; Social commitment; Brand legitimacy; Actual self-congruence; Ideal self-congruence Manthiou et al. (2018)

Table 3. Brand Authenticity Scale.

Items and Reliability	Factor loadings
First Dimension: Conscious ($\alpha = .86$)	
• The brand cares about its customers.	0.82
• The brand has moral principles.	0.79
• The brand reflects important values people care about.	0.78
• The brand cares about openness and honesty	0.74
• The brand is genuine because it empowers me.	0.67
Second Dimension: Longevity ($\alpha = .80$)	
• The brand has a history.	0.83
• The brand survives times and trends.	0.79
• The brand reflects a timeless design.	0.76
• The brand exudes a sense of tradition.	0.72
Third Dimension: Self-Empowerment ($\alpha = .82$)	
• The brand puts me in control of my life and experiences.	0.87
• The brand adds meaning to people's lives.	0.82
• The brand connects people with what is important.	0.81
The overall Brand Authenticity Scale (all 12 items together) ($\alpha = .88$)	

Table 4: Brand Authenticity Across Brands, Countries, and Segments

	United States	India	South Korea	
	Adults	Students	Adults	Students
SPORTS BRANDS				
Nike	4.77	5.26	5.80	4.92
Adidas	5.06	5.28	5.70	5.78
Under Armor	4.58	4.76	5.55	4.45
Reebok	5.32	4.82	5.44	4.45
New Balance	4.86	5.04	5.57	4.44
TECHNOLOGY BRANDS				
Apple		5.39		4.86
Sony		5.38		4.87
Google		5.58		5.41
Samsung		4.86		5.10
Microsoft		5.58		5.08
N	399	209	200	110
Cronbach Alpha	0.93	0.88	0.88	0.86

Chapter 3

How Perceived Brand Authenticity Drives Consumer Brand Engagement

Abstract

A strong consensus exists among both practitioners and academics that establishing brand engagement with consumers leads to numerous positive outcomes, including brand loyalty, and higher levels of likelihood to purchase, recommend, and research. However, there remains a lack of empirical consensus on how to create and increase engagement. To address this gap, we propose that in this social media-dominant society, the link missing in prior research to establish a significant path to create and increase consumer brand engagement is perceived brand authenticity. Using attribution and trust-commitment theories, we develop a model that demonstrates how to increase perceived brand authenticity and then how this perceived brand authenticity drives customer brand engagement. We test the model by drawing on three diverse datasets (over 450 US adults, more than 200 Indian adults, and almost 300 US students). Key findings include 1) Brand authenticity perceptions can be created and managed by increasing brand transparency, distinctiveness, perceived brand social responsibility, and enhancing brand-self congruence. 2) Consumers trust authentic brands and that leads to their engagement with the brands. 3) A brand authenticity – brand engagement link is mediated by trust in 2 of the 3 samples tested. Finally, 4) As seen in previous research, brand engagement leads to loyalty and intention to purchase, recommend, and research.

Introduction

Despite the acknowledged importance of brand engagement, there remains a lack of understanding on how to best create and increase this construct. Prior literature has included a diverse group of proposed antecedents to brand engagement. Triggers to brand engagement in extant literature include customer satisfaction (Anderson and Mittal 2000) customer participation (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan 2012), involvement (Hollebeek et al. 2014), and customer experience (Dwivedi 2009), but the void in identifying a pathway to create and increase brand engagement remains (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Recent research continues to stress the importance, and positive outcomes, of driving brand engagement, but a lack of understanding key facets of this construct remains (Obilo, O., Chefor, E. and Saleh, A. 2020).

Through a brand engagement literature review, interviews with brand leaders, and small sample surveys revealed, gaps in key facets of brand engagement emerged, these gaps include a high level of disparity in empirical analysis and findings, as well as disagreements among academics on antecedents and pathways that will best create and drive brand engagement.

Many of the recently proposed triggers are similar to antecedents that are often cited in brand engagement literature and were first proposed several years ago. Thus, these antecedents lack relevance and appeal to today's social media saturated consumers, whose views, behaviors, and attitudes have evolved significantly in recent years (Lim and Rasul 2022). Research continues to produce mixed empirical results, a lack of generalizability, and wide-ranging consumer engagement triggers (Islam et al., 2019) that are failing to connect with consumers, especially on social media (Lim and Rasul 2022). These gaps have led to discontent and confusion among brand managers, who are struggling with how best to establish brand engagement with customers (Harvard Business Review). This lack of advancement in this key field comes at a time when the

number of social media users continue to rapidly increase, with many of the participants interacting with brands on social platforms. In just the past four years, the number of social media users has risen from 2.7 billion to 6 billion users, almost 60% of the world's population today uses social media regularly, and the average user spends 2 ½ hours a day on social media sites (Kepios 2022). These accelerating numbers are cause for concern, as the primary antecedents from literature proposed to create brand engagement were proposed before the rapid increase in social media usage and are not proving effective in our social media centric era. Contemporary, empirically driven ideas are lacking, and new, impactful ideas, are scarce (Ndhlovu and Maree 2022),

The lack of impactful advancement has led managers to try a variety of strategies and tactics in attempts to establish consumer engagement and build brand loyalty (Harvard Business Review 2020). One reason for this lack of consumer connection is that managers are still using the antecedents proposed and tested before the acceleration of social media use (GWI 2022). Our brand engagement literature review, as well as the small sample size surveys, and personal interviews with practical marketing leaders, helped to reveal important gaps in brand engagement studies and applications. Novel, influential empirical research must be developed and executed to achieve a generalizable, consistent way that provides managers levers they can manipulate to drive high levels of brand engagement.

Prior brand engagement literature has been criticized for failing to “address the barriers to higher-order customer engagement” (Chathoth et al. 2016, p. 223) while also emphasizing the need for better linkage to engagement outcomes and advanced consumer journey mapping that better engages consumers (Lemon and Verhoef 2016).

To address these arears, we propose that the link missing in prior research to establish a significant path and create brand engagement is brand authenticity. Popular literature has shown that social media consumers value and trust authenticity (Shirdastiana et al., 2019; Jepson 2019). In this research we define brand engagement as when “consumers invest effort in maintaining a degree of interaction with a brand, be happily engrossed in such interaction and feel enthusiastic and inspired in doing so” (Dwivedi (2015, p. 101), and we define brand authenticity as “a genuine brand with a unique style that cares about being open and honest with consumers and will survive times and trends” (Campagna, Donthu, and Yoo 2022).

Brand Authenticity as a Path to Brand Engagement

To the best of our knowledge, extant literature has not proposed brand authenticity as a direct link to creating and increasing brand engagement in the manner our framework outlines. An underlying framework for one of the paths we propose is commitment-trust theory (Morgan and Hunt 1994). According to commitment-trust theory, when positioned as mediating variables, commitment and trust play a pivotal role in linking antecedents with impactful outcomes (Morgan and Hunt 1994).

Practitioners have expressed that perceived brand authenticity will lead to strong consumer connections, stating brand authenticity creates engagement through areas such as personalization and customization (GaggleAMP 2020). Other practitioners proclaim brand authenticity can create engagement through content that consumers perceive as authentic (Alton 2018). We propose that commitment-trust theory is the critical path that links brand authenticity to brand engagement in an indirect manner. Research has shown that brand trust plays a critical role in this pathway, as when consumers lack trust in a brand, developing further relationships becomes difficult (Portal 2019). This is where the significance of brand authenticity, a vital benchmark for

all brands (Grant 1999) gains great importance. Brand authenticity has been shown to drive higher levels of brand trust. Brands that are perceived to be authentic and are true to themselves and the customers they serve, trigger feelings of trust from consumers (Poral et al. 2019, p. 725). The feelings of trust fostered by brand authenticity are especially vital, as consumers distrust brands due to disconnects between brand claims compared to actual brand experiences (Leitch and Davenport 2011). When performance falls short of brand claims, consumers build brand mistrust in multiple areas (Holt 2002). Brands that consumers perceive as authentic experience very different outcomes and consumer perceptions.

Consumers regard firms they view as authentic as having a clear set of values that are true to the brand, thus leading to higher levels of brand trust (Eggers, et al. 2012). On a direct path, we have identified four contemporary and influential drivers of perceived brand authenticity, which we propose will directly lead to the creation of high levels of consumer brand engagement. Importantly, in these unpredictable times, high levels of perceived brand authenticity have been cited as a key competitive advantage in maintaining brand trust amidst stressful scenarios, when overall trust in brands decreases (Abimbola and Kocak 2007). These brand authenticity outcomes are especially important in today's marketplace, as consumers' trust in brands has fallen to new lows (Klara 2019).

In prior research, using SEM for empirical testing, brand trust and commitment have been shown to be significant mediators in linking brand engagement to other constructs, resulting in impactful relationships and positive outcomes (Khan et al. 2020). Additionally, trustworthiness leads to positive feelings from consumers, and building high levels of trustworthiness leads to higher level of brand engagement for brands, and then to various engagement marketing opportunities and positive outcomes (Kosiba et al. 2019).

Brand authenticity has been shown to drive brand trust (Portal et al. 2019), while trustworthiness drives consumer brand engagement (Kosiba et al. 2019). Therefore, applying the commitment-trust theory as a mediator, and identifying contemporary drivers of perceived brand authenticity, we propose the hypotheses outlined in our full theoretical model, which includes antecedents and consequences, and pathways that link brand authenticity to brand engagement through commitment-trust theory, as well as a direct link from brand authenticity to brand engagement.

Brand Authenticity may be used in addition to all current drivers of engagement or as an alternative driver of engagement.

While establishing an influential, empirically driven pathway from brand authenticity to brand engagement is important, we first have to also identify actionable antecedents to drive high levels of perceived brand authenticity. In our framework, we identify actionable triggers that create significant authenticity perceptions that managers can control. While we are showing a new way to create brand engagement, we have also identified a novel set of antecedents to drive perceived brand authenticity with variables that are forward-thinking and important for today's consumers.

Our theoretical model proposes two potential key pathways to create consumer brand engagement. The left side of our model identifies contemporary antecedents to drive high levels of brand authenticity, applying attribution theory (Kelly 1967) for the brand transparency, brand distinctiveness and brand social responsibility paths; and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1985) for the brand self-congruence path. To the best of our knowledge, these four variables have not been proposed as an exclusive set to drive brand authenticity in extant literature.

Having achieved high levels of perceived brand authenticity through modern antecedents, I then tested the two pathways to drive consumer brand engagement, a mediating pathway, with consumer-trust theory serving as the impetus, and a direct path from brand authenticity to consumer brand engagement.

Hypotheses Development

Proposed Antecedents to Brand Authenticity

Brand transparency

Being open and honest, and making all information accessible to consumers can trigger perceptions of brand authenticity, as the more consumers believe a brand is making all information, both positive and negative, accessible, the more they will perceive the brand as being authentic (Rawlins 2008). By deliberately making all legally releasable materials available, firms drive higher levels of brand transparency, which serves as a trigger for brand authenticity (Leitch 2017). With consumers being deluged with a lack of transparency by brands, they are increasingly putting higher values and weight on brands they believe are not trying to conceal information (Leitch 2017).

As stated by Anderberg and Morris in their 2006 paper “Authenticity and Transparency in the Advertising Industry”, transparency and building brands that are felt to be authentic by consumers go “hand in hand” (Anderberg and Morris 2006, pg. 1021). Consumer’s attribute their perception of a brand’s transparency to their belief of its overall authenticity (Morhart et al. 2015). Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H1: The higher the level of a brand’s transparency, the more likely consumers are to perceive the brand as being authentic.

Brand Distinctiveness

Possessing distinct qualities not only separates brands from competitors in a unique way but also helps elevate perceptions of being an “innovative brand” (Pasquinelli 2014). Being distinct also helps consumers connect with brands at a faster pace compared to other brands, as consumers identify the brand’s unique qualities/aspects more rapidly. When brands communicate distinctive qualities, communication is more likely to connect with consumers, as consumers are looking for unique qualities “that engages their senses and touches their hearts and strikes them as authentic and genuine” (Santos, et al., 2021). Being distinctive helps brands establish saliency, which enables brands to quickly grab consumers’ attention in a cognitive, long-lasting way (Sharp, 2010). As noted by Kelly (1973), people attribute uniqueness and distinctiveness, to their belief in its authenticity. We therefore propose:

H2: The higher the level of a brand’s distinctiveness, the more likely consumers are to perceive the brand as being authentic.

Brand social responsibility

In 2005 Mazutis and Slawinski identified a strong relationship between brand social responsibility and brand authenticity, as their research highlighted that when brands drive effective levels of social responsibility, brand authenticity increases. Recent empirical research has shown the influence of brand socially responsible activities on consumers attitudes and perceptions. When consumers view a brand’s socially centric activities as authentic, and as a fit to their own attitudes, outcomes include positive consumer-brand relationships and higher levels of perceived brand authenticity (Kim, Lee 2020). Consumers attribute the authenticity of the brand based upon the level of a brand’s social responsibility and their perception of a brand’s motives (Alhouti et al. 2016).

Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3: The higher the level of BSR a brand exhibits, the more likely consumers are to perceive the brand as being authentic.

Brand Actual Self-Congruence

Extant literature has described “authentic branding” as brand’s seeking to enhance consumer fit by establishing personality connections with consumers, with the outcome often being deeper emotional connections with consumers and higher brand loyalty (Astakhova et al., 2017).

The idea that being true to oneself is essential to authenticity is proposed in marketing literature (Arnould and Price 2000), as well as other disciplines such as literary criticism (Trilling 1972) and art (Fine 2003). The definition adopted herein is based on a recent conceptualization in marketing (Moulard et al. 2014; Moulard et al. 2015)

Furthermore, research has proposed that self-determination theory is essential in developing strong consumer-brand relationships, especially when individuals view brand communication to the “real” them (Ryan and Deci 2000). True-to-self, authentic behavior is closely related to actual-self-congruence, as individuals are drawn to brands whose actions and behavior appeal to their own motivations and beliefs. Self-determination theory involves a spectrum of internal motivation, and with this theory as the underlying framework, intrinsic motivated behavior is “authentic in the fullest sense of those terms” (Moulard, et al., pg. 103, 2021). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H4: If a brand’s values and the individual’s actual, true-to-self values are congruent, I individuals are more likely to perceive the brand as authentic.

Mediated and Direct Effects of Brand Authenticity on Brand Engagement

In prior research, using SEM, trust and commitment have been shown to be significant mediators in linking brand engagement to other constructs, resulting in the impactful relationships (Khan et al. 2020). Trust leads to positive consumer sentiment, and high levels of trustworthiness drives high brand engagement, thus leading to engagement marketing opportunities for brands and positive outcomes (Kosiba et al. 2019). Brand authenticity has been proven to trigger brand trust (Portal et al. 2019; Eggers et al 2012), while trustworthiness drives consumer brand engagement (Kosiba et al. 2019). Therefore, we hypothesize brand authenticity can create and increase brand engagement in two ways, through a direct effect, and a mediating effect.

Direct Effect:

H5a: The higher level of perceived brand authenticity, the more likely consumers will engage with that brand.

Mediated Effect

H5b: The higher the level of perceived brand authenticity, the higher the level of trust and commitment to the brand, which will lead to higher levels of brand engagement.

Consequences of Brand Engagement

The hypotheses listed below, H6-H9, have been tested and established in extant brand engagement literature. We are just replicating them to provide validation to our data.

H6: Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014), applying consumer culture theory and Verma (2021), using social exchange theory, as underlying frameworks, showed that the higher the level of brand engagement consumers have for brand, the higher the likelihood they will purchase that brand.

H7: Pansari and Kumar (2016) applied engagement theory as an underlying framework to prove that the higher the level of brand engagement consumers have for a brand, the higher the likelihood they will recommend the brand.

H8: Using attachment theory as an underlying framework, van Doorn et al. (2010) showed that the higher the level of brand engagement consumers have for a brand, the higher the likelihood they will research the brand.

H9: Dwivedi (2015) adopts employee engagement theory as an underlying framework to prove that the higher the level of brand engagement consumers have for a brand, the higher the loyalty they will have for the brand.

Methods

Data was collected from 466 U.S. adult respondents, 208 Indian adult respondents, and 292 U.S. student respondents. In our adult surveys, we used MTurk Masters' level respondents, with high-level Qualtrics quality checks. MTurk Masters' level respondents have demonstrated a high degree of success and accuracy across a wide range of segments and have been used in the methodology of papers published in highly rated journals. For one study in the 2014 *Journal of Consumer Research* article "Lucky Loyalty: The Effect of Consumer Effort on Predictions of Randomly Determined Marketing Outcomes" the authors used both Master's level respondents, who were noted as individuals who earned this designation for completing a specified number of HITs/Tasks that had earned them approval ratings of 95% or greater, and had consistently shown abilities to provide successful results for a wide range of tasks across a variety of segments. The other half of respondents in this study was composed of non-Masters level MTurk respondents. The authors noted a variance in effort put forth by the Masters' group compared to the non-Master's group (Reczek, Haws, and Summers 2014). In their 2018 *Journal of Marketing* article "Design Crowdsourcing: The Impact on New Product Performance of Sourcing Design Solutions from the "Crowd", the authors used MTurk respondents for studies and found the group's Cronbach's alpha to be reliable (.80) and the group's correlation matrix similar to non-MTurk respondents (Allen, Chandrasenaran and Basuroy 2018).

Goodman and Paolacci showed that 27% of surveys and experiments conducted in the *Journal of Consumer Research* between June 2012 and April 2016 used MTurk (2017).

Structural equation modeling was used to test the overall model and each hypothesis (Figure 1), and to analyze structural relationships between variables. For the survey, we used the sports apparel segment, due to wide use and high knowledge of the categories, products, and brands, such as Nike, Adidas, and Lululemon. Participants were asked to first select a sports apparel brand, with some of the best-known brands listed to provide context for the participants. The respondents then took a series of 32 questions with construct-specific questions, with the sports apparel brand they choose automatically filling in for “*Brand X*” in questions such as, “*Brand X* asks for feedback about the quality of its information”.

We used a 1-7 Likert Scale for survey responses, with 1=strongly disagree, and 7=strongly agree. We used existing scales from literature to measure each construct. Each scale, with the measurement items and source is listed in Table 2. All Cronbach’s alphas, with sample sizes taken into effect, were within acceptable range (Nunally 1978).

Insert Table 2 Here

Results

Sample 1: Indian Adults:

We surveyed 217 Indian adults. After going through a cleaning process which included eliminating surveys that were incomplete, we ended up with 209 total respondents. Using structural equation modeling for our testing, our results for each hypothesis were as follows.

Hypothesis 1, which proposed that the higher the level of a brand's transparency, the more likely consumers are to perceive the brand as being authentic was not supported. The path coefficient to brand authenticity was slightly negative and the relationship was not significant. We believe that the Power Distance dimension played a significant role in the lack of impact as in India individuals hold brands and brand leaders, in high esteem and do not challenge company leaders' claims often (Yoo, Donthu and Lenartowicz 2011). With a power index level of 77 out of 100, India has one of the highest Power Distance levels in the world and thus the majority of the country's citizens would not expect brand leaders to be transparent in their communication. In contrast, Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 were all supported and had positive, significant effects on perceived brand authenticity. Both brand distinctiveness ($b = .34, p < .001$), and brand social responsibility ($b = .46, p < .001$), were positively related to perceived brand authenticity, as was actual self-congruence ($b = .11, p < .01$). The strong relationships brand distinctiveness and brand social responsibility had with perceived brand authenticity make intuitive sense as distinctiveness and brand social responsibility are two areas growing in importance for the Indian population. Brand actual self-congruence was also significant with a coefficient level of .11, slightly lower than brand distinctiveness and brand social responsibility but still significant. Hypotheses 5B and 5A, reflecting our mediation model effects were each significant but to varying degrees.

Indirect and Direct Effects

Hypothesis H5b proposed that the higher the level of perceived brand authenticity, the higher the level of trust and commitment to the brand, thus leading to higher levels of brand engagement.

This indirect pathway had a coefficient level of .19 and was significant.

Looking at each individual pathway's values revealed variances in each part of the mediating effect. The path from perceived brand authenticity to brand trust had a high coefficient level of .78 and was significant, while the relationship between brand trust and consumer brand engagement had a lower effect level but still was significant.

Significantly, in terms of findings and implications, the direct path from perceived brand authenticity to consumer brand engagement was extremely strong with very high levels of regression and significance. In conclusion, while both the direct effect, from brand authenticity to brand engagement; and the indirect pathway, were significant, the direct pathway was much stronger.

Hypotheses 6-9, including brand engagement leading to higher levels of likelihood to purchase, likelihood to recommend, likelihood to research, and higher levels of brand loyalty, and each showed strong relationships and high significance levels, corresponding to findings in previous empirically driven research. Increasing the sample size, and eliminating cross-loading and non-significant variables, are methods to improve the model fit statistics. All results of our testing for the Indian adult sample can be found in Table 1.

Sample 2: US Adults

We surveyed 470 US adults, and after going through a cleaning process, we ended up with 466 respondents. Results of our testing were as follows. Hypothesis 1, proposing that the higher

the level of a brand's transparency, the more likely consumers are to perceive the brand as being authentic was supported, with a coefficient level of .143 and significant. Hypothesis 2 and 3 each had high coefficient levels, of .28 and .47 respectively, with high significance. These results back up research showing the effect brand distinctiveness has in increasing positive perceptions of brands (Zhang et al., 2020) and the increasing impact brand social responsibility is having on areas such as brand equity, brand perceptions, and consumer attitudes (Yanga, et al., 2020). Hypothesis 4, with self-determination theory as the underlying theoretical framework, proposed that if a brand's values and an individual's actual values were congruent, individuals would be more likely to perceive the brand as authentic, was not supported.

Indirect and Direct Effects

Hypothesis H5B proposing that the higher the level of perceived brand authenticity, the higher the level of trust and commitment to the brand, was not supported. While the relationship between perceived brand authenticity and brand trust had high, significant effects and the link between brand authenticity and brand engagement was both strong and significant, the pathway from brand trust to consumer brand engagement was slightly negative and not significant. With brand trust at an all-time low in the United States (Barwick 2021) this result was not overly surprising. It is important to note that the relationship between perceived brand authenticity and consumer brand engagement was once again very strong

While the direct effect was highly significant, the indirect, mediating effect was insignificant. A lack of brand trust in the United States was a significant factor in the low levels of the mediated effect. The pathway from brand authenticity to brand trust was highly significant and showed a strong relationship,

($b = .148, p < .001$), the brand trust to consumer brand engagement path was extremely weak and insignificant ($b = -.002$). Traditionally, a key driver of brand engagement has been brand trust, but after years of brand and political indignities, consumers remain wary of brand claims (Goldring and Azab 2020).

Hypotheses 6-9, including brand engagement leading to higher levels of likelihood to purchase, likelihood to recommend, likelihood to research, and higher levels of brand loyalty all showed strong relationships.

Increasing the sample size, and eliminating cross-loading and non-significant variables, are methods to improve the model fit statistics. All results of our testing for the US Adult sample can be found in Table 1.

Sample 3: US Students

Using Qualtrics, we surveyed 307 US students. After going through a cleaning process, we ended up with 292 US student respondents. The final US student sample included 70% members of generation z and 30% millennials. Using structural equation modeling for our testing process, our results for each hypothesis were as follows. Hypothesis 1, proposing that the higher the level of a brand's transparency, the more likely consumers are to perceive the brand as being authentic was not supported. Reasons for this lack of support include the fact that brands are not meeting evolved expectations from generation z and younger millennials. These age groups believe brands are not keeping up with their evolving attitudes, perceptions, and what they are looking for in brand's, such as "representing societal values they care about, and taking actions that represent their lifestyles" would make brand more relevant and build higher brand trust (Edelman, pg. 12, 2021). These younger generations have been divulged over the past few years with false claims from companies, and members of these generation have developed mistrust for

brands. In our transparent world, a company's actions must match its ideals, claims and brand communication. If there is dichotomy between what brands say, and their actions, these generations will find out about these false claims and quickly spread the information virtually (Francis and Hoefel 2018).

The next three proposed antecedents to high brand authenticity, including brand distinctiveness, brand social responsibility, and actual self-congruence all proved to have positive effects on perceived brand authenticity, and each relationship was significant.

Over the past several years, these younger generations have been divulged with false claims from brands, and members of these generations have developed a mistrust for brands, even when they claim to be totally transparent.

In an effort build positive relationships with members of generation Z, brands are shifting marketing expenditures and initiatives to where a great deal of these consumers are, social media platforms. Yet, these attempts are often coming across as disingenuous, with a general feeling among this generation that brand's claims are not fully accurate, and their trust in institutions and brands continues to decline (Reinikainen, Kari and Luoma-aho 2020). The next three proposed antecedents to high brand authenticity, including brand distinctiveness, brand social responsibility, and actual self-congruence all proved to have positive effects on perceived brand authenticity, and each relationship was significant. Using structural equation modeling for our testing process, our results for each hypothesis were as follows.

Mediated and Direct Effects

Hypothesis H5B proposes that the higher the level of perceived brand authenticity, the higher the level of trust and commitment to the brand, was supported and significant. However, Hypotheses 5A, the direct pathway from perceived brand authenticity to consumer brand engagement, once again proved to be the much stronger path with a high coefficient and significance level.

Model fit statistics were adequate but could be improved with a larger sample size. Each of the path coefficient values, with standard deviations and significant levels, and model fit values for all three studies can be found in table 1.

Hypotheses 6-9, including brand engagement leading to higher levels of likelihood to purchase, likelihood to recommend, likelihood to research, and higher levels of brand loyalty all showed strong relationships and high significance, corresponding to the findings in previous empirically driven research. Increasing the sample size, and eliminating cross-loading and non-significant variables, are methods to improve the model fit statistics.

Testing results from all three samples can be found in Table 1 below.

Insert Table 1 Here

Findings and Discussion

Our results show that Brand Authenticity perceptions can be created and managed by increasing brand transparency, distinctiveness, brand social responsibility, and enhancing brand actual-self congruency. Also, our empirical testing revealed that consumer engagement with the brand can be increased by making the brand authentic. The brand authenticity-brand engagement link mediated by trust-commitment in the Indian Adult and US Student samples proved significant, but not as strong as the direct brand authenticity-brand engagement path.

While brand trust can be a mediating factor in the brand authenticity-brand engagement relationship, overall, the direct brand authenticity-brand engagement path was significantly stronger and showed a very powerful influence on creating and driving consumer brand engagement. The unique, contemporary set of antecedents identified, drove high levels of perceived brand authenticity, which then triggered consumer brand engagement.

Our structural equation modeling testing showed that consumers trust authentic brands and that leads to strong engagement with the brands. Consumers are likely to purchase, recommend, and research brands that they engage with. Consumers are also loyal to brands that they engage with.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

Theoretical Contributions

The right side of our theoretical model applies commitment-trust theory as a framework. When positioned as mediating variables, relationship commitment and trust can play pivotal roles in linking antecedents with impactful outcomes. We link brand authenticity to brand engagement using commitment-trust theory. By increasing the levels of our four recommended

antecedents, high levels of perceived brand authenticity will be established, leading to the creation of impactful consumer brand engagement, and the subsequent powerful outcomes.

Managerial Contributions

The left side of our model includes antecedents that were empirically proven to drive high levels of brand authenticity. These four pathways to perceived brand authenticity were supported by theories proven in extant literature, with attribution theory being applied for brand transparency, brand distinctiveness and brand social responsibility paths, and self-determination theory for the brand self-congruence path. We suggest that the four antecedents we have identified are relevant and important to today's consumers. To the best of our knowledge, these four antecedents have not been included as an exclusive set of triggers to brand authenticity in prior literature. Managers will be able to control our model by executing and communicating attributes of a specific antecedent to drive brand authenticity and brand engagement.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this research include the fact that we focus on B2C markets in our studies. In future research, we suggest testing the effectiveness of the model in B2B markets.

In the paper "Brand worlds: Introducing experiential marketing to B2B branding", the authors found that brand authenticity was influential in many different areas of B2B relationships (Österle, Kuhn and Henseler 2018). Thus, further research could unearth numerous possibilities and applications for our model in the B2B segment. Furthermore, in a global marketplace, a limitation of our model is that it is very U.S. centric. Future studies testing if the model would work in countries such as China and India would be beneficial.

Future research should delve deeper into the role of brand authenticity in driving other influential constructs. First, research should test a model that includes a path analysis of the antecedents of brand authenticity, such as those proposed herein, as well as significant consequences of brand authenticity. Studies relating to managerial applications of a framework that contain both antecedents and consequence of brand authenticity and also test the external validity of the model, are needed. Research should develop a model for managers, outlining how they can best achieve greater perceived brand authenticity, thereby driving key variables such as brand engagement. This practitioner roadmap must be generalizable, so it is effective for a variety of consumer segments and helps develop long-term, profitable customer relationships for a depth of brands.

Future research would also benefit from focusing on the four key antecedents we identify, as well as the consequences of brand authenticity in an empirical manner. Research that develops a new measurement scale of brand authenticity which reflects our comprehensive definition would be useful. Our planned future work includes identifying potential consequences of brand authenticity, such as engagement, equity, and trust.

As the spending power and influence of millennials, individuals born between 1981-1996, and generation Z, people born starting in 1997 (Dimock 2019) continues to increase, we have seen a growth in brand authenticity research focusing on these two generations (Vitelar 2019; Shirdastian et al. 2019; Djafarova and Bowes 2020). This increase in research has come as a wealth of practical articles detailing the impact brand authenticity has on younger generations has become common place (Scott 2020). Additionally, research firms such as GlobalWebIndex, have outlined the influence brand authenticity has on a variety of attitudinal and behavior factors of millennials and members of generation z in their “latest trends” reports.

With this shift in buying power, and millennials and generation z expected to overtake baby boomers as the dominant spenders in the United States in the near future (Morgan Stanley, 2019), future research focusing on identifying triggers which impact the perceptions and shopping behaviors of these age groups could be significant. Indeed, 43% of millennials regard the authenticity of a brand as more important than the content the brand communicates (Fournier 2017).

Along with the importance of studying the impact of our model on different age groups, we suggest research be conducted on other potential moderation variables, such as gender, brand segment, segment consumer involvement (high/low), education, ethnicity, and income.

Finally, we also recommend testing our model using a variety of experimental designs that can be manipulated. Testing for interactions between proposed antecedent variables may reveal significant findings regarding the influence of each of the specific antecedents. For example, checking for interaction between brand transparency and brand distinctiveness may reveal that brand transparency is more important and has a greater impact on brand authenticity than brand distinctiveness. Thus, if a brand is seen as having brand transparency but not as being distinctive, the brand may still be perceived as being an authentic brand.

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Table 1
Structural Equation Modeling: Testing Results

Paths	US Adults β	Hypothesis Supported ?	Indian Adults β	Hypothesis Supported ?	US Students β	Hypothesis Supported ?
Antecedents of Brand Authenticity						
H1: Brand Transparency → Brand Authenticity	.143** (.05)	√	-.004 (.06)	×	.079 (.05)	×
H2: Brand Distinctiveness → Brand Authenticity	.28*** (.04)	√	.34** (.037)	√	.24*** (.05)	√
H3: Brand Social Responsibility → Brand Authenticity	.47** (.03)	√	.46*** (.07)	√	.22*** (.06)	√
H4a: Brand Actual Self-Congruence → Brand Authenticity	.029 (.02)		.11** (.04)	√	.27*** (.05)	√
Mediation Model: Main Effects						
H5b: Perceived Brand Authenticity → Brand Trust	.148*** (.06)	√	.78*** (.08)	√	.76*** (.04)	√
H5b: Brand Trust → Consumer Brand Engagement	-.002 (.06)	×	.25* (.10)	√	.47* (.07)	√
H5a: Brand Authenticity → Consumer Brand Engagement	1.051*** (.04)	√	1.025*** (.10)	√	.68*** (.07)	√
Outcomes of Brand Engagement						
H6: Brand Engagement → Likelihood to Purchase	.59*** (.04)	√	.38*** (.07)	√	.53*** (.06)	√
H7: Brand Engagement → Likelihood to Recommend	.53*** (.05)	√	.48*** (.08)	√	.96*** (.05)	√
H8: Brand Engagement → Likelihood to Research	.56*** (.04)	√	.56*** (.08)	√	.68*** (.05)	√
H9: Brand Engagement → Brand Loyalty	.90*** (.04)	√	.72*** (.05)	√	.87*** (.05)	√
Mediation Model: Indirect Effects						
H5a: Brand Authenticity → Brand Trust → Brand Engagement	.00 (.006)	√	.19* (.08)	√	.36* (.05)	√
Total Effect	1.05*** (.037)		1.022*** (.08)		1.044*** (.044)	

Notes: Sample sizes; n=466 for US Adults, n=209 for Indian Adults, and n=292 for US Students. β : Path Coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

√: Support for hypothesis attained; ×: Lacking support for hypothesis. *p-value < .05, **p-value < .01, ***p-value < .001.

Model Fit

χ^2 (d.f.)	2539.47 (49)	1467.05 (49)	1922.54 (49)
RMSEA	0.106	0.205	0.174
CFI	0.9323	0.804	0.850
TFI	0.898	0.699	0.770
SRMR	0.085	0.125	0.103

Notes: χ^2 is reported with degrees of freedom in parentheses

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha – Multi-Item Constructs	n=209	n=466	n=292
	Indian Adults	US Adults	US Students
Constructs, Items and References for each study	CA	CA	CA
Brand Transparency (Rawlins, B. 2009)	0.77	0.86	0.79
<i>Brand X</i> asks for feedback about quality of its information.			
<i>Brand X</i> provides detailed information			
<i>Brand X</i> is open to criticism.			
<i>Brand X</i> is forthcoming with information that might be damaging.			
<i>Brand X</i> makes it easy to find information people need.			
Brand Distinctiveness (N. Stokburger-Sauer, S. Ratneshwar, S. Sen. 2012)	0.61	0.87	0.65
<i>Brand X</i> has a distinctive identity			
<i>Brand X</i> is unique.			
<i>Brand X</i> stands out from its competitor			
Brand Social Responsibility (Maignan, I. 2001)	0.83	0.85	0.79
I believe that <i>Brand X</i> is committed to well-defined ethics principles.			
I believe that <i>Brand X</i> allocates resources to philanthropic activities.			
I believe <i>Brand X</i> plays a role in society beyond a mere generation of profits.			
I believe that <i>Brand X</i> helps solve social problems.			
Brand Actual Self-Congruence (Malär, L., Krohmer, H., Hoyer, W. D., & Nyffenegger, B. 2011)	0.8	0.84	0.62
<i>Brand X</i> asks for feedback about the quality of its information.			
<i>Brand X</i> provides detailed information			
<i>Brand X</i> is open to criticism.			
<i>Brand X</i> is forthcoming with information that might be damaging to the organization.			
<i>Brand X</i> makes it easy to find information people need.			
Brand Authenticity (Campagna, Donthu and Yoo 2022)	0.91	0.93	0.91
<i>Brand X</i> committed to well-defined ethics principles.			
<i>Brand X</i> allocates some of their resources to philanthropic activities.			
<i>Brand X</i> plays a role in society beyond the mere generation of profits.			
<i>Brand X</i> helps solve social problems.			
<i>Brand X</i> cares about its consumers.			

Brand X reflects important values I care about.

Brand X has moral principles.

Brand X reflects a timeless design.

Brand X has survived times and trends.

Brand X exudes a sense of tradition.

Brand X is a brand with a history.

Brand X puts me in control of my life and experiences.

Brand X connects me with what is important.

Brand X adds meaning to people's lives.

Brand Trust Scale (Delgado-Ballester, E. 2004)

0.83

0.9

0.76

Brand X meets my expectations.

I feel confidence in *Brand X*

Brand X never disappoints me.

The *Brand X* name guarantees satisfaction.

Brand Engagement

0.93

0.93

0.9

I have a special bond with *Brand X*. (Sprott, et al., 2009).

I feel a personal connection with *Brand X* (Sprott, et al., 2009).

Time flies when I am interacting with *Brand X*. (Dwivedi, 2015)

I feel happy when interacting with *Brand X*. (Dwivedi, 2015)

It is difficult to detach myself when using *Brand X*. (Dwivedi, 2015)

I feel enthusiastic when interacting with *Brand X*. (Dwivedi, 2015)

Figure 1: Full Theoretical Model

