

# The moderating role of brand involvement between brand authenticity And brand relationship quality and its impact on behavioral outcome (In the Case of Selected National and International Brands)

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## Abstract

Despite a century-long interest with authenticity as a human enticement, marketing experts have only recently become interested in the concept of authenticity as a result of increased consumer demand for authenticity in purchased products and services. Consumers' desire for authenticity is one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing. The purpose of this study is to examine the Moderating Role of Brand Involvement in the Link between Antecedents of Brand Authenticity, Brand Authenticity, Relationship Quality and Behavioral Outcome. A total of 384 questionnaires were distributed and 300 questionnaires were returned at the end of the data collection process and used for the subsequent statistical analysis, which gave the response rate of 82 percent. In this study, SMART PLS was used to analyze the data set and the antecedents of brand authenticity--Brand heritage, Brand nostalgia, Brand Clarity, Social Commitment, Brand Legitimacy, Actual Self-Congruence, and employees' perceived passion--had a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity, whereas Brand Commercialization had a negative and significant effect on brand authenticity. Furthermore, brand authenticity has a significant and positive impact on brand relationship quality, which in turn had a beneficial impact on customers' behaviour intentions. On the other hand, brand involvement moderated the link between antecedents of brand authenticity and brand relationship quality and failed to moderate the relationship between antecedents of brand authenticity and brand authenticity. Furthermore, the quality of a brand's relationship was found to have a substantial impact on willingness to pay a price premium, purchase intent, and willingness to forgive mistakes. The findings concerning the antecedents of brand authenticity indicate that a company can influence brand authenticity in a variety of ways, and that it is thus critical to analyse which of the identified antecedents brand management should manipulate in order to positively impact the perception of the brand's authenticity.

**Keywords:** Branding, Brand perception, Brand authenticity, Brand involvement, Brand relationships Quality

**DOI:** 10.7176/JMCR/90-06

**Publication date:** August 31<sup>st</sup> 2023

## 1. Introduction

Athentikos, a Greek word emphasizing truthfulness, is where the word authenticity first appeared (Cappannelli and Cappannelli, 2004). According to M.M. Akbar and W. Wymer (2017) and M. Beverland (2006), brand authenticity is an authentic character that a brand has in its logo, design, or packaging in order to make its product stand out and be simple to recognize. Since at least a few hundred years ago, according to Grayson and Martinec (2004), people have been looking for authenticity. Marketing scholars have only recently developed an interest in the concept of authenticity as a result of the increased customer desire for authenticity in the products and services they purchase, despite the century-long fascination with this human aspiration. Turner and Manning (1988) claim that people have a heightened yearning for authenticity during times of change and uncertainty when they are looking for a constant to rely on. The need for authenticity, on the other hand, is commonly perceived as a result of the market's increasing homogenization (Beverland & Farelly, 2010). Research has revealed the brand

authenticity concept's increasing relevance for the marketing discipline given the potential that is ascribed to authentic brands, as stated in statements like "consumers' search for authenticity is one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing" (Brown et al., 2003, p. 21) or "Quality no longer differentiates; authenticity does" (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 23). A brand's authenticity can be visible in the logo, packaging, or other visual identifiers of its products that set them apart from the competition (M.M. Akbar & W. Wymer, 2017).

We use the concept of two distinct perceptual processes—indexical and iconic interpretations of variables—as antecedents of brand authenticity to pinpoint the factors that influence the formation of an authenticity evaluation (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). The brand's claims are validated using indexical cues, which are unbiased sources (Morhart et al., 2015). Iconic signals transmit a feeling or emotional impression of something that affects a brand's perceived authenticity rather than showing a connection to a reference (Ewing et al., 2012). Indexical objective facts and iconic subjective interpretations can have an impact on how consumers perceive a brand's authenticity (Kovács et al., 2014). Today's consumers are seeking authenticity, making brand authenticity a crucial part of marketing plans. Despite the significance of brand authenticity, relatively little study has been done on how to establish it successfully and what behavioral effects such an impact might have. This study, which builds on earlier research, shows that consumers' judgments of brand authenticity and, consequently, brand loyalty, are significantly influenced by their sense of self-authenticity. Consumers nowadays must contend with a market that is becoming more globalized and products that are being more commercialized (Morhart et al., 2015). Customers seek out brands that are authentic and relevant. Since authenticity has supplanted quality as the most important factor to consider when making a purchase, consumers are becoming more and more interested in authentic brands (Gilmore and Pine, 2007).

Since authenticity improves the consumer experience (both in terms of the user's subjectivity and in relation to their experience with others), marketers are starting to become more interested in studying consumer preference for authentic offerings (Taheri et al., 2018). As a result, offering consumers authentic experiences is essential (Kim and Bonn, 2016). The way we create value in society, the economy, business, and marketing is changing quickly due to the nature of social interactions (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b). In order to improve outcomes for both the consumer and service organizations, businesses are increasingly focusing on providing more customer-centric experiences (Durugbo and Pawar, 2012; Di Tollo et al., 2012; Durugbo and Pawar, 2014; Payne et al., 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b). A minimal amount of research has been done on the causes and effects of perceived brand authenticity (PBA). Future studies on the causes and effects of PBA have been called for by researchers (Oishi et al., 2009; Fritz et al., 2017; Napoli et al., 2016). Morhart et al. (2015) suggested that future studies may examine customization and co-creation engagement in relation to perceived brand authenticity.

Coca-Cola, Davidson, McDonald's, Starbucks, as well as other notable brands have been the subject of certain brand authenticity research (Felicita Morhart et al. 2014); global sports brands Nike and adidas have also been the subject of studies (Hyeonyoung Choi et al. 2015); Own Computers (Erkan Yildiz and Elif Ülker-Demirel, 2017); 18 brands covering fast-moving and durable consumer goods, services like Google and Shell, and retail and brands (Kristine Fritz Verena Schoenmueller Manfred Bruhn, 2017); Craft beer in the USA (Asuncion Hernandez-Fernandez and Mathieu Collin Lewis, 2019), Attire clothing, sports bags, and shoes (Luki Adiati Pratomo and Ovy Noviyati Nuraini Magetsari (2020); Six top authenticate brands including google, apple, Coca-Cola, MacDonald and Nike (Asif Ali Safeer et al. 2021); Heritage tourism destinations -bushism Temples (Xiaohua Chen et al.). However, no organized brand authenticity studies have been undertaken in Ethiopia. The cited literature reviewed suggests that further research need to done to determine the combined impact of brand authenticity antecedents and their effects on brand relationship and brand behavioral outcomes, as well as the moderating effect of brand involvement in the relationship between brand authenticity antecedents and brand relationship quality.

Consumer unease in today's marketplace has increased interest in brand authenticity globally and increased demand for real brands. Consumers no longer trust information about brands as a result of the financial crisis, terrorism, Globalisation, standardization, and homogenization (Edberg & Sivertzen, 2015). Additionally, there is a sense of unease brought on by the rising political unrest in many parts of the world. There isn't much study on how to evaluate brand authenticity and how it fits into branding theory, despite the fact that brand authenticity is

getting more attention in management strategies and consumer behaviour research. The following research questions in this study were meant to be addressed:

- RQ1: Does the existence of brand antecedents enhance brand authenticity?
- RQ2: Does perceived brand authenticity influence brand relationship quality?
- RQ3: Does the quality of brand relationships influence consumer behaviour?
- RQ4: Does Brand Involvement moderate the relationship between Brand Authenticity and Brand Relationship Quality?

This study is divided into eight sections; the first is an introduction, and the second is a review of the literature. In Section 3, it will be shown how the research model and hypotheses evolved. Research methodology is covered in Section 4. The fifth section will discuss the research findings, including statistical analysis and hypothesis testing. In section six, the results are discussed in relation to prior investigations. The conclusion is covered in Section 7, and the limitations and future research directions are highlighted in Section 8.

## 2. Literature Review

Authenticity has emerged as a consumer-desired attribute, reflecting a perception of a brand being unique, genuine or original (Bruhn et al., 2012) and to help marketers to differentiate their brands from competing brands. The need for authentic brands is perhaps an outcome of a general air of consumer mistrust towards business (Young and Rubicam, 2013).

According to the literature, the brand's history, virtue, customers' self-identification with the brand, and employees/individuals who represent the brand are all important influencing variables. According to the literature, the brand's history, virtue, customers' self-identification with the brand, and employees/individuals who represent the brand are all important influencing variables. Both Beverland (2006) and Grayson and Martinec (2004) demonstrate a positive association between a brand's factual characteristics that link it to its tradition and heritage and brand authenticity in the context of that connection. According to M.M. Akbar and W. Wymer (2017) and M. Beverland (2006), brand authenticity is an authentic character that a brand has in its logo, design, or packaging in order to make its product stand out and be simple to recognize.

The current study is primarily based on **two theories**. The first is the *Self-expansion theory* (Aron & Aron, 1986), which contends that people have a natural desire to include other people (in this case, brands) in their conception of themselves. However, the perceived level of brand authenticity may influence how much a brand is integrated into the self. The second theory is Fishbein (1980) *the theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)*, which explains the rationale for adopting a particular purchasing behaviour. It demonstrates that behaviour is actually the outcome of a buyer's mindset and a subjective norm. Through the influence of developed customer attitudes, the idea has been utilized to explain consumer brand loyalty (Ha, 1998). According to the present research, brand relationship quality and behavioral outcomes are likely to follow from a positive evaluation of a product or service authenticity (Chinomona & Poore 2013).

### **Brand Authenticity: A Conceptualization and Model**

The desire from consumers for genuine brands is gradually increasing. Researchers and marketers are under greater pressure to find ways to impact a brand's perceived authenticity in order to meet this demand. Although there are various definitions of authenticity (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), there seems to be agreement that it involves being "true to oneself"—that is, that in order for someone to be "real," their behaviours should be driven by their true ideas and feelings. This concept has been around for a while in a variety of fields, such as marketing (Arnold & Price, 2000), literary criticism (Trilling, 1972), and the arts (Fine, 2003). This concept has been around for a while in a variety of fields, such as marketing (Arnold & Price, 2000), literary criticism (Trilling, 1972), and the arts (Fine, 2003). This study suggests that views of being genuine, or "true to self," also apply to a brand's

management—that the decision-makers for the brand are viewed to have a product orientation in that they concentrate on things they are enthusiastic and interested in. Table I provides a summary of the most common conceptualizations of brand authenticity. A number of definitions of the notion change as the literature do.

Table -1: Prominent conceptualizations of brand authenticity

Study By	Conceptualization	Product context
Goulding (2000)	Authenticity interpretations varied across different types of visitors. For instance, while one group relied more on tangible/observable cues, others relied more on imagination-based experiential cues	Heritage attractions
Brown et al. (2003)	Authenticity as an “aura” or a brand’s essence that is linked to a unique sense of historic tradition (i.e. a “spirit of the past”) (e.g. Volkswagen’s® Beetle brand)	Marketing of retro brands
Grayson and Martinec (2004)	Conceptualize authenticity in terms of indexical and iconic authenticity and outline cues that consumers use to judge each type	Themed tourist attractions (e.g. Sherlock)
Beverland (2006)	Identify six aspects that consumers use to judge authenticity of fine wine. These are heritage and pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, relationship to place, method of production and downplaying commercial considerations	Ultra-premium wine
Leigh, Peters and Shelton (2006)	Authenticity is multifaceted and can be conceived in terms of objective, constructive and existential forms. Authenticity is derived from object and its ownership, consumer experiences and identity construction and confirmation	MG brand of cars
Beverland et al.(2008)	Conceptualize consumer interpretations of authenticity in terms of pure (literal) approximate and moral authenticity	Trappist beer
Bruhn et al. (2012)	Conceptualize authenticity in terms of a brands’ continuity, originality, reliability and naturalness	Product brands
Gundlach and Neville (2012)	Outline multiple factors determining perceived authenticity such as heritage, ingredients, production methods, originality and relationship to place, to name a few	Product brand extensions (e.g. Nike® Vitamins)
Spiggle et al. (2012)	Conceive brand authenticity of a brand extension in terms of maintaining standards/style, brand heritage, brand essence and avoiding exploitation	Clothing (i.e. Levis® jeans) brand
Newman and Dhar (2014)	Authenticity in terms of consumers’ perceptions of a product’s connection to place of production (i.e. manufacturing location)	Beer and fast food
Schallehn, Burmann and Riley (2014)	Conceptualize brand authenticity (using a Sociopsychological perspective) as consumer perception of brand behaviour that mirrors consumers’ notion of being true to oneself in the face of external corrupting pressures	Sports shoes
Choi et al. (2015)	Conceive brand authenticity as authority, fashionability, consistency, innovativeness, sustainability, origin and heritage	Various brands
Morhart et al. (2015)	Brand authenticity is conceived in terms of continuity, credibility, integrity and symbolism	Various brands
Napoli et al. (2016)	Brand authenticity as quality commitment, heritage and sincerity as cues that drive consumer perceptions of authenticity	

#### Antecedents of Brand Authenticity Relevant To Marketing

According to earlier research (Beverland et al., 2008; Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Morhart et al., 2015; Munoz et al., 2006), communication strategies that emphasize a brand's tradition or heritage but do not necessarily constitute objective facts proving this connection affect consumers' perceptions of the brand's authenticity. A genuine brand perception thus seems to be directly tied to brand legacy. As a potential antecedent of brand authenticity, we examine another sort of past-related brand behaviour: a company's nostalgic positioning through spatio-temporal or symbolic ties (Leigh et al., 2006). Another way Americans search for actual life experiences, according to Cameron and Gatewood (1994), is through nostalgia. They argue that because modern life is so

alienating, people seek solace in the past (or other times) in an effort to state their emotional demands for belonging and connection (Cameron and Gatewood, 1994, p. 30). A brand's perceived integrity and lack of ambiguity—or if the brand stays loyal to itself—are described as its virtues. The research highlights, in particular, how brand authenticity is negatively impacted when values and conventions are subordinated to financial objectives (i.e., brand commercialization) (Beverland, 2006; Kates, 2004; Leigh et al., 2006). This is further backed up by the research of Morhart et al. (2015), who point out that brand scandals have a detrimental impact on marketing messages and operate as an indexical cue (Groves, 2001; Liao and Ma, 2009) that influences consumers' perceptions of a brand's authenticity. As a result, it appears that a brand's communication activities should be consistent and understandable in order to determine their authenticity, but inconsistent brand behaviour that puts profit concerns ahead of its conveyed behaviour or identity tends to erode views of brand authenticity. The findings of Morhart et al. (2015), which show that a brand's declared commitment to go beyond profitability, have a positive impact on the brand authenticity dimension, lend further credence to this.

The importance of socially and ecologically conscious brand behaviour in trade interactions and its potential to gain competitive advantages has been highlighted more and more recently by marketing scholars (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). Only Ewing et al. (2012) address this specific topic in the context of brand authenticity and show that both the use of labels that guarantee a brand's greenness (i.e., an indexical cue) and the stylized greenness of a brand (i.e., an organic look through packaging materials; an iconic cue) have a positive impact on brand authenticity. Therefore, further research is needed on the impact of a brand's social commitment on perceptions of brand authenticity. According to Rifon et al. (2004), consumer-brand identification refers to the extent to which a consumer perceives a likeness and connection to the brand. Congruence between the values and conventions of a brand and those of its target audience (i.e., cultural fit) is seen as a key factor in brand authenticity in this context (Beverland & Farelly, 2010; Kates, 2004; Leigh et al., 2006). A person or an object will be seen as authentic by a society, according to Goffman (1959), provided their behaviour is consistent with the cultural script of that society. The perceived consistency of a person's self-concept is also discussed in social psychology as a potential influencing element of perceived authenticity (Kraus et al., 2011). In line with this, Malär et al. (2011) provide one explanation of how emotional brand attachment is created by mentioning the fit between a brand's communication style and the consumer's true self-perception as being a factor of brand authenticity. Therefore, it may be argued that the perceived fit between a person's identity and a brand, such as through cultural legitimacy or self-image congruence, will improve the assessment of a brand's authenticity. The people who work for or represent the brand are a crucial success component in creating brand perception, according to various researches (Paul et al., 2015; Sirianni et al., 2013). According to research in the marketing literature, an individual's view of a brand's authenticity is influenced by employee behaviour (Sirianni et al., 2013). For instance, it has been shown that employee brand behaviour influences brand authenticity evaluations favorably (Morhart et al., 2015; Munoz et al., 2006). Furthermore, it makes sense to assume that brand ambassadors increase the credibility of a company because they are people who are naturally inclined to promote the brand.

### **Brand Authenticity and its Consequences**

Consumers now want companies to be authentic if they want to be perceived as being distinctive, real, or original (Bruhn et al., 2012). This helps marketers set their brands apart from those of their rivals. The desire for genuine brands may be a result of consumers' overall mistrust of businesses (Young and Rubicam, 2013). The idea of authenticity has become more prevalent in modern marketing as a result of the quick changes in available financial options. The Theory of Everything (TOE) by Pine and Gilmore (1999) asserts that increasing social experience and consumption through economic offerings is a key goal of marketing. As economic offerings become experiential, which are frequently more fake than genuine, consumers are more likely to attach to real things (Peterson, 2005). Authenticity has received recent academic attention, but few academics have provided a clear definition; the term has also been employed in a variety of contexts and with varied connotations (Leigh, Peters, and Shelton, 2006). According to Spiggle, Nguyen, and Caravella (2012), authenticity is a term derived from the Greek words *autos*, which mean "self," and *hentes*, which means "doer," and denotes something that has the backing of its original originator. Various beneficial brand-related psychological and behavioral consumer outcomes are linked to authentic brands. According to earlier studies on the psychological consequences of brand authenticity (Ewing et al., 2012; Spiggle et al., 2012), perceptions of authenticity have a favorable impact on brand

attitude. Authenticity attributions are also discussed by Blackshaw (2008) as impacting variables on a brand's reputation. The research of Napoli et al. (2014), which shows a positive association between brand authenticities and its credibility perception as well as brand trust, lends support to this. Additionally, Liu and Jang (2009) talk about how authenticity improves happiness in the setting of restaurants. According to hospitality study, Lu et al. (2015) found a correlation between brand equity characteristics of brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality and perceptions of an ethnic restaurant's authenticity. Additionally, Morhart et al. (2015) support the idea that brand authenticity influences consumers' emotional brand attachment. In the psychology research, where authenticity is highlighted as a key factor in determining relationship commitment and well-being, the importance of authenticity for emotional attachments is further supported (Wickham, 2013).

### 3. Research model Hypothesis Development

#### 3.1 Research model of the study

The research model was developed after a thorough theoretical and empirical assessment.

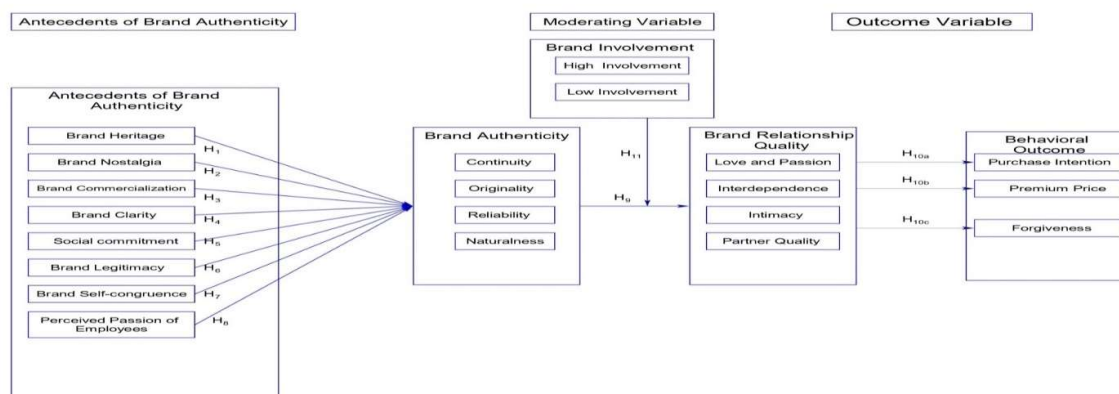


Figure -2: Research Model

#### 3.2 Hypothesis Development

##### Brand Heritage and Brand Authenticity

Urde et al (2007) also define the brand heritage construct as part of corporate brand identity - a dimension of a brand's identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols and particularly in an organisational belief that its history is important (Urde et al, 2007, pp. 4 – 5). According to Aaker (2004), heritage is an important value driver, especially for corporate brands; early roots add authenticity to brands and help them to differentiate themselves from others. The identity equity of such brands is extremely strong because their heritage helps define these brands today and add value, especially when they are re-interpreted in a contemporary light (Aaker, 2004, p. 7). Different studies have shown that brand heritage is a basic driver of brand identity or brand image and can help increase brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Liebrecht-Himes et al, 2007; Rindell, 2010). Brand legacy and brand authenticity are strongly related in the marketing literature (Brown et al., 2003; Peterson, 2005). The implication of their longevity and consistency (Zenith "since 1865," Guinness "established 1,759"), along with the brands' communication of their origins, may account for why these brands are seen as more legitimate. As a result, a brand looks to be more dependable and constant, for instance, demonstrating that it maintains a high standard of quality (Beverland, 2006). Last but not least, firms with a long history that emphasize this in their brand positioning, as done by many luxury brands (Louis Vuitton, Rolex), become more distinctive for the consumer as a result of these links (Hakala et al., 2011).



This suggests that a brand's history need to be a significant determining factor of brand authenticity. The following theories have been put forth as a result.

### **H1. Brand heritage has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity**

Brand Nostalgia and Brand Authenticity.

Nostalgia has two different aspects that conflict with each other - wistful longing or positive reminiscences about the past (Youn & Doodoo, 2021). Nostalgia was initially studied as customer preference in consumer research (Schindler & Holbrook, 2003). In the literature relating to psychology, medicine, and sociology. Schindler and Holbrook (2003) believed that nostalgia is a preference for specific items experienced every day in one's childhood. Emphasizing consumer nostalgia has developed into an effective strategy in the marketing field (Natterer, 2014). . Emphasizing consumer nostalgia has developed into an effective strategy in the marketing field (Natterer, 2014). Kessous et al. (2016) and Heinberg et al. (2020) identified the positive influence of nostalgia on brand attachment, as did Wen et al. (2019). Moreover, Tsai et al. (2020) noted that nostalgia has a significant impact on hospitality customers' destination attachment. Brand attachment, McEwen (2005) proposed that this is the emotional dependence of consumers on a specific brand. Thompson et al. (2005) think that brand attachment is a relationship between consumers and brands similar to the attachment among people. Park et al. (2006) put forward that brand attachment is a cognitive and emotional link between consumers and brands. In general, we believe that brand nostalgia enhances brand authenticity. Brands are seen as being more authentic, according to Peterson (2005), if their communicative appearance incorporates "former" ideals. Because the nostalgic staging suggests stability, nativeness, and originality, it may be anticipated that a brand's communication style that emphasizes a connection to the past would be viewed as authentic, trustworthy, continuous, and natural. The following theories have been put forth as a result.

### **H2. Brand nostalgia has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity.**

Brand Commercialization and Brand Authenticity

Commercial brands are distinguished by their intense, often aggressive, marketing efforts (Thompson and Arsel, 2004). Genuine brands, in comparison, seem uninterested in or unconcerned with business concerns (Beverland, 2006). Numerous academics have made the claim that commercialization compromises authenticity and can be seen as being at odds with brand authenticity, which is supported by this observation (Beverland, 2006; Beverland and Luxton, 2005; Chronis and Hampton, 2008; Holt, 2002; Napoli et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2006). In accordance with this, Kozinets (2002) contends that a brand's anti-commercial characteristics serve as markers of its genuineness. The fact that brands that sacrifice their values and norms for the sake of profit maximization are not perceived as distinctive, trustworthy, original, integer, and sincere (Thompson and Arsel, 2004) - and thus not as authentic - can be used to explain this negative relationship between brand commercialization and brand authenticity. The following theories have been put forth as a result.

### **H3. Brand commercialization has a negative and significant effect on brand authenticity.**

Brand Clarity and Brand Authenticity.

Brand authenticity is something we anticipate benefiting from brand clarity. For instance, Apple's tagline "Think Different" and Audi's motto "Vorsprung durch Technik" both benefit from consistency as a quality of a company's marketing strategy and communication activities since it increases brand clarity and the sense that a brand meets its promises. Contradictions in a brand's appearance, however, produce contradictory signals that damage the brand's reputation by undermining attributes like originality or naturalness and lowering the perception of brand authenticity (Sichtmann, 2007). Furthermore, it is likely that customers view brand clarity as an indication of dependability, which in turn supports a brand's legitimacy (Erdem & Swait, 1998). Consumers desire that genuine brands exhibit a distinct brand appearance that reflects the brand as being a transparent and unambiguous entity, according to the study by Bruhn et al. (2012). The following theories have been put forth as a result. Transparency,

on the other hand, was defined by Brando et al. (2018) as a brand's endeavour to give customers clear and pertinent information about their business practices and products.

#### **H4. Brand clarity has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity.**

Social Commitment and Brand Authenticity.

The assumption of social responsibility is linked to genuine, distinctive, and credible qualities (Sichtmann, 2007; Van Dorn and Verhoef, 2011), which are aspects describing the brand authenticity dimensions: naturalness, sincerity, and reliability, so we assume that the variable, social commitment will have a positive effect on the perceived brand's authenticity. The following theories have been put forth as a result.

#### **H5. Social commitment has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity.**

Brand Legitimacy and Brand Authenticity.

The significance of cultural aspects for authenticity attributions is discussed in various articles, as culture is reflected in a brand's production, attributes and value, and generally constitutes the lens through which consumers perceive brands (Kates, 2004; Spiggle et al., 2012). Thus, perceived cultural closeness may enhance authenticity attributions. This Assumption finds further support within self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000). According to self-determination theory, humans strive to satisfy their need for relatedness, which describes a sense of belonging and being accepted by significant others. As culture is represented in a brand's production, qualities, and value, and typically serves as the lens through which consumers view brands (Kates, 2004; Spiggle et al., 2012), the importance of cultural aspects for authenticity attributions is examined in many papers. As a result, perceived cultural affinity may improve authenticity judgments. Self-determination theory offers additional support for this presumption (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory holds that people try to fulfill their demand for relatedness, which is defined as a feeling of belonging and acceptance by important people. A brand's perceived cultural relevance will increase the more it reflects the values and norms of the significant others, which will affect consumer preferences (Rose et al., 1994). According to Kates (2004), a more genuine brand perception can be related to the perception of a brand as a legitimate entity (for instance, Levis among the LGBT community, or Vans within the skateboarding scene). Furthermore, brand legitimacy is a requirement for creating value, according to Deep House and Suchman (2008), because it is difficult for a brand that lacks legitimacy to receive acclaim from consumers. The following theories have been put forth as a result. According to Suchman (1995), moral legitimacy refers to whether a person's brand consuming behaviour complies with the ethical standards of the day. It also examines whether users of particular goods and brands are seen as moral role models. According to Liu et al. (2014), cognitive legitimacy refers to how much the social environment of a person recognizes that using a certain product or brand is vital and that the conflicting common norms within the society are unbelievable.

#### **H6. Brand legitimacy has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity.**

Actual Self-Congruence and Brand Authenticity.

We anticipate that self-congruence will have a variety of implications on brand authenticity. Consumers modify their behaviour to perceived consistency, according to the cognitive dissonance theory, because discrepancies cause discomfort and discord (Festinger, 1957). Because of this, customers favour firms (like Lane Bryant's "The Perfect Body" campaign) whose advertising image matches their sense of self. This preference is driven by the idea that a more authentic brand perception is evoked by a product's appearance: "People today purchase on the basis of whether a product conforms to their self-image; that alone determines the authenticity of the brand" (Gilmore, J.H. and Pine, 2007). Accordingly, brands are supposed to be regarded as a reflection of an individual's self and are therefore perceived as distinctive, real, and reliable. This is especially true for companies whose communication style coincides with the consumer's actual self-perception. As a result, the following theories have been put forth:



### **H7. Actual self-congruence has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity.**

#### Perceived Passion of Employees and Brand Authenticity

We assume that there is a correlation between the employee-specific characteristic and the authenticity of the brand in favour of the employee's passion. We presumptively assume that passionate employees are perceived as authentic, which will be attributed to the brand, based on research that shows a positive relationship between consumers' perceptions of a brand's employees and the perception of the brand (Värlander, 2009) and Grandey et al.'s (2005) findings that successfully demonstrate a relationship between perceived authentic friendliness of service employees and customer satisfaction. The following hypothesis only applies to service and retail companies where there is direct customer contact in order to ensure that participants can assess the employee's behaviour. As a result, the following hypothesis is made:

### **H8. The perceived passion of employees has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity.**

#### Brand Authenticity and Brand Relationship Quality

Brand Connection According to K. Kim, J. Park, and J. Kim (2014), quality is a relationship of high calibre between consumers and the brands of the products they consume, which results in consumers having a high level of interest in purchasing these products. High purchasing interest in products from specific brands can be sparked by the quality of a positive relationship between consumers and the brand. According to C. Calvo-Porrall and J.P. Lévy-Mangin (2017), consumer interest in a product determines whether they will purchase it.

### **H9. Brand authenticity has a positive effect on brand relationship quality.**

#### Brand Relationship Quality and Behavioral Outcomes

We anticipate that Brand authenticity will have a favorable impact on the psychological and behavioral characteristics examined in our study. Reliability, sincerity, naturalness, and steadiness—aspects representing the dimensions of brand authenticity—are influencing variables of the perceived value of customer-brand connections, according to Aaker et al. (2004). This is because real brands reinforce the consumer's identity, which improves self-congruence (Beverland and Farely, 2010). Self-congruence enhances the consumer's self-esteem and satisfies the urge for self-enhancement (Kressmann et al., 2006). Customers who feel self-congruent with a brand consequently value their relationship with the brand more intensely. Thus, it has been assumed that brand authenticity has a favorable effect on the calibre of brand relationships. The results of consumer behaviour include ongoing buy intent and price premium. In terms of consumer behaviour, the idea of continuous purchase intention is comparable to that of repurchase intention (Chen and Xu, 2019; Kaur et al., 2020). Additionally, according to a number of empirical findings, the strength of the relationship between a brand and its customer was predicted to have a significant impact on behavioral outcomes, such as willingness to pay a premium price and purchase intention (Batra et al., 2012; Smit et al., 2007). Price premiums were defined by Netemeyer et al. (2004) as "the amount a consumer is willing to pay for his/her preferred brand over comparable/lesser brands of the same package size/quantity." The impact of brand authenticity on consumers' purchase intentions (Lude and Pruggl, 2018; Fritz et al., 2017) and behavioral intentions (Oh et al., 2019) has been the subject of numerous studies. However, there is currently a shortage of study on Asian millennials' ongoing purchase aspirations. This study closes the knowledge gap about the continuous buying intentions of Asian millennials. Additionally, it has been hypothesised that the positive influence of brand relationship quality on consumers' capacity for forgiveness. According to McCullough et al. (2000), people are more inclined to pardon someone if they are close with them. Therefore, it is reasonable to predict that brand relationship quality will have a favorable impact on forgiveness when applied to the branding environment. Consequently, the following hypothesis was put forth.

### **H10: brand relationship quality has positive and significant effect on behavioral outcomes**

H10a. Brand relationship quality has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention.

H10b. Brand relationship quality has a positive and significant effect on the willingness to pay a Price Premium.

H10c. Brand relationship quality has a positive and significant effect on the willingness to Forgive Mistakes.

### Moderating Role of Brand Involvement between Antecedents and Brand Authenticity

It is significant to remember that not all customers may experience the impacts as strongly as predicted. Consumers with high levels of participation are more likely to exert cognitive effort when evaluating a brand (Malär et al., 2011), and authenticity appears to be more important to these consumers (Beverland, 2006). Additionally, the perceived individual relevance of the brand has a significant impact on the willingness to establish and maintain a relationship (Aaker et al., 2004). Therefore, it is anticipated that both the influence of the identified antecedents on brand authenticity and the effect of brand authenticity on brand relationship quality will be larger for consumers who have a high level of brand participation. This expectation gives rise to the following hypotheses:

H-11: Brand involvement moderates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality.

## **4. Research Methodology**

### **a) Population and Sampling**

An online self-administered survey of 384 graduate programme students enrolled in various colleges at major public institutions in Ethiopia was conducted between March 1 and June 20, 2023, to gather data for the purpose of experimentally evaluating developed hypotheses. The formula  $n = (1 - \alpha) / (e/Z)$  was used to calculate the required sample size for the study, which was found to be 384 in a 95% confidence range with an  $e=5\%$  margin of error. Four local and international product category brands were surveyed: energy drink, coffee, Coca-Cola, and computer brands. Graduate students who often use energy drinks, Coca-Cola, coffee, and computers made up the survey's sample. A graduate programme student was not permitted to respond to the questionnaire if they had not used the brands listed above. In this study, brands that were viewed as genuine, inauthentic, and partially authentic (in-between) were evaluated along a continuum of authenticity. Convenience sampling was utilized in this study because it is an efficient way to quickly get data from respondents and is frequently used by academics to predict consumer behaviour (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016; Awan and Raza, 2012).

### **b) Research Instrument**

The questionnaire was created following a thorough review of the literature, and all constructs were evaluated using scales that were already in use. On the constructs and measurements utilized in the study, questions were posed in the questionnaire. The final, amended instrument had fourteen criteria that were intended to evaluate the conditions that influence brand authenticity and, consequently, Brand Relationship Quality. Mostly five-point Likert scales were used to evaluate the fifteen variables. Each response was given a score on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 5 representing a strong agreement. The validity of the research has been attempted to some extent by addressing certain response and non-response biases. Since there were no double-barrelled questions and the survey items were worded according to standard usage, there may have been less misunderstanding among respondents, which could have led to answer errors. The self-administered nature of the poll raised questions about frequent technique bias. Section headings and page breaks have been used to address this prejudice. We stayed away from negatively phrased items and mixing items from different notions were also discouraged (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The questionnaire did not contain any secret clues, and respondent confidentiality was upheld (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, relevant items were placed farthest apart from one another to induce cognitive separation between the hypothesised antecedents and the dependent variable. The researcher was able to reduce

any potential self-generated validity thanks to this division (Feldman and Lynch, 1988). Respondent anonymity and the survey's self-administered aspect both reduce the possibility of biases related to acquiescence and disacquiescence (Jaffe and Pasternak, 1997).

## **5. Research Findings**

### **5.1 Demographic Profile**

At the conclusion of the data collection process, 300 of the 380 online self-administered questionnaires that were issued were returned and used for the statistical analysis, giving the response rate of 82 percent.

### **5.2 Data Analysis and Hypothesis Examination**

Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique with the SmartPLS 3 software (Ringle, Wende, and Becker, 2018) has been utilized to analyse the study model. The measurement model (validity and reliability) was tested before a look at the structural model (testing the hypothesised relationship), all in accordance with the two-stage analytical procedures advised by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) (Hair et al., 2017; Ramayah et al., 2011; 2013; Rahman et al., 2016). Additionally, a bootstrapping method (5000 resamples) was utilized to test the significance of the path coefficients and loadings (Hair et al., 2017).

#### **5.2.1 Measurement Model**

The data was first entered into SPSS and a preliminary stage of measurement item was first identified before the data were subjected to statistical analysis using the SMART-PLS tool. Then, SMART-PLS was used to assess the measurement model's psychometric qualities in terms of internal consistency, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The reliability measures Cronbach Alpha (0.88) and Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.85) were also confirmed using SPSS 23 version. Two different types of validity were looked at in order to evaluate the measurement model: convergent validity and discriminant validity.

#### **Reliability and Convergent Validity**

The loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability are typically examined to determine the measurement's convergent validity (Gholami et al., 2013; Rahman et al., 2015). If the question-statements (or other measures) linked to each latent variable are understood by various respondents in the same way, then the measurement tool has strong reliability. All Cronbach alpha coefficients, which measure the items' unidimensionality as a group of scale items, are therefore above 0.7 and range from 0.703 to 0.807, indicating strong internal consistency. Cronbach alpha, however, is predicated on the limiting premise that all signs are equally significant. Reliability can also be thought of as the percentage of measure variance that can be attributed to the underlying dimension (Werts et al. 1974). While Cronbach's alpha with its parallel measure assumption gives a lower bound estimate of internal consistency, Chin et al. (1996, p. 33) claim that a better estimate can be obtained using the composite reliability. This study's composite reliability, which ranges from 0.712 to 0.928 for all metrics, is also above 0.7. Similar to composite reliability, Dhillon Goldstin rho assesses internal consistence and is satisfactory above 0.7 (Gefen, 2000). The average variance extraction (AVE) of all variables, on the other hand, is higher than the cutoff point of 0.5. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE threshold that is commonly suggested for acceptable validity is 0.5.

Table 1: Reliability analysis

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ASC	0.765	0.770	0.596
BAN	0.770	0.915	0.692
BI	0.719	0.704	0.828
BLC	0.732	0.928	0.777
BNO	0.723	0.926	0.783
BRC	0.807	0.880	0.814
BRH	0.747	0.937	0.661
BRL	0.726	0.822	0.663
BRQ	0.759	0.804	0.559
BSC	0.769	0.901	0.627
EPA	0.703	0.745	0.599
PIN	0.711	0.712	0.576
PRP	0.715	0.723	0.590
WTF	0.787	0.932	0.705

Source: Own Survey, 2023

### Discriminant Validity

The Fornell-Larcker criterion, which states that for each latent variable, the square root of AVE should be higher than its correlation with any other latent variable, can also be used to establish the discriminant validity of AVE. This indicates that the variance shared by a latent variable with its block of indicators is bigger than the variance shared by that latent variable with any other latent variable. The square root of AVE and correlations are shown in the diagonal cells of the Fornell-Larcker criterion table in the SmartPLS output. This means that there is discriminant validity if, in absolute value terms, the top number (which is the square root of AVE) in any factor column is higher than the numbers (correlations) below it.

Table 2: Latent variable Correlation and Discriminant Validity

	ASC	BAN	BI	BLC	BNO	BRC	BRH	BRL	BRQ	BSC	EPA	PIN	PRP	WTF
ASC	<b>0.772</b>													
BAN	0.306	<b>0.832</b>												
BI	-0.237	0.125	<b>0.796</b>											
BLC	-0.132	0.096	0.096	<b>0.881</b>										
BNO	-0.032	0.145	0.145	0.326	<b>0.885</b>									
BRC	0.030	0.103	0.103	0.185	0.490	<b>0.902</b>								
BRH	-0.041	0.160	0.160	0.040	-0.008	0.241	<b>0.813</b>							
BRL	0.346	0.516	0.516	-0.008	0.061	0.091	0.099	<b>0.814</b>						
BRQ	0.147	0.522	0.522	0.039	0.092	0.047	0.096	0.530	<b>0.748</b>					
BSC	0.032	0.138	0.138	0.145	0.190	0.155	0.312	0.065	0.036	<b>0.792</b>				
EPA	-0.031	0.080	0.080	-0.037	-0.187	-0.125	-0.231	-0.029	0.038	-0.357	<b>0.774</b>			
PIN	0.423	0.339	0.339	-0.077	-0.045	0.043	-0.004	0.129	0.313	-0.065	0.060	<b>0.759</b>		
PRP	0.312	0.333	0.333	-0.116	0.012	0.007	0.013	0.112	0.286	-0.033	-0.002	0.199	<b>0.768</b>	
WTF	0.054	0.436	0.436	0.150	0.077	0.068	0.201	0.106	0.163	0.124	-0.029	0.264	0.315	<b>0.840</b>

Source: Own Survey, 2023

A good model should have indicators that load well on the parameters they are designed to evaluate and that cross-load significantly with other aspects they are not. Each assessment item must only have a weak correlation with the construct to which it is conceptually connected for discriminant validity to be demonstrated. When there is an adequate pattern of loading, meaning that the measurement item loads heavily on the theoretically assigned component and not much on other variables, the correlation between the latent variable score and the measurement item will be strong. When compared to the cross-loading of other variables, all loadings in this example strongly demonstrated an appropriate pattern of loading. No indicator variable, at the very least, should be more correlated with one other latent variable than with its own latent variable. If it does, the model's specifications are incorrect.

Table 3: Discriminate validity

	ASC	BAN	BI	BLC	BNO	BRC	BRH	BRL	BRQ	BSC	EPA	PIN	PRP	WTF	BI x BAN
ASC-1	<b>0.613</b>	-0.003	0.027	0.448	0.382	0.283	-0.050	-0.062	-0.076	0.139	-0.003	-0.058	-0.044	-0.001	-0.060
ASC-2	<b>0.594</b>	0.365	0.357	0.117	0.051	-0.004	0.072	0.302	0.152	0.021	0.044	0.217	0.107	0.499	-0.141
ASC-3	<b>0.714</b>	0.231	0.172	-0.091	-0.074	0.040	0.116	0.243	0.089	-0.051	-0.055	0.380	0.199	0.016	-0.154
BAN-1	-0.029	<b>0.631</b>	0.036	0.121	0.102	0.032	0.169	-0.043	0.076	0.069	0.034	0.007	0.017	0.027	-0.121
BAN-2	0.065	<b>0.812</b>	-0.034	0.255	0.194	0.035	0.016	0.064	0.125	0.231	-0.118	-0.066	-0.006	0.212	-0.105
BAN-3	-0.010	<b>0.842</b>	0.005	-0.130	-0.058	0.019	0.199	-0.112	-0.069	0.015	0.033	-0.111	-0.060	0.041	-0.067
BAN-4	0.312	<b>0.812</b>	0.052	-0.016	-0.004	0.001	0.064	0.396	0.260	-0.026	0.041	0.398	0.251	0.181	0.016
BI	0.065	0.013	<b>0.947</b>	0.205	0.094	0.030	0.012	0.004	0.128	0.031	-0.108	-0.060	-0.008	0.202	-0.005
BLC-1	-0.005	0.003	0.148	<b>0.703</b>	0.237	0.091	0.058	-0.054	-0.166	0.408	-0.076	-0.031	-0.057	-0.040	0.058
BLC-2	0.184	-0.020	0.061	<b>0.756</b>	0.026	0.011	0.199	0.148	-0.016	0.129	-0.258	0.292	0.251	0.020	0.049
BLC-3	0.088	0.027	0.462	<b>0.678</b>	0.027	0.050	0.107	0.152	0.131	0.235	-0.087	0.272	0.099	0.094	-0.246
BNO-1	-0.061	0.058	0.698	0.327	<b>0.568</b>	0.350	0.203	-0.029	0.058	0.151	-0.101	-0.048	-0.038	0.072	-0.049
BNO-2	-0.032	0.070	0.848	0.390	<b>0.734</b>	0.420	0.121	0.035	0.064	0.182	-0.198	-0.043	0.058	0.047	-0.248
BNO-3	0.054	0.013	0.805	0.056	<b>0.536</b>	0.359	0.283	0.044	0.097	0.275	-0.149	0.057	0.046	0.058	-0.138
BNO-4	-0.014	0.159	0.541	0.181	<b>0.890</b>	0.376	-0.162	0.081	0.077	0.195	-0.138	-0.034	0.003	0.061	-0.181
BRC-1	-0.054	0.018	0.049	0.291	0.247	<b>0.581</b>	0.314	0.043	-0.080	0.255	-0.028	0.046	-0.114	0.026	0.001
BRC-2	0.126	0.078	0.023	0.246	0.407	<b>0.863</b>	0.218	0.067	-0.039	0.275	-0.125	0.050	-0.011	0.002	-0.119
BRC-3	-0.033	0.108	0.091	0.074	0.462	<b>0.921</b>	0.182	0.092	0.118	0.411	-0.107	0.025	0.039	0.105	0.149
BRH-1	-0.036	0.112	0.035	0.063	0.143	0.260	<b>0.866</b>	0.100	0.031	0.394	-0.295	0.000	-0.005	0.164	0.158
BRH-2	0.001	-0.056	0.160	0.055	0.300	0.096	<b>0.725</b>	0.026	-0.106	0.394	-0.183	0.007	-0.032	-0.026	0.176
BRL-1	0.066	0.288	0.018	-0.112	-0.040	-0.003	-0.020	<b>0.850</b>	0.173	0.013	-0.034	0.445	0.303	0.083	0.125
BRL-2	0.162	0.023	0.081	-0.013	0.110	0.054	0.070	<b>0.779</b>	0.028	0.047	0.010	0.308	0.373	0.117	-0.070
BRL-3	0.162	0.123	0.139	-0.013	0.110	0.054	0.070	<b>0.785</b>	0.128	0.047	0.010	0.308	0.373	0.012	0.135
BRQ-1	-0.156	-0.075	0.125	0.065	-0.045	-0.137	0.086	0.010	<b>0.700</b>	-0.100	-0.011	0.078	-0.037	0.108	0.062
BRQ-2	0.013	0.073	-0.055	0.098	0.012	-0.015	-0.146	-0.024	<b>0.849</b>	-0.024	0.192	0.023	-0.025	0.007	0.100
BRQ-3	-0.115	0.004	0.242	0.049	0.113	0.131	-0.001	-0.210	<b>0.790</b>	0.490	0.275	-0.157	-0.201	-0.092	-0.389
BSC-1	0.349	0.101	-0.074	-0.001	0.061	0.089	0.101	0.198	0.123	<b>0.835</b>	-0.035	0.327	0.168	0.102	-0.047
BSC-2	-0.134	0.107	0.112	0.167	0.302	0.200	0.109	-0.019	0.075	<b>0.942</b>	-0.095	-0.082	-0.132	0.165	-0.025

BSC-3	-0.108	0.061	-0.001	0.154	0.306	0.126	-0.089	0.015	-0.023	<b>0.774</b>	0.072	-0.054	-0.066	0.103	0.157
EPA-1	-0.051	0.076	0.483	0.354	0.187	0.168	0.422	0.059	0.009	0.135	<b>0.620</b>	-0.027	-0.057	0.110	-0.290
EPA-2	0.080	0.149	0.094	0.130	0.191	0.102	0.201	0.030	0.070	0.142	<b>0.529</b>	-0.021	-0.034	0.117	-0.118
EPA-3	0.029	-0.041	0.037	0.087	-0.199	-0.028	-0.125	-0.119	0.083	-0.277	<b>0.741</b>	0.212	-0.057	-0.022	-0.047
PIN-1	0.082	-0.038	0.092	0.276	0.450	0.262	0.232	-0.005	-0.003	0.252	-0.481	<b>0.607</b>	-0.067	0.068	0.129
PIN-2	-0.052	-0.026	0.155	0.059	-0.236	-0.097	-0.106	-0.101	0.081	-0.305	0.220	<b>0.964</b>	-0.059	-0.007	-0.021
PIN-3	-0.033	-0.208	-0.037	0.121	-0.159	-0.033	-0.085	-0.225	-0.138	-0.186	0.229	<b>0.760</b>	-0.406	-0.166	-0.162
PRP-1	0.039	0.067	-0.001	-0.028	-0.245	-0.114	-0.187	-0.048	0.113	-0.353	0.241	0.103	0.742	0.018	0.017
PRP-2	0.447	0.354	-0.048	-0.094	0.018	0.070	0.025	0.173	0.298	0.017	0.001	0.103	<b>0.833</b>	0.272	-0.150
PRP-3	0.301	0.281	-0.223	-0.159	0.010	0.013	0.043	0.104	0.187	-0.023	0.011	0.110	<b>0.772</b>	0.282	-0.085
PRP-4	0.255	0.176	0.060	0.034	0.042	0.043	0.030	0.037	0.198	0.031	0.009	0.117	<b>0.768</b>	0.198	-0.145
WTF-1	0.091	0.342	0.299	0.031	-0.011	0.004	0.083	0.272	0.192	0.063	-0.066	0.105	0.159	<b>0.747</b>	-0.297
WTF-2	0.037	0.389	0.234	0.155	0.087	0.073	0.198	0.126	0.081	0.119	-0.016	0.261	0.303	<b>0.976</b>	-0.152
BI x BAN	-0.370	-0.185	-0.193	-0.085	-0.005	-0.062	0.004	-0.295	-0.224	0.076	0.007	-0.330	-0.202	-0.174	<b>1.000</b>

Source: Own Survey, 2023

A simple factor structure is ideal, which is generally interpreted to suggest that desired loadings should be higher than 0.6 (others use 0.5). The attained metrics in the table above load on each factor just fine.

### Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

According to a general rule, in order to prevent the collinearity issue, we need a VIF of 5 or lower (i.e., a Tolerance level of 0.2 or higher) (Hair et al., 2011). Similar to this, it is advised to use a latent variable threshold of 3.3 or less when using VIFs to test multicollinearity. It is necessary to confirm the correlation between the predictors of a variable whenever factor loadings are greater than 0.70 values in order to check the viability of multi-co-linearity tests. Multiple co-linearity causes the standard errors to be inflated incorrectly, and some model parameters may occasionally become unstable (Kock, 2012). Variance inflation factors (VIFs) are analysed for each of the predictor variables to determine the level of multicollinearity. According to Table 4, all VIF values between 1.001 and 2.333 fell below the recommended threshold levels, indicating that there is no multi-collinearity for any outside indicators. The inner VIF values, which range from 1.000 to 2.340, are also below the suggested level.

Table 4: Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

Constructs	Factors	Outer VIF Values	BAN	BRQ
Actual self-congruence	ASC-1	1.015	1.218	
	ASC-2	1.657		
	ASC-3	1.094		
Brand Authenticity	BAN-1	1.125	1.326	
	BAN-2	1.127		
	BAN-3	1.108		
	BAN-4	1.069		
Brand clarity	BLC-1	1.082	1.661	
	BLC-2	1.068		
	BLC-3	1.314		
Brand nostalgia	BNO-1	1.281	2.340	
	BNO-2	1.721		
	BNO-3	1.492		
	BNO-4	1.615		



Brand commercialization	BRC-1	1.035	1.584	
	BRC-2	1.373		
	BRC-3	1.572		
Brand heritage	BRH-1	1.458	1.370	
	BRH-2	1.262		
Brand legitimacy	BRL-1	1.206	1.169	
	BRL-2	1.731		
	BRL-3	1.622		
Brand Social commitment	BSC-1	1.013	2.001	
	BSC-2	1.076		
	BSC-3	1.075		
Perceived passion of employees	EPA-1	1.034	1.235	
	EPA-2	2.333		
	EPA-3	2.313		
Purchase intention	PIN-1	1.808		1.000
	PIN-2	1.798		
	PIN-3	1.011		
	PIN-4	1.001		
Willingness to pay a price premium	PRP-1	1.003		1.000
	PRP-2	1.116		
	PRP-3	1.087		
Willingness to forgive mistakes	WTF-2	1.003		1.000
	WTF-3	1.279		
Brand Involvement	BI x BAN	1.000		1.053

Source: Own Survey, 2023

#### R-Square and Q-square

This study's R square was substantial. The  $R^2$  value of 0.548 revealed that about 54.8% of the variations in brand authenticity were predicted by factors such as brand heritage, brand nostalgia, brand commercialization, brand clarity, social commitment, brand legitimacy, actual self-congruence, and perceived enthusiasm of employees. Brand Authenticity was predicted by roughly 63.6 percent of the differences in Brand Relationship Quality, according to the  $R^2$  value of 0.636. Similar to this, brand connection quality predicted changes in purchase intention, willingness to pay a price premium, and willingness to overlook mistakes by 56.5 percent, 43.8 percent, and 54 percent, respectively.

Table 5: Quality criteria

	R-Square	R -Square Adjusted
Brand Authenticity	0.548	0.543
Brand Relationship Quality	0.636	0.621
Purchase intention	0.565	0.559
Willingness to pay a price premium	0.438	0.433
Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.540	0.535

Source: Own Survey, 2023

#### F-Square/Effect Size

According to Cohen (1988), a "small"  $f^2$  effect size is 0.02, a "medium" effect is 0.15, and a "high" effect size is 0.35. We may conclude that the model's influence of brand authenticity (.279) has a significant impact on the calibre of brand relationships. Similar to this, the model's effect of brand relationship quality is strong on willingness to pay a premium (.160), willingness to overlook mistakes (.891), and purchase intention (.197), while the effects of actual self-congruence (.075), brand clarity (.053), brand nostalgia (.045), brand legitimacy (.053),

and perceived employee passion (0.072) show a medium effect on brand relationship quality and the effects of other dimensions are weak on brand relationship as a whole.

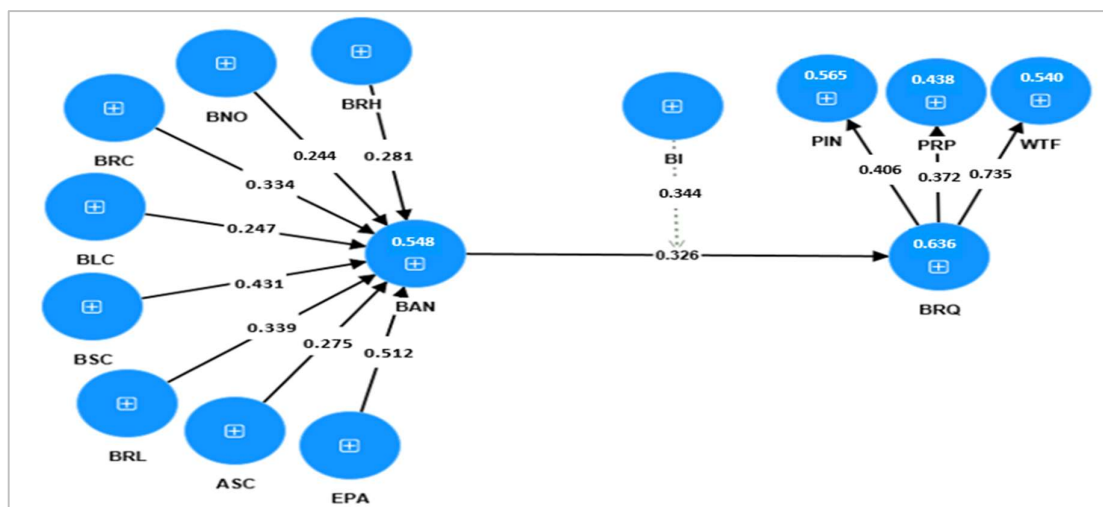
Table 6: effect size (f square)

	BAN	BRQ	PIN	PRP	WTF
ASC	0.075				
BAN		0.279			
BI		0.014			
BLC	0.053				
BNO	0.045				
BRC	0.007				
BRH	0.004				
BRL	0.053				
BRQ			0.197	0.160	.891
BSC	0.006				
EPA	0.072				
BI x BAN		0.017			

Source: Own Survey, 2023

### Hypothesis Testing Results

Hair et al. (2017) recommended using a bootstrapping approach with a resample of 5,000 samples to examine the R<sup>2</sup>, beta ( $\beta$ ), and corresponding t-values in order to evaluate the structural model. They also recommended that studies report the effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) in addition to these fundamental measurements. According to Sullivan and Feinn (2012), a p-value can tell the reader whether an effect exists, but it cannot tell them how big of an effect it is. Both the substantive significance (effect size) and statistical significance (p-value) are crucial results to report when reporting and analyzing studies (p. 279). Figure 1 illustrates the variance explained by brand heritage, brand nostalgia, brand commercialization, brand clarity, social commitment, brand legitimacy, perceived employee passion, and actual self-congruence.



**Source:** Own Survey (2023): Figure 1: The Moderating Role of Brand Involvement between Brand Authenticity and Brand Relationship Quality

Brand authenticity also affects brand relationship quality outcomes; 63.6 percent of the variance is explained by this variable. Similar to this, brand connection quality has a 56.5 percent, a 43.8 percent, and a 54.8 percent impact on consumers' willingness to make a purchase, pay a premium price, and accept faults. The results of this study show that Brand heritage, Brand nostalgia, Brand commercialization, Brand clarity, social commitment, Brand legitimacy, Actual self-congruence, and Perceived passion are significant predictors of Brand Authenticity and positively correlate with it. The use of effect size estimates and confidence intervals, Bayesian approaches, Bayes factors or likelihood ratios, and decision-theoretic modelling are some of the recommendations made by Hahn and Ang (2017) for publishing results in quantitative studies with rigour. We have reported effect sizes and confidence ranges in accordance with suggestions.

Table 7: Summary of hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta( $\beta$ )	STDEV	T value ( $\beta$ /STDEV)	P-Value	VIF	Decision
H1	BRH -> BAN	0.281	0.067	4.194	0.024	1.370	Supported
H2	BNO -> BAN	0.244	0.047	4.170	0.020	2.340	Supported
H3	BRC -> BAN	0.334	0.068	4.912	0.018	1.584	Not Supported
H4	BLC -> BAN	0.247	0.049	5.041	0.027	1.661	Supported
H5	BSC -> BAN	0.431	0.079	5.456	0.000	2.001	supported
H6	BRL -> BAN	0.339	0.084	4.036	0.016	1.169	Supported
H7	ASC -> BAN	0.275	0.057	4.825	0.025	1.218	Supported
H8	EPA -> BAN	0.512	0.063	8.127	0.000	2.235	Supported
H9	BAN -> BRQ	0.326	0.089	3.663	0.022	1.326	Supported
H10a	BRQ -> PIN	0.406	0.075	5.413	0.000	1.000	Supported
H10b	BRQ -> PRP	0.372	0.057	6.526	0.011	1.000	Supported
H10c	BRQ -> WTP	0.735	0.078	9.423	0.000	1.000	Supported
H11	BAN-> BI-> BRQ	0.112	0.041	2.731	0.040	1.053	Supported

\* ABAN-Antecedent of Brand Authenticity

**Source:** Own Survey, 2023

Antecedent Factors on Brand Authenticity and Relationship Quality

Additionally, it has been examined how brand engagement affects relationship quality and brand authenticity. In other words, brand involvement's moderating effects assess the indirect impact of antecedent forces on relationship quality and brand authenticity. When a third variable or construct stands in between two other related constructs, a moderating effect is produced (Hair et al., 2010). The indirect effects are the product of the path coefficients from the independent variable to the moderator variable and the moderator variable to the dependent variable. Direct and indirect impact analysis (moderating effect) was performed using the SEM analysis. The indirect effect estimates and the moderating effect are displayed in Table 8. Because the indirect impact estimates are greater than the direct effect estimates (0.344>0.326, T>1.96), brand engagement moderates the link between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality. However, because the indirect effects estimates are greater than the direct effects estimates (0.3440.412, T1.96), brand engagement does not act as a moderator in the link between the antecedent of brand authenticity and brand authenticity.

Table 8: Moderating role of Brand involvement on brand authenticity and Brand Relationship Quality

Hypothesis	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Status	Evidence
H11	0.326	0.344	Moderate	Supported

Source: Own Survey, 2023

## 6. Discussion of Results

The impact of antecedents on brand authenticity is discussed /looked at first, secondly it attempted to investigate the relationship between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality thirdly, it discusses the relationship quality on customer behavioral outcomes and finally it addresses the moderating role of Brand involvement between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality.

The results of the study's **first section** show that brand authenticity is influenced by elements that are closely related to a brand's past, such as brand heritage and brand nostalgia; its virtue, including: brand commercialization, brand clarity, and social commitment; employees representing the brand, which is an employee's passion; and consumers' self-identification with the brand, which consists of brand legitimacy and actual self-congruence. Three (3) sub-hypotheses and twelve (12) main hypotheses were empirically tested using data acquired from 300 educated and youthful Ethiopians. The study discusses the research results and how they relate to prior literary works in the sections that follow.

- **The results of the analysis support Hypothesis- 1's** claim that "Brand heritage has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity" ( $\beta = 0.281$ ,  $T = 4.194$ ,  $P = 0.024$  .05). The results of this study are consistent with many prior investigations (Zenith "since 1865", Guinness "founded 1,759; Beverland, 2006).
- **Hypothesis 2** asserts that "Brand nostalgia has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity" ( $\beta = -0.196$ ,  $T = 4.170$ ,  $P = 0.020$  .05). Numerous earlier investigations have found similar results, according to Peterson (2005).
- **In line with Hypothesis-3** ("Brand commercialization has a negative and significant effect on brand authenticity") ( $\beta = -0.334$ ,  $T = 4.912$ ,  $P = 0.018$  .05). The results of this study do not agree with those of a number of other investigations (Beverland, 2006; Beverland and Luxton, 2005; Chronis and Hampton, 2008; Holt, 2002; Napoli et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2006; Kozinetz, 2002). This could be explained by the fact that respondents might not have understood the construct's genuine meaning. Since commercialization threatens authenticity and might be seen as being in conflict with brand authenticity (Beverland, 2006; Beverland and Luxton, 2005; Chronis and Hampton, 2008; Holt, 2002; Napoli et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2006), it should be avoided.
- **As per Hypothesis -4:** "Brand clarity has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity" ( $R^2 = 0.247$ ,  $T = 5.041$ ,  $P = 0.027$  .05). The results of this investigation are consistent with those of other earlier studies (Sichtmann, 2007, Bruhn et al., 2012, Erdem and Swait, 1998), among them. Brand managers should therefore establish a policy that shows an unchanging/enduring brand identity that encompasses the business's values, standards, mission, as well as all of its communication efforts, in order to improve a brand's perception of authenticity. Companies are advised to refrain from some - frequently short-term - marketing actions in particular to avoid the pitfalls of inconsistent brand behaviour and to ensure a brand's authenticity: no brand can afford to implement short-term price campaigns, aggressive or unsubstantiated advertising campaigns, unbelievable testimonials, use communication tools or distribution channels that conflict with its original essential identity.

- **Hypothesis -5** asserts that "Social commitment has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity" ( $\beta = 0.431$ ,  $T = 5.456$ ,  $P = 0.000 < .05$ ). A significant number of earlier investigations (Sichtmann, 2007; Van Dorn and Verhoef, 2011) have shown results that are consistent with those of this study.
- **Hypothesis -6** holds true, "Brand legitimacy has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity" ( $\beta = 0.339$ ,  $T = 4.036$ ,  $P = 0.016 < .05$ ). The results of this investigation are consistent with those of other earlier studies (Kates, 2004; Spiggle et al., 2012; Deci and Ryan, 2000; Rose et al., 1994, Kates, 2004), as well as a number of other recent studies. Thus, brand managers should understand the culture of their target consumers and investigate the symbols and behavior which represent their values and norms, to integrate these aspects within the brand culture.
- **Hypothesis-7** states that "Actual self-congruence has a positive and significant effect on brand authenticity." ( $\beta = 0.275$ ,  $T = 4.825$ ,  $P = 0.025 < .05$ ). Many earlier investigations have found similar results (Festinger, 1957; Gilmore and Pine in Weinberger, 2008, p. 42), and this study is no exception. In accordance with Hypothesis- 8, "The perceived enthusiasm of employees has a favorable and significant effect on brand authenticity. ( $\beta = 0.512$ ,  $T = 8.127$ ,  $P = 0.000 < .05$ ).
- **In accordance with Hypothesis- 8**, "The perceived enthusiasm of employees has a favorable and significant effect on brand authenticity. ( $\beta = 0.512$ ,  $T = 8.127$ ,  $P = 0.000 < .05$ ). The results of this study are consistent with the majority of past investigations (including Grandey et al. 2005 and Värlander, 2009). The results of this study are consistent with the majority of past investigations (including Grandey et al. 2005 and Värlander, 2009). Brand managers should note that the perceived brand identification of frontline employees plays an important role in driving consumers' authenticity perceptions and is therefore relevant for consumers' behavioral outcomes. When interacting with highly intrinsically motivated employees, consumers are more likely to perceive the brand as authentic. Hence, the brand will be evaluated more positively, enhancing mutual understanding as well as the intention for long-term relationships.

**The first section** of this study focuses on how brand authenticity is created. The findings demonstrate that factors that are closely related to the brand's past (such as brand heritage and nostalgia), its virtues (such as brand commercialization, brand clarity, and social commitment), employees who represent the brand (such as employee passion), and consumers' self-identification with the brand (such as brand legitimacy and actual self-congruence) all have an impact on brand authenticity. The findings regarding the antecedents of brand authenticity show that a business can influence brand authenticity by employing a variety of strategies. It is crucial to determine which elements (such as a brand's history, virtue, employees or individuals who represent the brand and consumers' self-identification with the brand) can be manipulated by brand management to favorably affect consumers' perceptions of the brand's authenticity.

**The study's second section** offers empirical proof for the widely held notion that brand authenticity increases consumer-brand emotional bonds. Particularly, it has been demonstrated that the strength of brand relationships is significantly influenced by brand authenticity.

- **Hypothesis- 9** states that "Brand authenticity has a positive effect on brand relationship quality." ( $\beta = 0.326$ ,  $T = 3.663$ ,  $P = 0.022 < .05$ ). A significant number of earlier investigations, including those by K. Kim, J. Park, and J. Kim in 2014 and C. Calvo-Porrall and J.P. Lévy-Mangin in 2017, concur with the conclusions of this study.

**The third section** of the study focuses on how the nature of the brand relationship affects the behavioural outcomes of purchase intention, premium pricing, and forgiving.

- **Hypothesis -10** was put forth as "brand relationship quality has a positive and significant effect on behavioral outcomes" and was composed of three sub-hypotheses, the findings of which are discussed and addressed below:
  - **Sub-Hypothesis -H10a** states that the strength of the brand relationship has a favorable and considerable impact on consumers' willingness to pay a price premium. ( $\beta = -0.406$ ,  $T = 5.413$ ,  $P = 0.000 < .05$ ). The findings of this study agree in large part with those of other earlier investigations (Batra et al., 2012; Smit et al., 2007).
  - **Sub-Hypothesis -H10b** states that the strength of the brand association has a favorable and significant impact on purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.372$ ,  $T = 6.526$ ,  $P = 0.011 .05$ ). A significant number of earlier investigations (Batra et al., 2012; Smit et al., 2007) have shown results that are in agreement with those of this study.
  - **Sub-Hypothesis -H10c** claims that the strength of a brand's relationship with its customers has a favorable and significant impact on that customer's readiness to overlook mistakes ( $\beta = -0.735$ ,  $T = 9.423$ ,  $P = 0.011 .05$ ). Numerous earlier investigations have found similar outcomes to this one (McCullough et al., 2000).

Thus, strong emotional bonds between a consumer and a brand are fostered by the brand's perceived authenticity, which in turn increases consumer loyalty (i.e., purchase intention, willingness to pay a premium), as well as consumer toleration for negative brand experiences (i.e., willingness to overlook mistakes). These findings highlight how crucial brand authenticity is for marketers.

**The fourth section** of this study highlights the moderating effect of brand involvement between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality.

- **According to Hypothesis -11** "Brand involvement moderates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality" (" $\beta = 0.112$ ,  $T = 2.731$ ,  $P = 0.040 < .05$ ). Hence, Brand involvement moderates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality since the indirect effect estimates are higher than the direct effects estimates ( $0.344 > 0.326$ ,  $T > 1.96$ ). Thus, the findings of this study are in line with a large number of earlier studies (Aaker et al., 2004, Malär et al., 2011, Beverland, 2006, Zaichkowsky, 1985).

This study's further investigation applying a qualitative study may help to explain why brand authenticity has a more noticeable effect on brand relationship quality for both low- and high-involvement consumers.

## 7. Conclusion

The primary goal of the study was to evaluate the moderating influence of brand involvement on the link between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality and how this affected behavioral outcomes. The following research questions were brought up in this study: Does having brand antecedents increase the legitimacy of the brand? Does perceived brand authenticity affect the perceived quality of a brand relationship? Does the quality of brand relationships influence consumer Behaviour? Does Brand involvement the relationship between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality? The scientific investigation of brand authenticity revealed a considerable impact on brand integrity and a large beneficial impact on the quality of brand relationships. Moreover Brand relationship quality had an impact on brand purchase intent, leading consumers to pay more and be more forgiving of mistakes. Lastly, brand involvement has moderated the relationship between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality?



In the cases of computer brands, Coca-Cola, Ethiopian coffee, and Energy brands, brand authenticity can be considered as an important factor in branding success. The moderating effect of brand involvement and the favorable and consistent relationships between brand antecedents, brand authenticity, brand relationship quality, and brand behavioral outcome identified in this study will have a significant impact on brand managers' decisions as they formulate their strategy. Brand authenticity as a differentiating factor will probably define the future of marketing, and this study suggests that brand involvement across brands can act as a moderator.

In response to the consumer quest of authentic offerings, building brand authenticity has emerged as a strategic imperative for marketers. The issue that we addressed is how antecedents of brand authenticity may help develop consumer perceptions of brand authenticity. Using the context of computer brands, Coca-Cola, Ethiopian coffee, and Energy brands this research showed that antecedents of brand authenticity and its relationship with brand relationship quality and its impact on behavioral outcomes. The strong overall effect of brand authenticity on brand relationship quality leads us to advocate the importance of brand marketing communication in an authenticity-building strategy. Brand authenticity as a differentiating factor will likely shape the marketing landscape in the years to come, and our study suggests that brand marketing communications will likely remain a potent tool for marketers towards building brand authenticity among their consumers

The capacity to develop genuine brand relationships with consumers will undoubtedly continue to be a potent marketing technique. Given that there were only four brands examined, it is crucial to exercise caution when interpreting the findings because they might not be applicable to other brand categories.

## 8. Limitation and Direction for Future Research

The study's primary goal was to examine how brand involvement moderated the relationship between brand authenticity, relationship quality, and behavioral outcome in the context of selected product categories. The intended audience for this study on Ethiopia's energy drinks, coffees, and apparel was graduate students at public universities.

This study has limitations, just like any other type of research.

The results are for the Coca-Cola, energy drink and coffee brand and Computer brands category, which is one subset of the larger FMCG sector. The findings of this study may be speculatively anticipated to apply to comparable mass-marketed, low-involvement FMCG categories, such as potato chip and soft drink brands, detergent brands, and fast food brands. In this study, four types of brand categories were examined: **Coca-Cola, coffee, energy drinks, and computer brands**. In contrast, other researchers may concentrate on a specific brand category to better understand the effects of brand authenticity and brand relational outcomes. Future studies should look into how consumers perceive brands in high involvement categories since high-involvement brands may not respond to brand authenticity elements in the same way. Examples of such high-involvement brand categories include medical brands, luxury cars and goods, and financial services. Despite the fact that graduate students from public universities were the ideal demographic for the product category in this study, a study with other groups might produce different results. Since the research was carried out in Ethiopia, it needs to be thoroughly examined in other countries. Future research may be conducted utilizing a longitudinal method due to the cross-sectional character of this study. The only factors considered in this study as meaningful drivers of behavioral outcomes were willingness to pay a price premium, purchase intention, and readiness to overlook errors. Additional researchers can be as Brand status (awareness, acceptance, commitment/loyalty/tribalism, preference, and salience and usage intent), brand disposition (attitude, authenticity, personality, trust, and warmth), brand attribute (brand association, equity, image, and satisfaction), and brand connection (brand attachment, experience, intimacy, involvement, and self-brand connection) are examples of brand relational outcomes. Only the following factors were employed in this study as antecedents of brand authenticity: brand heritage, brand nostalgia, brand commercialization, brand clarity, social commitment, employee enthusiasm, brand legitimacy, and actual self-congruence. As antecedents of brand authenticity, other researchers may employ factors like brand transparency-producer and cost information, commitment to quality, sincerity, longevity, scarcity, longitudinal consistency, etc. In this study, only willingness to pay a price premium, purchase intention, and willingness to forgive mistakes

were investigated as relevant determinants of behavioral outcomes. Other researchers can include as Brand relational outcomes including brand status (brand awareness, acceptance, commitment/loyalty/tribalism, preference, and salience and usage intent), brand disposition (brand attitude, authenticity, personality, trust, and warmth), brand attribute (brand association, equity, image, and satisfaction), and brand connection (brand attachment, experience, intimacy, involvement, and self-brand connection). The effects of brand authenticity dimensions (continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness) on word-of-mouth marketing via brand image can also be researched by other academics using structural equation modelling. Given the wide range of potentially helpful theories brand on authenticity and relationship outcomes that are available, both inside and outside of the marketing field of study, other academicians are invited to look into those that may be able to advance the development of the profession. In this study, brand participation served as a moderator between the quality of the brand relationship and the authenticity of the brand. Consumer skepticism can be used by other studies as a moderating factor between these two dimensions. Finally, this study takes into account three significant product categories for students: two consumer goods—energy drink and coffee brands—and one durable good Computer. These might affect how customers view authenticity.

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## Acknowledgment

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