BRAND AUTHENTICITY: DIMENSIONS, TRUST, AND CONSUMER LOYALTY IN MODERN MARKET COMPETITION

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the concept, dimensions, and influence of brand authenticity on consumer loyalty. The research was conducted through a literature study with a qualitative approach using thematic synthesis. The results show that brand authenticity consists of several dimensions, namely continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism, which together influence consumer perceptions. These dimensions are proven to increase trust and emotional attachment, which in turn strengthen consumer loyalty. The findings also reveal mediating variables such as trust and emotional involvement, as well as moderating variables such as demographic factors and nostalgia, which influence the relationship between authenticity and loyalty. The main challenge lies in how companies maintain brand value consistency in the digital age, when transparency and public openness increasingly demand clarity of brand identity. From a managerial perspective, brand authenticity serves as a strategic asset that can create sustainable competitive advantage. Organizations therefore need to integrate authenticity values into their internal culture, communication strategies, and social responsibility practices. This research contributes theoretically by expanding the understanding of the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer loyalty, as well as providing practical recommendations for brand management in the modern market.

Keywords: brand authenticity, consumer loyalty, trust, emotional engagement, brand communication, organizational culture, differentiation.

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly competitive global market has prompted brands to find ways to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Today's consumers are more selective in making choices, considering not only price and quality, but also the authenticity of the values offered by a brand. In this context, brand authenticity has emerged as an important concept that has received widespread attention in modern marketing research (Napoli et al., 2014).

The phenomenon of increasing consumer awareness of social, environmental, and cultural issues has also encouraged companies to present a brand identity that is considered honest, consistent, and trustworthy. Consumers are increasingly critical of manipulative marketing practices, requiring companies to demonstrate transparency and consistency between the values they communicate and their actual actions (Morhart et al., 2015).

In marketing, brand authenticity is seen as an element that can strengthen the emotional bond between consumers and brands. Brand authenticity is believed to create a deeper sense of connection because it provides consumers with an experience that is considered sincere and meaningful (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). This emotional bond, in turn, is believed to have a positive impact on consumer loyalty.

Against this backdrop, research on brand authenticity has become increasingly relevant in explaining how companies can build brands that are not only recognized but also trusted. Brand authenticity is expected to go beyond communication claims and be manifested in organizational behavior, products, and interactions with consumers.

One of the main issues that arises in the research on brand authenticity is how companies can maintain brand value consistency in the long term. Many organizations face difficulties in maintaining authenticity due to market pressures, changing trends, and profitability demands (Fritz et al., 2017). This poses the risk of brand dilution when brands lose their original image in the eyes of consumers.

Another problem lies in the dimensions of brand authenticity, which are still debated among academics. Some research emphasizes the aspect of brand historical continuity, while others focus more on communication honesty, product quality, and emotional relationships with consumers (Napoli et al., 2016). These differences indicate that there is no uniform standard for measuring brand authenticity.

The relationship between brand authenticity and consumer loyalty still raises questions about the underlying mechanisms. Some studies have found a strong positive relationship, while others show that the impact is influenced by mediating variables such as trust or emotional involvement (Schallehn et al., 2014). These differing findings indicate a research gap that needs to be further explored.

Research on brand authenticity is important because this concept is directly related to the challenge of building consumer trust in the digital age. Amidst the proliferation of false information and excessive marketing campaigns, consumers are increasingly demanding transparency and integrity from brands. This research can provide a better understanding of how brands can build authenticity that consumers trust.

Understanding the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer loyalty can help companies design sustainable marketing strategies. By identifying the dimensions of authenticity that most influence loyalty, organizations can allocate resources more effectively to strengthen brand value.

This research aims to examine the concept of brand authenticity, identify its dimensions, and explain its relationship with consumer loyalty. The contribution of this research lies in its effort to provide a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of brand authenticity and to offer practical implications for companies in building and maintaining customer loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach based on literature study. This approach was chosen because the issue of brand authenticity is still widely debated in both conceptual and practical aspects, requiring extensive theoretical review to examine the previously established framework. Literature study allows researchers to explore concepts, dimensions, and their impact on consumer loyalty through analysis of relevant scientific works. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is effective for understanding social phenomena through the exploration of meaning contained in textual data, including scientific publications and academic books.

The analysis technique used is thematic synthesis. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that this method is carried out by identifying patterns in the data, grouping them into themes, and then interpreting the relationships between themes. In this research, literature was collected based on keywords such as brand authenticity, brand loyalty, consumer trust, and marketing management. The data was then selected to ensure relevance, followed by initial coding, theme formation, and integration of the results into a complete conceptual framework.

To increase validity, this research applies the principle of source triangulation. Denzin (2012) states that triangulation in qualitative research can strengthen reliability through the comparison of various references. This research not only refers to academic journals, but also books and empirical publications published up to 2021. With this approach, the research results are expected to provide a structured conceptual overview of brand authenticity and its implications for consumer loyalty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of brand authenticity has evolved into one of the important themes in marketing studies because it is directly related to how consumers perceive brand identity. Beverland and Farrelly (2010) define brand authenticity as consumers' perception of the extent to which a brand is considered honest, consistent, and has intrinsic value that is consistent with its original identity. This definition indicates that authenticity is not only the result of communication strategies, but also a perception formed through consumer experience. Napoli et al. (2014) developed a consumer-based measurement to assess brand authenticity, emphasizing the dimensions of quality, historical continuity, and integrity. This perspective provides an overview that brand authenticity is multidimensional and depends on repeated interactions between the brand and its consumers. In managerial practice, understanding authenticity is crucial for developing communication strategies that align with organizational identity while strengthening market differentiation. In other words, the concept of brand authenticity serves as the foundation for building more emotional, rather than purely transactional, relationships with consumers.

Researchers have identified various dimensions of brand authenticity that influence consumer perceptions. Morhart et al. (2015) propose four main dimensions: continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. Continuity refers to the consistency of a brand's history and traditions, while credibility relates to the honesty of a brand's claims. Integrity refers to the brand's commitment to its values, while symbolism emphasizes the brand's ability to reflect consumer identity. Fritz et al. (2017) expanded this model by emphasizing the importance of consumer experiences that are consistent with brand values. The relevance of these dimensions shows that consumers are not just looking for products, but also for meanings that represent themselves. The managerial implication is that companies must emphasize brand identity consistency through communication and concrete actions, including product development, social responsibility, and service. By understanding these dimensions, organizations can prioritize the aspects of authenticity that most influence loyalty, especially among consumers who are increasingly critical of discrepancies between claims and reality.

Although brand authenticity is considered important, there is a dilemma between maintaining authenticity and the demands of commercialization. Schallehn et al. (2014) found that companies often face pressure to adapt to market trends, which can potentially damage the perception of brand authenticity. This can lead to consumer distrust when marketing strategies are considered excessive or inconsistent with brand values. Napoli et al. (2016) showed that nostalgia and storytelling can help reinforce perceptions of authenticity, but only if they are consistent with consumers' real experiences. The implication for management is the need for a balance between marketing innovation and core value consistency. Companies must be careful that efforts to attract market attention do not sacrifice brand integrity. If consumers perceive inconsistency, the risk of losing loyalty will be greater. Maintaining authenticity therefore requires organizational discipline to always place core values as a guide in every business decision.

Consumer trust is often viewed as a mediating variable that bridges the relationship between brand authenticity and loyalty. According to Morhart et al. (2015), consumers who perceive a brand as authentic tend to consider it more trustworthy. This trust arises because consistency between brand claims and organizational actions provides consumers with a sense of security. The research by Fritz et al. (2017) confirms that perceptions of authenticity can strengthen brand credibility, which ultimately influences trust. In a managerial framework, this emphasizes the importance of corporate openness to consumers, whether through digital communication, service interactions, or corporate social responsibility. By building trust based on authenticity, companies can reduce the risk of consumer skepticism and strengthen long-term loyalty. This is in line with the demands of the digital age, where consumers have easier access to information and can more readily criticize organizational behavior.

Consumer loyalty is a strategic goal in marketing, and brand authenticity has been proven to be a significant influencing factor. Beverland and Farrelly (2010) state that consumers who perceive authenticity are more likely to show emotional loyalty, which goes beyond mere behavioral loyalty such as repeat purchases. An empirical study by Napoli et al. (2014) shows that authenticity directly contributes to repurchase intention and consumers' willingness to recommend a brand. This occurs because authenticity strengthens emotional bonds, creating high psychological involvement. The practical implication is that companies not only need to maintain product and service consistency, but also pay attention to communication methods that are in line with brand values. The more authentic a brand is perceived to be, the more likely consumers are to build long-term loyalty. Brand authenticity can therefore be seen as a strategic investment that increases competitiveness in a dynamic market.

In an increasingly saturated market, brand authenticity is one of the most effective instruments of differentiation. According to Morhart et al. (2015), authenticity provides emotional uniqueness that is difficult for competitors to imitate, as it is rooted in history, values, and inherent identity. Napoli et al. (2016) emphasize that authentic storytelling can build stronger emotional bonds than functional promotions. From a managerial perspective, authenticity is not merely a marketing strategy, but a strategic asset that can create sustainable competitive advantage. When consumers associate a brand with authentic values, they tend to be more tolerant of price changes, thereby increasing long-term profitability. Brand authenticity can thus be viewed as symbolic capital that can strengthen a brand's position in the market.

Recent research shows that the relationship between brand authenticity and loyalty is not always linear, but is influenced by mediating and moderating variables. Schallehn et al. (2014) found that consumer emotional involvement acts as a mediator, strengthening the influence of authenticity on loyalty. Demographic factors such as age and cultural background act as moderators that determine how strong the influence of authenticity is on consumers. Napoli et al. (2016) added that nostalgia can increase perceptions of authenticity, especially among consumers with historical ties to the brand. From a managerial perspective, this requires companies to not only emphasize authenticity in general, but also tailor their communication strategies to specific consumer segments. By identifying mediators and moderators, organizations can design more targeted approaches to strengthen authenticity-based loyalty.

The digital era brings both opportunities and challenges for brand authenticity. Social media allows brands to showcase their authenticity through direct interaction with consumers. Digital transparency, however, also makes any brand inconsistencies easier to uncover. According to Fritz et al. (2017), digital consumers are more critical of brand claims, and viral tendencies can magnify the impact of minor inconsistencies. Research by Morhart et al. (2015) emphasizes the importance of cross-channel consistency in communication to maintain consumer trust. The implication for managers is the need to build an authentic digital communication strategy, including openness to criticism and commitment to claimed values. Brand authenticity can no longer be built through advertising alone, but through continuous and consistent interaction in the digital space.

Brand authenticity is determined not only by external communication, but also by the internal culture of the organization. Beverland and Farrelly (2010) emphasize that consistency between internal company values and brand promises is a key requirement for authenticity. If employees do not believe in brand values, it is difficult for consumers to perceive authenticity. Fritz et al. (2017) show that organizational commitment to social and environmental values increases consumers' perception of authenticity. The managerial implication is that companies must instill brand values into the organizational culture through training, reward systems, and human resource management practices. By building a culture that is aligned with the brand identity, companies can ensure that authenticity is reflected in every point of interaction with consumers.

The research findings have theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the research confirms that brand authenticity is a multidimensional concept involving historical consistency, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. Authenticity is also closely related to consumer trust and long-term loyalty, but is influenced by mediating and moderating variables. From a practical perspective, companies need to view authenticity as a strategic investment, not merely a communication tool. Companies must maintain brand value consistency across all communication channels, strengthen organizational culture, and tailor strategies to different consumer segments. Brand authenticity can thus serve as a foundation that strengthens consumer loyalty while creating sustainable competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that brand authenticity is a multidimensional concept that encompasses continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. Brand authenticity contributes significantly to the formation of consumer trust, which in turn strengthens long-term loyalty. Amidst a competitive market dynamic, authenticity serves as a source of differentiation that is difficult to imitate, as it is rooted in the history and intrinsic value of the brand.

Practically speaking, companies need to place authenticity at the foundation of brand management. This includes consistency across communication channels, openness in digital interactions, and alignment of organizational culture with brand values. Theoretically, this research emphasizes the importance of understanding mediating variables such as trust and emotional engagement, as well as moderating variables such as demographics and nostalgia, in explaining the relationship between authenticity and loyalty.

Further research should expand the analysis to various industry sectors, including local brands and digital-native brands, to understand the dynamics of authenticity in a more diverse context. A longitudinal approach could also be used to examine how brand authenticity affects consumer loyalty in the long term.

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