

**FROM THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY TO
ADVOCACY:
HOW DO AUTHENTIC BRANDS CREATE BRAND
ADVOCATE CONSUMERS?**



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**FROM THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY TO ADVOCACY:
HOW DO AUTHENTIC BRANDS CREATE BRAND ADVOCATE
CONSUMERS?**

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PH.D. THESIS

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PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

23.03.2023

ASLI TOSUN

ABSTRACT

In a quest to investigate whether brands that position themselves as authentic create brand advocate consumers, the current doctoral dissertation thesis analyzes and collates the extant literature on brand authenticity through unfolding the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy on the grounds of brand experience, actual self-image congruence, consumer involvement as well as the product category with an aim to explore whether brand authenticity positively influences brand advocacy behavior among consumers. The relationships are investigated through a comprehensive research model using two different product categories (i.e., mobile phone and automobile) with a large sample of 825 respondents for both categories in total. Through an online survey, data was collected from mobile phone and automobile consumers with regards to two brands (Apple and Mercedes) predefined as a result of the first pilot study conducted. The research hypotheses were tested and analyzed with Structural Equation Model (SEM) on SmartPLS 4 statistical program. The findings reveal that brand authenticity positively predicts brand advocacy mirroring previous research, however, on a single product category (mobile phone). Brand experience is proven to have a significant mediating impact in this relationship whereas actual self-image congruence and consumer involvement are not proven to strengthen the relationship. Consequently, academics and practitioners can benefit from the theoretical model: This research presents news insights on brand authenticity to better understand consumers' perceptions in order to create brand advocate consumers in a fiercely competitive environment, in

addition to adding new constructs to the body of brand authenticity literature for further research.



ÖZET

Bu doktora tezi, kendilerini özgün olarak konumlandıran markaların marka savunucusu tüketiciler yaratıp yaratmadığını araştırmak için, marka özgünlüğü ve marka savunuculuğu arasındaki ilişkiyi marka deneyimi, tüketici katılımı ve benlik temelinde, iki farklı ürün kategorisinde ortaya koyarak marka özgünlüğü üzerine mevcut literatürü analiz eder ve derler. Marka özgünlüğünün tüketiciler arasında marka savunuculuğunu olumlu bir şekilde yordayıp öngörmediğini araştırarak iki farklı ürün kategorisinde (cep telefonu ve otomobil) her iki kategori için de toplamda 825 katılımcıdan oluşan geniş bir örneklemle test ederek, tüketicilerin benlik uyumunun ve tüketici katılımının etkisini ölçümlemeyi hedefler. İlk pilot çalışma sonucunda belirlenen iki marka (Apple ve Mercedes) ile ilgili olarak cep telefonu ve otomobil tüketicilerinden online anket yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Araştırma hipotezleri SmartPLS 4 istatistik programında Yapısal Eşitlik Modeli (YEM) ile test ve analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları, marka özgünlüğünün, literatürdeki önceki araştırma bulgularını yansıtarak marka savunuculuğu üzerinde olumlu bir etkiye sahip olduğunu, ancak yalnızca bir ürün kategorisi (cep telefonu) için bu etkinin gözlemlendiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre, marka deneyiminin bu ilişkiyi yönetmede önemli bir etkiye sahip olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra, gerçek benlik imajı uyumu ve tüketicilerin ilgilenim düzeyleri ise marka özgünlüğü ve marka savunuculuğu arasındaki ilişki üzerinde düzenleyici bir etki ortaya koymamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, akademisyenler ve uygulayıcılar teorik modelden kavramsal ve pratik olarak yararlanabilirler: Bu araştırma, marka özgünlüğü kavramına dair yeni bir bakış sunmanın ve yeni araştırmalar için yazına yeni yapılar eklemenin yanı sıra, markaların ve uygulayıcıların

yoğun rekabet ortamında marka savunucusu tüketiciler yaratmak için tüketicilerin marka özgünlüğü algılarını daha iyi anlamalarına yönelik çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.



DEDICATION

This Ph.D. thesis is solely dedicated to my beloved son, Tuna Tosun, who has been my main motivation in life to forever pursue the best of all possible worlds since the moment I held him in my arms.

With a heartfelt wish to spark an inspiration within him for his future academic endeavors...



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The Ph.D. journey resembles to drawing a painting on a large canvas; it is hard to imagine how the whole picture will eventually come together until the last brushstroke touches the canvas. Such was how I exactly felt like when I first set out this journey as it was hard to imagine myself typing the concluding words on my thesis; the end seemed so far away. It has been one long journey with a lot of learnings on various layers. There has been uncountable times of ups and downs accompanied by contradicting feelings of sometimes high motivation and perseverance, sometimes desperation and exhaustion along the way. I was lucky to be surrounded by many precious people who were always there for me to ignite the fire of motivation and rekindle the self-belief inside me at the times most needed: I greatly owe those “authentic” people, and I cannot thank them enough for their mere existence in my life as they are.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASIC	: Actual Self-Image Congruence
BA	: Brand Authenticity
BE	: Brand Experience
B.ADV	: Brand Advocacy
CBBA	: Consumer-Based Brand Authenticity
CI	: Consumer Involvement
PBA	: Perceived Brand Authenticity
PLS-SEM	: Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling
MV	: Mediating Variable
IV	: Independent Variable
DV	: Dependent Variable
WOM	: Word-of-mouth

PART ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not be false to any man.

—Shakespeare, Hamlet

What is authentic? What is real? Answers to these questions have long been sought after for centuries and only more to come. Across many works of art and science, many poets, painters, scholars, philosophers, and scientists have long sought for what is “authentic” or what is “real” (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). The concept of authenticity has been a deep-rooted term since the earliest times in history and has been a highly researched concept within the social sciences for decades. However, the rise of authenticity becomes prominent as a response to modernization (Lehman et al., 2019). The disparate usage of the concept has given the rise for the formation of new conceptualizations of the term, hence further enriching it across various disciplines.

Human beings have a natural tendency to seek for authenticity in life, even more so, in our century. There has always been a search for authenticity for certain, yet not as much as it is in our era. On the grounds that contemporary life is becoming increasingly artificial and inauthentic, the need for authenticity in the modern society has greatly increased in time as we lose originality and naturality each day (Şimşek, 2017). Even

more so in the marketing realm, considering that consumers today are flooded with marketing messages at every possible touchpoint via their smart phones, smart TV's, computers, etc. in a highly connected age, it's a huge opportunity for brands to stand out as "authentic" among their competitors by conveying the hints of an authentic brand in all their communication messages and at each encounter with the consumers. Marketers began to reconsider their positioning strategies for effectively portraying consumer experiences and expectations, and aspirations when marketing scholars observed an increase in the gravity of authenticity to customers (Yuan et al., 2014).

At its core and on a broader perspective, authenticity ensures the feeling of security and trust we human beings wish to attain irrespective of the conditions and consequences. This helps us achieve the feeling of congruence on a broader view.

1.1. Why is Brand Authenticity Concept on the Upbeat in Marketing Realm?

Brands occupy a great space in our lives, even more than we think they do: We use them, eat them, wear them, experience them, consume them, desire for them. In this sense, we live brands (Morhart, 2015). Therefore, consumers' perceptions of a brand play a central part in defining the longevity of a brand.

Amidst an incessantly changing marketplace and rapid technological advances, consumers and their needs, wants, perceptions, motives, and behaviors have dramatically changed, as well. Already an essential concept for the marketing world, brand authenticity has gained even a greater importance in this turbulent atmosphere for brands that prioritize attaining a higher emotional engagement with consumers by occupying

higher rates of heart share and mind share rather than merely concentrating on the market share figures. Many consumers today prefer the brands that are purposeful, relevant, and authentic, as though this contributes their lives more worth and makes their lives more meaningful (Morhart, 2015). Thus, it is an imperative for brands nowadays to be perceived as authentic by consumers for ensuring a long-term existence; differently put, brands must be regarded as authentic for a sustainable growth to survive in competition (Beverland, 2005).

Each part of our lives is touched by the global shift we have gone through over the past decades and as consumers we look for those commercialized experiences which represent a global shift in economic activity (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Furthermore, there is even a greater demand for authenticity among consumers. At its core, authenticity represents a need for distinction as to what is real and what is not.

On an individual level, the way we communicate, shop, socialize, stay up to date with the news, have access to education, interact, so on and so forth has tremendously changed, and along with this technological transformation came an indispensable social transformation.

On an organizational level, the changes undergone during this transformational era are equally disrupting in the way how businesses are run today: the way in which brands engage with their consumers, the way and medium of advertising, 4 Ps of marketing, the sales and distribution channels, overall supply-chain management, sustainability objectives, strategic plans and what not.

It is apparent that the highest-rated authentic companies frequently ensure their market presence for many years to come after they achieve an authentic perception in the eyes of their consumers even though young brands can also achieve and enjoy brand authenticity, as well. A global study conducted by Cohn & Wolfe reveals the list of 100 Most Authentic Brands in the world according to consumers based on the perceived level of authenticity by their consumers. According to the latest study dated to 2016, the top-rated authentic brands that have been on the market for a while are also among the world's top brands in terms of consumer perceptions of authenticity (e.g., Adidas, BMW, Bosch, Mercedes, Intel and Microsoft). However, seeing relatively young brands in the top rows like Google, Amazon, Apple compared to the aforementioned brands shows the significance of aiming an authentic approach in the core of branding.

Within the omnipresence of uncountable number of alternatives available in the market, consumers have become more and more interested in brands that are authentic as a differentiating factor for shaping their purchasing decisions (Arnould & Price, 2000; Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Beverland, 2005). Nonetheless, authenticity is thought to be a new consumer consciousness that consumers both desire and struggle to achieve. Businesses, on the other hand, strive to meet that need, although creating authenticity for a genuine brand experience is still an extremely hard task for the brands to attain.

Taken together, brands that offer authentic meaning achieve an advantage over their competitors in an age when consumers receive targeted advertising messages at every corner. Brand authenticity, as a consequence, is increasingly seen as a key marketing resource (Södergren, 2021) since “*consumers choose to buy or not buy based on how real they perceive an offering to be*” (Gilmore & Pine, 2009:4).

1.2. Research Problem Statement

Every research starts with a problem statement which determines the scope and purpose of the research (Malhotra, 2010). Therefore, the current research begins with stating the research problem that has not been tapped onto in the concept of *brand authenticity* to the best of our knowledge after scrutinizing the existing literature on the core *brand authenticity* concept.

Even though the extensive academic research that has been carried out in the past decades undoubtedly played a pivotal role in contributing to the concept of *brand authenticity* (e.g., Beverland, 2006); Bruhn et al., 2012; Morhart et al., 2014; Napoli et al., 2014), the literature has its own gaps to be filled with new areas of research on the network of other constructs *brand authenticity* may be linked to and/or has an influence on. So far, for instance, there has been little academic discussion about the relation between brand authenticity and brand advocacy (Dağ Başar, 2020) and much uncertainty still exists about the relations of these constructs as to whether authentic brands create brand advocate consumers or not. Brand advocacy is an important construct in our digital age for building strong consumer-brand relationships (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012); Wilk et al., 2018); Dağ Başar, 2020). Consumers that identify themselves with the products of a brand develop a consistent, lifelong preference for the products of the brand they identify with (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Furthermore, the impact of how consumers experience a specific brand in the brand authenticity and brand advocacy continuum is yet to be discovered in the brand authenticity literature since this relation has not been explored from an experience perspective. In other words,

the role of experience with an authentically perceived brand and its influence on the advocacy behavior of consumers is an important question to be examined.

In comparison to similar research studies on the concept, this study proposes a different outlook with relatively unorthodox combination of variables that are assumed to have direct and/or indirect effects on the brand authenticity and brand advocacy relation; theoretical paradigms, experiential factors (sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioral), self-concept of consumers as well as their involvement levels in order to explain brand authenticity and brand advocacy relation.

1.3. Aim of the Research

Despite cumulative contributions made to the development of brand authenticity concept over the past twenty-five years among numerous marketing scholars, there are still many areas of the concept that are underexplored or not touched upon yet. This fact about brand authenticity makes the concept quite attractive to many researchers as much as it is for the researcher of the present study insofar as authenticity is an increasingly more vital concept in people's lives than it once ever was. In a world where the possibilities are endless as ever before as well as the dazzling speed of change in trends, communication, technology etc., individuals are seeking for authentic experiences, authentic lives, authentic relationships, authentic selves more than two decades ago. The search for availability is now replaced by the search for authenticity in a world where there are uncountable number of substitutes. Therefore, it is a great motivation to work on the possibility of shedding some light on authenticity within the concept of marketing that is shaping our era as well as the current marketing practices in many ways.

The focal point of present study, therefore, is bringing a new perspective on the brand authenticity core concept by unfolding the effects perceived brand authenticity on brand advocacy. In order to achieve this goal, the research model presented in the present doctoral thesis suggests analyzing “brand authenticity” construct a broader approach where its antecedents, moderator and mediator variables as well as their outcomes come into play. Aim of the research, therefore, is to represent the interrelation of the construct within other highly researched brand constructs such as *brand experience* and *brand advocacy* as well as the consumers’ self-congruence and involvement so as to underscore the increasing importance of authenticity within the marketing discipline. Consequently, brands can benefit from a lasting brand along with advocate consumers by integrating the authenticity cues into their brand management strategies by scrupulously looking out for *brand authenticity* indicators.

1.4. Research Questions

In particular, this dissertation seeks to address seven main research questions:

1. What is the influence of *Brand Authenticity* on *Brand Advocacy*? Does perceived brand authenticity create brand advocate consumers?
2. What is the impact of *Brand Experience* on the relationship between *Brand Authenticity* and *Brand Advocacy*?
3. Does authentic perception of brands have an impact on *Brand Experience*?
4. Does *Brand Experience* result in brand advocate consumers?
5. Does involvement level of consumers have an impact on their advocacy behavior for authentic brands?

6. Does *Self-Image Congruence* level of consumers with a brand have an impact on their advocacy behavior for authentic brands?
7. Does advocacy behavior of consumers for authentic brands change based on the *Product Category*?

1.5. Significance of the Research

The extant research on brand authenticity reveals that the effect of authenticity is growing by the day within marketing discipline. Examining the concept of brand authenticity in marketing literature and applying an empirical investigation to the rare instances of the concept within the Turkish culture, the current study aims to contribute to the literature with empirical results.

Furthermore, this research examines the concept from a multidimensional perspective putting several significant subjects into play such as brand experience and brand advocacy which are very important constructs for the marketing research. The role of perceived brand authenticity in predicting the brand advocacy level of consumers through the mediating effect of brand experience along with the moderation of self-image congruence with brands has not yet been studied. Therefore, it becomes vital for brands to thoroughly assess and acknowledge the role of perceived brand authenticity with a holistic approach during their journey of authentication.

Within the context of extant literature, the present study investigates whether perceived brand authenticity can generate brand advocate consumers who identify

themselves with the brand through positive experiences they have gained with a specific brand. Thus, positive consumer responses achieved through the authenticity towards the brand may ultimately lead to advocacy of the brand by its consumers. The research model, therefore, unravels a new perspective to the concept of brand authenticity with a comprehensive consideration of the concept along with other key concepts for a brand such as brand experience and brand advocacy whilst investigating the effect of self-congruence and involvement of the consumers within this model.

As a consequence of a thorough examination of the literature on brand authenticity and to the best of our knowledge, it is concluded that there has not been any empirically conducted academic study done so far which relates brand authenticity concept with brand advocacy along with investigating the mediating effect of brand experience as well as the moderating effect of self-congruence and involvement of consumers in the brand authenticity continuum. What is more, seldom do literature on brand authenticity so far takes the approach of underpinning the relationship of the concept within the frame of experience factor in this continuum. In this respect, this doctoral thesis aims at filling the gap in the brand authenticity literature as well as helping marketing practitioners develop marketing plans and brand strategy that meticulously prioritize brand authenticity dimensions for creating a lasting brand.

PART TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Authenticity

The notion of authenticity at its core is that “something is ‘real’ or ‘true’, that its outward appearance accords with its inner essence” (Heynen, 2006). It is a movement to go back to what is “natural” and “unspun” and it is a longing for the real (Boyle, 2006). According to Boyle (2006), the idea of “real” that individuals are craving for has several elements: First and foremost, “real” signifies ethical, which stems from individual’s desire to have moral coherence in their choices in life. “Real” may also signify “natural,” as in preferring face-to-face human interactions. “Real” may also indicate honesty and straightforward-ness. It has to do with the beauty of places as well as with being anchored in a tradition or a place of origin. From the experience perspective, what makes an experience “real” is its being rich in depth, complexity, and three-dimensionality. Finally, “real” signifies “human”: Authenticity is thus anchored in humanity (Heynen, 2006).

Reviewing the dictionary definitions and roots of authenticity, a similar pattern follows in defining the concept from the earliest times. Oxford Dictionary defines *authenticity* as “*the quality of being genuine or true*”. The word *authenticity* has its roots from late Latin word *authenticus* and from Greek word *authentikos*, and it means *principal* or *genuine*. The dictionary provides several definitions of the word *authentic* as “*of being undisputed origin and not a copy: genuine*”. Derived from the Greek words, “*autos*” means “self,” and “*hentes*” means “doer” basically hinting the authority of

acting as the original author (Spiggle et al., 2012). Another definition provided for the term is “*made or done in the traditional or original way, or in a way that faithfully resembles an original.*” On another note, for anything to be authentic, it should be “*based on facts; accurate or reliable*” according to Oxford Dictionary. Similarly, being authentic means “*worthy of acceptance, authoritative, trustworthy, not imaginary, false or imitation, conforming to an original*” (Cappannelli & Cappannelli, 2004:1). On the other hand, the word *authenticity* has undergone a meaning shift from being related to the authority of the original creator to indicating *genuineness* in the late eighteenth century (Spiggle et al., 2012).

The definition of authenticity varies across different research disciplines and therefore it is impossible to come up with a single, well-articulated definition of the term. Kernis & Goldman (2006:294) propose a multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity: These components are 1) “Awareness - being motivated to increase knowledge in one’s motives, emotions, desires, and self- cognitions, 2) Unbiased Processing – objectivity to one’s desirable and undesirable self-aspects 3) Behavior – behaving in harmony with one’s own self, values and preferences across different situations, and 4) Relational Orientation - valuing and striving for openness and truthfulness in one’s close relationships”. Ultimately, it is obvious that there is no single widely agreed-upon definition of what defines authenticity since it is a complicated, multifaceted term that varies based on the individual/position groups in connection to the product or experience (Goulding & Derbaix, 2019).

Although the concept of authenticity is approached on various perspectives, there are three distinctions that can be drawn from the literature that embody the core of authenticity concept according to Lehman et al. (2019:2):

“Authenticity as (1) *consistency* between an entity’s internal values and its external expressions, (2) *conformity* of an entity to the norms of its social category, and (3) *connection* between an entity and a person, place, or time.”

2.1.1 The Concept of Authenticity Across Other Disciplines

The concept of authenticity is discussed and studied in numerous fields including psychology (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Fiske & Taylor, 1991), philosophy (Sartre, 1943; Heidegger, 1962) as well as sociology (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009) and it is defined across numerous works of art and sciences throughout the history. However, main contributions to the authenticity concept come from philosophy and psychology disciplines. Authenticity is commonly related to qualities of being historically anchored and founded in tradition and legacy, despite variances in conceptual definitions across fields (Riefler, 2020). Since the late nineteenth century, the concerns of inauthenticity, such as the perception of a meaningless or superficial, have frequently appeared in literary and philosophical works such as of Flaubert, Sartre, Nietzsche’s (Rose & Wood, 2005).

“Searching for authenticity” as a term can be traced as far back as to the Ancient Greek philosophers – Socrates and Aristotle. Socrates, for example, acknowledges that the “unexamined” life is not worthwhile to maintain whereas Aristotle stresses the importance of actions. The term authenticity in philosophy discipline is fundamentally

associated with *metaphysics* or *ontology* along with the movements of *existentialism* or *phenomenology* attributed to such authors like Sartre or Heidegger. According to Heidegger, authenticity is achieved through individuals' existentially being themselves (Goulding & Derbaix, 2019). Existentialism, one of the most influential theoretical school of thoughts, has contributed to our knowledge of authenticity and its connection to the idea of meaning (Tran & Keng, 2018). According to the existentialist perspective of Sartre (1943) or Heidegger (1962), authenticity imparts a moral meaning regarding the inherent qualities of an object's values and choices. Therefore, a person is regarded to be authentic if he or she is truthful and takes responsibility for his or her behaviors and makes explicit decisions about those acts (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009).

In art, being “the one and only” refers to the authenticity of the mentioned artwork. Even the most exact replica lacks the original vibe, and hence is not authentic (Benjamin, 1969).

Authenticity in psychology discipline refers to individual's self-perception, eagerness to objectively evaluate their self-aspects (both negative and positive), behaviors and orientation towards interpersonal relationships (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Main contribution for the development and enrichment of the concept comes from psychology discipline as several researchers within psychology field have developed scales in order to determine the degree of authenticity in individuals and the antecedents of authentic/inauthentic feelings and behaviors. According to the authenticity model put forward by Wood et al. (2008), people can only authentically express their basic beliefs if they are aware of who they are, their feelings, motives, and values. This level of awareness also requires the individual to have the strength to stand up against any

external influences that might prove being inconsistent with their core values (Wood et al., 2008). Therefore, individuals feel increased level of authenticity when their behaviors and core values are in perfect harmony. This also refers to the self-concept consistency which is achieved when individuals maintain a consistency of their traits, motives, and goals across varying contexts (Kraus et al., 2011). On a related note, authenticity can be characterized as being true to one's core values and inner self, which results in consistent conduct of behavior across the course of time and situations (Lasaleta & Loveland, 2019). The authenticity itself incorporates a consistent pattern over time. Differing approaches and definitions of authenticity in psychology discipline reveal the significance of the concept in terms of its explaining power of human behaviors.

Authenticity in sociology, on the other hand, refers to a prevalent sociological observation that identifies authenticity as a socially generated phenomenon rather than an independently defined "real" thing or something that can be objectively established. According to this viewpoint, anything to be identified and considered as "authentic" is, in fact, required to be considered so by its audience in certain social context (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009).

The conceptions of authentic and inauthentic are no longer viewed opposites, but rather as flexible and negotiable (Zhu, 2012). Along with this flexibility, authenticity can be viewed from a broader perspective. Rather than placing a strong emphasis on the condition of "being" authentic to oneself as existential authenticity suggests, the performative approach stresses the dynamic of "becoming" authentic through actual practice (Zhu, 2012). Therefore, authenticity can be defined as an ongoing and ever-improving process rather than an outcome that is reached once and preserved.

It is worth noting that authenticity is a strong value in living history, and the term “*quest for authenticity*” refers to the zeal with which it is sought (Handler & Saxton, 1988).

2.2. Brand Authenticity

What makes a brand authentic? How do consumers perceive a brand as authentic? It is surely beyond doubt that consumers define brand authenticity based on their own perception of “*what is genuine, sincere, real, and true*” (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Molleda, 2010; Pace, 2015).

According to the definition on Marketing Dictionary (an online dictionary supported by American Marketing Association), an authentic brand is defined as a brand that “delivers on its promises in a sincere and engaging way. It is clear and consistent about what that brand stands for and is culturally relevant to its target market.” In other words, authenticity of a brand is a function of the degree determined by consumers' perceptions of a brand's reliability, relevance, and authenticity over time. Brand authenticity, therefore, can be defined as the perception of a brand's actions that is consistent with its core principles and standards, as a result of which it is regarded as being true to its core and not subverting its substantive nature or essence (Fritz et al., 2017).

There are two main research strands that are observed related to the concept of authenticity in marketing (Rajendran, 2020): In the first stream, consumers are the primary focus (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), whereas brands are the primary focus of the second stream (Keller, 1998; Beverland, 2005). Consumers'

authenticity perceptions based on their evaluations of the experience with the brand constitute brand authenticity in the first stream. However, in the second stream, the success of a brand is based on its own authenticity since an authentic brand creates its own distinctive brand image (Rajendran, 2020).

Consumer perceptions of authenticity are formed based on how people differentiate between what is real and what is not (Peirce, 1998). As a result, Peirce's concepts of psychological authenticity provide a solid groundwork for investigating and comprehending how consumers perceive authenticity cues (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Peirce is the father of the term "index". The term is used to identify the things that have a factual and spatio-temporal links. In terms of market offerings, they can be either associated with a place or a product or both. Accordingly, authentic items are the ones that have factual and spatio-temporal links with indexical cues such as original materials, creation date that distinguish those items from their similar kinds (Coary, 2013). It is significant to note that the concept of consumers as meaning generators is relevant in understanding of authenticity (Rose & Wood, 2005).

2.2.1 Conceptualization of Brand Authenticity

The concept of brands and branding have been studied and researched for several centuries from different perspectives and constructs such as brand trust, brand experience, brand equity, brand loyalty, brand image, brand preference, brand attribute, brand recall, brand strength, and what not, just to name a few. However, it is surprisingly interesting to realize that brand authenticity as a concept has not been brought under the spotlight until 2000's, which coincides with the profound changes that occurred in our

rapidly changing world along with the advances in technology, especially along with digitalization. As the need has arisen for authenticity in all parts of life, the quest for authenticity has also begun in the field of branding as it has in various fields of life. Marketers realized one major fact about dynamics that affect consumer perceptions and behaviors: In a world where mass manufacturing of artifacts causes individuals doubt the authenticity of the value, consumers place a rising emphasis on authenticity (Rose & Wood, 2005).

The notion of brand authenticity has piqued the interest of marketing academics as a research area, particularly in the last two decades after Barbara Stern urged marketing academics to place brand authenticity the due importance within the marketing discipline. Authenticity, today, is considered to be one of the core concepts of marketing discipline although a substantial amount of confusion among the marketing scholars still exists regarding the usage of the term within the marketing literature (Södergren, 2021). The reason brand authenticity has gained a vital importance today is mainly triggered by the fact that creating and maintaining strong brands in today's world has become a major challenge for brands. Strong brands are formed through building strong relationships with consumers in the relationship-driven economy of our highly connected, extremely digitalized era. Building brand-specific associations with consumers' aspirations is one of the mostly preferred ways in order to create strong consumer–brand relationships (Oh et al., 2019). Therefore, authenticity of brands become a major criterion for determining brand choice of consumers. Brand authenticity is created not only by the aspects of a brand that foster the sense of authenticity in consumers, but also by the assessments of consumers themselves. Considering the increasing demand and/or need for authenticity

or “what is real” which widely permeates among the consumers or the society at large nowadays more than ever before, marketers assess consumers’ evaluations from every dimension so as to apply required measures alongside the authentication journey of their brands as well as improving the authenticity level of their brands.

As previously stated, authenticity is a multilayered concept that has definitions in a vast variety of social disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology. Revolving from the general term to the marketing specific concept, there is a great deal of effort put forth by marketing scholars to define the concept of authenticity for decades. One reason for that is because there are many variables that predict the concept of authenticity in consumers’ realm since marketing itself mainly deals with human traits, motives, goals, and there are more concepts to be studied for years to come in parallel to the cumulative research being done on the concept of authenticity over the years until today.

Throughout the brand authenticity literature, the elements influencing brand authenticity are strongly related to the brand's history, moral values, consumer’s identification with the brand as well as employees/individuals that represent the brand (Fritz et al., 2017).

A more sophisticated notion of authenticity has sprung up in the recent decades and notion of self-determination is closely linked to this concept (Tran & Keng, 2018). It is no surprise that authenticity has gained a paramount importance as consumption plays a crucial role in individuals’ lives as a self-authenticating act, authentication being one of the primary motives of consumer behavior (Arnould & Price, 2000). Within the context

of psychological framework of consumer behavior studies, consumption objects are regarded as a means of acquiring meaning attached to them since they are perceived as essentially psychological items that represent human traits and motives, as well as societal patterns and strivings (Levy, 1959). The patterning of object meanings (Author & Holt, 1997) therefore, is crucial for evaluating social patterns of consumption. Through self-authentication, consumers either reveal or create their “true” self, which enables consumers to accommodate several various selves. By doing so, people develop their social and personal identities by socially constructing their self as well as a great contribution of their collective identities is made in the quest for authenticity (Leigh et al., 2006). Therefore, this makes authenticity a subjective rather than an objective concept in its core. Furthermore, consumers constantly make personal judgements about the authentic qualities of products and their consumption as they strive to fulfill their need for authenticity (Tran & Keng, 2018).

As previously stated, consumer motives have greatly changed over the past decades. Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry (2003:21) summarized this new era of marketing as “*the search for authenticity is one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing.*” which, in fact, completely resonates with the idea of contemporary consumers’ need and search for authenticity. The reason brand authenticity has gained a pivotal importance for today’s researchers as well as practitioners is because the search for authenticity matters more in the recent years than it ever did before. Beginning with industrial revolution, humanity has undergone an ongoing social transformation accelerated by digital transformation in the past decades. This has created arising needs, which has led to new ways of consumption as well as marketing practices affecting all parties involved in the overall

process. Among an uncountable number of alternatives and easily accessible means, consumers are ever more confused in their preferences, and they constantly look for cues of authenticity during different stages of buying process or forming their purchase decisions.

We are at a time that the spokesperson for brands and organizations at large is “consumer” contrary to those times when “brands” were communicating with their customers in a one-way fashion and consumers were taking for granted what was offered by the brands. Considering that individualism and the importance placed on the self for modern people has substantially increased in the recent decades, authenticity has emerged to be an even more crucial concept for modern individuals of today because there is an increasing motivation and need to extend and enhance their own identity (Belk, 1988) via various mediums in today’s highly connected and fast-changing world. Brands, therefore, play a crucial role for consumers to sense a feeling of connectedness to the brands and extend their identity as they are building blocks throughout their self-actualization journey.

It is obvious that consumers search for authentic brands that they can feel connected to as a part of their own selves. Moreover, consumers value authenticity as a means of self-expression, as well. For instance, through brand community memberships such as owning a Harley Davidson motorbike, consumers might find a reflection of their inner selves or an expression of their identity (Beverland, 2005). Individuals feel their most authentic selves when they have a feeling of independence and self-expression as authenticity has significant links to the self-concept, which eventually lead to positive internal motivations and more creativity (Sheldon et al., 1997). Therefore, products and

services that has achieved to evoke the look and feel of authenticity in consumers serve not only on a functional level but also contributes to the psychological well-being of consumers.

From the consumer-centric stance, what society expects to see in today's organizations is not obviously a solely profit-driven approach but an organization with a greater transparency, clarity, and responsibility approach (Molleda, 2017). Therefore, it is even more important for organizations to have a perfect fit between their claims and offerings. In simpler terms, organizations/brands should do what they claim to do, and they should stay true to their promise for years to come in a sustainable way. The imperative of building brand authenticity is not only using authenticity as a communication material but building authenticity of the product, idea, or the organization itself from its very core (Molleda, 2017). Otherwise, it is not possible nor sustainable to maintain their authentic corporate identities in the long run and overlooking to this fact eventually ensures more loss to the organization than it has ever gained. Gilmore & Pine, (2009:7) clearly projects the paradigm shift over the course of time stating that *“authenticity has overtaken quality as the prevailing purchasing criterion, just as quality overtook cost, and as cost overtook availability.”*, which beautifully summarizes the paramount importance of authenticity in today's marketing practices in a nutshell.

Most research conducted in brand authenticity literature has focused mainly on the nature and conceptualization of the concept from a consumer perspective by measuring consumer-based and/or consumer-perceived brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2014; Napoli et al., 2014). The role of consumer perception in interpreting brand authenticity is a very crucial point for consideration of the term in broader perspective.

Therefore, brand authenticity conceptualization of marketing scholars so far has consisted of common consumer-oriented dimensions of the concept such as “*credibility, integrity/sincerity, quality commitment, heritage/continuity, originality, reliability, naturalness, individuality, consistency*” (Beverland, 2006; Bruhn et al., 2012); Morhart et al., 2014; Napoli et al., 2014). Consumer-orientedness could be explained with the fact that authenticity can be defined or can only exist on the single condition that if it is perceived as authentic by the target group. In other words, for a brand to be authentic, it certainly needs its consumers to affirm and experience that brand as authentic. This notion portrays a parallelism with Napoli et al.’s (2014:2) definition of brand authenticity as “*a subjective evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a brand by consumers.*” Hence, brand authenticity is a consumer-driven concept. Consumers search for authenticity in brands they prefer mainly because it is a part of their identity projects. Considering or refusing brands is a kind of authentication, “a self-referential act” (Napoli et al., 2014).

Marketing researchers have made earnest efforts for defining the concept of brand authenticity dimensions for over the past two decades. Thanks to these efforts, the concept has evolved with new empirically proven dimensions that have greatly contributed to the body of knowledge in brand authenticity concept. The research findings have led to an enriched brand authenticity literature and helped pave the way to the new brand authenticity studies. Being one of the most recent studies on brand authenticity, (Södergren, 2021) reviews the extant literature covering 25 years period and proposes an insight on overall development of the concept as well as aiming to identify the gaps within brand authenticity literature, thus shedding a brighter light for the future research. In his study, Södergren (2021) categorizes brand authenticity literature into

three main research streams as follows: (1) traits that set the "real thing" apart from a copy, (2) the legitimacy-giving role of authenticity, and (3) the emotional and moral implications of authentication.

Some scholars such as Beverland (2006) go so far as to question the genuineness of authenticity disrupting the concept from its core. (Beverland, 2006) proposes that managing consumers' perceptions of authenticity is the key point in creating authenticity. In that sense, authenticity, therefore, can be created modelling from consumer's frame of mind with regards to what makes a brand "authentic." In order to achieve that, building a strong brand authenticity comprises of strategic and well-planned road map for the brands. For a brand to claim being "authentic", however, will most probably lead to failure because authenticity means more than real (vs. counterfeit) brand (Beverland, 2005). The authenticity is achieved only when it is not claimed by brands but rather when it is genuinely perceived by consumers. Interestingly though, some brands use authenticity to veil their aggressive commercial approach (Holt, 2002).

Morhart et al. (2014), on the other hand, focused on the perceived brand authenticity proposing four dimensions which are *credibility*, *integrity*, *symbolism*, and *continuity* that are regarded as the most critical indicators for brands that strive to be perceived as authentic by its consumers. They revealed that perceived brand authenticity affects emotional brand attachment positively as well as increasing positive word-of-mouth in consumers with higher levels of self-authenticity. The study also demonstrates the value of the consumer's approach on authenticity. Individuals who value the notion of being authentic to themselves and crafting their lives to support that authenticity are far more likely to look for and value brand authenticity than those who do not care about

being authentic to themselves (Morhart et al., 2015). Thus, consumers that are considered as seeking self-authenticity and self-congruence in their lives positively relate themselves with those brands that they consider as authentic and actively seek for such brands for their consumption choices. This proves a parallelism to the fact that consumers associating themselves with a brand are regarding highly of authentic brands and seek for authentic cues in their brand preferences because it is a part of their identity project. In other words, consumers associating themselves with authentic brands is a way of conveying their message about their selves to others. Depending on the consumer's objectives, the method of authenticating an item or experience may differ (Beverland & Farrelly, 2009). Therefore, authenticity differs from consumer to consumer since the goal in consumers' minds greatly changes as individuals seek for different type of authenticity in their experiences with brands.

Products that create a sense of grounded-ness may also elicit a sense of being authentic to oneself (i.e., self-authenticity or existential authenticity, e.g., Arnould & Price, 2000; Eichinger et al., 2022). Indeed, products may foster authenticity perceptions of consumers in this sense. Thus, brand authenticity has also been researched on product level in recent years. Brand authenticity on product level is defined as the degree to which consumers believe brand's manager's intrinsic drive, enthusiasm and dedication about the products he or she is offering (Moulard, Raggio, & Folse, 2016). Perceived quality and trust are favorably influenced by consumers' beliefs that brand managers are enthusiastic about their products. Also, the four antecedents proposed (i.e., *uniqueness & scarcity and longevity & longitudinal consistency*) suggest the product orientation of brand manager. Authenticity, therefore, must not appear as a commercialized concept and

hence, brand managers must distance themselves from commercial considerations to some extent (Beverland, 2005).

Brand authenticity concept has been widely researched in various markets so far. The craft beer industry is among those markets that scholars often searched for authenticity cues (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). The findings also prove the long-discussed results of brand authenticity effect on brand success through the medium of brand trust, perceived value, and authenticity. Within a market where brands have similar marketing and positioning strategies, authenticity is a sought-for attribute by consumers.

There are no criteria that can be used to objectively determine whether a market offering is authentic. Consumer's perception, in this sense, plays a key role. Two types of authenticity can be mentioned in this case: indexical and iconic authenticity (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Indexical cues are evidence-based, factual cues whereas iconic cues are based on impressions, on "consumer's sensory experience". Once again, a market offering to be indexically or iconically authentic, therefore, is based on the consumer perceptions to a great extent.

On the other hand, few researchers attempt to understand the processes in the phase of creating brand authenticity noting prior research mainly revolved around either the nature or the consequences of brand authenticity (Guèvremont, 2018). In the study, Guèvremont challenges previous research on the case of a young brand and explains whether a young brand can achieve to be perceived as authentic in the early stages of its development proposing three dimensions of authenticity, namely, "*transparency*,

virtuousness, and *proximity*". The findings suggest transparency plays a vital role in the early stages of building brand authenticity. It resembles to making a promise at the beginning of consumer-brand relationship in order to build and ensure a lasting consumer-brand relationship.

Reviewing brand authenticity dimensions of marketing scholars, one of the most common dimensions of brand authenticity that almost all the dimensions proposed by the researchers is "*heritage, continuity, or pedigree*". Brands seek a distinction among many others through using implications to time and place in their messages. This is even a more important aspect for luxury brands as they seek to establish iconic credentials (Alexander, 2009). In the study that investigates a company's efforts to establish brand authenticity through co-branding relationships, Alexander (2009) maintains that both the brewery brand and the national team that as the sponsor for the former are conscious of shared heritage. Connection with time and venue is a meaningful aspect for consumers because it is a way of affirming tradition (Beverland, 2005).

Within the sociocultural context, consumers seek for authenticity in products and brands in order to fulfill their personal self-authentication goals which are feeling "*connected*" and in "*control*" as well as having "*virtue*" (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Consumers are motivated to focus on authenticity cues in objects with an aim to acquire various "identity benefits" from those objects which are "*control, connection, virtue*". Referring to the dominance over oneself and one's surroundings, *control* is achieved through the authentic object by means of its being a supporting function to consumers in mastering over both the self and the outer world. It is the ultimate outcome rather than a process (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). *Connection*, on the other hand, is the sensation of

being connected to significant others, a community, a location, culture, or society at large with an aim to build an authentic self being a part of a community, and proximity to like-minded people. *Virtue* denotes to the adherence to ethical standards. The authentic object reinsures the notion of following and maintaining morality. As a result, when commercial products such as experiences, brands, and events are authentic, consumers gain positive identity benefits as a consequence of the favorable portrayal of their true selves. Interestingly, these identification benefits present a reflection of the authenticity perception of consumers regardless of the context of brands, objects, or experiences. Besides, standards, cues and information-processing are all taken into consideration when determining authenticity by individuals.

Below figure summarizes the authentication process in the sociocultural context:

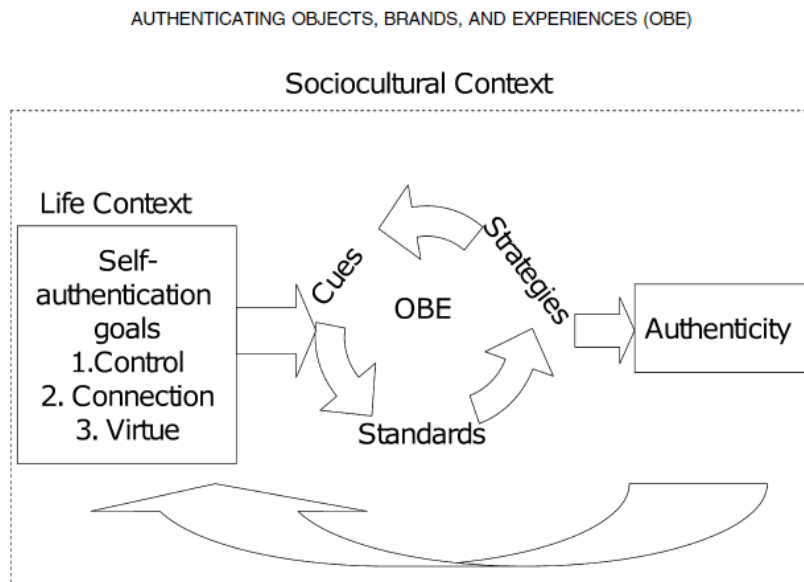


Figure 2. 1 *Consumers' Authentication Process of Commercial Objects*

Source: Beverland, M. B., & Farrelly, F. J. (2009). The Quest for Authenticity in Consumption: Consumers' Purposive Choice of Authentic Cues to Shape Experienced Outcomes. *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Most research conducted in the literature have focused on the nature, formation, and conceptualization of brand authenticity, however, the brand authenticity literature lacks quantitative results of how brand authenticity is sustained over time (Beverland, 2005). Nevertheless, existing body of knowledge on brand authenticity can still enlighten the way and provide direction for a strategic approach.

Reviewing the brand authenticity literature and studies, the “evolutionary pattern” of topics studied in different industries over the years has also changed, enriching the brand authenticity literature (Rosado-Pinto & Loureiro, 2022). While the initial studies dwelled mainly on explaining the perspectives of authenticity until 2005, the studies in the following years focused more on the attributes and measurement methods of the concept in various industries.

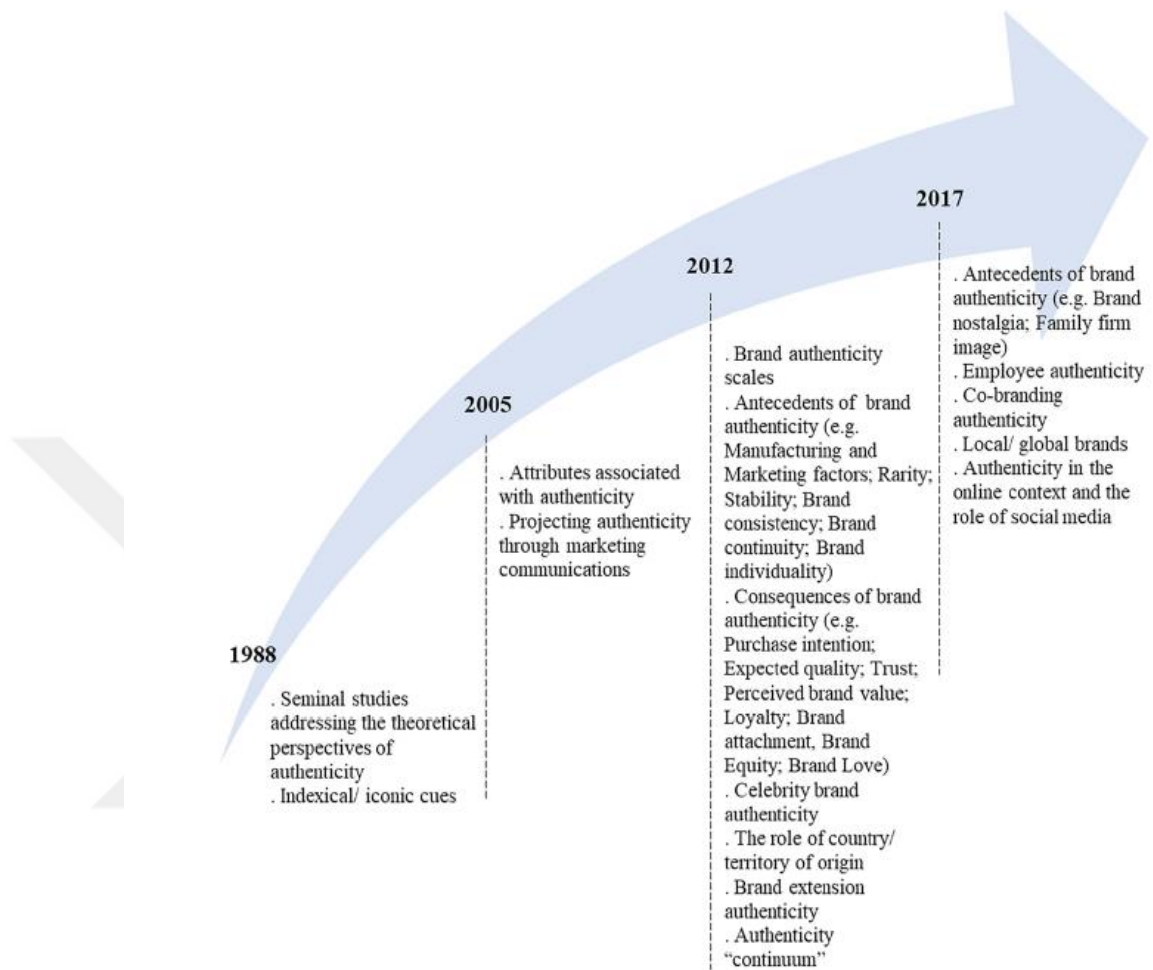


Figure 2. 2 *Evolutionary Pattern of Studies in Brand Authenticity Concept*

Source: Rosado-Pinto, F., & Loureiro, S. M. C. (2022). Authenticity: shedding light on the branding context. *EuroMed Journal of Business*, (ahead-of-print).

2.2.2 Genres of Brand Authenticity

Consumers form their authenticity attributions in a variety of ways, for different objects/experiences and under different situations (Grayson, 2002). Grayson and Martinec's (2004) indexical and iconic authenticity types have been followed by a substantial corpus of brand authenticity literature. According to this distinction, indexical authenticity refers to the identifying the originality of an object whereas iconic authenticity refers to the degree of resemblance of a counterfeit object to its original (Riefler, 2020). In terms of marketing, indexical authenticity of products refers to the factual relationship between a brand and its point of reference. On the other hand, iconic authenticity is based on the idea of a symbolic function of products which lays the foundation for self-authentication. Therefore, it can be inferred that authenticity may not necessarily be existing indexically but can be created by marketers iconically (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010).

2.2.2.1 Indexical Authenticity

The word “authentic” is often used for describing things that are considered to be genuine, not an imitation (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Indexical authenticity refers to “the original” or to “the real thing” which simply indexes the preservation of the originality of a particular object or experience. In this sense, something can be regarded as indexically authentic if it is believed to be “the original”, as the one and only. In order for referring an object as “authentic”, the perceiver needs a verification, confidence or reassurance to do so. For instance, a consumer can judge an object to be authentic based

on both physical and/or non-physical cues such as a certification that proves its originality that is approved by authorities. In other words, indexicality is the proof of originality that differentiates the original painting of Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* from its reproductions.

2.2.2.2 Iconic Authenticity

The word “authentic” is also used for denoting those objects/things that physically resemble something that is indexically authentic such as an authentic reproduction of a famous piece of art or painting (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Iconic cues refer to those things “perceived as being similar to something else” and individuals’ sensory experience defines their perception of iconic authenticity contrary to indexical authenticity. In other words, iconic authenticity is achieved if an object is an exact reproduction of its original or it resembles to its original to a great extent (Leigh et al., 2006). Consumers are specifically looking for cues in products in order to verify their authenticity, and as iconic cues are consumer-generated, consumers tend to classify them as indexical (Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink, 2008). In terms of marketing, understanding iconic cues of consumers and how consumers perceive authentic qualities of brands and advertisements are crucial for marketers (Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink, 2008). Iconicity is also referred as “brand essence” (Leigh et al., 2006) and brand essence is closely connected to authenticity (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003).

It is worthwhile to note that what consumers are looking for is not necessarily indexical or iconic authenticity in objects or experiences but essentially their true selves. In other words, individuals start searching for experiencing adventures that would help building and realizing their self-identity projects if they are unable to do so in regular life (Leigh et al., 2006).

2.2.3 Perspectives on Brand Authenticity

Perceived authenticity arises from the coaction of objective reality (indexical authenticity), subjective mental connections (iconic authenticity) and brand-related existential motives (existential authenticity), all of which contributes to the extent that consumers perceive and acknowledge a brand as truthful to themselves and their consumers (Morhart et al., 2014).

Along with the beginning of intensive usage and pressing importance of authenticity concept in the marketing realm over the past decades, the concept has been embodied into three perspectives by Morhart et al. (2014): *Objectivist*, *Constructivist* and *Existentialist*.

2.2.3.1 Objectivist Perspective

According to the objectivist perspective on authenticity, brand authenticity perceptions are based on factual information that can be evaluated using the brand's origin, age, ingredients, or performance (Morhart et al., 2014). Trilling (1972) explains the term with the authenticity experts in museums who assess and confirm the

authenticity of the works of arts brought to the museum. In other words, it is considered that authenticity is a term that is an inherent quality which can be assessed by the experts. Objective and concrete sources of information provide hints to consumers regarding da product or brand's authenticity. Grayson & Martinec (2004:298) expands on *indexical authenticity* perspective proposing that “indexicality distinguishes ‘the real thing’ from its copies”. Authenticity, in this context, refers to being *sui generis*, “not to be a copy or an imitation” (Grayson & Martinec, 2004), but being “real”, and hence having a unique attribute.

2.2.3.2 Constructivist Perspective

According to the constructivist perspective on authenticity, perceptions of brand authenticity are generated by a subjective approach formed by the consumer's own perception of a product or brand shaped by their beliefs and expectations. Constructivist perspective refers to authenticity as a socially produced and defined concept in accordance with notions, beliefs, and images (Rose & Wood, 2005; Goulding & Derbaix, 2019). In other words, it is a “mental template” (Grayson & Martinec, 2004) which is associated with the pre-existing knowledge and experience of consumers. Thus, authenticity is an individually and socially generated phenomenon as opposed to being an intrinsically constructed phenomenon (Beverland & Farrelly, 2009).

Authenticity, in contrast to objectivist perspective, is influenced by one's own values, prior experiences, and perceptions according to this approach rather than inherently existing in the product itself. Therefore, some consumers would happily fulfill

their desire of owning famous brands with literally using their reproductions instead such as the VW Beetle (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003).

2.2.3.3 Existentialist Perspective

The existentialist vantage point on authenticity is related to consumer's identity. Existential authenticity in the framework of branding refers to a brand's potential to act as a vessel for consumers to disclose their actual selves or fulfill themselves by discovering true meaning in the branded products. The vantage point on authenticity within the notion of existentialism, therefore, is fundamentally about being true to oneself. According to existentialist perspective, if a person is not living genuinely, their life lose its purpose and they may develop long-term anxiety, boredom, and despair (Tran & Keng, 2018).

Existentialist perspective is highly integral to the present study as it is from the existentialist perspective that authenticity springs up from its power of relatability to one's identity. In this sense, brand authenticity can only be achieved under the condition that a brand can be true to itself and its consumers whilst encouraging and supporting its consumers to also be true to themselves (Morhart et al., 2014).

According to the authenticity literature, all three perspectives are interconnected, and each contributes to creating perception of authenticity. (Leigh et al., 2006).

2.2.4 Dimensions of Perceived Brand Authenticity

Difficulties faced in identifying and measuring authenticity across many disciplines have resulted in disparities in forming its dimensions: There occurred diversities in defining dimensions of brand authenticity among marketing scholars (Dağ Başar, 2020).

Morhart et al. (2014) begin their study by initially reviewing the extant brand authenticity literature and the perspectives of all authenticity conceptualizations. They build upon the literature review along with exploratory in-depth interviews which lead to the proposed formation of their scale comprising of four dimensions of Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBA): *continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism*.

➤ **Continuity**

Continuity is related to a brand's potential to survive all trends over time in order to create its history. A great number of consumers, especially the brand-loyal consumers, specifically look for heritage cues in brands as well as the persistence of key characteristics of the brand with little or no change over time. Continuity dimension refers not only to the historicity of a brand but also its persistence to survive in the future, as well.

➤ **Credibility**

Credibility is related to consumers' association of brands with their ability to deliver what they promise. It is conceptualized as brand's honesty and transparency to its consumers. It is important for a brand's consumers to

have a congruity in what they do and what they say. In that sense, the mottos of brands also have their part in forming that perception in consumers' minds as they function as promises made to their consumers. Commonly associated with brand trustworthiness, brand credibility is related to a brand's ability to keep its promises.

➤ **Integrity**

Integrity is concerned with a brand's ethical obligation to its customers by putting moral standards over business considerations and shaping its communications in the orbit of these values. This dimension is parallel with virtuousness of authentic brands (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) which is related to rigidly adhering to one's morals. The main component of integrity dimension is the commercial disinterestedness of brands (Holt, 2002), which reflects related notions of integrity. The Integrity dimension, therefore, focuses on moral behaviors and ethical activities, as well as the brand's obligation to provide genuine care and dedication to customers and it represent to giving back to its customers and society at large.

➤ **Symbolism**

Symbolism takes its stance from the existentialist perspective which is related to the potential of a brand to resonate with personal values of its consumers and how they associate the brand with their actual self-image. By giving the brand a human-like identity and enabling consumers to see it as a person, anthropomorphic portrayal of a brand may support the development of brand authenticity as it encourages consumers to view the

brand as a tool for creating and fostering their own identity (Morhart, 2015). Symbolism of a brand, in other words, helps consumers construct their identity and even have a mirror image of their actual self by offering a symbolic meaning to them which they can acquire and make a part of their self-determination journey. As briefly and nicely put by Belk (1988), “we are what we have”. Therefore, it plays a crucial role within the self-authentication journey of consumers. Furthermore, decisions are made more effortlessly when one product is more symbolically congruent with our goals, emotions, and self-definitions than the other (Levy, 1959). In sum, brands play a crucial role in individuals’ lives as carriers of symbolic meanings.

Symbolism dimension of Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBA) scale developed by Morhart et al. (2014) is one of the main reasons to use this brand authenticity scale in this study since symbolism dimension is expected to explain and correlate with the actual self-image moderator in the proposed research model.

Not until 2000’s has there been empirical studies conducted on brand authenticity concept within the brand authenticity literature (Dayanç Kıyat & Şimşek, 2017). Empirically measuring the concept by developing the first scale of brand authenticity, Bruhn. et al.’s (2012) lit the way for other researchers studying on the concept of brand authenticity to develop new scales of brand authenticity in order to empirically evaluate brand authenticity through the impact of dimensions associated with it, thus attempting to put over this complicated concept in an empirically meaningful way.

There have been four main scales developed and extensively used in numerous academic research related to brand authenticity until recent years (e.g., Bruhn et al., 2012; Napoli et al., 2014; Schallehn, Burmann & Riley, 2014; Morhart et al., 2015; Akbar & Wymer, 2016). Reviewing the scales developed in the past couple of years, the most recent of brand authenticity scales is developed by Tran and Keng in 2018, which proposes a new set of brand authenticity dimensions that are further discussed in this section. However, it is a relatively new scale which is observed not to have been extensively used in brand authenticity research so far.

Based on the fact that there was not a commonly agreed upon definition of brand authenticity in the literature nor was there a consensus among scholars on the dimensions that constitute brand authenticity, Bruhn et al. (2012) developed a scale for evaluating the level of consumers' perceived brand authenticity in their exploratory, qualitative study that was carried out with various consumers and brands within the scope of five different studies. Combining the ideas and findings in the literature, they associated the term with concepts like “*consistency, durability, particularity, individuality, trustworthiness, credibility, maintaining commitments, genuineness, and realness.*” Narrowing down and distilling the terms that are associated with brand authenticity in the extant literature, Bruhn et al. (2012) proposed a scale for brand authenticity that consists of four dimensions: “*continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness.*” The scale is widely used in numerous brand authenticity studies due to its dimensions that lay the core pillars of authenticity in a brand.

The concept of authenticity and its dimensions have been enriched by the subsequent studies. For instance, the relation of brand authenticity was tested on brand

trust and growth of SME (small-to-medium sized enterprise) (Eggers et al., 2013). The findings reveal that brand congruence and brand consistency along with customer brand orientation are discovered to significantly impact a company's growth as well as increasing trust among its consumers.

Constituting on the existing literature, the concept of brand authenticity was further investigated in manufacturing and service industries in order to explain how authenticity perceptions of consumers relate to “*brand image, trust and premium price*” (Mingione & Cherubini, 2015). In their study, Mingione & Cherubini (2015) emphasize that “*corporate brand alignment*” is a key aspect of creating authentic brands as it enables congruency and consistency with brands' strategy and operations. The findings of the research further indicate that main antecedents of brand authenticity are “*quality, heritage, sincerity, originality, and reliability*”, which also resonate with the previous research findings and scales.

By proposing a new approach on brand authenticity concept as reframing it as consumer-based brand authenticity (CBBA), Napoli, Dickinson-Delaporte, & Beverland (2016) further investigated the area of research on the concept by drawing an attention on the requirement of an objective assessment of brand authenticity from a more consumer-centric perspective. Napoli, Dickinson-Delaporte, & Beverland (2016) suggested three brand authenticity dimensions: “*quality commitment, sincerity, and heritage*” which are proposed to have differential effect on brand's position on authenticity scale, therefore affecting the authenticity strategies of a brand. They investigate the connection between brand authenticity and the concept of value as perceived by the consumer and the brand

with an effort to portray what brands and consumers can equally benefit from an authentic positioning of a brand.

Schallehn, Burmann, and Riley (2014) propose and test a brand authenticity scale in their research carried out with beer and fast-food brands. As a result of their study, three main dimensions proposed to have an influence on the perceived brand authenticity are “*consistency, individuality, and continuity*”. Consequently, delivering the brand promise in a unique, consistent, and continuous manner could be considered as a critical factor for building and maintaining brand authenticity.

Morhart et al. (2014) focused on the perceived brand authenticity based on a thorough literature analysis and exploratory in-depth interviews and formed their scale around four key dimensions of brand authenticity which are “*credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity*.” which are the most important drivers for brands that strive to be perceived as authentic by its consumers. A brand's historical heritage and capacity to "transcend trends" are related to *continuity* whereas a brand's *credibility* is based on its openness, sincerity, and ability to fulfill its commitments. *Integrity* refers to the brand's moral and ethical foundation, or its devotion to a set of principles. The ability of a brand to conjure a person's own beliefs, roles, and connections constitutes the fourth dimension, *symbolism*. It is observed that perceived brand authenticity positively increases emotional brand attachment as well as positive word-of-mouth among consumers with greater degrees of self-authenticity. The authors demonstrate how brands may improve brand authenticity through the characteristics proposed dimensions. By doing this, organizations may raise the likelihood that consumers' choosing their brand, foster greater brand loyalty, and promote effective brand advocacy (Morhart, 2015).

Taking its core from parsimonious approach in research, Akbar & Wymer, (2017) contrastingly proposes a “*unidimensional*” construct for evaluating brand authenticity which refers to *genuineness, originality*. They suggest that having a single dimension for determining brand authenticity averts the concept being amalgamated with other constructs with similar meanings.

Articulating to have developed the most thorough brand authenticity scale after scrutinizing the existing literature, Tran & Keng (2018) propose a six-dimensional scale that determines the characteristics required for building brand authenticity which are “*virtue, connection, realism, aesthetics, control, and originality*”, all of which represent similarities with dimensions of previous in an inclusive manner.

One dimension of brand authenticity that was explored in prior research has been studied as a subtitle of another dimension in several studies, according to the pertinent literature. For instance, Napoli et al., (2014) initially proposed “*cultural symbolism*” as a dimension of brand authenticity, however, they eliminated the dimension from the final set of dimensions they proposed as a result of their initial assessment considering that it does not have a significant effect on brand authenticity. Nonetheless, Morhart et al. (2014) proposed that “*symbolism*” is a significant dimension for measuring brand authenticity, and they included *symbolism* as a dimension in their proposed scale (İpek et al., 2020).

The idiosyncratic nature of brand authenticity paves the way to new research on reconceptualizing the concept with new perspectives. Nunes et al., (2021) define the concept as a comprehensive evaluation of the consumer that is based on six components

“*accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency*”, where each component's function might vary depending on the consumption situation. Along with these components, the authors offer directions to brands as to how they can convey authenticity messages to consumers.

Taken together, brand authenticity concept has been researched both on conceptual level as well as on empirical grounds as previously explained in greater detail, which enable measuring the concept and its relations to other concepts.

Below table is designed by the researcher to summarize and briefly capture the brand authenticity dimensions (both conceptual and empirical) proposed in the related studies as well as recapitulating the major brand authenticity studies in the literature:

Table 2. 1 *Major Studies on Brand Authenticity with Antecedent/Attributes Proposed*

Researcher	Year	Brand Authenticity Dimensions / Attributes	Conceptual (C) / Empirical (E)	Major Findings
Beverland	2006	"Heritage and pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, relationship to place, method of production, downplaying commercial considerations"	C	"The proposed attributes of authenticity reflected that of consumers. The characteristics of authenticity included both true and idealized representations of the truth."
Gundlach & Neville	2012	"Aesthetics, commitments to consistency and quality, relationship to place, heritage and pedigree, exclusivity"	C	This study added "exclusivity" as an additional factor to the existing theoretical framework.
Bruhn <i>et al.</i>	2012	"Continuity, originality, reliability, naturalness"	E	"Brand authenticity measured with regard to related marketing constructs such as brand involvement, brand image, and brand satisfaction"
Coary	2013	"Being a category pioneer, maintaining product originality, adhering to principles"	C	"The effects and process of brand authenticity differ for various product categories, functional versus experiential products."
Eggers <i>et al.</i>	2013	"Brand consistency, brand congruency, brand customer orientation"	E	"Brand authenticity accelerates SME growth as consumers and other stakeholders search for greater meaning and sincerity from the brands."
Napoli <i>et al.</i>	2014	"Quality commitment, sincerity, heritage"	E	"Authenticity cues of quality commitment, heritage and sincerity have differential effects on a brand's position along the authenticity continuum and consequently, authenticity strategies."
Schallehn, Burmann & Riley	2014	"Consistency, individuality, continuity"	E	"Brand authenticity positively impacts on brand trust. Furthermore, the key antecedents such as consistency, continuity and individuality of a brand drive the perception of brand authenticity"
Morhart <i>et al.</i>	2014	"Credibility, integrity, symbolism, continuity"	E	"PBA increases emotional brand attachment and word-of-mouth, and that it drives brand choice likelihood through self-congruence for consumers high in self-authenticity. "
Marks & Prinsloo	2015	"Autonomy, closeness, quality assurance, individuality, economic rebellion"	C	"Resistant consumers were more likely to identify themselves with the presented authentic brands and appreciated their benefits."

Mingione <i>et al.</i>	2015	"Sincerity, quality, heritage, originality, reliability"	E	"There is a link between authenticity and sensory branding because expressions of authentic brands include sensory expressions different generational cohorts"
Akbar & Wymer	2016	"Originality, genuineness"	E	"The study refined the conceptualization of BA in such a manner that its use will apply across brand type contexts."
Moulard, Raggio & Folse	2016	"Rarity, stability"	E	"This research focused on how the authenticity of the human brand of a celebrity is perceived."
Tran & Keng	2018	"Virtue, connection, realism, aesthetics, control, originality"	E	"If a brand is able to capitalize on one or more of these dimensions, the brand may be viewed as authentic and receive additional benefits from this perception."
Guèvremont	2018	"Transparency, virtuousness, proximity"	C	"Findings substantiate the prevalence of brand transparency over both virtuousness and proximity in the early stages of the development of an authentic brand."
Nunes, Ordanini & Giambastiani	2021	"Accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, proficiency"	E	"Findings provide a fuller understanding of what it means for a consumption experience to be authentic."

2.3. Brand Advocacy

The degree to which a consumer can express and enhance his/her own identity/self through a brand is conceptualized as consumer-brand identification (Kim et al., 2001). It is seen as critical to our understanding of how, when, and why brands assist customers in articulating their identities (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). As carriers of symbolic meanings (Levy, 1959), brands can greatly help consumers in achieving their core identity projects.

One of the key outcomes of consumer-brand identification (CBI) is the advocacy of the consumers that can take place both on a social and/or physical level (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Brand advocacy is described as the endorsement or defending of a product/brand by one customer to another, as well as being the strongest consumer-brand relationship antecedent (Walz & Celuch, 2010; Coelho et al., 2019). The experience beginning from the first encounter with these brands constitutes brand experiences. Therefore, the strength and intensity of the initial experience create the most popular brands and advocates of those brands. Brand advocates are those customers with a high level of brand loyalty who form emotional bonds with the brand and participate in arguments in order to defend the brand as/when it is challenged by others (Coelho et al., 2019). In other words, consumers may recommend a brand's offerings to others and/or may defend a specific brand when there is a negative word-of-mouth is encountered. On a physical level, brand advocate consumers may tend to purchase and use a certain brands' offerings with their logo or even may not hesitate to go to extremes as even getting their favorite brand logos on tattooed on their bodies.

Although almost 90 percent of marketing budget is allocated to advertising and promotions, it should be noted that brand advocacy is frequently the single most effective motivation in purchase decisions (Edelman, 2010). 91 percent of consumers are more likely to choose a brand that has been recommended by someone who has used it themselves (Rusticus, 2007). Although 90 percent of marketing budget is spent on advertising and promotions, however, the most effective impulse to purchase is frequently someone else's recommendation (Edelman, 2010).

New research reveals that consumers' decision journey is not only related to their considerations of alternatives but rather a prolonged assessment period during which consumers add and eliminate brands from a group under review (Edelman, 2010). Marketers frequently overestimate the "consider" and "buy" stages of the decision journey and they place a great amount of marketing efforts for raising awareness through advertising and other promotional activities. However, "evaluate" and "advocate" stages are becoming increasingly important as a result of new media. Marketing efforts that help consumers in their evaluation process subsequently result in consumers' promoting favorable word of mouth about the brands they choose. More importantly, if consumers become brand advocates, they naturally make a "bond" with the brand, and they will repurchase it without going through the previous steps of the decision-making process. In other words, consumers become "brand advocates" only when they have a strong connection with a brand (Bhati & Verma, 2020).

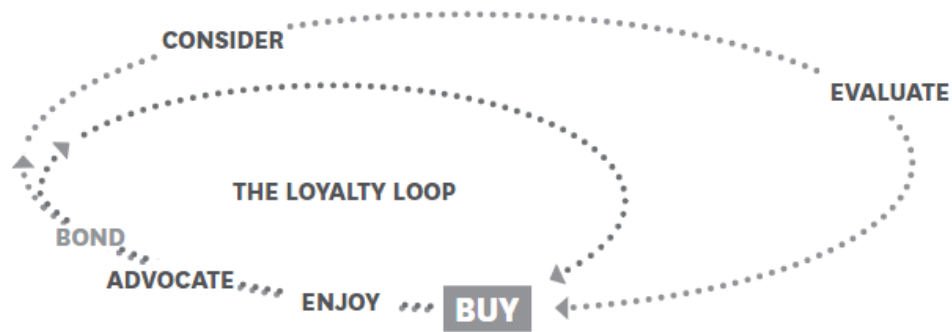


Figure 2. 3 *The Consumer Decision Journey*

Source: Edelman, D. C. (2010). Branding in the Digital Age: You're Spending Your Money in All the Wrong Places. *Harvard Business Review*. www.hbr.org

Consumer perception of a brand has always been crucial along the consumer purchase decision process, yet the incredible extent, speed, and interactivity of the digital era necessitates special attention to how consumers experience the brand throughout their decision journey (Edelman, 2010).

Brand advocacy is closely associated with such terms as brand evangelism, brand spokesperson, brand lover, brand fan, brand enthusiast, brand love, brand missionary (Matzler et al., 2009; Doss, 2013; Singh, 2015; Choudhury et al., 2019). Highly devoted advocates of a brand actively promote it and enthusiastically motivate other consumers to do so, as well. As a consequence of this, it will be simpler for a business to acquire long-term trust, purchases, and loyalty by finding and delivering an optimal solution to its customers in a particular market (Lawer & Knox, 2006).

When consumers identify themselves with a brand, they will be willing to diffuse positive word-of-mouth about the related brand to the groups they are a part of, and thus they will be willing advocates of the brand (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Similarly, trust increases commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), because being a trusted partner is so highly regarded that consumers are likely to engage in the relationship and make efforts to sustain it.

2.3.1 Definition of Brand Advocacy

Brand Advocacy is achieved through consumers' favorable communication about a brand to their circles, hence positively affecting brand's reputation. Positive customer brand equity and favorable consumer response expedite brand acceptance and adoption of new launches, which in turn leads to higher revenue and profit margins while enjoying low costs (Keller, 1993). Often, brand is strongly associated with its product and/or service in its category by its consumers as it is seen as a prototype of its products and services, therefore their favorable or unfavorable response to the brand should not differ from that of the product and/or service (Keller, 1993). In this case, positive word-of-mouth which relates to pleasant and novel experiences about a brand (Anderson, 1998) exerts a strong influence on purchase decision of certain products and it can be the most influential information source particularly because it is considered to come from a more reliable and less biased source (Herr et al., 1991).

In the context of advocacy, consumers become "evangelists" for the brand and are eager to recommend it to other people, fostering brand adoption due to their positive experiences with the brand (Kemp et al., 2012).

2.3.2 Antecedents of Brand Advocacy

The brand advocacy literature contains a great number of antecedents for measuring the concept. Brand advocacy is particularly considered as an advanced dimension of word-of-mouth (WOM), therefore, studies on WOM are utilized for measuring brand advocacy (Shimul & Phau, 2018).

In the recent study of Bhati and Verma (2020), the authors propose a meta-analysis of brand advocacy summarizing the antecedents of the concept. The antecedents proposed as a result of the meta-analysis are categorized into three major types: *“relational factors, social factors, personal factors”*.

➤ Relational Factors

- *Brand Trust*

Brand Trust is consumers' faith in a brand with their assumption that the brand will perform particular functions (Erciş et al., 2012). High levels of brand trust result in positive WOM (Ranaweera & Menon, 2013) and research shows that higher brand trust levels lead to WOM advocacy (Bhati & Verma, 2020). Furthermore, when the source of the information is regarded as reliable, consumers are more likely to

spread it. Consumers' respond by promoting the brand when the brand prioritizes transparency and trust (Bhati & Verma, 2020).

- *Customer Satisfaction*

Customer satisfaction is the final decision consumers make after the purchase of a specific product in comparison to their initial anticipation before the purchase (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982). When a brand's performance exceeds customers' expectations, customers are driven to share their positive experience with one another, thus resulting in high levels of brand advocacy (Bhati & Verma, 2020).

- *Brand Identification*

Brand identification is the amount of association customer creates with his or her personal image as overlapping with the brand's image (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Consumers who believe a specific brand reflects their inner or social selves are likely to advocate the brand (Wallace et al., 2012).

- *Customer-based brand equity*

Brand equity is a set of resources including consumer loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and associations like the brand's name

or symbol that add to (or take away from) the value of the goods / services being delivered (Aaker, 1991). Differently stated, brand equity equals to the image of a brand in the eyes of its consumers. Consumer-based brand equity positively affects brand loyalty and WOM, as well as eventually leading to brand advocacy (Bhati & Verma, 2020).

- *Affective Commitment*

Affective commitment is an expression of an emotional bond with a product, brand, or an object at large (Buchanan, 1974; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The level of affection of consumers determines the level of their commitment and their advocacy behavior towards a brand (Bhati & Verma, 2020).

- *Normative Commitment*

When a brand prioritizes the needs of its customers, normative commitment develops. As a result of the business's good action, customers become brand ambassadors, brand advocates (Fullerton, 2011).

➤ **Social Factor**

- *Normative Influence*

The propensity to live up to other people's expectations is termed as normative influence. Normative influence has an impact on people's behaviors (Bearden et al., 1989). Research reveals that consumers' WOM, and brand advocacy behavior are influenced by normative influence (Chu & Sung, 2015; Bhati & Verma, 2020).

➤ **Personal Factor**

- *Opinion leadership*

Opinion leadership is defined as an individual's power to influence the attitudes or behaviors of others (Bhati & Verma, 2020). In the context of marketing, it is the ability to exert influence on other consumers/customers in order to shape a positive attitude towards a brand and eventually drive consumers to a purchase behavior. Brand advocacy/customer advocacy in the form of WOM has been proven to result from opinion leadership (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988), and brand advocacy and opinion leadership have a significant relation. (Bhati & Verma, 2020).

2.3.3 Consumer-Brand Relationship (CBR)

Positive consumer-brand relationship (CBR) is proven to be an important element of brand advocacy from a customer-brand relational aspect (Wallace et al., 2012).

Therefore, it is necessary to understand the essentials of CBR as an integral component in order for examining the brand advocacy concept.

As long as there have been relics of human life, brands and branding have existed. Throughout history, both have two vital functions: The first one is to disseminate information about the origin and quality of goods and/or services, the second one is being that of a carrier of image or meaning (status/power, value, and/or personality). The markings on the seals used during the early ages such as Early Bronze Age suggest that there occurred a need for means to imply the point of origin and enable the fulfillment of numerous marketing functions such as storage and transportation for all the included parties to benefit from such as re-sellers and government authorities (Moore & Reid, 2008). Whether these early practices could be termed as “brand” or not is arguable, however, they can still be called as “*proto brand*” as they are the early practices of branding from a functional point of view if not from a consumer-centric stance. Brands in the modern times, on the other hand, include both informational features as well as symbolical ones such as status, power, value, and personality.

In the modern times, brands are, primarily, of consumer-centric nature. In other words, their referent power is substantial. A relationship can only exist between two parties when there is some degree of interdependence to be mentioned. Moreover, relationships are of purposive nature (Kelley et al., 1983) and they help adding and forming meaning in one’s life as well as playing a significant role in developing personality. Meaningful relationships can alter self-concept by increasing self-worth and self-esteem (Aron & Aron, 1986). According to the reciprocity principle, the quality of brand connections grows via meaningful brand and consumer behaviors, which underpins

all relationships (Fournier, 1998). Within the concept of consumer brand relationship (CBR), the strength of this relationship ensures heritage and loyal customers to the brand whereas it offers a meaning and attachment on the consumer end of the continuum.

Consumer brand relationship (CBR) continues to be an important scope of research among marketing scholars in a wide range of markets around the world. Thanks to the corpus of extant literature on the topic, academic scholars have revealed ground dimensions of the concept providing valuable insights and inspiration for future research.

Consumer brand relationship is mainly about developing a ‘resonance’ with the consumer where the brand and consumers’ expectations and experiences with the brand are “in synch” (Keller, 2001). In other words, brands that resonate with their consumers to a level where consumers can identify themselves with the brand, ultimately create a strong relationship and loyalty through a psychological bond, which results in strong consumer-brand relationship, hence higher price premiums and more successful marketing campaigns for the brand.

Fundamentally, brand resonance or consumer-brand relationship can be broken down to four dimensions:

➤ ***Behavioral Loyalty***

The first dimension refers to the behavioral consequence of a strong consumer-brand connection which is repeat purchase and amount of volume.

➤ ***Attitudinal Attachment***

A personal attachment towards the brand creates a special bond or brand love, which results in describing the brand as an indispensable and valuable possession.

➤ ***Sense of community***

The brand itself may become a vessel for a sense of belonging or being an integral part of a community. As a result of this, consumers of a specific brand may find more meaning using that brand and identify themselves with the brand community.

➤ ***Active engagement***

Often occurring as an expected outcome of *attitudinal attachment* and *sense of community*, *active engagement* portrays the strongest tie in consumer-brand relationship where consumers willingly invest time and energy into the brand beyond repeat purchases as loyal customers and they genuinely function as brand ambassadors of their own free will.

Consumer-brand relationship is closely related to brand authenticity concept as consumers' perceptions are key denominators of consumer-brand relationship. It is also very crucial for low involvement types of products. For instance, there is some research in brand authenticity literature (e.g., Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018) that seek for authenticity cues on mass-produced fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) which are comprised of frequently consumed low-involvement product categories, and therefore, they lack inherent authenticity by nature. Brand authenticity in the eyes of consumers may be influenced directly or indirectly by consumers' views about brand marketing

messages. Therefore, achieving brand authenticity through a strong consumer-brand relationship is a need for products particularly with low inherent authenticity and low involvement.

2.3.4 Significance of Brand Advocacy

Brand advocates are customers who love the brand with which they are associate themselves, enjoy sharing their positive attitudes towards the brand to other consumers, and are happy to know that others use the same brand thanks to themselves (Bozkurt, 2021). The companies may be able achieve a long-term competitive advantage and a sustainable growth when there is a close link between consumers' self-concepts to a brand (Kemp, Childers & Williams, 2012). In essence, attaining a strong association with the self in consumers' minds helps brands be less vulnerable to the attitudinal changes of its consumers at times of poor campaigns or temporary quality issues, which may also result in higher levels of brand loyalty and less probability of switching to competitor brands (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). In the long run, brands achieve advocates of their own who are eager to promote positive word-of-mouth of their brands' offerings as well as being advocated by the most influential group of people – their loyal consumers – in the most authentic way.

Due to consumer distrust towards brand-supported communications, brand advocacy is critical for businesses in terms of successfully and efficiently distributing and sharing information among consumers. Brands need brand advocate consumers to attract new

customers and profit from the perceived credibility of cross-consumer referrals (Bozkurt, 2021).

Brand advocacy is the ultimate consequence of a company's customer relationships, and organizations rely on brand advocates to bring in new customers since their consumers rely more on personal recommendations and word of mouth than they do on the company's own marketing efforts (Bendapudi, 1997). Due to social developments including a decline in confidence in individuals in positions of authority and the spread of the internet and other digital media, companies today are confronted with a communications landscape that is dramatically changing. Word of mouth (WOM) is increasingly evolving into being the most potent and successful communication method (Keller, 2007).

The consumer's journey is a crucial parameter to pay attention to in the way to achieve brand advocacy. Along with the increased pace of life and content generation on social platforms accompanied by the shorter attention spans, consumers now turn to trusted sources of information while making their purchase decisions. Consumers who used to consult with relatives and friends in the past now rely on the individuals they engage with online (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan 2021, 109). Therefore, digital literate consumers already have experience with a brand long before they acquire a product/service, and it goes beyond that long after the purchase decision takes place.

Kotler's (2021) 5A Customer Journey Model presents the importance of aiming brand advocacy as the ultimate goal of brand loyalty rather than customer retention or repeat purchase behavior. As shown in the figure below, advocacy is the final and most

important pillar of Kotler's 5A Customer Journey Model where brands create their willing advocates via deep set brand/customer loyalty.

The model proposes that aiming all consumers that are aware of the brand will advocate it. Therefore, *Advocate* is the final stage at which consumers build a strong brand loyalty and are passionate recommenders of the brand that turn into brand evangelists, impulsively and willingly recommending their favorite brands to people around themselves.

	Aware	Appeal	Ask	Act	Advocate
Customer Behaviors	Passively learn about the brand from past experiences, marketing communications, and recommendations of others.	Customers process the messages they are vaporized with and are attracted to only a few brands.	Customers are curious and actively research. They seek additional information from friends and family, and even directly from the brand.	Purchase a specific brand. And interact more deeply with the brand through the process of purchase, use, and service.	Over time, customers develop strong loyalty to a brand, which is expressed in retention, repurchase, and ultimately, recommendation to others.
Touch Points	- Hear about the brand from others - See advertisements for the brand - Recalling a past experience	- Be attracted to brands - Select a small number of brands to consider	- Ask a friend for advice - Search for product reviews online - Call our call center	- Buy in store or online - Use that product for the first time - Receive service	- Continue to use the brand - Re-purchase the brand and recommend the brand to other companies
Thoughts	I know it.	I love it.	I'm sure it's good.	I will buy it.	I will recommend it.

Figure 2. 4 Kotler's 5A Customer Journey Model

Source: Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H. ve Setiawan, I. (2021). *Marketing 5.0: Technology for humanity*. John Wiley & Sons, pg.110.

Online Source for The Figure: https://www.pkmarketing.jp/en/articles/marketing4-5acj_en/

(Last accessed on 25.12.2022)

2.4. Brand Experience

The answer to the questions as to how consumers interact with a brand and how their experience with a brand influences their attitude and behavior has long been sought after within the marketing realm. Consequently, marketing professionals have shown a lot of interest in the concept of brand experience after the concept being outspoken by Schmitt (2003). As a pioneering researcher, Schmitt (2003) initially proposed the concept of brand experience in the literature, and he defined brand experience as “*all the static elements that the customer encounters — the product itself, logos and signage, packaging, brochures and advertising.*” These elements are considered to be “static” as they are “*delivered to the customer in this predesigned state.*” In other words, brand experience occurs with the “direct experience” with a product or brand. Therefore, it is very crucial for marketers to devise “*realistic stimuli in naturalistic situations*” in order to properly let consumers experience their brand prior to purchase so consumers know what to expect when they actually purchase the products/services from that brand (Schmitt, 2003).

Brands nowadays need to promise their consumers satisfying experiences in addition to their products or services. Competing on experience level entails coordinating all the “clues” that customers collect during the purchasing process (Berry et al., 2002). It is a prerogative for brands to equally manage “*the emotional component of experiences*” as they do so for managing the functionality of the goods and services, they offer (Berry et al., 2002). Marketers have realized how important it is to understand the way customers engage with businesses when developing marketing strategy.

Brand experience occurs in a number of contexts when consumers look for, purchase, and use brands. Accordingly, brand experience is a subjective concept that is formed by consumer reactions that are elicited in such contexts by particular brand-related experiential cues (Brakus et al., 2016). Design and identity, packaging, messaging, and environments are examples of brand-related experiences that can trigger feelings, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. In order to measure brand experience both on academic and practical level, Brakus et al. (2016) propose a brand experience scale with four dimensions of the concept: “*sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral*”. The four dimensions of the construct propose that a major role brands play shifted from being an identifier to being a provider of experiences (Schmitt, Brakus & Zarantonello, 2015). On a separate note, brand experience positively predicts customer satisfaction and loyalty (Brakus et al., 2016).

2.4.1 Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing, by definition, is “*a marketing approach that directly engages consumers and invites and encourages them to participate in a branded experience.*” according to American Marketing Association (2023). More importantly, it plays a crucial role in reaffirming brand's essence as well as eliciting an emotional response within consumers.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) propose that “*economic value*” in the society has evolved into being a service economy which is no longer driven by the products or services alone but mainly driven by experiences that consumers receive from these market offerings in *The Experience Economy*. This is called “*the new economy*” or “*the*

experience economy”. They argued that businesses will be able to differentiate themselves from competition by providing positive experiences to their customers in addition to offering goods, products, or services. In other words, designing experience opportunities for consumers becomes a significant differentiator in a fiercely competitive marketplace, which positions those brands to a premium level in the eyes of their customers.

Experience is a multi-faceted term, and it may mean different things to different individuals even when the exact same object or circumstance is concerned. The reason why it has various dimensions to different individuals is because “*experience involves acting and being acted upon, sensing and feeling both, and transforming them into something emotionally and intellectually meaningful*” (McCarthy & Ciolfi, 2008:250).

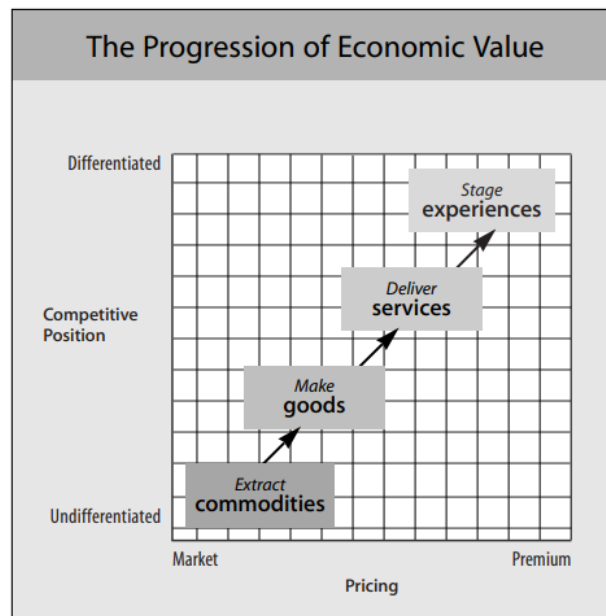


Figure 2. 5 *The Progression of Economic Value*

Source: Pine, J. B., & Gilmore, J. H. (1998). Welcome to the Experience Economy. *Harvard Business Review*.

In a highly digitalized world, consumers take sophisticated products, high quality, and positive brand image for granted and given. It is an intense touch on all senses as well as touch on consumers' hearts that they are looking for from the brands nowadays (Schmitt, 1999). Therefore, brands had no other alternative to shift from features and benefits oriented marketing toward a more experiential marketing. At the core of experiential marketing lies the fundamental principle of offering consumers an experience while also immersing them in the brand's journey by making them a part of it. Therefore, brands that can elevate their product and service offerings to the level of experience stand out from competition in the minds of their consumers mainly because experiences offer consumers emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and relational values replacing the functional values of products (Bozkurt, 2021).

There are four pillars of experiential marketing that distinguishes it from the conventional marketing approach:

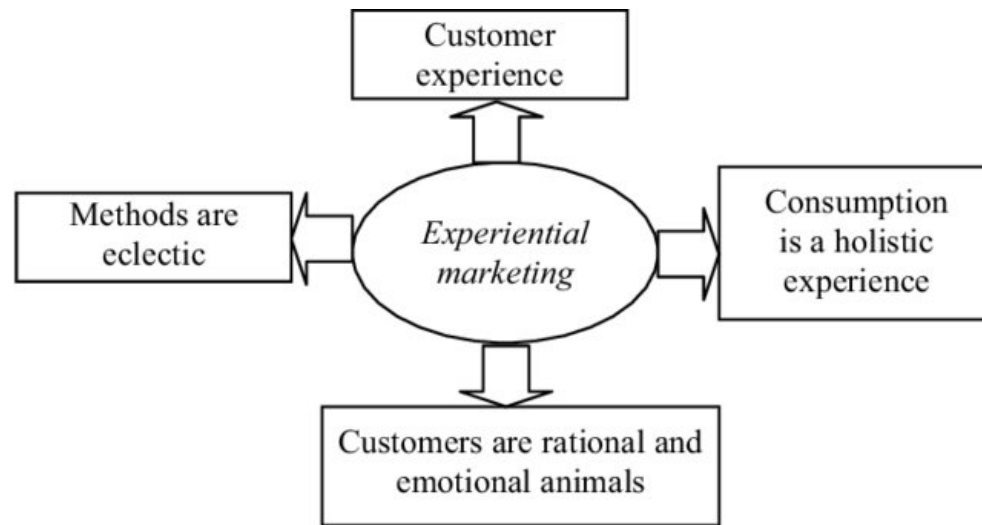


Figure 2. 6 *Four Pillars of Experiential Marketing*

Source: Schmitt, B. (1999). Experiential Marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1-3), 53-67.

Experiential marketing, as opposed to traditional marketing, is an approach that targets consumers who make rational and emotional judgments and perceive consumption as a “holistic experience” using “eclectic methods”. In other words, experiential marketing concentrates on customer experiences contrary to traditional marketing which fundamentally focuses on functional values and benefits of products/services. The focus has shifted from a single product to tracking a sociocultural consumption vector for achieving a greater meaning for the consumer (Schmitt, 1999b).

In order to create holistic experiences, marketers may utilize several modules in order to offer their consumers a variety of customer experiences. These modules include “Sensory experiences (SENSE), affective experiences (FEEL), creative cognitive experiences (THINK), physical experiences, behaviors, and lifestyles (ACT), and social-

identity experiences that emerge from belonging to a reference group or culture (RELATE)”.

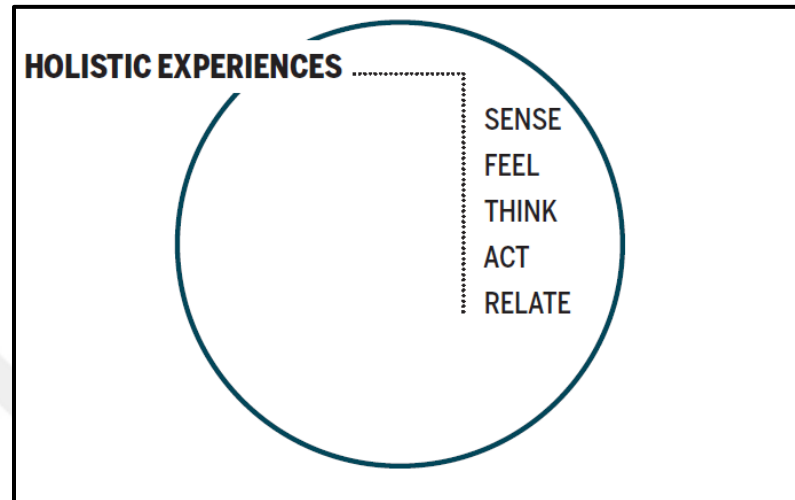


Figure 2. 7 *Strategic Experiential Modules for Holistic Experiences*

Source: Schmitt, B. (1999). Experiential marketing: A new framework for design and communications. *Design Management Journal (Former Series)*, 10(2), 10-16.

2.4.2 Genres of Brand Experience

Today, brands strive to offer their consumers as many customized experiences as possible without even requiring consumers to own or purchase their products unlike before. For tailoring experiencing environments, brands create strategies for introducing their products/services to consumers at some point in order to make themselves accessible to the consumers by increasing brand awareness so that their brands will be top of consumers’ minds when/as they need to purchase a particular market offering.

Consumers may experience brands under different circumstances and in different ways before, during or after purchase.

➤ ***Product Experience***

Product experience is developed during information collecting, examining, and evaluating process about a product prior to purchasing it. Experience is the result of consumer's direct or indirect interaction with a product (Brakus et al., 2009)

➤ ***Shopping and Service Experience***

Consumers' encounters with a store's physical attributes and staff throughout their shopping create the shopping and service experience (Brakus et al., 2009). Especially the physical conditions of the store such as lighting, decorations etc. play an important role for consumers to spend more time in the store, which, in turn, results in a more satisfying experience. In recent years, shopping and service experience has become more important for brands in order to differentiate themselves from competition.

➤ ***User Experience***

User experience is related to experience consumers have with a design during, before or after a purchase. For instance, it may be a product's packaging that a consumer purchases offline or online, how long a

consumer stays on a web page in a digital environment or how long a user watches an ad before skipping it, etc. (Bozkurt, 2021).

➤ ***Customer Experience***

The customer experience is a sensory, affective, cognitive, and behavioral condition that is related to a brand in the absence of which a discomfort arises (Bozkurt, 2021). Therefore, individuals tend to keep purchasing the same brands over time, going to the same restaurant or hairdresser repeatedly as a result of a positive customer experience. The opposite condition applies for a negative customer experience.

➤ ***Consumption Experience***

Consumption experience is formed during consuming or using a product which is of more hedonic nature than other experience types (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Brakus et al., 2009). It is “*a phenomenon directed toward the pursuit of fantasies, feelings, and fun.*” (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

2.4.3 Dimensions of Brand Experience

Brakus et al., (2015) conceptualized brand experience as the subjective reactions of consumers to brand-related sensory inputs that may be broken down into four categories: “*sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral*”.

➤ ***Sensory***

Sensory dimension refers to the brand's appeal to consumers' five senses and potential to captivate their senses. Sensory experiences with brands include visual elements such as colors, logo, packaging, design etc.; auditory elements such as slogan, music, jingle etc.; elements related to smell such as the smell of coffee, flowers, etc.; elements that are experienced by tasting food and beverages, and the elements related to the tactile senses for which consumers are enabled to experience the look and feel of the products (Bozkurt, 2021).

➤ ***Affective***

Affective dimension refers to the feelings and emotions brands evoke in their consumers by brand attributes. In affective experiences with a brand, consumers experience feelings such as belonging, pleasure, happiness, love, and sociability. These kinds of feelings which remain as strong memories, provide positive feelings about the brand (Brakus *et. al.*, 2009).

➤ ***Intellectual***

Intellectual dimension refers to the degree of thinking and curiosity that comes as a consequence of the encounter of a specific brand stimulus (*i.e.*, advertisements, using the brand, etc.). In this experience, people are encouraged to think about the brand by arousing interest, curiosity, and excitement. Cognitive experiences are particularly used in the communication of technological products and product design or promotions (Bozkurt, 2021).

➤ ***Behavioral***

Behavioral dimension refers to the degree of physical reactions that a brand-specific stimulus causes in its consumers. Behavioral brand experiences affect consumers' lifestyles, physical experiences, and interactions with other people. Along with a behavioral experience with a brand in lifestyle and leisure activities, positive behavioral experiences are created for the consumer.

2.4.4 Significance of Brand Experience

The numerous studies have shown that having an intense and memorable brand experience positively affects brand outcomes in terms of customer and brand loyalty. Considering the great variety of touch points consumers have with a brand beginning with real experience of the product/service itself towards weaving further knots with the

brand by multichannel communication activities, how consumers experience brands gain utmost importance. In experiential marketing, communication is centered on those characteristics that speak to consumers feelings, soul, and mind because today, consumers want to be “*entertained*” and “*stimulated*” more than ever (Grundey, 2008). Along with the conceptualization of brand experience of Brakus et. al. (2009), definition of brand experience expanded as “*subjective, internal consumer responses as well as behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli*” emphasizing the significant role of brands as being a provider of experiences for the consumers.

Brand experience offers benefits both to the brand and the consumers since both parties get a chance to “experience” each other: This allows the brand to better deliver on consumer expectations while also allowing consumers to learn more about the brand, which eventually will lead to a mutual trust. A single positive experience with a brand might persuade a consumer to choose one brand over another, which, in the long run, creates long term customer- brand relationships. Brands can enhance the level of happiness of their consumers thus serving towards a greater good on a societal level, and this goal can only be achieved through novel experiences that brands can offer to their customers. Brands’ ultimate aim is to create loyal customers who can advocate and promote their brand across platforms and creating a memorable brand experience is one of the key paths to follow in order to achieve this objective.

2.5. Actual Self-Image Congruence

The idea of self is a key research area in psychology and sociology literature and the extant literature in both disciplines delineate explaining the antecedents and outcomes of self-concept in consumer behavior. Since individuals' self-image directly influences the purchases they make, the self-concept is fundamental in the research of consumer behavior.

Marketers can benefit from understanding self-concept and self-image for designing more effective marketing strategies. Coherence and congruence are also vital in creating the connection between one's actual image, self-image, and ultimate purchasing behavior (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). Self-theory and symbolism are two behavioral science conceptual areas that have the potential to generate meaningful data on consumer behavior (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967).

Symbols serve as a foundation and reference for facts (Mead, 1934). "Meanings" form the basis of symbolic interaction. The theory of symbolic interaction focuses on the meanings that result from individuals interacting with one another in a social setting. The social self, according to Mead (1934), is the individual's behavior as a reaction to the comments and criticism he receives through interactions with other individuals whose opinions he /she cares about. The self-concept is shaped by family and social environment interactions. Individuals are inclined to adapt their choices if they are unsatisfied with the impression they create on people. In doing so, they will act in a way that their social environment will approve since our social environment has referent power. Therefore, it is crucial for individuals to maintain and enhance his sense of self.

Self-concept theory posits that individuals engage in actions that support and bolster their self-concept. The items that individuals buy, and use are a significant way that they accomplish this goal. The products that consumers buy, and use can help define, maintain, and improve their self-image (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987).

Brands and products serve as communication tools for customers. Individuals use products and brands as symbols to represent themselves because they connect them to their actual selves. Symbols serve for purposes such as self-expression as well as identifying a person's socioeconomic status (Mead, 1934). Thus, brands and products serve more than their functional meaning (Levy, 1959). Consumers buy products also for their symbolic meaning which become means to express themselves rather than functional purposes.

Self-congruity is a psychological term which is defined as consumers' comparing their perception of a brand with their own self perceptions on actual, ideal, and social-self layers (Sirgy, 2018). From a theoretical stance, the degree of congruence between consumers' self-concept and the product-user image as defined by mental assessment has an impact on consumer behavior (Sirgy, 1986). According to this rationale, individuals experience considerably high levels of genuine self-congruity when brand image and/or product-user image is in harmony with consumers' self-image, which is closely related to "the need for self-esteem and self-consistency" (Sirgy, 2018). Furthermore, self-concept has a culminating impact on consumers' behaviors because it plays central role in preserving and improving his/her sense of self (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967).

The connection with a brand can be so strong that consumers can associate themselves with a brand on a high level of congruence with their actual or ideal selves. Consumers are prone to comparing their self-images to those of archetypal brand users (Sirgy, 1982). Their brand preferences, which mirror their actual or ideal self-images, allow them to express their identities (Aaker, 1999). As a consequence of all, brands are becoming more cognizant of the inextricable association between the consumer's self-concept and the consumption item.

In parallel to the main construct of this research, roots of the word *authenticity* itself bears “self” inside: The term authenticity is derived from the Greek terms “*autos*”, which means "self," and “*hentes*”, which means "doer" (Spiggle et al., 2012), thus, it cannot fall far apart from the self-concept.

Consumer behavior research on self-image congruence is essential since it may help brands position themselves effectively, which eventually lays the groundwork for market segmentation. The area of research in this concept aims at interpreting and explaining main drivers of consumer attitude towards self-brand congruence as well as predicting the direction of this relationship. According to Image Congruence Hypothesis, the greater the similarity between a consumer's self-image and the brand's image, the more favorable their evaluations of that brand would be (Graeff, 1996). Figure 2.8 illustrates the association between image congruence (the relationship between brand image and self-image) and consumer brand evaluations.

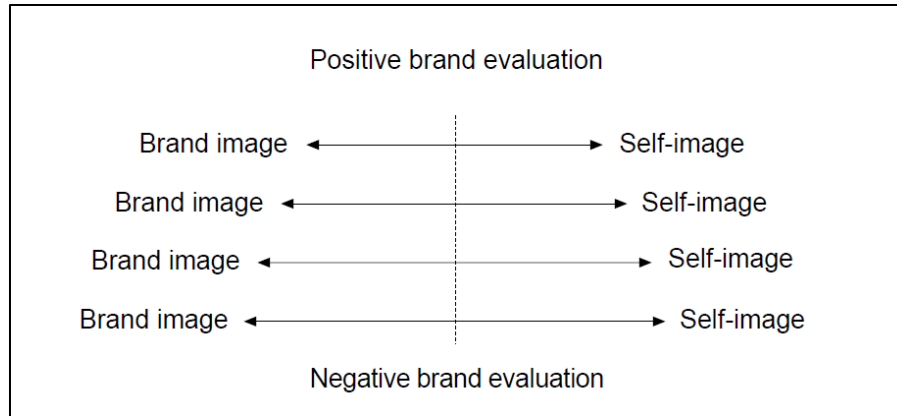


Figure 2. 8 Image Congruence Hypothesis

Source: Graeff, T. R. (1996). Using promotional messages to manage the effects of brand and self- image on brand evaluations. *Journal of consumer marketing*, 13(3), 4-18.

2.6. Consumer Involvement

Consumers develop distinct attachments to products as they symbolize various things to different people. The degree and type of attachments that an individual has may range greatly from those of their family or friends. Consumer behavior scholars are interested in interpreting consumers' diverse attachments, the ways they emerge and perpetuate, and are influenced (O'Cass, 2000). Involvement is a concept which is used to understand and explain consumer behavior.

Studies on consumer involvement concept in marketing literature date back to social psychologists. Sherif & Cantril's (1947) research on the concept where involvement is defined as "the relationship/intimacy between an individual and an object". Their research focuses especially on self (ego) involvement. Ego involvement refers to the importance that a product adds to the self-concept of consumers. From this perspective,

involvement becomes a critical factor which can either harm or enhance consumers' self-concept (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 1999, pg. 109). Considered together with self-image congruence of consumers, Sherif and Cantril's (1947) self (ego) involvement becomes more important for this research since the current approach of involvement is a part of identity project of consumers which is previously mentioned as a key factor in this regard.

The concept of involvement entered the marketing literature with Krugman's (1965) work on the involvement concept which is described as the extent of conscious "bridging experiences," associations, or intimate connections created by the individual in one minute between their own life and the stimuli. This might range from none to several (Krugman, 1965).

Consumer involvement is a multifaceted concept with no single definition or attribute. As a result of a number of antecedents, a range of basic elements of consumer behavior such as "*choice processes, information processing, and ad processing*" varies between products and consumers which are "*sign value, risk importance, risk probability, pleasure, and interest*" (Kapferer & Laurent, 1993). Although involvement has been employed as a moderator to explain consumer behavior in marketing research, researchers have not reached a common consensus on its definition. As a result, scientists working in diverse areas of research have used involvement in different areas of research (Johnson & Eagly, 1989). Following the emergence of involvement concept in the marketing realm, however, motivation seems to be a common factor in various studies (Houston & Rothschild, 1980; Johnson & Eagly, 1989) as the notion of involvement was characterized as a motivational tool in customer behavior and it was utilized to expose

observable human actions (Beharrell & Denison, 1995). Similarly, Houston and Rothschild (1980) define the concept as a state in which consumers are motivated, aroused or interested by the stimulus. Furthermore, another definition of involvement is a motivating condition attained by the connection between an active attitude and one's self-concept (Johnson & Eagly, 1989). According to Zaichkowsky (1986), on the other hand, individuals' interest in a certain thing is characterized as being based on their wants, value judgments, and interests.

Consumer involvement has a range of effects on the consumer's buying behavior as a driving or motivating factor. Consumers' buying processes will thus vary substantially based on their involvement levels. Therefore, consumers' level of involvement determines the extent of their buying decisions as well as their search for information. Depending on their level of involvement with a product or brand, consumers differ in the intricacy of decision-making processes and information search, according to which they may be passive or active towards advertising communication as a result of which they may either restrict or prolong processing of communication (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). The form of consumer involvement consists of many types of involvement (product, purchasing choice, advertising, and consumption) (O'Cass, 2000). In O'Cass's (2000) study, involvement is regarded as a construct that is dependent on the relationship between an individual and a product, and it is concerned with the relative power of a consumer's mental representation in regard to a certain object such as products (Kandemir, 2018). Some research argues that product category involvement results in a more qualified consumer-brand relationship (Kressmann et al., 2006) whereas other research proposes that it has no significant impact on that relationship (Valta, 2013).

Furthermore, it can even become a definitive factor in the self-image congruence and involvement levels of consumers that consumers can readily attach and even explain their interest and love with a specific brand. Therefore, higher product category involvement also proves to result in a higher level of perceived brand relationship (Kressmann et al., 2006).

2.6.1 Antecedents of Consumer Involvement

Involvement occurs with the effect of personal, object or stimulus and situational factors through consumer involvement categories (with advertisements, with products, with purchase decisions) which will have some consequences on these categories (Zaichkowsky, 1986).

The antecedents of consumer involvement proposed by Zaichkowsky (1986) are categorized into three major types: “*personal factors, object or stimulus factors and situational factors*”. The degree of involvement may be impacted by the presence of one or more of these factors along with the possibility of interactions to occur in between the factors.

- **Person Factors:** Personal factors are associated with the characteristics of the individual's such as his/her lifestyle, values, and personality traits.
- **Object or Stimulus Factors:** This aspect is associated with the physical qualities of stimulus such as choice differentiation, communication source (television, radio, internet, newspaper, etc.), and communication content.

As a result, changes in the physical qualities of the stimulus have an influence on the involvement level of consumers. Furthermore, the degree of involvement is anticipated to increase as the available options in the product category or the risk level of in consumers' perceptions with respect to the related product grows.

- ***Situational Factors:*** Situational factors refer to those factors occurring under different occasions, purchases and uses. For instance, social factors such as circle of friends, special occasions such as holidays as well as buying purpose factors such as buying for oneself or for someone else all affect involvement levels of consumers.

2.6.2 Dimensions of Consumer Involvement

Varying definitions of involvement in consumer involvement literature have led to the development of numerous scales for measuring the concept. The most widely used scales are Zaichkowsky's (1986) "*Personal Involvement Inventory*" and Kapferer and Laurent's (1985) "*Consumer Involvement Profiles*".

Involvement occurs as a result of a number of causal or motivating factors on consumer communication and purchase habits, as well as an individual difference variable (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) involvement scale is the most widely used consumer involvement scale in the literature. The researchers evaluate consumer involvement from a multi-dimensional perspective rather than a

unilateral one, therefore, they propose five dimensions to measure the concept which are “*interest, pleasure, sign, risk importance, and probability of error*”, each measuring a different dimension of the construct which may differ based on the consumer behavior. One or a combination of the five dimensions may lead to consumer involvement (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985).

Five dimensions of consumer involvement are:

➤ ***Interest***

It is the personal interest of the consumer towards any product category which he or she attributes importance, sign value or pleasure value. Consumers are interested in channels that have both pleasure and sign value. The proclivity to be exposed to advertising is determined by the pleasure value of the product category (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). *Interest* is an emotion accompanied by curiosity, information seeking as well as exploration (Silvia, 2005). Consumers have a natural motivation to put some effort in examining and gathering information about a product/brand when they are deeply involved with a product category. Therefore, interest becomes the driving force to invoke curiosity in individuals which leads to the will to know more about a certain thing, i.e., the product or brand in the terms of marketing.

➤ ***Pleasure***

Pleasure is the hedonic value that a consumer receives as a result of the consumption behavior. The shifting perception of global values such as

pleasure, excitement, comfort, and self-esteem may very effectively represent the desire for items with brand names, colors, and designs that enhance these crucial values in use and consumption (Kandemir, 2018). Market offerings that promise more than functional value to its consumers guarantee high involvement with the product/brand. In other words, by emphasizing the two involvement requirements of pleasure and symbolic value, marketers may prevent any product from becoming a low involvement product (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985).

➤ ***Sign value***

It is the symbolic value attributed to the product, purchase, or consumption by its consumer (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). In other words, consumers place value on products and brands as they present their self because they bear the strength of self-expression. Therefore, some products may have a more lasting symbolic value than others (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985).

➤ ***Risk importance***

Risk importance is defined as the perceived risk of the potential adverse results of poor product choice (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). It is the consumer's assessment of the anticipated negative consequences of a poor product choice.

➤ ***Probability of error***

The risk probability of making a purchase decision on a poor product is defined as *probability of error* (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). In other words, it is the perception of consumer regarding making a wrong choice in product purchase preferences.

These dimensions are also regarded as antecedents of involvement by the researchers. Consumers who are involved with a product or brand often participate in certain activities such as active search and information processing, longer choice process, and so forth. Besides, they refrain from engaging in similar behaviors when they are not involved (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Consumer involvement, therefore, may be an important denominator in examining and explaining consumer behavior especially on the interest level of consumers. From this stance, the scale developed by Laurent and Kapferer (1985, 1993) was considered appropriate for the objective of the research and the *interest* dimension was used to assess the level of consumer involvement variable within the context of this thesis.

2.7. Attribution Theory As The Groundwork Of Research

The consumers' subjective evaluation of a brand's authenticity is defined as brand authenticity (Napoli et al., 2014). Namely, it is the attribution of consumers toward a brand that makes a brand authentic. If not perceived as authentic by its consumers, then, authenticity is not achieved by the brand. It is a consumer-based phenomenon (Napoli et al., 2014). Therefore, attribution plays a key factor in authenticity journey of brands.

As a strong antecedent of authenticity, the term "attribution theory" is used to explain personal authenticity by studying how people assign reasons to actions and occurrences (Schallehn et al., 2014). Borrowed from psychology, Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958) construes how individuals draw meaningful inferences of other people's or their own behaviors by consistently attributing causal inferences about events or behaviors around themselves in order to determine the causes of things. With a naïve scientist approach, people want to understand why people do what they do. The pioneer of attribution theory, Fritz Heider, postulated two distinct types of attributions: 1) Internal Attribution: Individuals do what they do due to their intrinsic qualities such as their character, personality, etc., which is also termed as "*dispositional attitude*" 2) External Attribution: Individuals do what they do due to situations they are in, which is also termed as "*situational attitude*". According to Heider's theory of attribution, individuals are inclined to make causal inferences from behavior not only for fulfilling their need for clarity but for also predicting future

behavior as prediction is a key survival skill. In other words, accurate attributions help us predict our behavior as well as other individuals' behaviors around us.

Several further attribution theories have been formed based on Heider's main theory of attribution, among which Kelley's and Weiner's models have been extensively embraced in academic literature (Schmitt, 2015). Harold H. Kelley has developed his theory based on Heider's theory through the covariance principle: "*an effect is attributed to the one of its possible causes with which, over time, it covaries*" (Kelley, 1973:108)) proposing that we can ascribe a person's behavior that is given as a response to a given stimulus at a certain time to three possible reasons: the individual, the stimulus and/or the conditions of the moment (Schmitt, 2015). These causes are qualified by three factors: *consistency* (repeated behavior towards a similar stimulus at different times), *consensus* (other people's similar behavioral response towards a similar stimulus), and *distinctiveness* (similar behavioral response towards a different stimulus), with which one can attribute the drivers of an individual's behavior either to intrinsic or extrinsic factors. In this instance, a consumer is more likely to view the brand as authentic as the brand promise is perceived to be drawn from the brand's core. According to Kelley's attribution theory, consumers' perceptions of a brand's antecedents—namely, its *uniqueness*, *consistency*, and *continuity*—which all need to be in harmony with the behaviors of the brand—determine how authentic the brand is viewed by customers. As a result of brand's synchronic behavior with its core, consumers perceive the brand as authentic (Schallehn et al., 2014).

Weiner et al.'s attribution theory (Frieze & Weiner, 1971; Weiner et al., 1974), on the other hand, focuses on the factors influencing attributions of success or failure. In other words, Weiner's model focuses on explaining the causes of individual's own behavior rather than others as it deals with how individuals explain success or failure in terms of fulfilling their goals. In order to determine the causes of success or failure, Weiner identifies two dimensions, *locus of control* and *stability*. The first dimension explains the origin of a cause whether it is an internal or an external cause. In the case of an internal cause, the individual experiences a "value" or "pride" when the goal is achieved, therefore, "*attribution to internal causes*" lead to higher values in individuals (Schmitt, 2015). *Stability*, on the other hand, refers to the continuity of causes. Stable causes refer to individual's own capabilities whereas instable causes refer to "effort" and "luck". Therefore, it is more probable to expect similar results from the stable causes in success/failure whereas individuals may expect different results when instable causes are concerned (Schmitt, 2015).

Having its roots in social psychology, attribution theory has been used extensively in management research, moving beyond the confines of social psychology. From marketing point of view, it has been a commonly applied theory for understanding consumer behavior, sales force management, and advertising especially since 1970s (Schmitt, 2015).

The most important inference of the theory is that attribution determines the future behavior of individuals (Schmitt, 2015). If individuals attribute a success or failure to an internal cause, they will be motivated to try again in case of a failure or continue to keep the success because they believe success or failure depend on their own actions rather than extrinsic factors.

There are several main differences between Kelley's and Weiner's attribution theories. Firstly, Kelley's theory focuses on individuals' attributing causes on others behavior. In other words, people attribute causes to other individuals' behavior in order to interpret the causes of their actions. In Weiner's theory, however, individuals attribute causes to their own behavior in order to determine the factors influencing their success or failure. Secondly and most importantly, Kelley's theory concentrates on the process of attribution whereas Weiner's theory concentrates on consequences of attribution (Schmitt, 2015).

In sum, Attribution Theory proposes that individuals are inclined to determine others' behavior and their own in an inferential way based on their judgments. In terms of authenticity cues for brands, the same principle applies when consumers connect their inner values with that of authentic brand's if they can attribute authenticity cues to a specific brand. Therefore, if the efforts of brands to create authenticity are perceived by its consumers, it will be easier for people to establish a connection between their inner values and the brand, which will result in rationalization of the authentic brand attribution (Dağ, 2020).

PART THREE

3 HYPOTHESES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Research Hypotheses

The present research proposes below stated hypotheses grounded on the extant literature review with an effort to fill a void in the brand authenticity literature, thus contributing to the body of knowledge within the marketing discipline.

Trust is a key component of our age in terms of all kinds of relationship. However, trust gains even a more strategic importance in creating brand loyalty among consumers (Morhart et al., 2015; Akbar & Wyemer, 2017). Brand trust resonates with authentic brand characteristics as in both cases, brands show their motives through upstanding organizational values and capacity to fulfill what they promise to achieve for their consumers (Morhart et al., 2014; Napoli et al., 2014); Morhart et al., 2015). Being a strong determinant of brand trust and loyalty, brand authenticity plays a crucial role as it positively affects brand trust and brand loyalty (Portal et al., 2019) Furthermore, brand authenticity has also been proven to have positive influence on brand equity through authentic campaigns of brand activists (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Brand activists, in this sense, work on designing both present and future campaigns in authentic nature in order to contribute to brand equity.

Brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand equity are just a few indicators of the proven benefits of brand authenticity; it greatly contributes to a positive word of mouth, brand

attachment and positive brand attitude, as well (Morhart et al., 2014). What is more, authenticity is construed as a key element of brand image due to the rise in consumer interest in brands with a brand image that incorporates aspects of authenticity and legacy (Ballantyne et al., 2006). According to the Attribution Theory, consumers' perceptions of a brand's antecedents, namely, *uniqueness*, *consistency*, and *continuity* which bear a resemblance to some core antecedents of brand authenticity such as *originality* and *continuity*, all need to be in sync with the behaviors of the brand. This harmony eventually determines a brand's the level of authenticity achieved by its consumers. Consumers seek for cues in order to attribute authentic qualities to brands. These attributions often explain consumer behaviors.

Given the present significance of brand authenticity to consumers, a great number of global brands are engaging more and more in authentic brand communication (Riefler, 2020). According to the Attribution Theory, individuals are prone to inferentially determining others', and their own conduct based on their judgements. The theory explains how people assign reasons to actions and occurrences (Schallehn et al., 2014) as well as how they draw meaningful inferences about other people's or their own behaviors by consistently attributing causal inferences about events or behaviors surrounding them in order to determine the causes of things. Under the condition that brands' attempts to build authenticity are perceived positively by consumers and if consumers connect their inner values with those of authentic brands, it will be easier for individuals to form an attachment between themselves and the brand, leading to a rationalization of authentic brand attribution (Dağ, 2020). Consumers who believe that a particular brand represents their actual or social identities are more inclined to advocate it (Wallace et al., 2012).

Furthermore, this congruence results in affection of consumers towards a specific brand which determines the level of their commitment and their advocacy behavior towards a brand (Bhati & Verma, 2020). When consumers' expectations are realized, they are more inclined to choose a brand because satisfied customers remain in contact with one another and spread favorable brand recommendations. It is anticipated that brands can leverage WOM which is an outcome of brand advocacy, to increase customer reach and sales without having to incur any additional costs for reaching this goal (Yildiz & Ülker-Demirel, 2017).

Scrutinizing the brand authenticity literature, the number of empirical studies done regarding the relationship of brand authenticity with brand advocacy as main constructs started to be researched in the recent years. The positive influence of brand authenticity on brand advocacy is empirically proven in the recent studies (Dağ Başar, 2020) studying on the impact of brand authenticity on brand advocacy as main constructs. Although each of these constructs could be the predictor of one another interchangeably (i.e., brand advocacy could predict brand authenticity and vice versa), the present research concentrates more on the direction of how strongly brand authenticity predicts brand advocacy. According to the Attribution Theory, individuals experience a “value” or “pride” in the case of an internal cause attributed to an instance and when the goal is achieved, therefore, “*attribution to internal causes*” lead to higher values in individuals (Schmitt, 2015). Thus, brand advocacy can only occur if consumers internalize the brand, believe in the “value” or “pride” they feel as a result of the experience with a brand.

Brand advocacy takes place as one of the key consequences of high levels of customer-brand identification which occurs socially and/or physically on consumer

behaviors (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). In other words, consumers can use the power of word-of-mouth marketing on a social level whereas they can even go as far as getting tattoos on their bodies in terms of high levels of advocacy that goes beyond buying and using the brand's merchandise on a physical level.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H1: Brand authenticity positively predicts brand advocacy.

Brand authenticity dimensions (i.e., “*continuity, credibility, symbolism, integrity*”) can influence how and with which motives consumers experience a specific brand as they do on its four dimensions (i.e., “*sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioral*”). Given that authenticity is a positively connoted term, one can necessarily hypothesize that authentic brands offer their consumers a positive experience through “sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral” way.

Recent research on the influence of brand experience on brand authenticity shows that brand authenticity is positively influenced by “intellectual, behavioral, affective, and sensory” experiences of consumers with a brand, which, as a result, has significant positive effects on brand love. Consequently, using brand authenticity as a key positioning element and applying a variety of experiential marketing methods result in creating consumers that love the brand (Safeer et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is proven that significant consistency in brand experience dimensions fosters brand authenticity, since brand authenticity is a critical outcome of brand experience, driving the brand to profitability and long-term success (Robbins et al., 2009). The effects of “intellectual,

behavioral, affective, and sensory” experiences are associated with the consumer according to the attribution theory (Safeer et al., 2020).

Nowadays, the search for authenticity and authentic experiences gained a paramount importance. Consumers seek authenticity everywhere in their lives, including experiences (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Numerous researchers investigate what authentic brand offers their consumers who desire to enhance their brand experiences through authenticity (Safeer et al., 2020). Thus, brand authenticity has been revealed to be one of the most important aspects of the brand experience that has a positive influence on consumer attitudes (Safeer et al., 2020). Furthermore, strong brand interactions and brand authenticity inspire customers to form an emotional attachment to and admiration for a brand (Raza et al., 2021).

Authentic perceptions of consumers about a product and/or brand is closely related to consumer’s experience with a specific product and/or brand. For instance, iconic authenticity is based on a consumer's sensory experience whereas indexical authenticity refers to the real product (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Consequently, brands that are perceived as authentic are expected to predict a positive brand experience. Experience becomes an important aspect in consumers' perception of a brand's authenticity. As experiential products are sensory in nature, experiencing the brand mediates the impacts of brand authenticity (Coary, 2013).

Whenever experiences come into focus, questions of authenticity follow as encountered in the cases of Walt Disney and Starbucks (Gilmore & Pine, 2009). The experiences consumers desire to have with a brand and/or market offerings are closely

related to how unique, real or authentic they are perceived by the consumers. In other words, authentic experiences are formed when a brand consistently and consciously achieves or exceeds its brand promise in a way that aligns with customer perceptions, because “*Brands are about experiences*” (Robbins et al., 2009:3). Furthermore, brand meaning in consumers’ minds are created as a result of the relationship between their self-concept and their experience with a specific brand (Robbins et al., 2009).

According to the Attribution Theory, attribution determines the future behavior of individuals (Schmitt, 2015). Individuals are inclined to make causal inferences from the situations, as well. Therefore, experiential situations may become strong predictors of consumers’ future behavior and attitude toward a specific brand.



Figure 3. 1 *The Three Key Elements of the Brand Experience*

Source: Robbins, D., Colligan, K., & Hall, J. (2009). Brand authenticity: a new way forward in customer experience management. *MI, Second To None*, 1-16.

As clearly indicated in Figure 3.1, brand authenticity is intricately related to consumers' experiences which are formed and implemented by the brand as well as consumer perceptions (Robbins, Colligan & Hall, 2009). It is important to note that brand authenticity is a co-creation process during which the interaction between what is possible for brands to deliver and what consumers' needs/desires are considered.

In the Experience Economy today, authenticity has emerged as the top concern that shapes individuals' purchasing decisions since they seek out places and activities that engage them in a naturally intimate and memorable way (Gilmore & Pine, 2009). In other words, consumers' authentic perception of brands may enhance their experience with a specific brand which may offer them the intimate and memorable experiences they seek.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is established:

H2: Brand authenticity positively predicts brand experience.

We have long been in an era of experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) where consumers undeniably want experiences, and an increasing number of businesses are responding to this consumer need by deliberately building experiences and advertising them. It is only then the differentiation takes place when the offerings are presented as strong experience vessels to consumers unlike the old times when goods and services were the main offerings to gain competitive advantage. After all, experiences are memorable whereas goods are tangible, services are intangible, and commodities are

fungible (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). In other words, the most valuable economic offerings in the experience economy are no longer goods or services alone, but rather entertaining and informative experiences designed for consumers.

Although in the literature, brand advocacy is referred to as word-of-mouth promotion of the brand, the term advocacy more commonly relates to the consumers' internalizing the brand due to their brand experience, and hence the desire to defend the brand to change others' negative perceptions of the brand, even when other consumers disparage the brand (Bozkurt, 2021).

The brand advocacy pyramid is one prism through which we can clearly evaluate the importance of brand experience that plays a key role in creating brand advocates. According to Rusticus (2007), every consumer segmentation can be done based on the level of brand experience satisfaction of consumers. Brand advocate consumers constitute the top of the pyramid whereas the brand adopters that are adequately satisfied with the brand experience form the base of the pyramid, where majority of the customer base will be found. However, the consumers that are at the center of the pyramid are brand adorers that love and are satisfied with the brand who show emotional attachment and brand loyalty behavior. Constituting the top of the pyramid, brand advocates are keen to disseminate positive word-of-mouth about the brand as a result of their high levels of satisfaction with their experience with a particular brand.

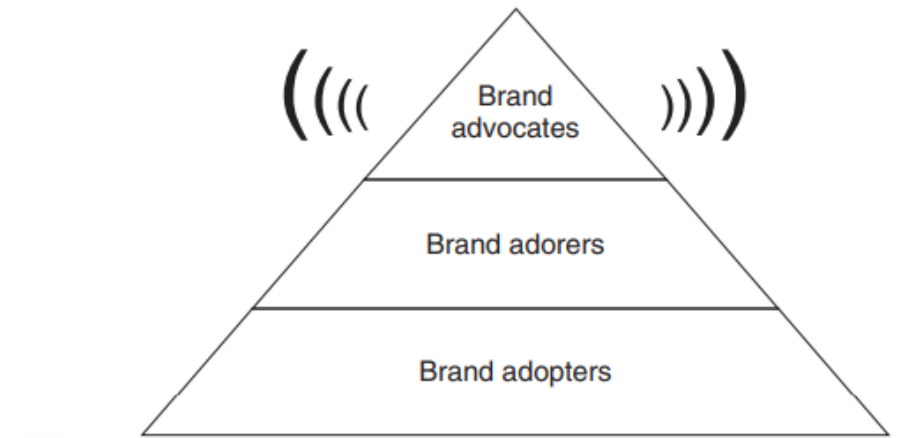


Figure 3. 2 *Brand Advocacy Pyramid*

Source: Rusticus, S. (2007). Creating brand advocates. In *Connected marketing* (pp. 47-58). Routledge.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3: Brand experience positively predicts brand advocacy.

Experience is an important denominator in our experience-driven era where consumers are seeking after ever-extraordinary experiences out of their lives, hence leading to a search for more from a consumer-centric viewpoint. Consumers who have favorable, emotionally charged memories of previous experiences with a particular brand are considered to have memorable brand experiences. As a result, consumers more strongly identify with a brand along with memorable brand encounters they have, which results in higher levels of brand advocacy (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Brand experience is researched for its mediating impact on the relationship between consumer-brand identification (CBI), and brand loyalty and brand advocacy (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).

As previously stated, attribution determines the future behavior of individuals based on the Attribution Theory (Schmitt, 2015). If individuals attribute a success or failure to an internal cause, they will be motivated to try again in case of a failure or continue to keep the success because they believe success or failure depend on their own actions rather than extrinsic factors. The parallel rationale explains the motivation of consumers for advocating a brand. At this junction, experiences with a brand play a crucial role in this direction.

Authentically perceived brands lead to experiencing brand offerings in a positive way, which eventually creates brand advocate consumers.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand experience mediates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy.

Brands have become an indispensable element of consumers' everyday lives over time, especially with their key role in defining, reflecting self, and creating their identities (Belk, 1988; Richins, 1994; Escalas, 2004) as well as fulfilling self-expressing purposes (Aaker, 1999). Therefore, products hold more than a utilitarian meaning for consumers: They serve for fulfilling symbolic and experiential objectives, as well (Park et al., 1986). According to Morhart et al. (2014), brands that are perceived as authentic have a “*symbolic quality*” on consumers with which they can achieve their identity project by identifying “*who they are or who they are not.*” Symbolic quality, therefore, is directly

related to a consumer's search for meaning that links their self with a brand which they can identify with. More importantly, the findings of Morhart et al. (2014)'s research suggest that PBA increases the probability that consumers will choose a brand by encouraging favorable word-of-mouth marketing and an emotional attachment to the brand.

Also termed as self-brand connection (Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005), customer-brand identification (CBI) occurs when consumers can readily associate themselves with an authentic brand under the condition that there is a brand-self congruency achieved. High levels of brand authenticity may serve as a reminder to customers of their own good traits, strengthening the bond between them and the brand (Coary, 2013). Consumers that associate themselves with a particular brand are more prone to maintain a sustainable, long-lasting preference for the products of the identified brand (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Another level that has recently been investigated is the relation between brand authenticity and brand attitude or loyalty via self-brand connection (Jung Park, 2017). Authenticity dimensions of brands can be utilized to create brand loyalty towards the brands through self-brand connection construct thus bringing success to authentic brands including positive brand attitude and customer loyalty.

Social categorizations not only function as cognitive tools to classify the social environments, but they also help individuals systematize their surroundings according to their "*self-reference*" (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), thus building and maintaining their place in society at large. Social identity is derived from these systematical reasonings, and it

contains self-image of the individual within the social group that he or she belongs to. At its core, individuals are prone to create their self-esteem through a positive self-concept in order to feel higher levels of self-esteem. Therefore, *symbolic quality* that consumers achieve by means of an authentic brand supports building and maintaining their self-esteem as well as contributing to their actual self-image congruence.

Consumers' possessions initially become a part of their well-being resulting in emotional attachment (Belk, 1988), which eventually results in adding a greater meaning to them to the extent that possessions become a part of individuals' personality, namely extending their self-images. In other words, the brand and product become a part of consumers' beings (Doss, 2010). The findings of Fournier (1998), who revealed that consumers believed that particular brands were imprinted onto them or vice versa, provided more evidence for this notion.

Furthermore, the concept of identification with possessions takes on a broader dimension with the fact that brand authenticity is not limited to customers' identity project only, but it is also an integral part of a brand identity project, as well. The drivers of brand authenticity may also serve to establish and maintain a brand aura (Alexander, 2009).

Consumers identify themselves with a brand if they find a meaning in brand behaviors. Brands are proven to be strong resources of meaning that are used purposefully in the production and reproduction of concepts and knowing the larger context of consumers' life experiences is critical for associating the brands with which such connections are likely to emerge (Fournier, 1998). People have a natural inclination

to be motivated to integrate things into their self-concept on the grounds of the self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986). Depending on the authenticity level of a brand, nonetheless, one may or may not integrate that brand into their identity (Morhart et al., 2014). From a different standpoint, the triangle between consumption, authenticity and the self are reinforced by consumers' search for authenticity to regulate their selves in times of inauthenticity (Lasaleta & Loveland, 2019) when individuals tend to buy new things that would connect or re-connect them to their true selves from the past so that they feel more authentic as they feel connected to their roots.

“Individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a real world and with their real selves.” when they have an authentic experience (Handler & Saxton, 1988:243). Besides, authenticity, from an existentialist stance, arises from an object's potential to function as a basis of identity for individuals (Morhart et al., 2014). According to the Attribution Theory, individuals are inclined to determine others' behavior and their own in an inferential way based on their judgments. In terms of authenticity cues for brands, the same principle applies when consumers connect their inner values with that of authentic brand's if they can attribute authenticity cues to a specific brand. Extensive research contributing to brand authenticity literature explored the self-concept from self-brand connection and self-brand congruity perspectives, and they confirm a positive influence of brand authenticity on the self-concept of consumers (Leigh et al., 2006; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Spiggle et al., 2012; Beverland, 2016; Akbar & Wyemer, 2016; Bruhn et al., 2017; Oh et al., 2019).

The moderating effect of self-congruence is confirmed by recent brand authenticity studies (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022) for influencing the relation between

perceived brand authenticity and consumer brand engagement, resulting in consumers being emotionally connected to a brand.

All in all, it can be argued that consumers who are able to go through an authentic experience with a brand can necessarily attach a congruency with their real self and the authentic brand, which eventually gives rise to brand advocacy.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H5: Actual Self-Image Congruence strengthens the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy.

When consumers are exposed to advertising communication, they may be passive or active as well as they may restrict or expand their processing of advertising message, depending on their level of engagement with the product, brand, or marketing stimuli. Therefore, consumer involvement becomes a critical factor in understanding consumer behavior towards a product, and necessarily towards a brand. As a driving or motivating element, involvement has a variety of implications on the consumer's purchasing behavior. The purchase processes of consumers, therefore, will differ greatly depending on their engagement levels. As a consequence, the extent of consumers' purchasing decisions and information-seeking activities are determined by their level of involvement. The consumer's brand self-connection is a prerequisite for creating brand authenticity. Since authentic products require self-brand connection and marketers should focus their efforts on creating and maintaining this relationship. Depending on their level of connection with a product or brand, consumers' decision-making processes and

information needs vary, and as a result, they may be passive or active towards advertising communication, which they may either restrict or extend processing of communication (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). As previously stated, consumer involvement refers to a variety of consumer involvement types such as product, purchase decision, advertisement, and consumption (O'Cass, 2000).

Early research on brand authenticity (Beverland, 2006) suggests that future research should concentrate on how consumers' evaluations of authenticity vary as they become either more or less involved in a product category.

Consumers' word-of-mouth marketing of the identified-with brand is one of the primary outcomes of identification of consumers with brands (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Consumers' promoting of a brand or brand advocacy can occur both on social level (word-of-mouth and/or advocating the brand under negative word-of-mouth situations) and physical level (purchasing products with the brand's logo) (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012)

Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H6: Consumer Involvement strengthens the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy.

Extensive research carried out in the field of branding focusing on the impact of product category on consumers' motives has proven that product category plays a crucial role in this journey. Research on the effect product category on consumer-brand relationships greatly vary (Fetscherin et al., 2014). On the other hand, there is still some

concern regarding measuring the effect of product category since it is unpredictable what potential similarities and differences may exist between product categories (Fetscherin et al., 2014).

Most people place a great emphasis on identifying themselves (i.e., “self-definition”) and having a positive idea about who they are. As a result, the efforts made to achieve these goals are likely to be both meaningful and effective (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). In order for a self-identification to occur, the product category plays an important role since it should be among those categories that consumers can fulfill their self-definitional needs. Consequently, consumers find product categories to be more appealing when they associate product categories with important higher-order goals like value creation (Bloch & Richins, 1983). It is empirically proven that high amount self-image congruence with a brand and/or product category positively predicts brand loyalty through product involvement and consumer brand relationship (Kressmann et al., 2006).

The product category, therefore, is essential in the consumer-brand relationship in the light of the existing literature and it may have a significant role in the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy where consumers are likely to have more tendency to advocate those brands that they perceive as authentic when it comes to certain product categories that they can associate their self-image with.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Product category influences all relationships between consumers and brands.

3.2. Research Model

There are six variables in the model proposed: These variables are (1) Brand Authenticity, (2) Brand Advocacy, (3) Brand Experience, (4) Actual Self-Image Congruence, (5) Consumer Involvement, and (6) Product Category.

In the proposed research model, brand authenticity is considered as the independent variable, brand advocacy as the dependent variable, brand experience as the mediating variable, consumer involvement and actual self-image congruence are considered as moderating variables, and finally, product category as categorical variable.

As a result of extensive literature research, the proposed model of the current research studying the relationships between the variables in the proposed research model and testing the relevant relationships in the research are formed as follows:

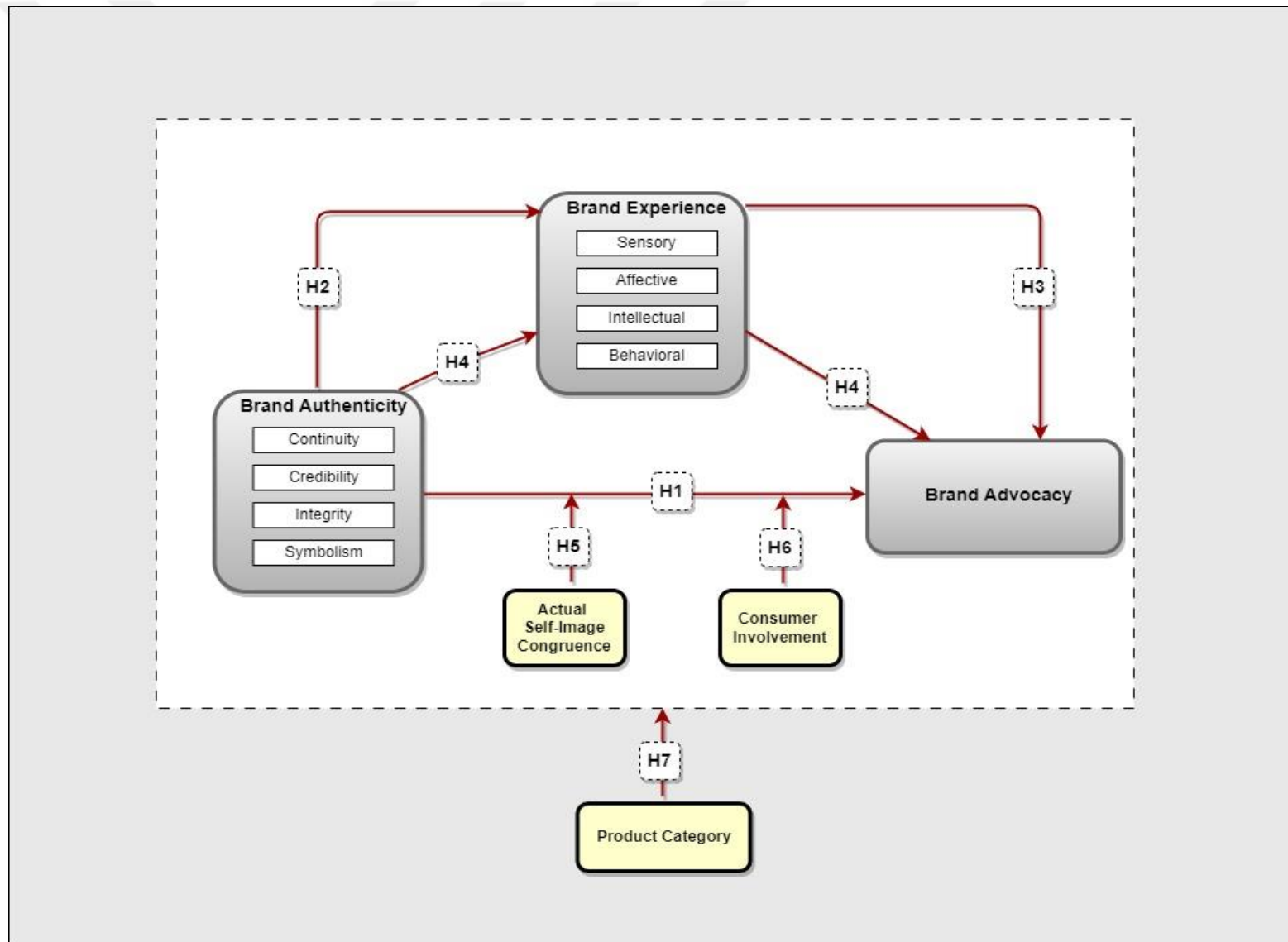


Figure 3. 3 *Proposed Research Model*

PART FOUR

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Data Collection Method

The data collection process for both pilot studies as well as the main study were prepared and conducted on a self-administered online survey platform *SurveyMonkey*. The reasons why *SurveyMonkey* platform was preferred for the survey were: a) the user-friendly design of the tool is thought to encourage the respondents for completion of the survey b) several output options of the data collected.

The respondents are only sought from Turkey and the participation to the survey was voluntary. *SurveyMonkey* platform secures and safeguards the respondents' anonymity. For *SurveyMonkey* surveys, researchers normally obtain only an IP address for each respondent; thus, the researcher of this study had no personal information about the respondents.

Two pilot studies were completed prior to the main study was carried out. The first pilot study was conducted in order to identify two brands from various product categories that consumers perceive to be the most authentic. The second pilot study was conducted in order to test the final survey design on the two pre-identified brands (i.e., *Apple* and *Mercedes*) that were selected as a result of the first pilot study. Details of the pilot studies are given in Table 4.2.

The measurement items used for the data collection were selected among those scales the validity and reliability of which were commonly accepted and greatly used in the various previous academic studies.

The questionnaire form used in the second pilot study and main study consists of three groups of question sets. In the first group, the consumers participating in the research were asked to indicate whether they used or had ever used the specific brand which were identified within the scope of the first pilot study, and they were asked to assess the statements given only for that specific brand (*i.e.*, Apple or Mercedes). In the second group of question sets in the questionnaire, the consumers were required to reply to the questions that measured the variables of brand authenticity, brand experience, brand advocacy, consumer involvement and actual self-image congruence. In the third group of question sets, the participants' demographic characteristics were determined which included age, gender, marital status, education level and income level.

There were two separate surveys designed for each brand (*i.e.*, *Apple* and *Mercedes*) and the respondents may or may not have responded both and/or one of the surveys. In order to eliminate the respondent fatigue, the respondents were sent two separate surveys and were expected to answer either or both of the surveys.

4.2. Data Collection Tools

The main construct of the proposed model of research was tested based on Morhart et.al.'s (2014) Brand Authenticity scale after meticulously studying and revisiting the existing brand authenticity scales. It was chosen primarily because the aforementioned scale was assumed be the best fit into this research as its objective is to measure the

influence of Brand Authenticity on Brand Advocacy through one of its mediators Actual Self Image Congruence with which *Symbolism* dimension of Morhart et al.'s (2014) Brand Authenticity scale could have a meaningful relationship; hence this could explain the relationship on a more explanatory level within the proposed research model.

Table 4. 1 *The Validated Brand Authenticity Scales in The Literature with Citations*

Researchers	Year	Brand Authenticity Dimensions	Total Citations (as of 2022)
Bruhn et al.	2012	“continuity, originality, reliability, naturalness”	n=348
Napoli et al.	2014	“quality commitment, sincerity, heritage”	n=701
Schallehn, Burmann & Riley	2014	“consistency, individuality, continuity”	n=288
Morhart et al.	2014	“credibility, integrity, symbolism, continuity”	n=721
Akbar & Wymer	2016	“originality; genuineness”	n=89
Tran & Keng	2018	“virtue, connection, realism, aesthetics, control, originality”	n=31

*Table is designed by the researcher **Citations source: Google Scholar (12/12/2022)

Morhart et al.'s (2014) Brand Authenticity Scale is considered to be appropriate to be utilized for this research for the reasons: 1) It is the most frequently used scale for measuring brand authenticity concept with the highest number of citations (721), and 2) The *symbolism* dimension of the scale is considered to have a significant effect within the framework of current research with self-image congruence being a variable in the research model.

All items used in the survey and their corresponding academic sources are shown in Table 4.2. The final version of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix C and Appendix D.

Table 4. 2 Items Utilized in The Survey

Construct	Academic Source	Abbreviation	Scale Item
Brand Authenticity_Continuity	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Con1	"A brand with a history"
Brand Authenticity_Continuity	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Con2	"A timeless brand"
Brand Authenticity_Continuity	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Con3	"A brand that survives time"
Brand Authenticity_Continuity	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Con4	"A brand that survives trends"
Brand Authenticity_Credibility	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Cre1	"A brand that will not betray you"
Brand Authenticity_Credibility	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Cre2	"A brand that accomplishes its value promise"
Brand Authenticity_Credibility	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Cre3	"An honest brand"
Brand Authenticity_Integrity	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Int1	"A brand that gives back to its consumers"
Brand Authenticity_Integrity	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Int2	"A brand with moral principles"
Brand Authenticity_Integrity	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Int3	"A brand true to a set of moral values"
Brand Authenticity_Integrity	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Int4	"A brand that cares about its consumers"
Brand Authenticity_Symbolism	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Sym1	"A brand that adds meaning to people's lives"
Brand Authenticity_Symbolism	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Sym2	"A brand that reflects important values people care about"
Brand Authenticity_Symbolism	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Sym3	"A brand that connects people with their real selves"
Brand Authenticity_Symbolism	Morhart <i>et al.</i> (2014)	BA_Sym4	"A brand that connects people with what is really important"
Brand Advocacy	Stokburger-Sauer <i>et al.</i> (2012)	BADV1	"I like recommending brand X to other consumers."
Brand Advocacy	Stokburger-Sauer <i>et al.</i> (2012)	BADV2	"I love to talk about the good points of brand X to people I know."
Brand Advocacy	Stokburger-Sauer <i>et al.</i> (2012)	BADV3	"I have managed to convince other people to buy brand X."

Brand Experience_ Sensory	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Sen1	"This brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses."
Brand Experience_ Sensory	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Sen2	"I find this brand interesting in a sensory way."
Brand Experience_ Sensory	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Sen3	"This brand does not appeal to my senses."
Brand Experience_ Affective	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Aff1	"This brand induces feelings and sentiments."
Brand Experience_ Affective	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Aff2	"This brand is an emotional brand."
Brand Experience_ Affective	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Aff3	"I do not have strong emotions for this brand."
Brand Experience_ Intellectual	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Intel1	"I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand."
Brand Experience_ Intellectual	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Intel2	"This brand stimulates my curiosity and problem solving."
Brand Experience_ Intellectual	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Intel3	"This brand does not make me think."
Brand Experience_ Behavioral	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Beh1	"I engage in physical actions and behaviors when I use this brand."
Brand Experience_ Behavioral	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Beh2	"This brand results in bodily experiences."
Brand Experience_ Behavioral	Brakus <i>et al.</i> (2009)	BE_Beh3	"This brand is not action oriented."
Actual Self-Image Congruence	Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997)	ASIC1	"Using this brand is consistent with how I see myself."
Actual Self-Image Congruence	Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997)	ASIC2	"Using this brand most of the time reflects who I am."
Actual Self-Image Congruence	Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997)	ASIC3	"People similar to me use this brand most of the time."
Consumer Involvement	Laurent & Kapferer (1985)	CI1	"What ____ I buy is extremely important to me."
Consumer Involvement	Laurent & Kapferer (1985)	CI2	"I'm really very interested in ____"
Consumer Involvement	Laurent & Kapferer (1985)	CI3	"I couldn't care less about..."

The questionnaire of the study was formed in accordance with the objectives of this research after meticulously scrutinizing the relevant literature. Within the framework of the research, the extant literature was studied and the various other scales for the related variables were investigated and evaluated. As a result of the extensive preparation process, the questionnaire was formed and questioned whether the items included in the scale were compatible with the purpose of the study. Furthermore, the items were also evaluated by the valuable academicians and the jury members of the thesis monitoring board during the thesis monitoring sessions.

In the questionnaire, brand authenticity was tested with 15 items, brand advocacy with 3 items, brand experience with 12 items, actual self-image congruence with 3 items, and finally consumer involvement with 3 items. A total of 36 items were included for testing the research hypotheses in the first section of the questionnaire. All the items for these scales were graded with the 5-point Likert type (Strongly Disagree = 1, Strongly Agree = 5). In the second part of the questionnaire, there are demographic questions included in the survey in order to determine the demographic characteristics of participants as well as obtaining descriptive information about the participants of the research.

The original language of the scales was in English. The translated versions of these scales that were used in various academic papers and theses which were assumed to have proven reliability/validity scores were analyzed, however, they were not used as they were proposed. Each item and its translation were evaluated comprehensively in order to verify the comprehensiveness of the sentence in the target language speakers that was Turkish. For the sake of achieving a high level of Turkish language adaptation of the

original scales, a pretest was done and the necessary adjustments in the translations were made for a more accurate translation. Meanwhile, the author of the current thesis is also a certified English translator which has greatly contributed to the scale formation and adaptation process.

The translation process of the items in the questionnaire is shown in below table which demonstrates the details of the changes made during each step:



Table 4. 3 *Translation Steps of Scale Items Utilized in The Survey*

BRAND AUTHENTICITY DIMENSIONS	Author's Translation for Pretest 2	Adjusted Translation for the Main Study
CONTINUITY	Geçmiş olan bir markadır.	SAME
CONTINUITY	Belirli bir zamana ait olmayan, sonsuz bir markadır.	SAME
CONTINUITY	Zamana karşı hayatta kalabilen bir markadır	Zamana karşı ayakta kalabilen bir markadır
CONTINUITY	Trendlere başarıyla uyum sağlayarak hayatta kalabilen bir markadır.	Yeni trendlere başarıyla uyum sağlayarak ayakta kalabilen bir markadır.
CREDIBILITY	Tüketicisini hayal kırıklığına uğratmayacak, tüketicisine ihanet etmeyecek bir markadır.	SAME
CREDIBILITY	Değerlerine ilişkin vaatlerini başarıyla yerine getirir.	Değerlerine ilişkin vaatlerini başarıyla yerine getiren bir markadır.
CREDIBILITY	Dürüst bir markadır.	SAME
INTEGRITY	Tüketicilerine hak ettikleri karşılığı veren bir markadır.	Tüketicisine hak ettiğini veren bir markadır.
INTEGRITY	Ahlaki prensipleri olan bir markadır.	SAME
INTEGRITY	Bir takım ahlaki değerlere sadık kalan bir markadır.	Bir dizi ahlaki değere sadık kalan bir markadır.
INTEGRITY	Tüketicilerine özen gösteren bir markadır.	Tüketicisine değer veren bir markadır.
SYMBOLISM	İnsanların hayatlarına anlam katan bir markadır.	SAME
SYMBOLISM	İnsanların özen gösterdiği önemli değerleri yansıtan bir markadır.	İnsanların önemsendiği değerleri yansıtan bir markadır.
SYMBOLISM	İnsanları gerçek benliklerine bağlayan bir markadır.	İnsanları gerçek benlikleriyle buluşturan bir markadır.
SYMBOLISM	İnsanları gerçekte önemli olan şeylere bağlayan bir markadır.	SAME
SELF-IMAGE CONGRUENCE DIMENSIONS	Author's Translation for Pretest 2	Adjusted Translation for the Main Study
N/A	Bu markayı kullanmak benim kendimi nasıl gördüğümle uyum içindedir.	Bu markayı kullanmak, kendimi nasıl gördüğümle tutarlıdır.
N/A	Bu markayı kullanmak çoğu zaman beni yansıtır.	Bu markayı kullanmak çoğu zaman beni olduğum gibi yansıtıyor.
N/A	Benim gibi insanlar genellikle bu markayı kullanır.	Benim gibi insanlar çoğu zaman bu markayı kullanıyor.

BRAND EXPERIENCE DIMENSIONS	Author's Translation for Pretest 2	Adjusted Translation for the Main Study
SENSORY	Bu marka tüm duyularım (görsel, işitsel, tat, koku, dokunma) üzerinde güçlü bir izlenim (etki) bırakır.	Bu marka tüm duyularım üzerinde (<i>görsel, işitsel, tat, koku, dokunma</i>) güçlü bir izlenim (etki) bırakıyor.
SENSORY	Bu markayı ilgi çekici buluyorum, beğeniyorum.	SAME
SENSORY	Bu marka duyularıma (görsel, işitsel, tat, koku, dokunma) hitap eder.	Bu marka tüm duyularıma (görsel, işitsel, tat, koku, dokunma) hitap ediyor.
AFFECTIVE	Bu marka duygularımı harekete geçirir.	Bu marka duygularımı harekete geçiriyor.
AFFECTIVE	Bu marka duygusal bir markadır.	SAME
AFFECTIVE	Bu marka için güçlü (olumlu) duygular beslerim.	Bu marka için güçlü (olumlu) duygular besliyorum.
INTELLECTUAL	Bu markayı görünce aklıma birçok fikir gelir.	Bu markayı gördüğümde aklıma birçok fikir geliyor.
INTELLECTUAL	Bu marka bende ilgi ve merak uyandırıyor.	SAME
INTELLECTUAL	Bu marka bana pek çok şeyi anımsatır, düşündürür.	Bu marka bana pek çok şeyi anımsatıyor, düşündürüyor.
BEHAVIORAL	Bu markanın ürünlerini kullandığımda fiziksel olarak harekete geçiyorum.	SAME
BEHAVIORAL	Bu markanın ürünlerini kullanmak bedensel bir deneyim yaşamama yol açar.	Bu markanın ürünlerini kullanmak bedensel deneyimler yaşamama imkân tanıyor.
BEHAVIORAL	Bu markanın ürünleri kişiyi harekete geçiren niteliktedir.	Bu markanın ürünleri kişiyi harekete geçiren özelliktedir.
BRAND ADVOCACY DIMENSIONS	Author's Translation for Pretest 2	Adjusted Translation for the Main Study
N/A	Bu markayı başkalarına tavsiye etmekten hoşlanıyorum.	Bu markayı başkalarına tavsiye etmeyi seviyorum.
N/A	Tanıdığım insanlarla bu markanın iyi yönleri hakkında konuşmayı seviyorum.	Tanıdığım insanlarla bu markanın iyi yanları hakkında konuşmayı seviyorum.
N/A	Çevremdeki insanları bu markanın ürünlerini almaya ikna etmeyi başardım.	SAME
CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT DIMENSIONS	Author's Translation for Pretest 2	Adjusted Translation for the Main Study
INTEREST	Apple marka cep telefonlarına gerçekten ilgi duyarım	Hangi marka cep telefonu satın aldığım/kullandığım benim için son derece önemlidir.
INTEREST	Apple marka cep telefonu satın almak benim için son derece önemlidir.	Apple marka bir cep telefonu kullanmak benim için son derece önemlidir.
INTEREST	Apple marka cep telefonu satın almak ya da kullanmak umurumda değildir.	Apple marka cep telefonu satın almak ya da kullanmak benim için çok büyük bir öneme sahiptir.

*Reverse coded items were changed into positive items after the pretest.

4.3. Pilot Studies

Prior to the main study, two pilot studies were conducted. The purpose of the first pilot study was to define two brands from different industries that were perceived as authentic by the consumers so that the researcher could include those brands in the main study in order for the data collected from the surveys would ultimately be useful and provide insightful results for the thesis.

The purpose of the second study was to test the reliability and validity of the scales used for the present research. The number of respondents for both pilot studies were considered based on Cooper and Schindler's (2003) suggestion that 25-100 respondents would be an optimal number for a pilot test.

The pilot tests were further discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.2.1 Pilot Study 1: Identifying Brands Perceived as Authentic from Different Product Categories

The objective of the first pilot study was to conduct extensive research on the brands that are perceived as authentic in the minds of consumers and identify two brands from different product categories with which the respondents perceived as most authentic considering the characteristics of authentic brands, so that the selected two brands could be used in the second pilot study to test the proposed research model. Expanding on the extant literature, the first pilot study set out to discover those brands that are perceived as authentic in eight different categories: *Automobile, White Goods, PC, Mobile Phone,*

Food, Clothing, Alcohol Drink, and Watch. Along with this study, the first pilot test aimed at shedding a light on the brands that were perceived by the Turkish consumers as authentic for any future academic study to be utilized from the pool of these brands.

The respondents were provided with the characteristics of authentic brands in the introduction and were asked to write a brand name that they considered as authentic in the related category for all eight categories *Automobile, White Goods, PC, Mobile Phone, Food, Clothing, Alcohol Drink, and Watch* along with their reasons for their choice of authentic brand (See Appendix A). The results were clustered, and the number of times the mentioned brand names are listed and counted (See Appendix B).

In the first pilot test, there were a total of 121 responses, 115 of which were usable after the respondents that were aged under 18 were eliminated for the data cleaning purposes. As for the gender distribution of the usable sample size, 60 of the respondents were female and 55 were male. This gender distribution is arbitrary, and the survey was closed as soon as the target sample size was fulfilled. 60 percent of the respondents are single whereas 40 percent of them are married. As it can be drawn from the Table 4.4, 49% of the respondents are comprised of people aged 18-24 whereas income level variance is distributed almost evenly with minor difference in percentages. As the first pilot study was conducted in 2020, the income level ranges are notably lower compared to the revised ranges used in the main study. More than half of the respondents has a bachelor's degree with 66 percent followed by the master's degree with 26 percent. This indicates that a great majority of the respondents has completed their higher education with a total of 89 percent.

As for the utilization of these brands for this thesis, the findings of the first pilot study were narrowed down and two of the most authentic perceived brands from automobile category and mobile phone category, *Mercedes* and *Apple* respectively, were decided to be used. Regarding these two product categories, 21 respondents among a total of 121 responses for automobile category mentioned *Mercedes* to be the most authentic automobile brand compared to other brands mentioned such as *Volvo*, *BMW*, *Volkswagen*, *Audi*, and so on. On the other hand, 81 respondents among a total of 121 responses for mobile phone category mentioned *Apple* to be the most authentic mobile phone brand by far compared to other brands mentioned such as *Samsung*, *Huawei*, and so on.

The significance of the brand category choice lies within the assumption that consumers more tend to perceive a brand as authentic if they use them specifically for their personal needs and even more importantly as a part of their identity projects. Automobiles and mobile phone product categories were chosen for this research as two key product categories in this study mainly because cars and mobile phones are among those product categories that are likely to be evaluated as of high symbolic value for today's consumers and they are used for not only their functional use but also for hedonic purposes, as well. Therefore, it is considered that automobiles and mobile phones play a crucial role in consumers' lives with their symbolic meaning carriers. From this stance, it is assumed that the authenticity as a matter of brand preference on such products is potentially a strong predictor of the buying behavior. Both automobiles and mobile phone product categories are among those that consumers directly use for personal needs that exceed their functionality and become a part of their personality projects.

Also, there is limited or no research conducted on automobile category that evaluates the impact of perceived brand authenticity to the best of our knowledge as a result of the extensive literature review done since the beginning of this journey. This Ph.D. thesis, therefore, aims to light up a new perspective on the concept from the lens of a new product category and hopefully contributes to the brand authenticity literature.

Additionally, the second product category selected from automobile category for this research as well as the decision of including one more brand in mobile phone category from the pool of brands that was perceived as authentic as a result of the first pilot study were considered mainly because automobile and mobile phone product categories are those product categories that are assumed to be indispensable for today's consumers and, that they can be considered more personal with a potentially strong symbolic meaning.

Therefore, the results of the first pilot test helped evaluate the product categories and brands that were commonly perceived as authentic which led the way to form the questionnaire used for the main study to be designed for both brands (i.e., *Mercedes* and *Apple*) from two different product categories (i.e., Automobile and Mobile Phone).

It is noteworthy to emphasize that *Apple* and *Mercedes* are also among the top 100 brands listed as authentic in global brands research of Cohn & Wolfe (2016). *Apple* being listed as the 5th and *Mercedes* being listed as the 16th, both brands are already proven to be perceived as globally authentic brands in the eyes of consumers, which presents a meaningful parallelism to the first pilot study. Therefore, selection of authentic brands for this research could be considered as reliable choices.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are displayed in Table 4.4 below:

Table 4. 4 *The Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents for Study 1*

Demographics	Criteria	Frequency	% Of Respondents
Gender	Female	55	48%
	Male	60	52%
Age	18-24	56	46%
	25-34	22	18%
	35-44	21	17%
	45-54	9	7%
	55 and above	7	6%
Marital Status	Single	69	60%
	Married	46	40%
Education Level	Elementary	-	-
	High School	2	2%
	Associate Degree (2 years)	-	-
	Bachelor's Degree (4 years)	76	66%
	Master's Degree	30	26%
	Doctoral Degree	7	6%
Monthly Income*	1.000 TL or below	11	10%
	1.001 – 2.000 TL	14	12%
	2.001 – 4.000 TL	16	14%
	4.001 – 6.000 TL	16	14%
	6.001 – 8.000 TL	20	17%
	8.001 – 10.000 TL	12	10%
	10.001 – 12.000 TL	8	7%
	12.001 TL and above	18	16%

4.2.2 Pilot Study 2: Pilot Study, Design of Research Instrument and Testing the Survey Design

The second pilot study was carried out to test proposed survey design on the two selected authentic-perceived brands identified as the outcome of the first pilot study. Also, some of the items in the questionnaire were re-considered and the translation of some items were rephrased with a clearer identification as a result of the pilot testing. In addition, the reverse coded items were changed into positive statements in the main study based on the results of the second pilot study.

In the second pilot test, there were a total of 70 responses, 69 of which were usable after the respondents that were aged under 18 were eliminated for the data cleaning purposes. As for the gender distribution of the usable sample size, 33 of the respondents were female and 36 were male. This gender distribution is arbitrary, and the survey was closed as soon as the target sample size was fulfilled. 51 percent of the respondents are single whereas 49 percent of them are married. The age group of the respondents falls between two main age groups; 25-34 and 35-44, and it is almost distributed evenly among these two major groups with 33 percent and 32 percent respectively. More than half of the respondents has a bachelor's degree with 59 percent followed by the master's degree with 23 percent. This indicates that a great majority of the respondents has completed their higher education with a total of 82 percent. Most of the respondents have an income level of 16.001 – 20.000 TL and 20.000 TL and above with 28 percent and 26 percent respectively.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are displayed in Table 4.5 below:

Table 4. 5 *The Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents for Study 2*

Demographics	Criteria	Frequency	% Of Respondents
Gender	Female	33	48%
	Male	36	52%
Age	18-24	9	13%
	25-34	23	33%
	35-44	22	32%
	45-54	11	16%
	55-64	3	4%
	65 and above	1	1%
Marital Status	Single	35	51%
	Married	34	49%
Education Level	Elementary	1	1%
	High School	1	1%
	Associate degree (2 years)	3	4%
	Bachelor's Degree (4 years)	41	59%
	Master's Degree	16	23%
	Doctoral Degree	7	10%
Monthly Income	4.000 TL or below	3	4%
	4.001 – 8.000 TL	7	10%
	8.001 – 12.000 TL	11	16%
	12.001 – 16.000 TL	11	16%
	16.001 – 20.000 TL	18	26%
	20.001 TL and above	19	28%

All measures were assessed to have acceptable validity and reliability with values above 0.7 and correct distribution of the items.

4.4. Main Study: Testing Proposed Research Model

4.4.1 Research Sample & Sampling Method

The population of this research consists of consumers that use/buy mobile phones and automobiles residing in Istanbul. Istanbul can be regarded as a representative of Turkey in the overall due to its highly cosmopolitan nature. The research sample represents overall Turkey population as a result of the increased levels of migration from different regions of Turkey to Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir (Goregenli, Karakus, & Gokten, 2016).

Within the scope of the research, convenience sampling method, which is one of the non-probability sampling methods, was used. The data for main study was collected within five months period (May-June-July-August-September-October) in 2022. By the end of the survey period, data was collected from 1134 respondents in total, 879 of whom completed the survey thoroughly. A negligible number of respondents (3) were under 18, and therefore, they were removed from the total number of completed responses.

The completion rates differ for each product category/brand. Survey with Apple brand has scored a completion rate of 75 percent whereas survey with Mercedes brand has scored 81 percent completion rate.

Out of the completed surveys, 825 surveys were found suitable for analysis for a total of both brands, (400 for Mercedes, 425 for Apple).

Before moving on to the research findings, the demographic characteristics of the respondents were examined. The descriptive analysis of demographic characteristics of

the research sample are demonstrated in below. Out of the 825 respondents in total, there is an even distribution of female and male respondents with 50 percent female and 50 percent male respondents. The same parallelism with gender results also applies to marital status of the sample with almost an even distribution of 51 percent married and 49 percent single respondents. The age group of the respondents falls between three main age groups; 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54 and it is almost distributed evenly among these three major groups with 26 percent, 32 percent, and 28 percent respectively. Majority of the respondents have a bachelor's degree with 44 percent followed by the master's degree with 20 percent. This indicates that majority of the respondents have completed their higher education with a total of 64 percent. Most of the respondents have an income level of 8.001 – 12.000 TL with 26 percent.

According to the results of the descriptive statistics, it was determined that majority of sample of the research had a close percentage in terms of distribution within the overall sample in terms of gender, age groups, education level, marital status, and income level.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are displayed in Table 4.6 below:

Table 4. 6 *The Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Demographics	Criteria	Frequency	% Of Respondents
Gender	Female	410	50%
	Male	415	50%
Age	18-24	70	8%
	25-34	212	26%
	35-44	261	32%
	45-54	231	28%
	55-64	44	5%
	65 and above	7	1%
Marital Status	Single	422	51%
	Married	403	49%
Education Level	Elementary	37	4%
	High School	90	11%
	Associate Degree (2 years)	79	10%
	Bachelor's Degree (4 years)	364	44%
	Master's Degree	167	20%
	Doctoral Degree	88	11%
Monthly Income	4.000 TL or below	42	5%
	4.001 – 8.000 TL	103	12%
	8.001 – 12.000 TL	216	26%
	12.001 – 16.000 TL	127	15%
	16.001 – 20.000 TL	183	22%
	20.001 TL and above	154	19%

On the product category level, a parallelism is observed on the sample characteristics with the total sample. For instance, the percentages and sample characteristics are similar to one another except for the marital status. Majority of the respondents (65%) are comprised of single consumers for mobile phone product category

(Apple) whereas majority of the respondents (64%) are comprised of married consumers for automobile product category (Mercedes).

Below table provides a demographic comparison of the research sample on a product category level.

Table 4. 7 *The Distribution Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents on Product Category Level*

Demographics Criteria		Mobile (Apple)		Phone		Automobile (Mercedes)	
		# Respondents	Of % Respondents	Of % Respondents		# Respondents	Of % Respondents
Gender	Female	210	49%			200	50%
	Male	215	51%			200	50%
Age	18-24	35	8%			35	9%
	25-34	97	23%			115	29%
	35-44	143	34%			118	30%
	45-54	122	29%			109	27%
	55-64	23	5%			21	5%
	65 and above	5	1%			2	1%
Marital Status	Single	278	65%			144	36%
	Married	147	35%			256	64%
Education Level	Elementary	36	8%			43	11%
	High School	200	47%			164	41%
	Associate Degree (2 years)	43	10%			45	11%
	Bachelor's Degree (4 years)	15	4%			22	6%
	Master's Degree	43	10%			47	12%
	Doctoral Degree	88	21%			79	20%
Monthly Income	4.000 TL or below	63	15%			64	16%
	4.001 – 8.000 TL	97	23%			86	22%
	8.001 – 12.000 TL	85	20%			69	17%
	12.001 – 16.000 TL	21	5%			21	5%
	16.001 – 20.000 TL	45	11%			58	15%
	20.001 TL and above	114	27%			102	26%

Research sample on gender distribution exactly represent Turkish population by even percentage of 50 percent compared to TurkStat (TUIK) data, however, a parallel distribution is not observed on education level and marital status of the overall Turkish population, which is an expected outcome as the research sample is comprised of the targeted groups of both categories. Age distribution, on the other hand, presents low to average percentage of similarity to the overall Turkish population.

Below table provides a demographic comparison of the research sample to the overall Turkish population.

Table 4. 8 *The Comparison of Research Sample Demographics to The Overall Turkish Population*

Demographics	Criteria	*Turkish Population in TurkStat (TUIK) (2021)	% Of Türkiye Population	% Distribution Of Research Sample
Gender	Female	42,252,172	50%	50%
	Male	42,428,101	50%	50%
Age	18-24	6,741,580	8%	8%
	25-34	12,818,686	15%	26%
	35-44	12,933,370	15%	32%
	45-54	10,416,745	12%	28%
	55-64	8,319,096	10%	5%
	65 and above	8,245,124	10%	1%
Marital Status	Single	25,217,275	38%	51%
	Married	40,487,035	62%	49%
Education Level	Elementary	36,264,180	47%	4%
	High School	17,132,775	22%	11%
	Associate degree (2 years)			
	Bachelor's Degree (4 years)	13,446,439	22%	85%
	Master's Degree			
	Doctoral Degree			

*Based on TurkStat (TUIK) Data, Population and Housing Census, 2021

4.4.2 Data Cleaning Process

A detailed analysis was conducted in order to clean the main study data with an aim to reach a purified sample. Each individual response from the data set was meticulously analyzed and evaluated whether to be kept or eliminated based on below stated criteria.

In total, 1134 people were reached for both brands: 601 for Apple brand and 533 for Mercedes brand. However, 879 completed responses were attained in the overall. Out of the completed responses, 51 responses were eliminated due to inattentive responding based on very low or zero standard deviation, which indicates random responses with the selection of repeatedly same response for all or almost all the items in the questionnaire. Additionally, the responses were checked for the age group that is under 18 and there were 3 respondents found to have selected “*Under 18*” item in the scale. Therefore, these respondents who were under 18 were also eliminated from the sample due to age limit. Eventually, the data cleaning process was finalized with a total of 825 usable responses with 425 responses for Apple brand and 400 responses for Mercedes brand.

Below table demonstrates the data cleaning finalization of the research sample:

Table 4. 9 *Data Cleaning Finalization of the Research Sample*

Reasons for Elimination	# Of Respondents	
	Apple	Mercedes
Total Responses	601	533
Completed Responses	449	430
Total Survey Responses Eliminated	176	133
Incomplete Responses	152	103
Inattentive Responding with Low/Zero Standard Deviation	22	29
Respondents under 18	2	1
Completion Rate	75%	81%
Final Sample Size	425	400
Total Sample Size for Both Product Categories	825	

PART FIVE

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research findings are presented in this chapter under descriptive statistics and data analysis subsections. Prior to moving forward with data analysis, the descriptive statistics were completed using SPSS 25.0 statistical program in order to analyze the normality, mean and standard deviation of the research sample.

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis was conducted of the research after completing the normality of the distribution.

Table 5. 1 *Normality of the Distribution Analysis*

Scales & Factors	Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics		Normality Test Scores	
	Skewness	Kurtosis	Kolmogorov-Smirnova	Shapiro-Wilk
Brand Authenticity	-0.72	1.07	0.06	0.97
Continuity	-1.11	1.72	0.12	0.91
Credibility	-0.72	0.80	0.13	0.94
Integrity	-0.76	0.98	0.12	0.94
Symbolism	-0.37	-0.27	0.09	0.97
Actual Self-Image Congruence	-0.05	-0.75	0.09	0.97
Brand Experience	-0.28	-0.52	0.07	0.98
Sensory	-0.44	-0.36	0.14	0.96
Affective	-0.25	-0.63	0.11	0.97
Intellectual	-0.34	-0.51	0.12	0.96
Behavioral	-0.11	-0.73	0.10	0.96
Brand Advocacy	-0.13	-0.71	0.09	0.97
Consumer Involvement	0.01	-1.08	0.12	0.95

Skewness is acceptable between -3 and +3 whereas kurtosis is acceptable between -10 and +10. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and the Shapiro-Wilk tests both examine whether a data set is normally distributed (Hair et al. 2010). The results indicate that the data used for this research is distributed normally.

Table 5. 2 *Descriptive Scores of Variables*

Scales & Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Brand Authenticity	825	3.74	0.74
Continuity	825	4.03	0.81
Credibility	825	3.80	0.84
Integrity	825	3.72	0.84
Symbolism	825	3.40	0.95
Actual Self-Image Congruence	825	3.04	1.05
Brand Experience	825	3.28	0.93
Sensory	825	3.49	0.99
Affective	825	3.24	1.03
Intellectual	825	3.31	1.01
Behavioral	825	3.07	1.07
Brand Advocacy	825	3.14	1.05
Consumer Involvement	825	2.97	1.20

5.2. Data Analysis

The collected data of this research was analyzed with the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) which is a commonly preferred modelling method among researchers of social science in the recent years. The PLS-SEM non-parametric statistical method is used to assess the research data for maximization of the dependent variable's explained variance in the PLS path model. The model's measurement and structural quality were evaluated using metric indicators of the model's predictive capabilities. Before moving forward with the main study of this research, the measurement model's validity was evaluated since it is required to be done (Hair et al.,

2013). As a result, the scales to be used in the survey were analyzed and assessed for validity and reliability scores as the initial step in the present study.

PLS-SEM provides an effective approximation method for common factor models in cases when factor-based SEM is unable to produce results because of methodological restrictions such model complexity, sample size limits, or the occurrence of composite variables in the model. In other words, PLS-SEM is an estimation method that effectively distinguishes between constructs and conceptual variables (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

The three most crucial measurement model metrics for explaining relationships between constructs and their respective indicator variables are reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. On the other hand, the most crucial structural model assessment metrics in academic research are R^2 (explained variance), f^2 (effect size), Q^2 (predictive relevance) as well as the size and statistical significance of the structural path coefficients.

In the main study, assessments done are explained in detail in the following sections.

5.2.1 Research Model Assessment

The research model consists of Brand Authenticity, Brand Experience, Actual Self-Image Congruence and Consumer Involvement as independent (exogenous) variables; Brand Advocacy as dependent (endogenous) variable.

The role of brand authenticity as a determinant in its relationship with brand advocacy is discussed as the main construct. Brand experience is proposed being a mediator in the relationship of brand authenticity and brand advocacy whereas consumer

involvement and actual self-image congruence variables are proposed being mediators within the brand authenticity - brand advocacy relationship.

An independent variable change that causes a change in the mediating variable, which then causes an independent variable change is referred to be a mediating variable. In other words, a change in the independent construct causes a change in the mediator variable, which in turn causes a change in the independent variable. On the other hand, the moderating variable affects the direction of a relationship between the dependent and independent variables in a research model.

In the proposed research model, brand authenticity is considered as the independent variable, brand advocacy as the dependent variable, brand experience as the mediating variable, and finally, consumer involvement and actual self-image congruence are considered as moderating variables.

The measurement specification of the research model is *reflective*, which occurs when there is a causality from indicators of a construct to that construct.

Initial analysis was done without including the moderator variables in the model. In the light of this, the first structural equation model developed without moderators to evaluate the research's assumptions, which is shown in Figure 5.1.

Afterwards, the final research was completed including moderator variables in the research model. In order to enable comparative analysis for some of the analyses that give different results, the related analyses are initially demonstrated without moderators followed by the same analyses done with the moderators included in the model.

Therefore, two tables/two figures are presented for some of the analyses shown in below subtitles.

Partial least squares path analysis (PLS-SEM) was utilized in order to analyze the initial and final research model. Data analysis was done using the SmartPLS 4 statistical program (Sarstedt et al., 2022; Yıldız, 2021). Regarding the evaluation of the initial research model without moderator variables, PLS-SEM algorithm was used whereas Consistent PLS-SEM algorithm was preferred for the final research model in order to calculate linearity, path coefficients, R^2 and effect size (f^2). Regarding the evaluation of the predictive power (Q^2) of our research model, PLS Predict analysis was run in order to calculate the predictive power of our model. Also, t values were calculated from 10.000 subsamples of the sample using Consistent PLS-SEM bootstrapping to assess the relevance of the PLS path coefficients. The traditional PLS algorithm “tends to overestimate the loadings in absolute value, and to underestimate multiple and bivariate (absolute) correlations between the latent variables... The advantage of PLSc is that it is ‘well calibrated’, *i.e.*, it will produce the true parameter values for the models we discuss when applied to the ‘population’” (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). As proposed by Dijkstra (2010), “Traditional PLS also underestimates the R-squared value of endogenous latent variables”. Since the proposed research model is reflective, consistent PLS Algorithm was preferred.

5.2.2 Measurement Model Analysis

Prior to the assessment of the research measurement model, it is advised to check the missing values within each indicator and replace with their respective mean values. However, there were no missing values in the data set since the data collection phase was designed and conducted as such that respondents were not allowed to move forward without answering all the questions. All items in the survey required a compulsory answer in order to move forward with the following questions. Therefore, this method ensured no missing values in the assessment phase. The incomplete surveys were eliminated in the data cleaning phase. Furthermore, a meticulous data cleaning process completed prior to analysis ensured that the data set had no outlier values.

Prior to analyzing the final research model, an analysis on the initial research model was done without including moderating variables in the model. Validity and reliability of the constructs were evaluated. Internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were all tested as a part of validity and reliability assessments. Cronbach's Alpha and CR=Composite Reliability coefficients were tested for internal consistency reliability. Average variance (AVE=Average Variance Extracted) values and factor loads were used in order to determine convergent validity. Factor loads were expected to be ≥ 0.70 ; Cronbach's Alpha and combined reliability coefficients were expected to be ≥ 0.70 ; and finally, the average variance explained was expected to be ≥ 0.50 . (Hair et al., 2006; Hair et al., 2022; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The same analysis steps were taken for the initial and final research model.

As for the initial research model, a higher order construct research model was created, and the analysis was carried out accordingly. In order to validate the higher order construct, PLS-SEM Algorithm was run.



Below figure indicates the scores of the research model without moderators:

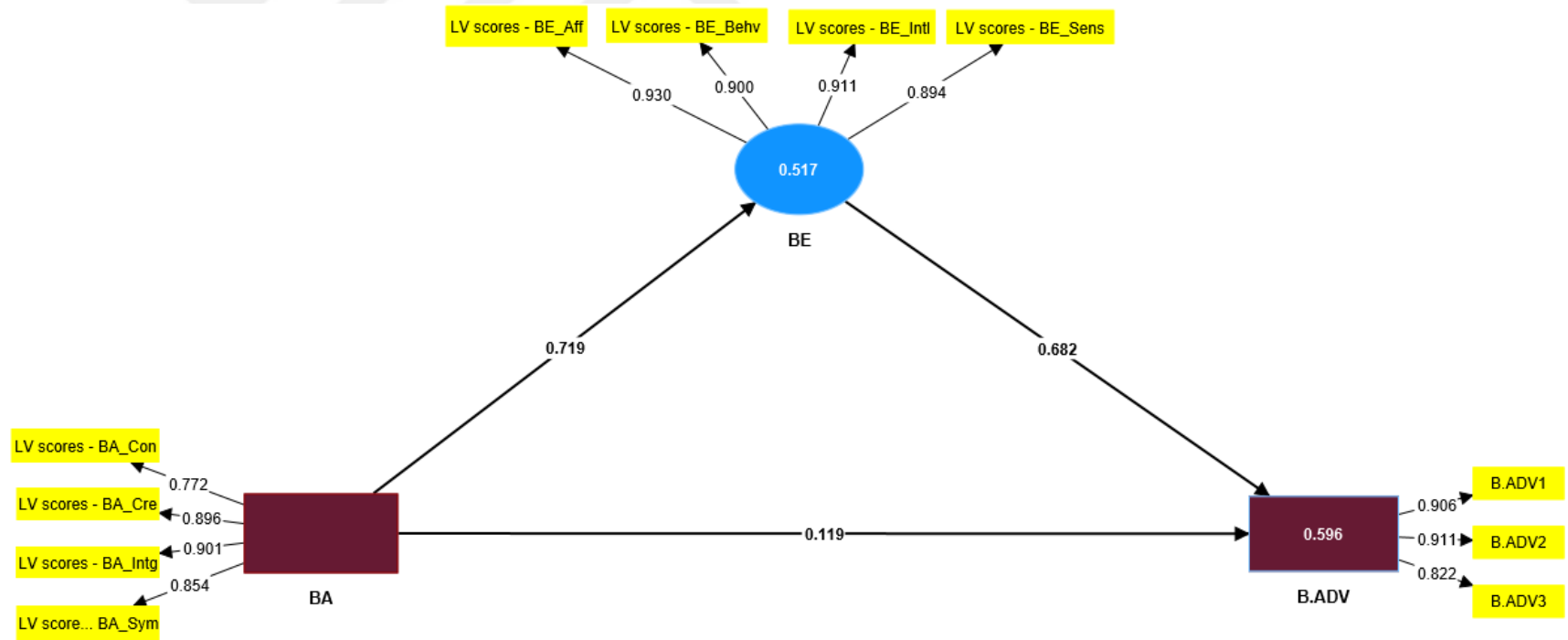


Figure 5. 1 *The Research Model in PLS-SEM without Moderators*

Below figure indicates the scores of the research model with moderators included:

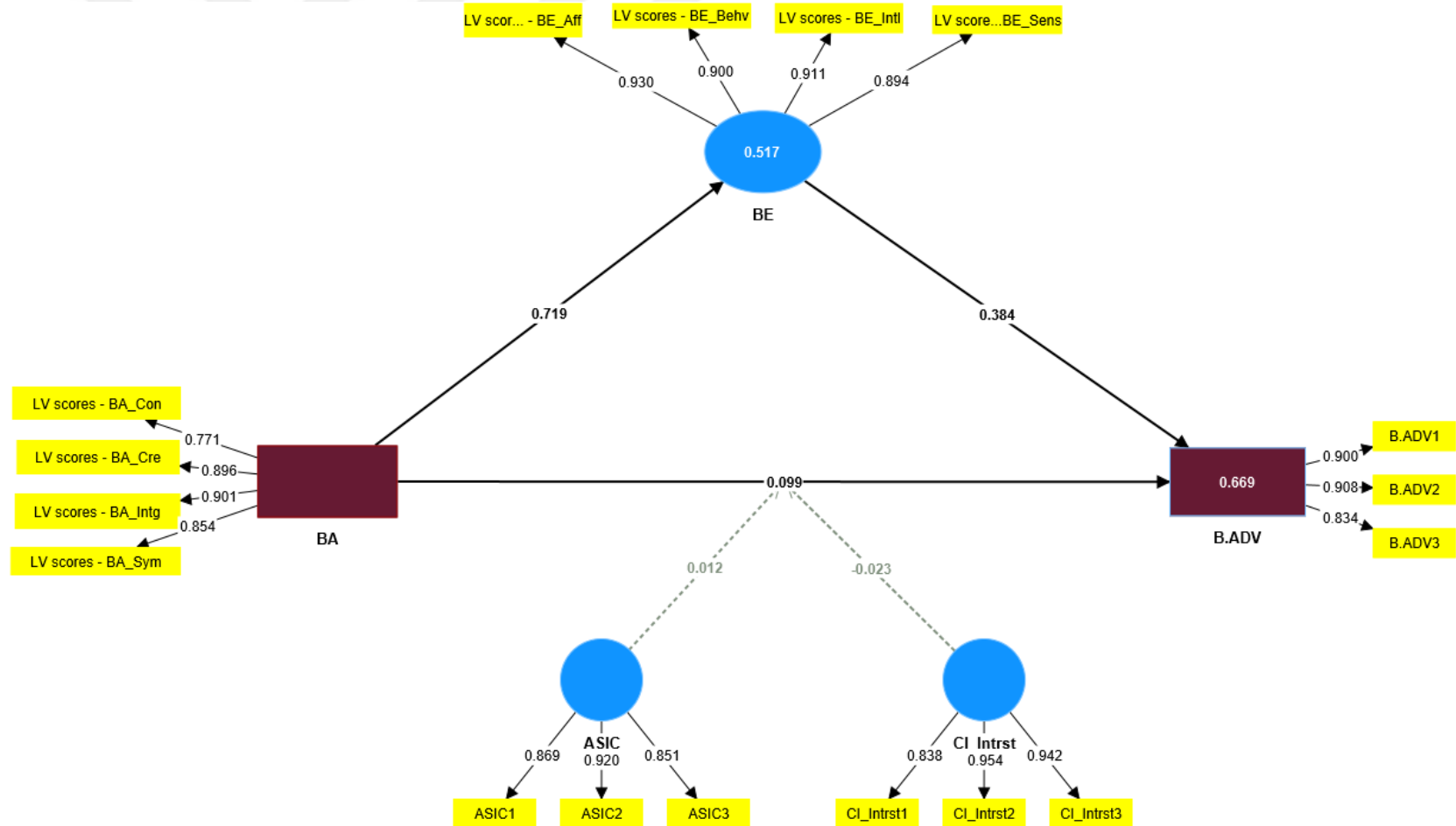


Figure 5. 2 *The Research Model in PLS-SEM with Moderators Included*

After validating the higher order construct, the overall scores were enhanced. Afterwards, the detailed measurement model analysis for the initial research model without moderators included was done followed by the final research model with moderators included. Tables in the following subtitles present the measurement model findings.

5.2.2.1 Reliability Analysis

The indicators' reliability is supposed to have internal consistency which is determined using the Cronbach's alpha criteria that offers an estimation based on the indicator variables' intercorrelations. It is predicated on the premise that all indicators are equally reliable, implying that they all have equal outer loadings on the construct. The acceptable Cronbach's alpha value is above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). Composite reliability, on the other hand, is considered to be a more precise method to test the constructs' internal consistency as it assumes the indicators with different outer loadings and calculates them accordingly. According to Hair et al. (2014), indicators scoring between 0.60 and 0.70 within a construct is acceptable from the composite reliability perspective. Composite reliability figures that are less than 0.60 indicate a lack of internal consistency reliability.

The extracted average variance (AVE) is a parameter used to determine the convergent validity of constructs which is statistically meaningful when the average variance extracted (AVE) value equals to or greater than 0.50. In other words, a construct

should have an AVE value of 0.50 or higher in order to explain more than 50% of its indicators in the construct.

After running Consistent PLS-SEM Algorithm on the research model on factor weighing scheme for the model without moderators, outer loadings of B.ADV3 and BA_Con items were found to score below the threshold, and therefore highlighted in red.

Table 5. 3 *Initial Outer Loadings in PLS-SEM – without Moderators*

	B.ADV	BA	BE
B.ADV1	0.906		
B.ADV2	0.863		
B.ADV3	0.677		
LV scores - BA_Con		0.665	
LV scores - BA_Cre		0.753	
LV scores - BA_Intg		0.792	
LV scores - BA_Sym		0.976	
LV scores - BE_Aff			0.880
LV scores - BE_Behv			0.865
LV scores - BE_Intl			0.879
LV scores - BE_Sens			0.881

After running Consistent PLS-SEM Algorithm on the research model on factor weighing scheme for the model with moderators included, however, outer loadings of B.ADV3 were found to exceed the threshold whereas BA_Con item still scored below the threshold, and therefore highlighted in red.

Table 5. 4 Initial Outer Loadings in PLS-SEM – With Moderators Included

	ASIC	B.ADV	BA	BE	CI_Intrst
ASIC1	0.770				
ASIC2	0.871				
ASIC3	0.803				
B.ADV1		0.870			
B.ADV2		0.842			
B.ADV3		0.736			
CI_Intrst1					0.748
CI_Intrst2					0.936
CI_Intrst3					0.920
LV scores - BA_Con			0.664		
LV scores - BA_Cre			0.753		
LV scores - BA_Intg			0.792		
LV scores - BA_Sym			0.977		
LV scores - BE_Aff				0.880	
LV scores - BE_Behv				0.866	
LV scores - BE_Intl				0.879	
LV scores - BE_Sens				0.881	

Furthermore, the Construct Reliability and Validity scores for both models with and without moderators are above the threshold. Thus, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and the average variance extracted (AVE) criteria are fulfilled in the initial research model for the model:

Table 5. 5 Initial Construct Reliability and Validity in PLS-SEM

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ASIC	0.855	0.859	0.856	0.666
B.ADV	0.856	0.863	0.858	0.669
BA	0.879	0.897	0.878	0.648
BE	0.930	0.930	0.930	0.768
CI_Intrst	0.899	0.915	0.904	0.761

5.2.2.2 Validity Analysis

Validity is an analysis of a scale's ability to measure what it intends to measure.

Construct validity is measured by Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity.

5.2.2.2.1 Convergent Validity

Convergent reliability describes how one item correlates positively with other items of the same construct. In order to measure convergent validity, the outer loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE) should be checked and the loadings are expected to score $\geq 0,708$ (Hair et al., 2017) to be significant and acceptable.

Indicators with outer loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 should be evaluated for deletion if doing so enhances either the composite reliability or the extracted average variance of the indicators. Indicators less than 0.40 should be completely removed from the construct (Bagozzi et al., 1991; Hair et al., 2011).

In the proposed research model without moderators, B.ADV3 (0.677) and LV Scores – BA_Con (0.665) items are slightly below the approved threshold (0.70) and there is no indicator which has an outer loading below 0.40. Therefore, no indicator was removed from the construct based on the outer loadings.

In the proposed research model with moderators included, outer loadings for B.ADV3 exceeded the threshold (0.736), however, LV Scores – BA_Con item (0.664) still remained slightly below the approved threshold (0.70) and there is no indicator which has an outer loading below 0.40. Therefore, the item was not eliminated from the final research model with moderators included.

5.2.2.2.2 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity shows how distinct the constructs of a research model are. By showing the distinction from other constructs, discriminant validity ensures that the constructs are not highly connected, and each explains a different phenomenon.

In SMART-PLS, three different measurement methods are applied to confirm discriminant validity. The first of the discriminant validity techniques is Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio which was suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) with the assumption that neither cross loadings nor Fornell and Larcker Criterion successfully measures discriminant validity. They posit that under circumstances when the path model contains constructs that correlate with each other with a threshold value of 0.90, indicating that these constructs are conceptually very similar, discriminant validity is violated.

In this research, none of the HTMT ratio values in path model are measured as close to 1 as shown in tables below. Therefore, the constructs are considered as being distinct with their correlation with one another and there is no similarity between constructs.

Table 5. 6 *Discriminant Validity – Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)*

	ASIC	B.ADV	BA	BE	CI_Intrst
ASIC					
B.ADV	0.781				
BA	0.650	0.678			
BE	0.821	0.854	0.782		
CI_Intrst	0.790	0.839	0.583	0.780	

The Fornell and Larcker Criterion, another discriminant validity method, postulates that the square root of AVE for a construct should be higher than its correlation with all

other constructs. In tables shown below, this condition is met in the current study and there is no construct violating Fornell and Larcker Criterion for the model.

Table 5. 7 Discriminant Validity – Fornell and Larcker Criterion

	ASIC	B.ADV	BA	BE	CI_Intrst
ASIC	0.816				
B.ADV	0.776	0.818			
BA	0.663	0.689	0.805		
BE	0.820	0.854	0.787	0.876	
CI_Intrst	0.748	0.811	0.549	0.745	0.872

Finally, another Discriminant Validity measurement is cross loadings. According to cross loadings, particular item in the construct must have greater loadings by itself than other constructs in the study. An item loading higher onto another construct in comparison to its own construct results in discriminant validity concerns. A loading of a construct that scores less than 0.10 implies that the item is cross loading onto another construct in the research, hence, it is considered for removal for the sake of retaining the discriminant validity. In tables shown below, there is no construct lower than 0.10 and thus cross loadings criterion is not violated in the research model.

Table 5. 8 Discriminant Validity – Cross loadings

	ASIC	B.ADV	BA	BE	CI_Intrst
ASIC1	0.770	0.598	0.568	0.659	0.593
ASIC2	0.871	0.676	0.610	0.731	0.649
ASIC3	0.803	0.624	0.443	0.613	0.587
B.ADV1	0.633	0.870	0.645	0.754	0.694
B.ADV2	0.654	0.842	0.590	0.738	0.655
B.ADV3	0.621	0.736	0.442	0.595	0.644
CI_Intrst1	0.601	0.607	0.466	0.583	0.748
CI_Intrst2	0.678	0.760	0.479	0.680	0.936
CI_Intrst3	0.677	0.746	0.495	0.681	0.920
LV scores - BA_Con	0.393	0.432	0.664	0.544	0.343
LV scores - BA_Cre	0.478	0.521	0.753	0.591	0.380
LV scores - BA_Intg	0.497	0.559	0.792	0.613	0.422
LV scores - BA_Sym	0.720	0.677	0.977	0.766	0.586
LV scores - BE_Aff	0.747	0.740	0.705	0.880	0.662
LV scores - BE_Behv	0.723	0.774	0.646	0.866	0.660
LV scores - BE_Intl	0.680	0.752	0.691	0.879	0.649
LV scores - BE_Sens	0.723	0.729	0.717	0.881	0.639

5.2.3 Structural Model Analysis

Following the examination of the measurement model's research model, the structural path model was evaluated in order to explore the relationships between research constructs and their statistical significance.

In order to assess the hypothesized paths of the structural model, (1) Collinearity, (2) Significance of path coefficients, (3) Coefficient of determination (R^2), and effect sizes (f^2), and lastly, predictive relevance and effect size were tested and analyzed.

Bootstrapping should be done in order to assess whether the formative indicator has a significant relationship with its corresponding construct. Bootstrapping demonstrates the

empirical t value that is higher than the critical value, which for a one-tailed test at a 5% significance level should be more than 1.65 to be statistically significant. The p value below 0.05, on the other hand, is considered as statistically significant at 5% level. In SmartPLS 4, Consistent PLS-SEM bootstrapping with 10.000 subsamples of complete results was run.

5.2.3.1 Significance of Path Coefficients

A researcher can determine the strength of the relationship between two latent variables by studying the path coefficient value. The path coefficients and significance levels should all be checked in order to analyze the relation between two latent variables.

The coefficients that are at zero or close to zero indicate very weak or insignificant relation. The coefficients that are around 0.3 are considered as of medium relation whereas the coefficients that are ≥ 0.5 indicate high relation (Kline, 2010:185).

The p values that are below 0.05 show significant path coefficients. For a particular impact on the research model to be explained, the path coefficient must be **minimum 0.100** with a significance level of **at least 0.05**.

As for the model without moderators included, Brand Authenticity (BA) has a positively significant relation with Brand Experience (BE), however, and it does not have a positively significant relation with Brand Advocacy (B.ADV).

Brand Experience (BE) has a positively significant relation with Brand Advocacy (B.ADV).

The significance of path coefficients for both model with and without moderators included are shown in below tables:

Table 5. 9 *Significance of Path Coefficients – without Moderators*

Item	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> B.ADV	0.046	0.046	0.049	0.952	0.171
BA -> BE	0.787	0.788	0.018	44.538	0.000
BE -> B.ADV	0.815	0.815	0.045	17.916	0.000

As shown in the table, the p values <0.05 indicate significant path coefficients, which explains a positive relation of the hypothesized paths in their respective paths.

Table 5. 10 *Confidence Intervals – without Moderators*

Item	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	5.0%	95.0%
BA -> B.ADV	0.046	0.046	-0.034	0.127
BA -> BE	0.787	0.788	0.758	0.815
BE -> B.ADV	0.815	0.815	0.740	0.889

As for the model without moderators included, Brand Authenticity (BA) has a positively significant relation with Brand Experience (BE), however, it does not have a positively significant relation with Brand Advocacy (B.ADV). Brand Experience (BE) has a positively significant relation with Brand Advocacy (B.ADV).

As for the model with moderators included, however, the p values that are above 0.05 (ASIC x BA $\rightarrow$ B.ADV=0.297; CI_Interest x BA $\rightarrow$ B.ADV= 0.260) indicate that there is no significant moderation effect of Actual Self-Image Congruence (ASIC) and Consumer Involvement (CI) in the Brand Authenticity and Brand Advocacy relationship.

Table 5. 11 *Significance of Path Coefficients – with Moderators Included*

Item	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> B.ADV	0.066	0.066	0.049	1.363	0.086
BA -> BE	0.787	0.788	0.018	44.527	0.000
BE -> B.ADV	0.448	0.448	0.075	5.956	0.000
ASIC x BA -> B.ADV	0.025	0.024	0.046	0.532	0.297
CI_Intrst x BA -> B.ADV	-0.034	-0.034	0.052	0.643	0.260

The *p* value for Brand Authenticity (BA) (0.086) is slightly above the threshold <0.05, which indicates that Brand Authenticity (BA) has little or no direct relation with Brand Advocacy (B.ADV). As a result, Brand Experience (BE) is proposed to have a full mediation in Brand Authenticity (BA) and Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) relationship as it can be interpreted from the table *Significance of Path Coefficients – with Moderators Included*.

Therefore, the findings suggest that H1 is not supported on both product categories but on a single product category level whereas H2, H3 and H4 are supported.

Table 5. 12 *Confidence Intervals*

Item	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	5.0%	95.0%
BA -> B.ADV	0.066	0.066	-0.014	0.147
BA -> BE	0.787	0.788	0.757	0.815
BE -> B.ADV	0.448	0.448	0.324	0.572
ASIC x BA -> B.ADV	0.025	0.024	-0.053	0.097
CI_Intrst x BA -> B.ADV	-0.034	-0.034	-0.118	0.053

The findings also suggest that H5 and H6 are not supported.

5.2.3.2 Coefficient of Determination R^2 value

The predictive ability of the structural model is measured by the coefficient of determination. R^2 values range between 0 to 1. The assumption follows that the model is more predictable the higher the R^2 value. As a rule, for dependent variables, structural model predictions with R^2 values of **0.75** are regarded as considerable, **0.50** as moderate, and **0.25** as weak (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009)

The results of the proposed model indicate that the prediction power of Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) is closer to 1, which shows a high predictability. Also, Brand Experience (BE) shows a high prediction power as indicated below table.

Table 5. 13 R^2 value for the Research Model

Item	R Square	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
B.ADV	0.804	0.809	0.025	32.706	0.000
BE	0.620	0.621	0.028	22.310	0.000

5.2.3.3 The Effect Size f^2

By estimating the change in the R^2 value, the effect size (f^2) indicates the relative impact of a certain exogenous variable on a particular endogenous variable under the condition that a certain exogenous variable is omitted from the model.

The assessment of f^2 values represented as values of 0.02 has small, 0.15 medium, and 0.35 large effect size (Cohen, 1988) of the independent construct. When

examining a certain endogenous construct, the effect size (f^2) represents the relative significance given to various predictor constructs.

The results of the proposed model without moderators indicate that Brand Authenticity (BA) has a very large effect size on Brand Experience (BE). Brand Experience (BE) also has a very large effect size on Brand Advocacy (B.ADV). However, Brand Authenticity (BA) has very small or no effect size on Brand Advocacy (B.ADV).

Table 5. 14 f^2 value for the Model without Moderators

Item	f square	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> B.ADV	0.003	0.006	0.008	0.384	0.350
BA -> BE	1.633	1.652	0.195	8.362	0.000
BE -> B.ADV	0.918	0.936	0.178	5.166	0.000

The results of the proposed model with moderators included present a similar effect size for explaining relations of Brand Authenticity and Brand Experience (BA→BE) as well as Brand Authenticity and Brand Advocacy (BA→B.ADV) relationship. Furthermore, Brand Experience (BE) also has a very large effect size on Brand Advocacy (B.ADV). However, there occurs a dramatic decrease in the effect size of Brand Experience and Brand Advocacy (BE→B.ADV) relationship when the moderators are included in the model in contrast to the diametrically opposite results of the model with moderators excluded. This finding suggests that the absence of Brand Experience (BE) variable has insignificant effect on Brand Advocacy (BA) when moderator variables are present whereas the absence of Brand Experience (BE) variable has very large effect on Brand Advocacy (BA) in the absence of moderator variables.

Table 5. 15 f^2 value for the Model with Moderators Included

Item	f square	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> B.ADV	0.008	0.012	0.013	0.590	0.278
BA -> BE	1.632	1.652	0.195	8.361	0.000
BE -> B.ADV	0.198	0.209	0.078	2.555	0.005

5.2.3.4 Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

The structural model was examined by evaluating the collinearity of exogenous constructs with respect to each endogenous construct once the measurement model's validity had been established. To determine collinearity, VIF values were examined as proposed by Hair et al. (2011). Collinearity problem occurs when/ if any measurement model indicator has a VIF value of 5 or higher and a tolerance value of 0.20 or less than 0.20. In other words, the research model revision is required in cases when the VIF value is higher than 5.

In the measurement model, Collinearity statistics results for the model in which moderators that do not show any values that are greater than 5 were excluded. Therefore, the proposed model without moderators included fulfills collinearity.

Table 5. 16 *Collinearity Statistics (VIF) – without Moderators*

Item	VIF
B.ADV1	2.411
B.ADV2	2.580
B.ADV3	1.807
LV scores - BA_Con	1.745
LV scores - BA_Cre	3.379
LV scores - BA_Intg	3.402
LV scores - BA_Sym	1.962
LV scores - BE_Aff	4.213
LV scores - BE_Behv	3.105
LV scores - BE_Intl	3.505
LV scores - BE_Sens	3.019

However, Collinearity statistics results for the measurement model with moderators included shows that CI_Intrst2 and CI_Intrst3 have VIF values that are greater than 5, which violates collinearity. Therefore, the analysis was done one more time initially deleting the item with a VIF higher value which is CI_Intrst2 in order to see how the results will change after.

Table 5. 17 *Collinearity Statistics (VIF) – with Moderators Included*

Item	VIF
ASIC1	2.237
ASIC2	2.763
ASIC3	1.886
B.ADV1	2.411
B.ADV2	2.580
B.ADV3	1.807
CI_Intrst1	1.941
CI_Intrst2	5.501
CI_Intrst3	5.053
LV scores - BA_Con	1.745
LV scores - BA_Cre	3.379
LV scores - BA_Intg	3.402
LV scores - BA_Sym	1.962
LV scores - BE_Aff	4.213
LV scores - BE_Behv	3.105
LV scores - BE_Intl	3.505
LV scores - BE_Sens	3.019

Initially CI_Intrst2 was deleted which has a higher VIF value than CI_Intrst3 to review whether the collinearity problem in the research model was eliminated. As shown in table below, the collinearity problem was eliminated by removing CI_Intrst2 from the construct:

Table 5. 18 *Collinearity Statistics (VIF) Adjusted for the model with Moderators Included*

Item	VIF
ASIC1	2.237
ASIC2	2.763
ASIC3	1.886
B.ADV1	2.411
B.ADV2	2.580
B.ADV3	1.807
CI_Intrst1	1.757
CI_Intrst3	1.757
LV scores - BA_Con	1.745
LV scores - BA_Cre	3.379
LV scores - BA_Intg	3.402
LV scores - BA_Sym	1.962
LV scores - BE_Aff	4.213
LV scores - BE_Behv	3.105
LV scores - BE_Intl	3.505
LV scores - BE_Sens	3.019

As shown in the table with the final VIF scores, removing CI_Intrst2 from the construct eliminated collinearity problem and no further action was required.

The final path for research model measurement with moderators included after the elimination of CI_Intrst2 is shown below:

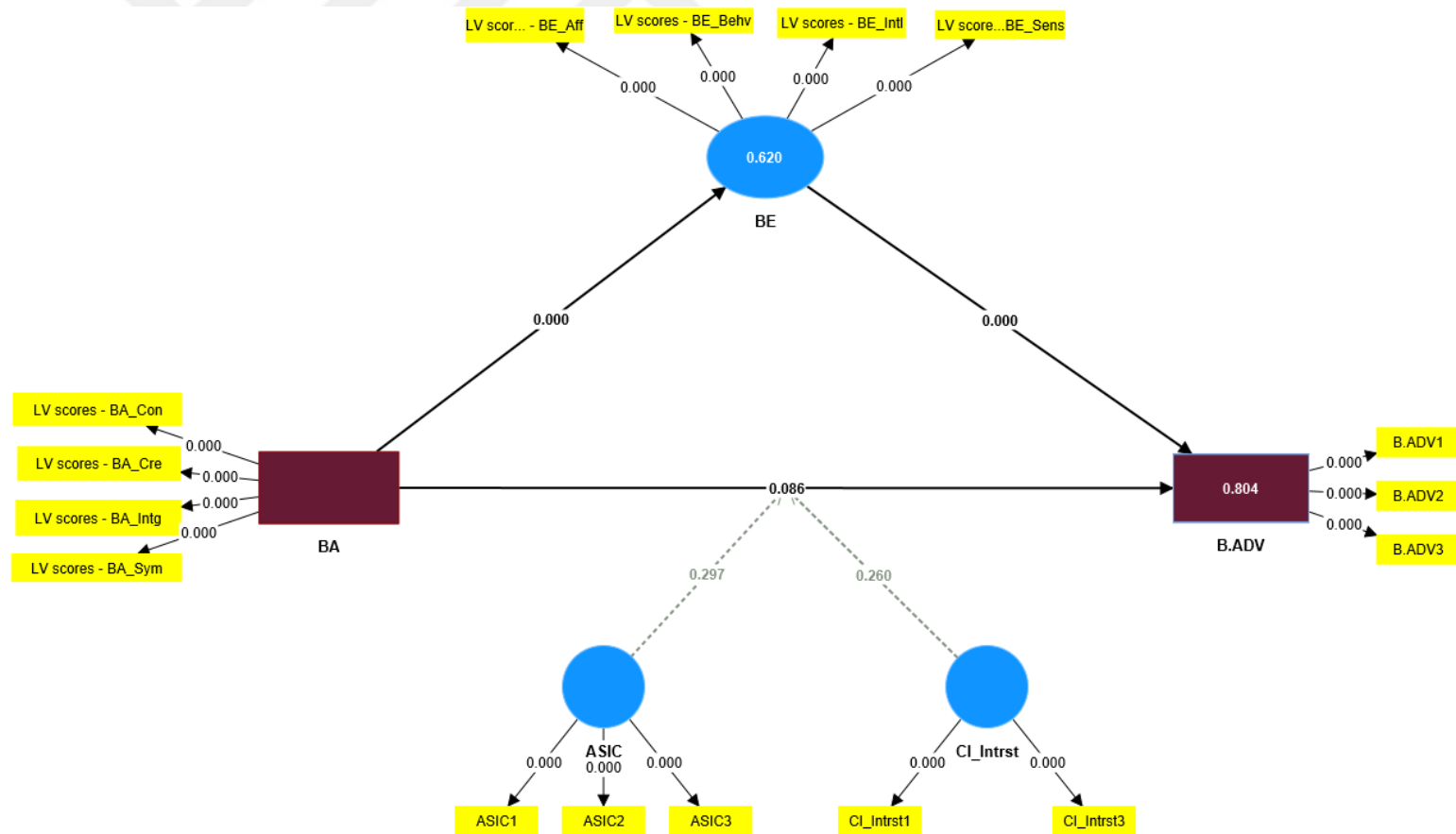


Figure 5. 3 *The Final Model in PLS-SEM*

5.2.3.5 Predictive relevance Q^2

Predictive relevance determines whether a research model has a good predictive quality. It is indicated the research model's predictive power which is required to be higher than zero in order to presume that the path model has predictive accuracy (Geisser, 1974).

As indicated in tables below for both model with and without indicators included, Q^2 values in the path model are higher than zero, hence, predictive relevance of the research model is established. There is a noticeable increase in the Q^2 values of Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) in the model where moderators are included, which can be interpreted as the predictive power and quality of Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) increases in the presence of moderators. The Q^2 values of Brand Experience (BE), however, remains unchanged under both circumstances.

Table 5. 19 *Predictive Accuracy Q^2 for the Model without Moderators*

Item	Q^2_{predict}
B.ADV1	0.368
B.ADV2	0.310
B.ADV3	0.166
LV scores - BE_Aff	0.445
LV scores - BE_Behv	0.371
LV scores - BE_Intl	0.427
LV scores - BE_Sens	0.459

Table 5. 20 *Predictive Accuracy Q^2 for the Model with Moderators Included*

Item	Q^2_{predict}
B.ADV1	0.510
B.ADV2	0.463
B.ADV3	0.346
LV scores - BE_Aff	0.445
LV scores - BE_Behv	0.371
LV scores - BE_Intl	0.427
LV scores - BE_Sens	0.459

5.2.4 Mediator Analysis

The relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable is determined by the mediator variables.

Mediation analysis was performed in order to assess the mediating role of Brand Experience (MV) in the relationship between Brand Authenticity (IV) and Brand Advocacy (DV). For analyzing the constructs which have mediation effect in the structural model, the specific indirect effects are checked.

Zhao et al.'s (2010) principles were followed in this research as a basis for the mediation analysis which suggests measuring the size of the indirect effect versus the direct effect in order to determine the strength of mediation.

The results of the analysis for the model without moderators revealed a significant indirect effect of Brand Authenticity (BA) on Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) through the mediation of Brand Experience (BE) ($\beta = 0.642$, $t = 15.721$, $p = 0.000$).

Table 5. 21 *Specific Indirect Effects (Mediation) for the Model without Moderators*

Item	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> BE -> B.ADV	0.642	0.642	0.041	15.721	0.000

On the other hand, the results of the analysis for the model with moderators included in the research model revealed a noticeably decreased level of significant indirect effect of Brand Authenticity (BA) on Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) through the mediation of Brand Experience (BE) ($\beta = 0.353$, $t = 5.840$, $p = 0.000$).

Table 5. 22 *Specific Indirect Effects (Mediation) for the Model with Moderators Included*

Item	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> BE -> B.ADV	0.353	0.353	0.060	5.840	0.000

The total indirect effect of Brand Authenticity (BA) on Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) for the model without moderators was significant ($\beta = 0.642$, $t = 15.721$, $p = 0.000$). Along with the inclusion of the mediator effect of Brand Experience (BE) variable, the effect of Brand Authenticity (BA) on Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) became less significant ($\beta = 0.353$, $t = 5.840$, $p = 0.000$). However, Brand Experience (BE) is proposed to have a full mediation in Brand Authenticity (BA) and Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) relationship based on the findings shown in the table *Significance of Path Coefficients – with Moderators Included* as well as the significance of total indirect effects and direct effects.

Table 5. 23 *Total Indirect Effects for the Model without Moderators*

Item	Total Indirect Effects	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> B.ADV	0.642	0.642	0.041	15.721	0.000

Table 5. 24 *Total Indirect Effects for the Model with Moderators Included*

Item	Total Indirect Effects	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> B.ADV	0.353	0.353	0.060	5.840	0.000

Table 5. 25 *Total Effects for the Model without Moderators*

Item	Total Effects	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> B.ADV	0.688	0.688	0.024	28.944	0.000
BA -> BE	0.787	0.788	0.018	44.538	0.000
BE -> B.ADV	0.815	0.815	0.045	17.916	0.000

Table 5. 26 *Total Effects for the Model with Moderators Included*

Item	Total Effects	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
BA -> B.ADV	0.420	0.419	0.052	8.038	0.000
BA -> BE	0.787	0.788	0.018	44.527	0.000
BE -> B.ADV	0.448	0.448	0.075	5.956	0.000

5.2.5 Moderator Analysis

The moderator variable affects the strength and direction of an impact between independent and dependent variables.

The present study assessed the moderating role of Actual Self-Image Congruence (ASIC) and Consumer Involvement (CI) within the relationship between Brand Authenticity (BA) and Brand Advocacy (B.ADV). There are two moderator variables in the research model, and a separate moderation analysis was not done as the essence of structural equation modeling is complex modeling, therefore the complete model was assessed along with all the moderator and mediator variables included in the model.

Table 5. 27 *Path Coefficients of Moderators*

Item	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
ASIC x BA -> B.ADV	0.025	0.024	0.046	0.532	0.297
CI_Intrst x BA -> B.ADV	-0.034	-0.034	0.052	0.643	0.260

Actual Self-Image Congruence (ASIC) and Consumer Involvement (CI) are proposed to strengthen the relationship between Brand Authenticity (BA) and Brand

Advocacy (B.ADV) in this research, however, neither of the two proposed moderators is moderating the relationship as shown in the table above. Since there is an insignificant moderating effect on the proposed relationship, slope analysis was not performed.

As a result of the findings presented, H5 and H6 are not supported.



5.2.6 Analysis on Product Category Level

After the completion of research model assessment and the evaluation of the structural model on the total sample with and without the moderators included in the research model, the final analysis of the research on product category level was done with an aim to examine whether the findings differ on product category level or not.

Initially, prior steps taken in the research model assessment are followed in the exact same order: A higher order construct was created in the research model and the analyses were done for each individual product category accordingly. After validating the higher order constructs, the measurement model analysis for the initial research model (with moderators included) was done followed by the final research model (with moderators included). The findings for the product category level analysis are not presented in greater detail as done in the previous analyses since the main purpose of product category level analysis is mainly done for a comparative reason. Therefore, the results are presented as a summary of the findings.

Table 5.27 presents the *Construct Reliability and Validity* scores on product category level and the results are above the threshold. Thus, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and the average variance extracted (AVE) criteria are fulfilled on a product category level, as well.

Table 5. 28 Construct Validity and Reliability on Product Category Level

	Mobile Phone (Apple)	Automobile (Mercedes)	All Product Categories
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	0.60-0.90		
Brand Authenticity (BA)	0.859	0.822	0.879
Brand Advocacy (B.ADV)	0.880	0.875	0.856
Brand Experience (BE)	0.933	0.918	0.930
Actual Self-Image Congruence (ASIC)	0.857	0.862	0.855
Consumer Involvement (CI)	0.814	0.754	0.793
<i>Composite reliability (rho_c)</i>	0.60-0.90		
Brand Authenticity (BA)	0.860	0.828	0.897
Brand Advocacy (B.ADV)	0.881	0.873	0.864
Brand Experience (BE)	0.933	0.918	0.930
Actual Self-Image Congruence (ASIC)	0.857	0.863	0.859
Consumer Involvement (CI)	0.823	0.764	0.816
<i>Average variance extracted (AVE)</i>	>0.50		
Brand Authenticity (BA)	0.611	0.617	0.648
Brand Advocacy (B.ADV)	0.711	0.637	0.670
Brand Experience (BE)	0.776	0.737	0.768
Actual Self-Image Congruence (ASIC)	0.668	0.678	0.666
Consumer Involvement (CI)	0.701	0.621	0.670
<i>Discriminant Validity (Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT))</i>	YES	YES	YES

Summary statistics of Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) tables for each category are set out as follows:

Table 5. 29 *Discriminant Validity - Mobile Phone (Apple)*

	ASIC	B.ADV	BA	BE	CI_Intrst
ASIC					
B.ADV	0.778				
BA	0.711	0.709			
BE	0.843	0.844	0.759		
CI_Intrst	0.805	0.831	0.591	0.775	

Table 5. 30 *Discriminant Validity - Automobile (Mercedes)*

	ASIC	B.ADV	BA	BE	CI_Intrst
ASIC					
B.ADV	0.775				
BA	0.589	0.650			
BE	0.797	0.873	0.773		
CI_Intrst	0.766	0.846	0.513	0.764	

Table 5. 31 *Discriminant Validity - All Product Categories*

	ASIC	B.ADV	BA	BE	CI_Intrst
ASIC					
B.ADV	0.781				
BA	0.650	0.678			
BE	0.821	0.854	0.782		
CI_Intrst	0.790	0.839	0.583	0.780	

Table 5. 32 Summary Results and Hypotheses Testing

	Mobile Phone (Apple)	Automobile (Mercedes)	All Product Categories
Summary Results (R^2)			
Brand Advocacy (B.ADV)	0.800	0.836	0.804
Brand Experience (BE)	0.584	0.611	0.620
Hypotheses Testing (p values)			
BA $\rightarrow$ B.ADV	0.000	0.289	0.054
BA $\rightarrow$ BE	0.000	0.000	0.000
BE $\rightarrow$ B.ADV	0.000	0.000	0.000
ASIC x BA $\rightarrow$ B.ADV	0.450	0.395	0.264
CI x BA $\rightarrow$ B.ADV	0.305	0.417	0.200

The overall results show parallelism with the overall results of the research (See *All Product Categories* Column in Table 5.31), except for BA $\rightarrow$ B.ADV relationship for Mobile Phone (Apple) category. The unanticipated finding to emerge from the product category level analysis is that Brand Authenticity (BA) positively predicts Brand Advocacy (B.ADV) for Mobile Phone (Apple) category only, contrary to overall results of the research as well as the results for Automobile (Mercedes) product category.

Therefore, H1 is supported solely on a product category level for Mobile Phone (Apple) category.

Since this finding proposes a different result from the overall results of the research in a positive way, it can be proposed that Product Category (PC) influences the relationship between Brand Authenticity (BA) and Brand Advocacy (B.ADV), however in a partial way as it applies for only one of the brands (Apple).

Thus, H7 is partially supported.

The summary of the research findings is displayed in below table:

Table 5. 33 *Summary of the Research Hypotheses Results*

Research Hypotheses	Result
H1: Brand Authenticity (BA) positively predicts Brand Advocacy (B.ADV)	Partially supported (only on a product category level)
H2: Brand Authenticity (BA) positively predicts Brand Experience (BE)	Supported
H3: Brand Experience (BE) positively predicts Brand Advocacy (B.ADV)	Supported
H4: Brand Experience (BE) mediates the relationship between Brand Authenticity (BA) and Brand Advocacy (B.ADV).	Supported
H5: Actual Self-Image Congruence (ASIC) strengthens the relationship between Brand Authenticity (BA) and Brand Advocacy (B.ADV).	Rejected
H6: Consumer Involvement (CI) strengthens the relationship between Brand Authenticity (BA) and Brand Advocacy (B.ADV).	Rejected
H7: Product category influences all relationships between consumers and brands.	Partially supported (only on a product category level)

PART SIX

6 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The central objective of this doctoral thesis is to reveal the perceived brand authenticity concept to marketing academicians as well as to practitioners as an integral pathway to creating brand advocacy through the multi-dimensional experience consumers have with a brand, and eventually to determine the direction of the relationship between brand authenticity, brand experience and brand advocacy through the lens of actual self-image congruence and consumer involvement. Through a deeper understanding of brand authenticity constructs, this dissertation aimed at answering such research questions as to whether perceived brand authenticity create brand advocate consumers; how authentic perception of brands impacts consumers' experience with a specific brand; whether consumers' experience with a specific brand affect their advocacy behavior; to what extent, if any, do consumers' involvement levels and self-image congruence with a brand affect their advocacy behavior for authentic brands; and finally, whether advocacy behavior of consumers for authentic brands change for different product categories. In order to fulfill the objective of this research, a comprehensive research model was developed and was evaluated using SEM on a large data set with an aim to attain representative results. The data for measuring the variables of the research were collected from consumers for two product categories, i.e., mobile phone consumers and automobile users, and the data was based on the consumer perceptions of two brands (Apple and Mercedes) from these two categories. In the present research, the mobile phone and automobile product categories were chosen due to several reasons: (1) Both categories

appeal to a large number of consumers, (2) both product categories are among dynamic product groups which are constantly changing and keeping up with the technological advances as well as consumer expectations, (3) the perceptions of the consumers towards the brands of both product categories have a significant impact on the marketing strategies and practices of brands, therefore having the potential to offer practical implications to marketing applications, (4) both product categories are considered to have potential symbolic meanings for consumers as playing an important role in their self-identity projects. As a consequence, it is aimed to provide a valuable insight for marketing practitioners in mobile phones and automotive sectors as well as to the marketing scholars on the concept of brand authenticity by contributing to the literature on the influence of brand authenticity on brand experience and brand advocacy.

In spite of the fact that the concept of brand authenticity has been widely researched over the last few decades, to the best of our knowledge, the impact of the concept on brand advocacy and brand experience has remained relatively unexplored. In this study, the impact of brand authenticity has been tested on other crucial brand constructs such as brand experience and brand advocacy and have been presented and discussed in detail with an effort to enrich and contribute to brand authenticity literature.

The present study confirmed the reliability of the multidimensional Perceived Brand Authenticity scale developed by Morhart et al. (2014) across two different brands and product categories as well as within a different cultural context. From this perspective, this research might make an essential contribution to the literature on brand authenticity by extending the applicability on a different culture and product categories.

As previously stated, Morhart et al. (2014)'s brand authenticity dimensions are chosen to be utilized as they are closely linked to the other constructs in this study such as self-image congruence, which has initially been considered to have a significant strength in explaining the latter relationships proposed. Therefore, selection of the brand authenticity scale that is presumed to be the best fit for explaining the research model has been a critical factor as there are several empirically proven brand authenticity scales in the literature.

Concisely summarizing the hypotheses results, majority of the research hypotheses were supported whereas only two hypotheses were rejected (See Table 5.32). On a more specific note, the impact of brand authenticity on brand experience (H2), the impact of brand experience on brand advocacy (H3) as well as the mediating impact of brand experience on the relation between brand authenticity and brand advocacy (H4) were the fully supported hypotheses of the research. On the other hand, direct impact of brand authenticity on brand advocacy (H1) as well as the impact of product category on the relation between brand authenticity and brand advocacy (H7) were partially supported on a single product category level (i.e., mobile phone). Finally, the moderating impact of actual self-image congruence on the relation between brand authenticity and brand advocacy (H5) and the moderating impact of consumer involvement on the relation between brand authenticity and brand advocacy (H6) were the rejected hypotheses of this research.

When a brand is perceived as authentic and a brand of integrity by its consumers, in return, consumers naturally become willing supporters of that brand by promoting it to others and standing up against any criticism related to the brand. In other words, when

the brand advocates its consumers, the consumers then advocate the brand in return (Dağ Başar, 2020). Similar to Dağ Başar's (2020) research studying on the impact of brand authenticity on brand advocacy, the findings of this research also show a parallelism on the importance of brand authenticity for creating advocate customers. Furthermore, word-of-mouth being one of the end-results of consumers' brand advocacy behavior towards a brand, this finding resonates with the finding of Morhart et al. (2014) as well as Şimşek (2017) both of which empirically prove the positive impact of brand authenticity on positive word-of-mouth of consumers. In the present research, however, the impact of brand authenticity on brand advocacy is confirmed only on product category level: The results show that brand advocacy behavior among consumers of mobile phones is positively influenced by their perception of a brand's authenticity, in contrast to consumers of automobiles. This finding is further discussed within the discussion of results on product category.

The findings of previous brand authenticity research prove that authenticity of a brand plays a pivotal role for consumers whether to integrate the brand into their identity (Morhart et al., 2014). Taking its stance from this viewpoint, the current study proposed that an authentically perceived brand with which its consumers can identify themselves would increase the likelihood of brand advocacy behaviors of the loyal consumers. Moreover, consumers that identify themselves with a brand are more eager to diffuse positive word-of-mouth about the related brand as a willing advocate of the brand (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). In the study of Dağ Başar's (2020), it is revealed that consumer brand identification mediates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy, thereby increasing the advocacy behavior of consumers since consumers

develop a self-congruence with the brand which leads to association with the brand. However, this study has been unable to demonstrate that actual self-image congruence of consumers has a moderating impact on the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy. One reason for this finding could be due to product category choices in the study. Perhaps, the moderation effect of actual self-image congruence on the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy could be tested on another product category such as apparels which supposedly might have a more direct and stronger impact on consumers' self-identity projects, thereby self-image congruence may have a deeper meaning for the consumers. Another reason could be related to the involvement level of the consumers in this study. Correspondingly, no evidence of consumer involvement was detected as a mediator on the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy in contrast to the proposed research hypothesis. As a result, consumers with low involvement levels towards a specific brand do not tend to consider the specific brand as a part of their self, which in turn, does not contribute much to the advocacy behavior of the consumers. Re-stating an important factor from involvement literature, involvement is defined as the relationship/intimacy between an individual and an object. Sherif and Cantril's (1947) self (ego) involvement proposes involvement as a part of identity project of consumers. In this sense, consumer involvement cannot be considered as a very separate concept from self-image. Hence, the reason why consumer involvement has proven having no moderating impact on the relation between brand authenticity and brand advocacy can also be explained by the same reason why this study has been unable to demonstrate that actual self-image congruence of consumers has moderating impact on that relationship. Taken together,

these results suggest that there is not a meaningful association of neither actual self-image congruence nor involvement levels of consumers within the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy.

Findings of the research have demonstrated that experience is an important denominator for today's consumers who live in an experience economy, and it plays an integral part as a catalyst in brand perceptions the most essential of which is perceived brand authenticity for this study. The findings observed in current study regarding the positive impact of perceived brand authenticity on brand experience mirror those of the previous studies that have examined the effect of perceived brand authenticity on brand experience. Brand authenticity is discovered to be one of the main factors of the brand experience that is proven to have positive influence on customer emotions (Safeer et al., 2020). In other words, perceived brand authenticity fosters positive brand interactions and brand experience (Raza et al., 2021) similar to the findings of present study. Furthermore, the impact of brand experience on brand advocacy is another perspective that this research aims to provide a clarification for. The findings observed in this study indicate that there is a positive impact of brand experience on brand advocacy behavior of consumers. This finding also accords with the previous research on measuring the effect of brand experience on brand advocacy which proved that high levels of brand experience create brand advocate consumers that are eager to promote positive word of mouth about a specific brand (Rusticus, 2007). The findings regarding the mediating role of brand experience suggests a meaningful insight: Brand experience proves to have a full mediation within the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy.

Differently stated, it is important for consumers to experience an authentic brand so as to advocate the brand under certain conditions.

The directionality of relationships between several constructs, such as brand love, brand loyalty, word of mouth, and purchase intention, has not proven to vary among product categories in prior study, and thus, it is suggested that different product categories may be applied as there is no major difference found (Fetscherin et al., 2014). However, in the current research, the findings only partially support this notion: Product category influences the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy in a partial way as it applies for only one of the brands (Apple) or product categories (mobile phone) tested. On the other hand, it has no significant impact for the other brand (Mercedes) in automobile product category tested. This dichotomous finding implies that future brand authenticity research can employ different product categories in order to draw a more specific finding as to whether product category in fact plays a significant role in brand authenticity constructs. This finding is important also because the product category is the main difference in explaining the relationship of brand authenticity on brand advocacy. The findings indicate that mobile phone consumers' authenticity perceptions of a brand play a positive role in the brand advocacy behavior whereas this result does not parallel with that of automobile consumers. Then again, this finding may result from the mobile phones being an indispensable part of our lives to an extent which they are almost an extension of our bodies rather than only being an electronic device to make calls. Therefore, sense of regarding mobile phones as a part of our identities can be much higher compared to that of automobiles.

Consequently, consumers are more prone to advocate those brands, especially for their products with high symbolic meaning to them. Besides, mobile phone penetration rates and automobile penetration rates in the world could be meaningful for interpreting these results: According to the most recent statistics in 2023, today, there are 6.92 billion smartphone users worldwide, which equates to 86.41% of the world's population having a smartphone. In all, 7.33 billion individuals own a smart or feature phone, accounting for 91.53% of the world's population (Bankmycell, 2023). On the other hand, there are 1.446 billion automobiles on earth in 2022 which makes up 17.7% of the world's population (pd.com.au, 2022). Revolving back to the previously stated notion, majority of world's population own a mobile phone whereas not as high as a percentage of people have their own car. This conclusion may shed some light on the possible reasons behind the difference in the findings for other product categories.

PART SEVEN

7 CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Summary & Conclusions

In a fiercely competitive marketplace where consumers have numerous options, their wants and needs are readily addressed, many brands to choose from, as well as the rapidly advancing technology, understanding customer expectations, and creating a distinctive and authentic approach for their consumers are essential for businesses.

The brand perceptions of new generation consumers who were born right into a digital world are shaped by other consumers rather than just the designated messages and experiences that brands aim to offer. Increasing levels of interaction with the social environment offers the opportunity to reach authentic experiences with brands and objective reviews about the products. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly vital for brands to build long-term, solid, trustworthy, and authentic relationship with consumers in order to mitigate the consequences of unfavorable opinions and negative word-of-mouth that may disseminate and may go out of their control. As previously stated in this research, consumers develop an emotional bonding with a brand when they believe their values are embodied in a brand as well as when the brand lives up to its promises. As a consequence of this authentic brand-consumer relationship, consumers intrinsically feel devoted to a brand. Along with this bonding comes a sustainable relationship based on a mutual trust. Especially considering the fact that information sharing takes place in no

time in our highly digital age, the dispersion of a negative information and/or experience with a brand may have long-lasting and significant impact on the long-term interests of a brand. To that end, it becomes even more crucial for brands to achieve an authentic perception in the minds of their consumers who can be loyal advocates of that brand and can have huge impact on behalf of the brand, which may eventually reach beyond the brand's own communication efforts.

The research in marketing realm concentrating on marketing communications and consumer behavior has borrowed The Attribution Theory from social psychology discipline and the attribution research findings in order to better comprehend what the consumers would refer to when exposed to marketing stimuli within the framework of attribution theory. The consumer might refer to external attributions such as the environment, message, product, marketer (Dağ, 2020), or to internal attributions such as such as endeavor or competency throughout the attribution process (Wang et al., 2008). Laying the groundwork to the present research, Attribution Theory plays an integral role for explaining the research findings since the intrinsic motives of consumers to attach meaning to the products/brands on a symbolic level constitute an important part of brand authenticity, and this in turn shapes consumers' brand perceptions. Rather than being an intrinsic element of the brand, authenticity is created by the consumer of the brand and consumers are inclined to authenticate brands in their perceptions in a way to allude to their true selves (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). In other words, consumers attribute authenticity to brands and explain their true selves through the means of brands. Consumers construct their opinions of a brand's authenticity based on the clues they gather from its “*continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolic*” (Morhart et al., 2014). A

long-standing brand that lives up to its brand promises on an ethically grounded manner may form an authentic perception in the eyes of its consumers. What is more, the symbolic meaning a brand holds for its consumer may be a strong authenticity cue. Findings of the current research postulate that the positive impact of the brand authenticity dimensions on brand experience as well as their positive impact on brand advocacy on product level underscores the significance of attribution for consumers and brands alike.

The results of this study reveal the impact of consumers' brand authenticity perceptions of technological products on brand advocacy. Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that consumers' purchasing preferences are significantly influenced by the brands that can stand out from the competition by making promises that they can fulfill, and as a result, they are perceived as authentic by their consumers. This dissertation also reveals the fact that how consumers experience brands have an utmost importance on their advocacy behavior towards brands.

Table 7. 1 *Summary of Key Findings and Implications*

Key Findings	Academic and/or Managerial Implications
<i>Antecedents & Outcomes</i>	
> Brand authenticity antecedents (namely credibility, integrity, symbolism, continuity) are proven to have an impact on brand advocacy behavior of consumers, however only on product category level. Brand advocacy behavior among mobile phone consumers is positively influenced by their perception of a brand's authenticity, in contrast to consumers of automobiles. > Perceived brand authenticity fosters the experience of consumers with a specific brand. > Positive experience with a brand increases advocacy (and hence, the likelihood of positive WOM) behavior of consumers.	> Consumers might be more inclined to advocate those brands for certain product categories such as mobiles phones, clothing that may potentially play a more significant role in fulfilling their identity projects. Thus, it is more critical for those brands to achieve a positive brand authenticity perception with their market offerings that consumers identify themselves with. > Authentic perception of brands create positive brand interactions and brand experience (Raza, Abd Rani, & Isa, 2021), therefore, it is an important pillar for consumers. > High levels of brand experience result in brand advocate consumers that are eager to promote positive word of mouth about the specific brand (Rusticus, 2007). Managers might target investing on creating authentic experience opportunities for different customer segments with an aim to create advocate customers for higher returns.
<i>Mediators</i>	
> Consumers are more inclined to advocate a brand they perceive as authentic if/when they have a positive experience with the brand.	> The finding captures the essential role of experience in consumer behavior. The mediating role of experience can be further investigated with other construct in order enrich the literature from this perspective. The magnifying impact of experience on consumers' perceptions should be taken into consideration by marketers/practitioners/managers for creating brand advocate and loyal customers.
<i>Moderators</i>	
> Consumers were expected to advocate a brand when 1) they believe the brand is congruent with their self-image and when 2) they are more involved with the product, however, the current research is unable to prove a significant impact on this regard.	> Researchers might extend this research on different product categories and across contexts which self-image congruence and consumer involvement effects might vary. For instance, as previous research revealed that consumer brand identification mediates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy (Dağ Başar, 2020), self-image congruence can be tested as a mediator in this relationship.

7.2. Limitations & Future Research Suggestions

As in the case of every academic research, there are certain limitations in the current academic research, as well, and the empirical findings presented in this study should be evaluated within the context of some limitations. To begin with, generalizability of research findings yet remains to be controversial topic in social sciences. As this thesis study was conducted in a specific culture covering only limited number of industries, as well as within a certain period in time, the results achieved cannot be claimed to be generalizable. It is also worth noting that the method of convenience sampling was utilized to gather primary data, which may restrict the research findings' generalizability, as well. Future research on the concept done with using various samples and sampling procedures will be able to produce data that brand authenticity literature can be enriched with.

Secondly, the current Ph.D. thesis examines brand authenticity perceptions of consumers on two technological product categories, i.e., *mobile phone* and *automobile*. The study fundamentally focuses on brand authenticity dimensions that develop brand advocacy in consumers for technological products. The results of the research do not provide sufficient insight on whether or how brand advocacy is developed for service brands as well as for other product categories such as white goods, food and beverage, alcohol drinks, apparels, and other industries. The product categories used in this study are automobile and mobile phone. Both product categories as purposefully chosen since both product categories potentially bear a symbolic meaning and carry high importance for modern consumers. As previously stated, symbolic meaning of products/brands is

central to the research model of this study as the influence of self-image congruence is also investigated in the model within the scope of this research. Therefore, it is important to investigate whether the scales employed in the research would produce comparable findings also on other product categories as well as on service businesses. In addition, another limitation regarding the product categories may be that the research was conducted on single brand from each category which were chosen as a result of the initial pilot study conducted in this study. Thus, the findings represent only limited number of brands.

Furthermore, the nature and dynamics of B2B businesses greatly differ from B2C. What role does brand authenticity play for brands functioning in B2B environments? This research question could provide valuable insights for B2B brands. Thus, current research can be extended to brands that function in B2B business environments.

Besides, this research covers only consumer perspectives on the scope of the research, however, the authenticity perspectives from a business-centric point of view would contribute to the brand authenticity literature since it is crucial to evaluate the authenticity pillars from the other side of the coin; namely, from brand's perspective. As a consequence, certain bottlenecks can be defined in the authentication journey of brands and necessary steps can be taken as an outcome.

It would also offer a different insight to extend this research to non-profit brands and observe how the impact of authenticity perception of individuals for non-profit brands changes and how this is reflected on their advocacy levels. Valuable insights could be obtained from the findings of such research on non-profit brands.

Finally, it may be concluded that the results for the rejected hypotheses could be evidence for the measured variables to be influenced by the culture in which this study was conducted. Therefore, testing those variables in future intercultural studies could help researchers make progress on the brand authenticity literature. Furthermore, actual self-image congruence and consumer involvement constructs might present meaningful results as mediators rather than moderators as used in this research. Therefore, future research could test the mediating effects of both constructs within the relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy.

ANCORA IMPARO...

[I'm still learning]

Michelangelo

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APPENDIX A

9 Questionnaire for Pilot Study 1

Identifying Brands Perceived as Authentic from Different Product Categories

Your Ideas on Authentic Brands

An authentic brand is a brand that delivers its promises to its consumers in a sincere and interesting way. The values that the brand represents are clear and consistent. The brand behaves culturally appropriate to its target market.

Four characteristics of authentic brands: Continuity, Credibility, Integrity, Symbolism

Product Category	PLEASE WRITE IN THE BOXES BELOW A BRAND NAME THAT YOU THINK IS AUTHENTIC IN THE CATEGORY AND THE REASON FOR IT.
<i>Automobile</i>	
<i>White Goods</i>	
<i>PC</i>	
<i>Mobile Phone</i>	
<i>Food</i>	
<i>Clothing</i>	
<i>Alcohol Drink</i>	
<i>Watch</i>	

1. Gender

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man

2. Age

- ☐ Below 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ +55

4. Marital Status

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married

5. Education Level

- ☐ Secondary School
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Associate Degree (2-year University)
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree (4-year University)
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Doctorate

6. Monthly Income*

- ☐ Below 1.000 TL
- ☐ 1.001 – 2.000 TL
- ☐ 2.001 – 4.000 TL
- ☐ 4.001 – 6.000 TL
- ☐ 6.001 – 8.000 TL
- ☐ 8001 – 10.000 TL
- ☐ 10.001 TL – 12.000 TL
- ☐ 12.000 TL and above

*The monthly salary ranges are to be considered for the year of 2019 when the first pilot study was conducted.

APPENDIX B

10 Results of Pilot Study 1

Identifying Brands Perceived as Authentic from Different Product Categories Results

Automobile	# of times chosen	White Goods	# of times chosen	PC	# of times chosen	Mobile Phone	# of times chosen	Food	# of times chosen	Clothing	# of times chosen	Alcohol Drink	# of times chosen	Watch	# of times chosen	SUMMARY	
Mercedes	21	Arçelik	37	Apple	47	Apple	81	Ulker	23	Zara	23	N/A	24	Swatch	24	Product Category	Brand
Volvo	18	Bosch	33	HP	18	Samsung	20	Eti	17	Mavi	8	Yeni Raki	17	Rolex	20	Automobile	Mercedes
BMW	15	Siemens	24	Monster	14	Huawei	10	N/A	11	Adidas	7	Efes Pilsen	13	Casio	9	White Goods	Arçelik
Volkswagen	13	Miele	6	Asus	12	N/A	4	Pinar	9	Beymen	7	Jack Daniel's	11	Seiko	8	PC	Apple
Audi	10	Beko	5	Lenovo	9	Oppo	3	Torku	8	Vakko	6	Absolut	7	N/A	6	Mobile Phone	Apple
Tesla	10	Vestel	5	DELL	6	Blackberry	1	Nestle	7	N/A	5	Chivas Regal	6	Armani	4	Food	Ulker
Ford	6	Samsung	4	MSI	4	Sutag	6	Inditex	4	Tuborg	6	Manastir	4	Fossil	4	Clothing	Zara
Toyota	4	Gaggenau	3	IBM	2	Coca Cola	4	Lacoste	4	Manastir	4	Apple	4	Apple	3	Alcohol Drink	Yeni Raki
Mini Cooper	3	N/A	2	Samsung	2	McDonald's	3	Kiçili	3	Monkey	3	Cartier	3	Cartier	3	Watch	Swatch
Peugeot	3	Beko	1	N/A	2	Barilla	2	Koton	3	bud	2	Guess collection	3	Guess collection	3		
Aston Martin	2	Dyson	1	Acer	1	Burger King	2	LC Waikiki	3	Kavaklıdere	2	Longines	3	Longines	3		
Ferrari	2			Amrd	1	Godiva	2	Massimo Dutti	3	Macellan	2	TAG Heuer	3	TAG Heuer	3		
Porsche	2			Casper	1	Migros	2	Network	3	Altın seri raki	1	Tissot	3	Tissot	3		
Renault	2			Dell	1	Milka	2	Oxo	3	Amanula	1	daniel wellington	2	daniel wellington	2		
Dodge	1			Toshiba	1	Nutella	2	Defacto	2	Bailey's	1	IWC	2	IWC	2		
HONDA	1					Ada yogurt	1	H&M	2	Cankaya	1	Rolex	2	Rolex	2		
Jeep	1					Ali Muhiddin Hacı	1	Levi's	2	Carlsberg	1	Skagen	2	Skagen	2		
Maserati	1					Bifa	1	Mango	2	Chamija	1	Tommy Hilfiger	2	Tommy Hilfiger	2		
Mazda	1					Carl's Jr	1	Marks&Spencer	2	Chandon	1	Audemars Piguet	1	Audemars Piguet	1		
Mustang	1					Filiz	1	Nike	2	Chardonnay	1	Breitling	1	Breitling	1		
N/A	2					Go raw	1	Topshop	2	Davidoff	1	Bvlgari	1	Bvlgari	1		
Nissan	1					Grunn	1	Yargici	2	Dom Perignon	1	Calvin Klein	1	Calvin Klein	1		
Skoda	1					Günaydin	1	Beshka	1	Heineken	1	Cerruti 1881	1	Cerruti 1881	1		
						KFC	1	Boyner	1	Jim Beam	1	daniel klein	1	daniel klein	1		
						Komili	1	Burberry	1	Johnnie Walker	1	Diesel	1	Diesel	1		
						Lacoste	1	Causal	1	Küp sarap	1	Diesel	1	Diesel	1		
						Montag	1	Colins	1	Lefte	1	DKNY	1	DKNY	1		
						Ovacik	1	Columbia	1	MSK	1	Esprit	1	Esprit	1		
						Özel çiçeklik	1	Damat&tween	1	Pina colada	1	Frederique Constant	1	Frederique Constant	1		
						Redbull	1	Dechaton	1	Red Label	1	Gc	1	Gc	1		
						Reis	1	Diesel	1	Singleton	1	Hermes	1	Hermes	1		
						Sana Yağ	1	Emporio Armani	1	Smirnoff	1	Lacoste	1	Lacoste	1		
						shake shack	1	Harley-davidson	1	Soplica	1	Maurice Lacroix	1	Maurice Lacroix	1		
						Tadim	1	hitemoglu	1	Tanqueray	1	Momentus	1	Momentus	1		
						Tamek	1	Kate spade	1	Vinç	1	Up	1	Up	1		
						Tat	1	Network	1	Volim	1	Wewood	1	Wewood	1		
						Tamek	1	Pierre Cardin	1								
								Ramsey	1								
								Skechers	1								
								Superdry	1								
								Tommy Hilfiger	1								
								Twist	1								
								Under Armour	1								
								UsPolo orjinal	1								
								Vans	1								

APPENDIX C

11 Questionnaire for Main Study (Apple Brand)

Özgün Markalar Hakkında Tez Çalışması İçin Görüşleriniz

Bu çalışma bilimsel amaçlı olup, Yeditepe Üniversitesi Pazarlama Doktora Programı kapsamında Marka Özgünlüğünün tüketicilerin Marka Savunuculuğuna etkisini ölçmeyi hedeflemektedir.

Ankette toplam 7 soru bulunmaktadır ve tahmini tamamlanma süresi 5 dakikadır.

Bilimsel araştırmamıza olan katkılarınızdan dolayı teşekkür ederiz. Çalışmaya katılımınız tamamen isteğe bağlıdır ve bilgileriniz anonim kalacaktır. Araştırmadan çekilmeniz durumunda verileriniz yok edilecektir. Sizden herhangi bir ücret talep edilmeyeceğini ve size herhangi bir ödeme yapılmayacağını belirtmek isteriz. Yapmak istediğimiz araştırmanın size herhangi bir risk getirmesi beklenmemektedir.

Bu anket formu ve çalışmayla ilgili sorularınız varsa bana iletişim bilgilerimden ulaşabilirsiniz.

Aslı Tosun (e-mail: asliyatirtosun@gmail.com)

Araştırmayla ilgili haklarınız konusunda yerel etik kurullarına da danışabilirsiniz.

Yukarıda anket ile ilgili belirtilen açıklamaları okudum, anladım ve ankete katılmayı kabul ediyorum.

1. APPLE marka bir cep telefonu kullanıyor musunuz veya daha önce hiç kullandınız mı?
 - ☐ Evet
 - ☐ Hayır

(Çalışmamızda ilgili marka konusundaki genel algıyı da ölçmek amaçlandığından, bu soruya cevabınız "Hayır" olsa dahi ankete devam etmeniz önemlidir.)

2. Aşağıdaki ifadelere ne derecede katıldığınızı, belirtilen markayı düşünerek verilen ölçeğe göre cevaplamanız gerekmektedir.

Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum 1	Katılmıyorum 2	Kararsızım 3	Katılıyorum 4	Kesinlikle Katılıyorum 5
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Aşağıdaki ifadelere ne derece katıldığınızı APPLE markasını düşünerek verilen ölçeğe göre cevaplamanız gerekmektedir.	APPLE				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Geçmiş olan bir markadır.					
2. Belirli bir zamana ait olmayan, sonsuz bir markadır.					
3. Zamana karşı ayakta kalabilen bir markadır.					
4. Yeni trendlere başarıyla uyum sağlayarak ayakta kalabilen bir markadır.					
5. Tüketicisini hayal kırıklığına uğratmayacak, tüketicisine ihanet etmeyecek bir markadır.					
6. Değerlerine ilişkin vaatlerini başarıyla yerine getiren bir markadır.					
7. Dürüst bir markadır.					
8. Tüketicisine hak ettiğini veren bir markadır.					
9. Ahlaki prensipleri olan bir markadır.					
10. Bir dizi ahlaki değere sadık kalan bir markadır.					
11. Tüketicisine değer veren bir markadır.					
12. İnsanların hayatlarına anlam katan bir markadır.					
13. İnsanların önemseydiği değerleri yansıtan bir markadır.					
14. İnsanları gerçek benlikleriyle buluşturan bir markadır.					

	APPLE				
	1	2	3	4	5
15. İnsanları gerçekte önemli olan şeylere bağlayan bir markadır.					
16. Bu markayı kullanmak, kendimi nasıl gördüğümle tutarlıdır.					
17. Bu markayı kullanmak çoğu zaman beni olduğum gibi yansıtıyor.					
18. Benim gibi insanlar çoğu zaman bu markayı kullanıyor.					
19. Bu marka tüm duyularım üzerinde (görsel, işitsel, tat, koku, dokunma) güçlü bir izlenim (etki) bırakıyor.					
20. Bu markayı ilgi çekici buluyorum, beğeniyorum.					
21. Bu marka tüm duyularıma (görsel, işitsel, tat, koku, dokunma) hitap ediyor.					
22. Bu marka duygularımı harekete geçiriyor.					
23. Bu marka duygusal bir markadır.					
24. Bu marka için güçlü (olumlu) duygular besliyorum.					
25. Bu markayı gördüğümde aklıma birçok fikir geliyor.					
26. Bu marka bende ilgi ve merak uyandırıyor.					
27. Bu marka bana pek çok şeyi anımsatıyor, düşündürüyor.					
28. Bu markanın ürünlerini kullandığımda fiziksel olarak harekete geçiyorum.					
29. Bu markanın ürünlerini kullanmak bedensel deneyimler yaşamama imkân tanıyor.					
30. Bu markanın ürünleri kişiyi harekete geçiren özelliktedir.					
31. Bu markayı başkalarına tavsiye etmeyi seviyorum.					
32. Tanıdığım insanlarla bu markanın iyi yanları hakkında konuşmayı seviyorum.					
33. Çevremdeki insanları bu markanın ürünlerini almaya ikna etmeyi başardım.					

	APPLE				
	1	2	3	4	5
34. Hangi marka cep telefonu satın aldığım/kullandığım benim için son derece önemlidir.					
35. Apple marka bir cep telefonu kullanmak benim için son derece önemlidir.					
36. Apple marka bir cep telefonu satın almak ya da kullanmak benim için çok büyük bir öneme sahiptir.					

3. Cinsiyetiniz

- ☐ Kadın
☐ Erkek

4. Yaşınız

- ☐ 18 altı
☐ 18-24
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55-64
☐ 65 ve üstü

5. Medeni Durumunuz

- ☐ Bekar
☐ Evli

6. Eğitim Durumunuz

- ☐ Ortaöğretim
☐ Lise
☐ Yüksekokul (2 yıllık üniversite)
☐ Lisans (4 yıllık üniversite)
☐ Yüksek Lisans
☐ Doktora

7. Aylık Geliriniz

- ☐ 4.000 TL ve altı
☐ 4.001 – 8.000 TL
☐ 8.001 – 12.000 TL
☐ 12.001 – 16.000 TL
☐ 16.001 – 20.000 TL
☐ 20.001 TL ve üstü

Bilimsel çalışmamıza verdiğiniz değerli katkınızdan dolayı teşekkür ederiz.

APPENDIX D

12 Questionnaire for Main Study (Mercedes Brand)

Özgün Markalar Hakkında Tez Çalışması İçin Görüşleriniz

Bu çalışma bilimsel amaçlı olup, Yeditepe Üniversitesi Pazarlama Doktora Programı kapsamında Marka Özgünlüğünün tüketicilerin Marka Savunuculuğuna etkisini ölçmeyi hedeflemektedir.

Ankette toplam 7 soru bulunmaktadır ve tahmini tamamlanma süresi 5 dakikadır.

Bilimsel araştırmamıza olan katkılarınızdan dolayı teşekkür ederiz. Çalışmaya katılımınız tamamen isteğe bağlıdır ve bilgileriniz anonim kalacaktır. Araştırmadan çekilmeniz durumunda verileriniz yok edilecektir. Sizden herhangi bir ücret talep edilmeyeceğini ve size herhangi bir ödeme yapılmayacağını belirtmek isteriz. Yapmak istediğimiz araştırmanın size herhangi bir risk getirmesi beklenmemektedir.

Bu anket formu ve çalışmayla ilgili sorularınız varsa bana iletişim bilgilerimden ulaşabilirsiniz.

Aslı Tosun (e-mail: asliyatirtosun@gmail.com)

Araştırmayla ilgili haklarınız konusunda yerel etik kurullarına da danışabilirsiniz.

Yukarıda anket ile ilgili belirtilen açıklamaları okudum, anladım ve ankete katılmayı kabul ediyorum.

1. MERCEDES marka bir otomobil kullanıyor musunuz veya daha önce hiç kullandınız mı?
 - ☐ Evet
 - ☐ Hayır

(Çalışmamızda ilgili marka konusundaki genel algıyı da ölçmek amaçlandığından, bu soruya cevabınız "Hayır" olsa dahi ankete devam etmeniz önemlidir.)

2. Aşağıdaki ifadelere ne derecede katıldığınızı, belirtilen markayı düşünerek verilen ölçeğe göre cevaplamanız gerekmektedir.

Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum 1	Katılmıyorum 2	Kararsızım 3	Katılıyorum 4	Kesinlikle Katılıyorum 5
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Aşağıdaki ifadeler ne derece katıldığınızı MERCEDES markasını düşünerek verilen ölçeğe göre cevaplamamız gerekmektedir.	MERCEDES				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Geçmiş olan bir markadır.					
2. Belirli bir zamana ait olmayan, sonsuz bir markadır.					
3. Zamana karşı ayakta kalabilen bir markadır.					
4. Yeni trendlere başarıyla uyum sağlayarak ayakta kalabilen bir markadır.					
5. Tüketicisini hayal kırıklığına uğratmayacak, tüketicisine ihanet etmeyecek bir markadır.					
6. Değerlerine ilişkin vaatlerini başarıyla yerine getiren bir markadır.					
7. Dürüst bir markadır.					
8. Tüketicisine hak ettiğini veren bir markadır.					
9. Ahlaki prensipleri olan bir markadır.					
10. Bir dizi ahlaki değere sadık kalan bir markadır.					
11. Tüketicisine değer veren bir markadır.					
12. İnsanların hayatlarına anlam katan bir markadır.					
13. İnsanların önemseydiği değerleri yansıtan bir markadır.					
14. İnsanları gerçek benlikleriyle buluşturan bir markadır.					

	MERCEDES				
	1	2	3	4	5
15. İnsanları gerçekte önemli olan şeylere bağlayan bir markadır.					
16. Bu markayı kullanmak, kendimi nasıl gördüğümle tutarlıdır.					
17. Bu markayı kullanmak çoğu zaman beni olduğum gibi yansıtıyor.					
18. Benim gibi insanlar çoğu zaman bu markayı kullanıyor.					
19. Bu marka tüm duyularım üzerinde (görsel, işitsel, tat, koku, dokunma) güçlü bir izlenim (etki) bırakıyor.					
20. Bu markayı ilgi çekici buluyorum, beğeniyorum.					
21. Bu marka tüm duyularıma (görsel, işitsel, tat, koku, dokunma) hitap ediyor.					
22. Bu marka duygularımı harekete geçiriyor.					
23. Bu marka duygusal bir markadır.					
24. Bu marka için güçlü (olumlu) duygular besliyorum.					
25. Bu markayı gördüğümde aklıma birçok fikir geliyor.					
26. Bu marka bende ilgi ve merak uyandırıyor.					
27. Bu marka bana pek çok şeyi anımsatıyor, düşündürüyor.					
28. Bu markanın ürünlerini kullandığımda fiziksel olarak harekete geçiyorum.					
29. Bu markanın ürünlerini kullanmak bedensel deneyimler yaşamama imkân tanıyor.					
30. Bu markanın ürünleri kişiyi harekete geçiren özelliktedir.					
31. Bu markayı başkalarına tavsiye etmeyi seviyorum.					
32. Tanıdığım insanlarla bu markanın iyi yanları hakkında konuşmayı seviyorum.					
33. Çevremdeki insanları bu markanın ürünlerini almaya ikna etmeyi başardım.					

	MERCEDES				
	1	2	3	4	5
34. Hangi marka otomobil satın aldığım/kullandığım benim için son derece önemlidir.					
35. Mercedes marka bir otomobil kullanmak benim için son derece önemlidir.					
36. Mercedes marka bir otomobil satın almak ya da kullanmak benim için çok büyük bir öneme sahiptir.					

3. Cinsiyetiniz

- ☐ Kadın
☐ Erkek

4. Yaşınız

- ☐ 18 altı
☐ 18-24
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55-64
☐ 65 ve üstü

5. Medeni Durumunuz

- ☐ Bekar
☐ Evli

6. Eğitim Durumunuz

- ☐ Ortaöğretim
☐ Lise
☐ Yüksekokul (2 yıllık üniversite)
☐ Lisans (4 yıllık üniversite)
☐ Yüksek Lisans
☐ Doktora

7. Aylık Geliriniz

- ☐ 4.000 TL ve altı
☐ 4.001 – 8.000 TL
☐ 8.001 – 12.000 TL
☐ 12.001 – 16.000 TL
☐ 16.001 – 20.000 TL
☐ 20.001 TL ve üstü

Bilimsel çalışmamıza verdiğiniz değerli katkınızdan dolayı teşekkür ederiz.