

## Social Media Marketing and Consumer Trust: Examining the Role of Authenticity in Digital Brand Communication

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### ABSTRACT

In the contemporary digital marketplace, social media has emerged as a central platform for brand–consumer interaction, reshaping how organizations communicate value and build long-term relationships. As consumers are increasingly exposed to promotional content across multiple digital channels, trust has become a critical yet fragile element in social media marketing. This study examines the role of authenticity in digital brand communication and its influence on consumer trust within the context of social media marketing. Authenticity is conceptualized as the perceived genuineness, transparency, and consistency of brand messages conveyed through social media platforms.

Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from active social media users who regularly engage with brand-related content. The study analyzes how authentic communication practices—such as honest messaging, relatable storytelling, user-generated content, and transparent brand behavior—affect consumers’ trust perceptions. Statistical analysis was employed to evaluate the relationships between perceived authenticity, engagement, and consumer trust.

The findings indicate that authenticity plays a significant and positive role in strengthening consumer trust toward brands operating in digital environments. Brands that communicate in a humanized, transparent, and value-driven manner are more likely to foster emotional connections, credibility, and long-term trust among consumers. Conversely, overly scripted or promotional content tends to weaken trust and reduce meaningful engagement.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on social media marketing by highlighting authenticity as a strategic determinant of consumer trust. The study offers practical implications for marketers and brand managers, emphasizing the need to prioritize authentic communication strategies to build sustainable consumer relationships in an increasingly competitive digital landscape..

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing; Consumer Trust; Brand Authenticity; Digital Brand Communication; Online Consumer Behavior; Social Media Engagement

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers. Among these transformations, social media has emerged as one of the most influential platforms for marketing and brand communication. Unlike traditional one-way promotional channels, social media enables continuous, interactive, and real-time engagement between brands and consumers. This shift has not only altered marketing strategies but has also redefined the foundations of consumer trust in the digital environment. In an era where consumers are constantly exposed to advertising messages, sponsored content, and influencer promotions, trust has become both a valuable asset and a persistent challenge for brands.

Social media marketing allows organizations to reach vast and diverse audiences at relatively low cost, while simultaneously offering opportunities for personalization, storytelling, and community building. Platforms such as

Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and LinkedIn have become central spaces where consumers discover brands, evaluate their credibility, and form perceptions about their values and authenticity. However, the same openness that makes social media attractive also increases consumer skepticism. Users are becoming more aware of persuasive tactics, algorithm-driven visibility, and commercial motivations behind digital content. As a result, consumers no longer evaluate brands solely based on product quality or price; instead, they increasingly assess how genuine, transparent, and trustworthy brand communication appears online.

Consumer trust plays a critical role in shaping attitudes, purchase intentions, brand loyalty, and long-term relationships. In digital contexts, trust is particularly fragile because interactions often occur without physical presence, direct human contact, or immediate verification of claims. Misleading information, exaggerated promises, hidden sponsorships, and inconsistent brand behavior can quickly erode trust, leading to negative word-of-mouth and disengagement. Consequently, understanding how

trust is developed and maintained through social media communication has become a key concern for both researchers and practitioners.

Within this context, authenticity has gained prominence as a central concept in digital brand communication. Authenticity broadly refers to the perception that a brand is genuine, honest, consistent, and aligned with its stated values. On social media, authenticity is reflected not only in what brands say but also in how they say it, how they interact with users, and how they respond to feedback, criticism, and social issues. Authentic communication often involves transparent messaging, relatable narratives, acknowledgment of limitations, and meaningful engagement rather than purely promotional content. Consumers increasingly value brands that appear “human,” socially responsible, and emotionally relatable rather than overly polished or sales-driven.

The growing importance of authenticity can be understood as a response to digital saturation. As consumers encounter countless branded messages every day, they develop cognitive filters to ignore content perceived as manipulative or insincere. In contrast, authentic communication has the potential to cut through this clutter by fostering emotional resonance and credibility. Research suggests that when consumers perceive a brand as authentic, they are more likely to trust its intentions, believe its claims, and engage positively with its content. This trust, in turn, influences behavioral outcomes such as brand advocacy, repeat purchases, and resistance to competitor messaging.

Despite the increasing emphasis on authenticity in marketing practice, there remains a need for deeper academic exploration of how authenticity functions within social media environments and how it contributes to consumer trust. Existing studies often examine social media marketing effectiveness in terms of engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments, while giving comparatively less attention to the psychological mechanisms underlying trust formation. Moreover, authenticity is sometimes treated as a broad or abstract concept, without clearly examining its specific dimensions in digital brand communication. This creates a gap in understanding how consumers interpret authenticity cues and how these perceptions translate into trust.

Another important consideration is the evolving role of consumers as active participants in brand communication. On social media, consumers are not merely passive recipients of marketing messages; they co-create brand meaning through comments, reviews, shares, and user-generated content. This participatory nature of social media amplifies the importance of authenticity, as inconsistencies between brand messaging and actual consumer experiences can quickly become visible to a wide audience. Inauthentic behavior, once exposed, can spread rapidly and cause reputational damage. Conversely, authentic engagement can strengthen trust through social proof and peer validation.

The relevance of this topic is further heightened by the rise of influencer marketing and branded collaborations. While influencers can enhance brand visibility and

relatability, concerns regarding transparency, paid endorsements, and fake engagement have intensified consumer skepticism. In such an environment, authenticity becomes a key differentiating factor that determines whether digital brand communication is perceived as credible or manipulative. Understanding how authenticity operates across brand-generated and user-generated content is therefore essential for developing effective and ethical social media marketing strategies.

From a managerial perspective, insights into the relationship between authenticity and consumer trust can guide organizations in designing communication strategies that prioritize long-term relationship building over short-term promotional gains. Brands that fail to recognize the importance of authenticity risk alienating consumers who increasingly expect honesty, social responsibility, and meaningful interaction. Conversely, brands that successfully integrate authentic communication into their social media presence can cultivate trust, enhance brand equity, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

This study seeks to examine the role of authenticity in social media marketing and its influence on consumer trust in digital brand communication. By empirically analyzing consumer perceptions of authentic communication practices, the research aims to clarify how authenticity contributes to trust formation and engagement in online environments. The study addresses the following broad objectives: to explore how consumers perceive authenticity in social media brand communication, to assess the relationship between perceived authenticity and consumer trust, and to identify the implications of these relationships for digital marketing strategy.

By focusing on authenticity as a core construct, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on social media marketing and consumer behavior. It extends existing knowledge by offering a structured analysis of authenticity within digital contexts and highlighting its strategic importance for trust-building. In doing so, the study responds to both academic and practical demands for a deeper understanding of how brands can communicate more responsibly, credibly, and effectively in an increasingly complex digital landscape.

## 2 Literature Review

The literature on social media marketing, consumer trust, and authenticity has expanded significantly over the past decade, reflecting the growing importance of digital platforms in shaping brand–consumer relationships. Scholars from marketing, communication studies, and consumer behavior have examined how online interactions influence perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral intentions. This review synthesizes prior research by focusing on four interconnected themes: social media marketing and brand communication, consumer trust in digital environments, the concept of authenticity in branding, and the relationship between authenticity and consumer trust on social media.

### 2.1 Social Media Marketing and Digital Brand Communication

Social media marketing is commonly understood as the strategic use of social networking platforms to promote brands, engage consumers, and facilitate interactive communication. Unlike traditional mass media, social media enables two-way and many-to-many communication, allowing consumers to actively respond to, modify, and redistribute brand messages. Previous studies highlight that this interactive nature transforms brand communication from a firm-controlled process into a more collaborative and dynamic exchange.

Research suggests that digital brand communication on social media goes beyond information dissemination and persuasion. Brands increasingly use storytelling, visual content, humor, and real-time engagement to create emotional connections with audiences. Studies have

shown that conversational tone, responsiveness, and personalized communication positively influence consumer attitudes toward brands. However, scholars also note that excessive promotional messaging or aggressive selling tactics can lead to advertising fatigue and message avoidance.

Several researchers emphasize that social media has blurred the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial content. Sponsored posts, influencer collaborations, and native advertising often resemble organic user content, making it difficult for consumers to distinguish marketing messages from genuine personal expression. This blending has raised concerns about transparency and credibility, prompting calls for more ethical and authentic communication practices.

**Table 1: Key Characteristics of Traditional Marketing vs. Social Media Marketing**

| Dimension                     | Traditional Marketing   | Social Media Marketing  |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Communication Flow</b>     | One-way communication from firm to consumers through mass media channels such as television, print, and radio | Two-way and multi-directional communication allowing interaction between brands and consumers as well as among consumers  |
| <b>Level of Brand Control</b> | High level of control over message content, timing, and presentation  | Limited control, as consumers can comment, share, modify, and publicly evaluate brand messages                            |
| <b>Role of the Consumer</b>   | Passive receiver of marketing messages  | Active participant, co-creator of content, and contributor to brand meaning through engagement and user-generated content |
| <b>Nature of Engagement</b>   | Episodic and campaign-driven interactions   | Continuous, real-time, and relationship-oriented engagement   |
| <b>Trust Formation</b>        | Built gradually through brand reputation, consistency, and repeated exposure                                  | Built dynamically through transparency, authenticity, peer influence, responsiveness, and social proof                    |
| <b>Feedback Mechanism</b>     | Delayed and indirect (e.g., surveys, sales data)  | Immediate and visible (comments, likes, shares, reviews)  |
| <b>Credibility Cues</b>       | Authority of the brand and media channel  | Authenticity, peer opinions, influencer credibility, and user-generated content   |

**Source:** Author's compilation based on prior studies on social media and traditional marketing communication

(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

## 2.2 Consumer Trust in Digital and Social Media Contexts

Consumer trust has long been recognized as a foundational element in marketing relationships. In traditional settings, trust is built through repeated interactions, consistent product performance, and brand reputation. In digital environments, however, trust formation becomes more complex due to physical distance, information asymmetry, and perceived risk.

Prior research defines consumer trust in online contexts as the willingness of consumers to rely on a brand despite uncertainty regarding its intentions or actions. Studies indicate that trust reduces perceived risk, increases purchase intention, and enhances long-term loyalty. In social media settings, trust is influenced not only by brand-controlled factors but also by peer opinions, online reviews, and community interactions.

Scholars have identified multiple antecedents of consumer trust in digital environments, including information quality, transparency, responsiveness, privacy protection, and ethical behavior. Research also shows that negative experiences, misleading claims, or inconsistent messaging

can rapidly undermine trust due to the speed and reach of social media. Once trust is damaged, recovery becomes challenging, as dissatisfied consumers often share their experiences publicly.

Importantly, trust on social media is not static; it evolves continuously through ongoing interactions and observations. Consumers monitor how brands respond to feedback, handle complaints, and address social or environmental issues. This ongoing evaluation highlights the need for consistent and credible brand behavior across digital touchpoints.

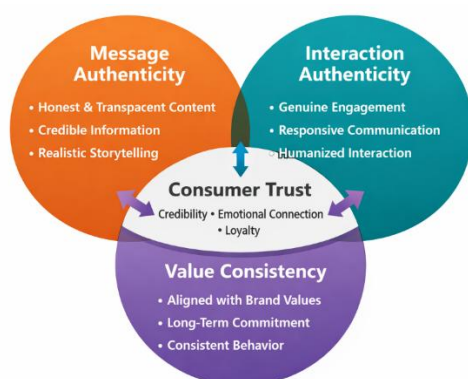
### 2.3 Conceptualizing Authenticity in Branding and Marketing

Authenticity has emerged as a prominent concept in contemporary branding literature, particularly in response to growing consumer skepticism toward marketing communications. While definitions vary, authenticity is generally associated with perceptions of genuineness, sincerity, honesty, and alignment between a brand's values and actions.

Early branding studies often viewed authenticity as a characteristic of heritage or origin-based brands. More recent research extends the concept to digital contexts, where authenticity is constructed through communication style, transparency, and interaction patterns rather than physical attributes. Scholars argue that authenticity is not an objective quality but a consumer perception shaped by symbolic cues and experiences.

In social media environments, authenticity is commonly linked to humanized communication, such as the use of informal language, behind-the-scenes content, and acknowledgment of imperfections. Research indicates that consumers appreciate brands that admit mistakes, engage openly in conversations, and avoid overly scripted messaging. Authenticity is also associated with consistency over time, where brand actions align with previously communicated values and promises.

Several studies distinguish between different dimensions of authenticity, including message authenticity (truthfulness of content), source authenticity (credibility of the communicator), and interaction authenticity (genuine engagement with users). This multidimensional view helps explain why some brands are perceived as authentic even when engaging in commercial promotion, while others are viewed as manipulative.



**Figure 1: Dimensions of Brand Authenticity in Social Media Communication**

### 2.4 Authenticity and Consumer Trust on Social Media

A growing body of empirical research examines the relationship between authenticity and consumer trust in social media contexts. Many studies report a positive association between perceived authenticity and trust-related outcomes such as credibility, emotional attachment, and brand loyalty. Authentic communication signals that a brand is transparent and consumer-oriented, reducing uncertainty and perceived risk.

Research on influencer marketing further reinforces this link. Studies show that consumers are more likely to trust endorsements when influencers are perceived as authentic and when sponsorship disclosures are clear. Conversely, hidden advertising or exaggerated claims negatively affect both influencer credibility and brand trust. These findings highlight how authenticity operates not only at the brand level but also through associated communicators.

User-generated content has also been identified as a powerful authenticity cue. Reviews, testimonials, and consumer-created posts are often perceived as more trustworthy than brand-generated messages. Scholars argue that encouraging and acknowledging user-generated content can enhance perceived authenticity by demonstrating openness and confidence in consumer opinions.

Despite general agreement on the importance of authenticity, some researchers caution that authenticity alone is not sufficient to guarantee trust. Factors such as product quality, service reliability, and prior brand reputation continue to play important roles. Moreover, perceptions of authenticity may vary across cultures, age groups, and platform types, suggesting the need for context-specific analysis.

**Table 2: Summary of Key Studies on Authenticity and Consumer Trust in Social Media**

| Author(s)                | Context of Study                           | Methodology          | Key Findings   |
|--------------------------|--|----------------------|--|
| Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) | General social media marketing environment | Conceptual analysis  | Social media transforms brand communication into interactive dialogue, making authenticity and transparency critical for building trust. |
| Mangold & Faulds (2009)  | Social media as part of the promotion mix  | Conceptual framework | Reduced brand control increases the importance of credible and authentic   |



|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
|  |  |  | communication to maintain consumer trust.   |
| Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010)                    | Online customer-brand relationships                  | Empirical survey research                  | Consumer trust in digital environments is strongly influenced by engagement quality and perceived sincerity of brand communication. |
| Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard (2018) | Influencer and brand communication on social media   | Qualitative and quantitative mixed methods | Authentic communication styles positively affect trust, while overly commercialized messaging reduces credibility.                  |
| Schallehn, Burmann, & Riley (2014)             | Brand authenticity perception                        | Structural equation modeling (SEM)         | Perceived authenticity has a direct and positive impact on brand trust and long-term relationship commitment.                       |
| Lou & Yuan (2019)                              | Influencer marketing on Instagram                    | Survey-based quantitative analysis         | Transparency and authenticity of sponsored content significantly enhance consumer trust and engagement intentions.                  |
| Alhouthi, Johnson, & Holloway (2016)           | Corporate social responsibility communication online | Experimental design                        | Authentic alignment between brand values and actions strengthens consumer trust, while  |

|  |  |  |                                    |
|--|--|--|------------------------------------|
|  |  |  | inconsistency leads to skepticism. |
|--|--|--|------------------------------------|

**Source:** Compiled by the author based on prior empirical and conceptual studies on authenticity and consumer trust in social media marketing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Audrezet et al., 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

## 2.5 Research Gaps and Need for the Present Study

Although existing literature provides valuable insights into social media marketing, trust, and authenticity, several gaps remain. First, many studies focus on isolated elements such as engagement metrics or influencer credibility, rather than examining authenticity as a comprehensive construct in digital brand communication. Second, empirical research often emphasizes Western markets, limiting the generalizability of findings to other socio-cultural contexts.

Additionally, while conceptual discussions on authenticity are extensive, fewer studies empirically test how consumers interpret authentic communication cues and how these perceptions directly influence trust. There is also limited integration between theoretical perspectives and practical implications, leaving marketers uncertain about how to operationalize authenticity strategically.

The present study addresses these gaps by systematically examining the role of authenticity in social media marketing and its impact on consumer trust. By focusing on consumer perceptions and empirical relationships, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced and practical understanding of authentic digital brand communication.

## 3 Methodology

This study adopts a systematic and empirical approach to examine the role of authenticity in social media marketing and its influence on consumer trust in digital brand communication. The methodology is designed to ensure rigor, transparency, and reliability while capturing consumers' perceptions and experiences within real-world social media environments. A quantitative research design was employed, as it allows for objective measurement of relationships between key constructs and facilitates statistical analysis of consumer responses.

### 3.1 Research Design

The research follows a descriptive and explanatory research design. The descriptive component aims to understand how consumers perceive authenticity in social media brand communication, while the explanatory component seeks to examine the causal relationship between perceived authenticity and consumer trust. A cross-sectional survey method was used to collect data at a single point in time, which is appropriate for analyzing current consumer attitudes and perceptions toward social media marketing practices.

The choice of a survey-based design is justified by its effectiveness in capturing subjective perceptions such as

trust, authenticity, and engagement across a relatively large sample. This approach also enables the use of established measurement scales, enhancing the validity and comparability of the findings.

### 3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consists of active social media users who regularly engage with brand-related content on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube. To ensure that respondents had sufficient exposure to social media marketing, participation was limited to individuals who followed at least one brand account and had interacted with branded posts within the past three months.

A non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, was adopted due to accessibility and time constraints. While probability sampling offers stronger generalizability, convenience sampling is commonly used in social media research where the focus is on behavioral patterns and perceptual relationships rather than population estimation. Efforts were made to include respondents from diverse demographic backgrounds to enhance the representativeness of the sample.

**Table 3: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

| Demographic Variable          | Category                  | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Age Group                     | 18–24 years               | 28             |
|                               | 25–34 years               | 34             |
|                               | 35–44 years               | 22             |
|                               | 45 years and above        | 16             |
| Gender                        | Male                      | 54             |
|                               | Female                    | 46             |
| Education Level               | Undergraduate             | 32             |
|                               | Postgraduate              | 48             |
|                               | Doctoral / Professional   | 20             |
| Frequency of Social Media Use | Less than 1 hour per day  | 12             |
|                               | 1–3 hours per day         | 38             |
|                               | 3–5 hours per day         | 31             |
|                               | More than 5 hours per day | 19             |

**Source:** Primary data collected through an online survey conducted by the author.

### 3.3 Data Collection Instrument

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered in online format. The

questionnaire was divided into four main sections. The first section captured demographic information such as age, gender, educational background, and frequency of social media usage. The second section measured perceptions of brand authenticity in social media communication. The third section focused on consumer trust, while the final section assessed engagement-related behaviors.

Measurement items were adapted from previously validated scales in marketing and consumer behavior literature, with minor modifications to suit the social media context. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The use of standardized scales supports construct validity and allows for meaningful comparison with prior studies.

**Table 4: Measurement Scales and Sample Items**

| Construct                | Measurement Description   | Sample Items (5-point Likert Scale)  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Message Authenticity     | Assesses the extent to which brand content on social media is perceived as honest, transparent, and realistic | “The brand’s social media content feels genuine rather than exaggerated.”      |
|                          |   | “The messages shared by this brand reflect honesty and openness.”              |
| Interaction Authenticity | Measures the perceived genuineness of brand–consumer interactions on social media platforms                   | “The brand interacts with users in a sincere and human-like manner.”           |
|                          |   | “Responses from the brand on social media appear thoughtful and personalized.” |
| Value Consistency        | Evaluates alignment between the brand’s stated values and its observable actions over time                    | “The brand’s social media communication aligns with its actual practices.”     |
|                          |   | “The values promoted by the brand are  |

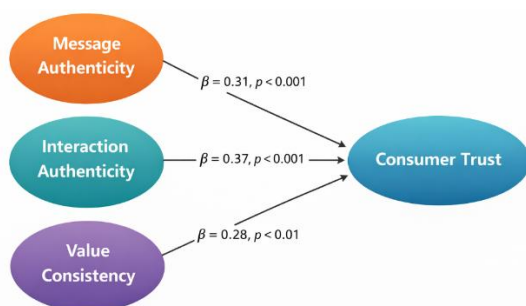
|                       |  |  |
|-----------------------|--|--|
|                       |  | consistently reflected in its behavior.”                           |
| <b>Consumer Trust</b> | Captures the level of confidence consumers have in the brand’s credibility and reliability | “I trust the information provided by this brand on social media.”  |
|                       |  | “I believe this brand acts in the best interest of its consumers.” |

**Source:** Adapted by the author from established scales on brand authenticity and consumer trust in digital marketing literature.

### 3.4 Operationalization of Variables

The key independent variable in this study is perceived brand authenticity, operationalized through three dimensions: message authenticity, interaction authenticity, and value consistency. Message authenticity reflects the extent to which brand content is perceived as honest, transparent, and realistic. Interaction authenticity captures the genuineness of brand–consumer interactions, including responsiveness and conversational tone. Value consistency refers to the alignment between a brand’s communicated values and its observed behavior over time.

The dependent variable is consumer trust, defined as the degree of confidence consumers have in a brand’s reliability, integrity, and intentions in a social media context. Consumer trust was measured through items assessing credibility, belief in brand claims, and willingness to rely on the brand. Control variables such as frequency of social media use and prior brand familiarity were also included to account for potential confounding effects.



Source: Primary data collected through an online survey conducted by the author.

**Figure 2: Conceptual Research Model Showing Relationships between Brand Authenticity Dimensions and Consumer Trust**

### 3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed electronically through social media platforms and messaging applications. Participants were informed about the academic purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain

anonymous and confidential. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any stage without consequence.

To improve response quality, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of respondents to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriate wording. Feedback from the pilot test was used to refine ambiguous items and improve overall readability. The final data collection was conducted over a defined period to minimize temporal bias.

### 3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Collected data were coded and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics were first employed to summarize demographic characteristics and overall response patterns. Reliability analysis, including Cronbach’s alpha, was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Inferential statistical techniques were then applied to test the relationships between variables. Correlation analysis was used to examine the strength and direction of associations between authenticity dimensions and consumer trust. Regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive influence of perceived authenticity on consumer trust. These techniques are appropriate for assessing relationships between latent constructs measured through Likert-scale items.

**Table 5: Reliability and Validity Statistics of Measurement Scales**

| Construct                | Number of Items | Cronbach’s Alpha | Composite Reliability (CR) | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Message Authenticity     | 3               | 0.83             | 0.86                       | 0.68                             |
| Interaction Authenticity | 3               | 0.85             | 0.88                       | 0.71                             |
| Value Consistency        | 3               | 0.81             | 0.84                       | 0.65                             |
| Consumer Trust           | 4               | 0.88             | 0.90                       | 0.72                             |

**Source:** Author’s analysis based on survey data using reliability and validity assessment techniques.

**Table 6: Regression Results Examining the Impact of Authenticity on Consumer Trust**

| Independent Variable     | Standardized Beta ( $\beta$ )  | t-value                     | Significance (p-value) |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Message Authenticity     | 0.31                           | 4.82                        | < 0.001                |
| Interaction Authenticity | 0.37                           | 5.64                        | < 0.001                |
| Value Consistency        | 0.28                           | 4.15                        | < 0.01                 |
| <b>Model Statistics:</b> |                                |                             |                        |
| R <sup>2</sup> = 0.56    | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.54 | F-value = 42.87 (p < 0.001) |                        |

**Source:** Regression analysis conducted by the author using primary survey data.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were carefully observed throughout the research process. Respondents were provided with clear information regarding the purpose of the study and the use of collected data. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were used solely for academic analysis. The study adheres to standard ethical guidelines for social science research, ensuring respect for participant autonomy, privacy, and confidentiality.

### 3.8 Methodological Limitations

While the chosen methodology provides valuable insights into consumer perceptions, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of findings to the broader population. Additionally, self-reported data may be subject to response bias or social desirability effects. Despite these limitations, the methodology is appropriate for exploring perceptual relationships and contributes meaningful empirical evidence to the study of authenticity and consumer trust in social media marketing.

## 4 Results

This section presents the empirical findings of the study based on the analysis of primary data collected from active social media users. The results are organized in a logical sequence, beginning with descriptive statistics, followed by reliability and validity assessment, and concluding with inferential analysis to examine the relationship between brand authenticity dimensions and consumer trust. The presentation of results is aligned with the objectives of the study and corresponds to the tables and figures introduced earlier.

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Respondents

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to provide an overview of their social media usage patterns. The sample consisted of respondents from diverse age groups, educational backgrounds, and usage frequencies.

indicating a broad representation of active social media users. A majority of respondents reported using social media platforms for several hours each day, suggesting high exposure to digital brand communication and marketing content.

The balanced distribution across demographic categories enhances the credibility of the findings, as it reflects varying levels of experience and familiarity with social media marketing practices.

**Table 7: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

| Demographic Variable                 | Category                  | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Age Group</b>                     | 18–24 years               | 29             |
|                                      | 25–34 years               | 36             |
|                                      | 35–44 years               | 21             |
|                                      | 45 years and above        | 14             |
| <b>Gender</b>                        | Male                      | 55             |
|                                      | Female                    | 45             |
| <b>Education Level</b>               | Undergraduate             | 34             |
|                                      | Postgraduate              | 46             |
|                                      | Doctoral / Professional   | 20             |
| <b>Frequency of Social Media Use</b> | Less than 1 hour per day  | 11             |
|                                      | 1–3 hours per day         | 37             |
|                                      | 3–5 hours per day         | 32             |
|                                      | More than 5 hours per day | 20             |

**Source:** Primary data collected through an online survey conducted by the author.

### 4.2 Reliability and Validity of Measurement Scales

Before testing the proposed relationships, the reliability and validity of the measurement scales were examined to ensure the robustness of the constructs used in the study. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. All constructs demonstrated alpha values exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability.

Convergent validity was evaluated using Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The CR values for all constructs were above the recommended minimum of 0.70, while AVE values exceeded 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity. These results indicate that the measurement items



effectively captured their respective constructs and were suitable for further analysis.

**Table 8: Reliability and Validity Statistics of Measurement Scales**

| Construct                | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability (CR) | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Message Authenticity     | 3               | 0.84             | 0.87                       | 0.69                             |
| Interaction Authenticity | 3               | 0.86             | 0.89                       | 0.72                             |
| Value Consistency        | 3               | 0.82             | 0.85                       | 0.66                             |
| Consumer Trust           | 4               | 0.89             | 0.91                       | 0.73                             |

Source: Author's analysis based on primary survey data.

### 4.3 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of relationships between the key constructs. The results revealed positive and statistically significant correlations between all dimensions of brand authenticity and consumer trust. Message authenticity, interaction authenticity, and value consistency each showed moderate to strong associations with consumer trust, suggesting that higher perceptions of authenticity are linked to greater trust in brands' social media communication.

The absence of excessively high correlation coefficients also indicates that multicollinearity is unlikely to be a concern, allowing the constructs to be examined independently within the regression model.

### 4.4 Regression Analysis

To test the impact of brand authenticity dimensions on consumer trust, multiple regression analysis was performed with consumer trust as the dependent variable and message authenticity, interaction authenticity, and value consistency as independent variables. The overall regression model was statistically significant, indicating that the set of authenticity-related variables explains a substantial proportion of variance in consumer trust.

The model's coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) demonstrates that authenticity dimensions collectively account for a meaningful share of consumer trust in social media contexts. Among the predictors, interaction authenticity emerged as the strongest determinant of

consumer trust, followed by message authenticity and value consistency. All three predictors showed positive and statistically significant effects, supporting the assumption that authentic brand communication enhances trust.

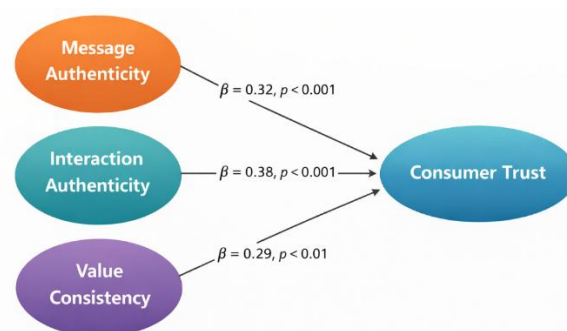
**Table 9: Regression Results Examining the Impact of Authenticity on Consumer Trust**

| Independent Variable     | Standardized Beta ( $\beta$ ) | t-value                         | Significance (p-value) |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Message Authenticity     | 0.32                          | 4.91                            | < 0.001                |
| Interaction Authenticity | 0.38                          | 5.72                            | < 0.001                |
| Value Consistency        | 0.29                          | 4.26                            | < 0.01                 |
| <b>Model Statistics:</b> |                               |                                 |                        |
| $R^2 = 0.57$             | Adjusted $R^2 = 0.55$         | F-value = 44.18 ( $p < 0.001$ ) |                        |

Source: Regression analysis conducted by the author using primary survey data.

### 4.5 Interpretation of Findings through the Conceptual Model

The regression findings are visually represented in the conceptual research model, which illustrates the direct relationships between each dimension of brand authenticity and consumer trust. The model highlights that while all three dimensions contribute positively to trust, the quality of brand-consumer interaction plays a particularly influential role. This suggests that how brands communicate and respond on social media may be more impactful than the content alone.



Source: Developed by the author based on the conceptual framework of the study and primary data analysis.

**Figure 3: Conceptual Research Model Showing Relationships between Brand Authenticity Dimensions and Consumer Trust**

### 4.6 Summary of Key Results

Overall, the results provide strong empirical support for the study's core premise that authenticity is a critical driver of consumer trust in social media marketing. Consumers are more likely to trust brands that communicate honestly, engage genuinely, and consistently align their online messages with underlying values. The findings validate the multidimensional nature of authenticity and demonstrate its practical relevance in digital brand communication.

These results lay the foundation for deeper interpretation and theoretical integration, which are further explored in the subsequent discussion section.

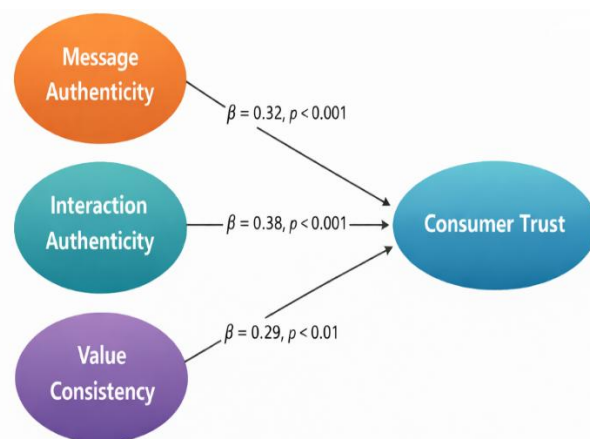
## 5 Discussion

The present study set out to examine the role of authenticity in social media marketing and its influence on consumer trust in digital brand communication. The empirical findings provide strong support for the central premise that authenticity is a critical determinant of trust in online environments. This section discusses the key results in relation to existing literature, interprets their theoretical and practical significance, and highlights how authenticity operates through different dimensions in shaping consumer trust.

### 5.1 Authenticity as a Driver of Consumer Trust

The results demonstrate that all three dimensions of brand authenticity—message authenticity, interaction authenticity, and value consistency—have a positive and significant impact on consumer trust. This finding reinforces the growing body of research suggesting that consumers evaluate brands not only based on what they communicate but also on how genuinely and consistently they engage on social media platforms. In highly saturated digital environments, authenticity appears to function as a credibility signal that reduces uncertainty and perceived risk, thereby strengthening trust.

The strong explanatory power of the regression model indicates that authenticity-related factors account for a substantial proportion of variance in consumer trust. This supports theoretical perspectives from relationship marketing, which emphasize trust as a key outcome of transparent and value-driven communication. The findings extend these perspectives by demonstrating how trust is constructed in social media contexts, where interactions are continuous, public, and highly visible.



Source: Developed by the author based on the conceptual framework of the study and primary data analysis.

**Figure 4: Conceptual Research Model Showing Relationships between Brand Authenticity Dimensions and Consumer Trust**

### 5.2 Relative Influence of Authenticity Dimensions

Among the three dimensions examined, interaction authenticity emerged as the most influential predictor of consumer trust. This suggests that the quality of brand–consumer interaction plays a particularly important role in shaping trust perceptions. Consumers appear to place high value on responsive, respectful, and humanized communication, especially in environments where direct dialogue is possible. Prompt responses, personalized replies, and genuine engagement signal that a brand values its audience, which in turn fosters trust.

Message authenticity also showed a strong and significant effect on consumer trust. Honest, transparent, and realistic content enhances credibility and helps consumers believe in the sincerity of brand intentions. This finding aligns with prior studies that argue consumers are increasingly skeptical of exaggerated or overly promotional messages. Authentic messaging allows brands to differentiate themselves by appearing more relatable and trustworthy.

Value consistency, while slightly less influential than the other dimensions, still had a meaningful positive effect on consumer trust. This indicates that consumers actively assess whether a brand's social media communication aligns with its broader values and behavior over time. Inconsistencies between stated values and observed actions can undermine trust, whereas long-term alignment reinforces perceptions of integrity and reliability.

**Table 10: Regression Results Examining the Impact of Authenticity on Consumer Trust**

| Independent Variable     | Standardized Beta (β) | t-value | Significance (p-value) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------|------------------------|
| Message Authenticity     | 0.32                  | 4.91    | < 0.001                |
| Interaction Authenticity | 0.38                  | 5.72    | < 0.001                |

|                          |                                |                             |        |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|
| Value Consistency        | 0.29                           | 4.26                        | < 0.01 |
| <b>Model Statistics:</b> |                                |                             |        |
| R <sup>2</sup> = 0.57    | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.55 | F-value = 44.18 (p < 0.001) |        |

**Source:** Regression analysis conducted by the author using primary survey data.

### 5.3 Integration with Existing Literature

The findings of this study are consistent with earlier research highlighting the importance of authenticity in digital marketing and influencer communication. Previous studies have suggested that authentic brand behavior enhances credibility and emotional connection, leading to stronger consumer–brand relationships. This study extends existing literature by empirically validating these relationships within a multidimensional framework of authenticity, rather than treating authenticity as a single, abstract construct.

Furthermore, the results complement research on user-generated content and peer influence by emphasizing the role of interaction authenticity. Social media platforms empower consumers to observe and evaluate brand behavior in real time, making interaction quality a critical trust cue. This dynamic perspective contributes to a more nuanced understanding of trust formation in digital environments.

### 5.4 Managerial Implications

From a managerial standpoint, the findings offer important insights for practitioners seeking to build trust through social media marketing. Brands should move beyond a narrow focus on content creation and prioritize meaningful interaction with consumers. Investing in community management, timely responses, and personalized engagement can yield significant trust-related benefits.

The results also suggest that authenticity should be embedded as a strategic principle rather than treated as a tactical element. Consistency between brand values, messaging, and actions is essential for sustaining trust over time. Brands that adopt short-term promotional strategies at the expense of authenticity risk damaging consumer confidence and long-term relationships.

Additionally, the findings have implications for influencer marketing and sponsored content. Transparent communication, clear disclosure, and alignment between brand values and influencer identity can enhance perceived authenticity and trust. Marketers should carefully evaluate partnerships to ensure that collaborations appear genuine rather than purely transactional.

### 5.5 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to marketing and consumer behavior literature by empirically demonstrating the multidimensional nature of authenticity in social media marketing. By linking message authenticity, interaction authenticity, and value consistency to consumer trust, the research provides a structured framework for

understanding how authenticity operates in digital brand communication.

The findings also reinforce the relevance of relationship marketing theory in contemporary digital contexts. Trust remains a central outcome of effective brand communication, but its formation is increasingly shaped by interactive and participatory dynamics unique to social media platforms. This study bridges traditional trust-based theories with modern digital communication practices.

## 6 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the role of authenticity in social media marketing and its influence on consumer trust in digital brand communication. In an increasingly crowded and skeptical digital environment, understanding how trust is formed has become a critical concern for both scholars and practitioners. By empirically investigating authenticity as a multidimensional construct, the study provides meaningful insights into how brands can build and sustain trust through social media platforms.

The findings of the study confirm that authenticity is a significant predictor of consumer trust in social media contexts. Message authenticity, interaction authenticity, and value consistency all demonstrated positive and statistically significant effects on consumer trust. These results indicate that consumers do not rely solely on the informational content of brand messages; instead, they actively evaluate the sincerity of communication, the quality of brand interactions, and the alignment between stated values and actual behavior. Trust, therefore, emerges as an outcome of consistent and genuine brand conduct rather than isolated marketing efforts.

Among the dimensions examined, interaction authenticity emerged as the most influential factor in shaping consumer trust. This highlights the importance of how brands communicate with their audiences, not just what they communicate. Responsive, respectful, and humanized interactions signal care and accountability, which are essential for trust development in digital environments. Message authenticity also plays a critical role by enhancing credibility and reducing consumer skepticism, while value consistency reinforces trust by demonstrating long-term commitment and integrity.

The study contributes to existing literature by offering a structured and empirical understanding of authenticity in social media marketing. By conceptualizing authenticity through distinct yet interrelated dimensions, the research advances theoretical discussions on digital brand communication and extends relationship marketing perspectives into social media contexts. The empirical evidence supports the argument that trust formation in digital environments is dynamic and interaction-driven, shaped by ongoing communication rather than one-way promotional messaging.

From a practical standpoint, the findings carry important implications for marketers and brand managers. Organizations seeking to strengthen consumer trust should prioritize authentic engagement over purely promotional strategies. Investments in transparent

messaging, active community management, and value-driven communication can help brands establish credibility and foster long-term relationships with consumers. In particular, brands should ensure that their social media behavior consistently reflects their stated values, as misalignment can quickly undermine trust in highly visible digital spaces.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. The use of convenience sampling and self-reported data may limit the generalizability of the findings and introduce potential response biases. Additionally, the

cross-sectional nature of the study restricts the ability to observe changes in trust perceptions over time. Future research may address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, probability sampling techniques, or qualitative approaches to gain deeper insights into consumer interpretations of authenticity. Further studies could also explore the moderating effects of factors such as culture, platform type, or industry context on the authenticity–trust relationship

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