



The mediating role of perceived brand authenticity between brand experience and brand love: a cross-cultural perspective

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Abstract

This research investigates the mediating role of perceived brand authenticity (PBA) between brand experience (BE) and brand love (BL) of global high-tech brands Apple and Samsung. A quantitative study was conducted in Japan, India, and Portugal. The research found evidence that PBA is a multidimensional, reflective-formative higher-order construct composed of two lower-order components namely PBA Core and PBA Peripheral. The findings also contribute to understand how consumers are impacted by different BE and PBA dimensions using the lens of consumer culture theory and how BL is formed as a social-cultural phenomena. Finally, the study demonstrates for the first time that relationship intensity and self-authenticity moderate the effect of BE on PBA. Although limited to three countries and high-tech brands, the findings are of relevance to global brands by raising awareness that culture plays a key role in how consumers perceive authentic brand experiences and how passionate feelings for global brands can be strengthened.

Keywords Perceived brand authenticity · Brand experience · Brand love

Introduction

Globalisation has fuelled cultural diversity of consumer markets (Torelli et al. 2021) and created challenges for branding in postmodern societies. It is well-established that creating strong emotional bonds with consumers is increasingly difficult since consumers perceive and evaluate brands differently (Torelli et al. 2021). Research also show that cultural contexts may impact on individual levels factors, such as emotions, behaviours, and cognition (Kastanakis and Voyer 2014; Markus and Kitayama 1991) which are linked to experiences. In this regard, consumer culture can be considered as a lens through which consumers experience brands and align them with elements of their culture (Andreini et al. 2018). Thus, brands are considered means to address consumers' psychological needs connected to self-identity and

social needs in specific contexts (ibid). For instance, in collectivistic cultures, consumers are more likely to define the self in terms of social identities when compared to individualist cultures that foster independence and the prioritisation of personal goals (Triandis 1995; Torelli et al. 2021).

Some relevant branding studies stressed that the cultural significance and symbolism of a brand is linked to its authenticity (e.g. Fritz et al. 2017; Napoli et al. 2013). Additionally, it was pointed out that values, myths, lifestyles, beliefs, and moral norms are relevant drivers that influence consumers' perceptions (Jian et al. 2019). As such, perceived brand authenticity (PBE) may result from the interplay of objective facts (indexical authenticity), subjective mental associations (iconic authenticity) and existential motives about a brand (existential authenticity) that are linked to culture. This assumption posits a relevant challenge to global brands aiming to design simultaneously engaging and authentic brand experience that can drive brand love.

To date several empirical studies have been conducted in the field of positive consumer–brand relationships but these studies tend to neglect the socio-culturally constructed phenomena from an experiential marketing perspective (Andreini et al. 2018). To address this gap, our study investigates the mediating role of the PBA between brand experience and brand love in three distinct cultural settings, namely

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Japan, India, and Portugal. Moreover, our study focuses on high-tech global brands Apple and Samsung. Global brands are conceptualised in our study as brands that are offered across international markets and benefit from high levels of brand recognition mainly due to centrally coordinated marketing strategies across several markets (Dimofte et al. 2008; Steenkamp et al. 2003; Nie and Wang 2021). The following section covers the literature reviewed on brand experience, PBA and brand love and is followed by hypotheses development.

Literature review

Brand Experience

Brand experience is conceptualised as “subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments” (Brakus et al. 2009, p. 53). Four brand experience dimensions were identified: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural (ibid). Sensory brand experience refers to the stimulation provided by the five human senses. Affective brand experience relates to the degree that the brand can induce feelings and sentiments and thus strengthen the emotional ties with consumers. By contrast, the behavioural brand dimension is linked to the more rational action-oriented ability of the brand to engage consumers in physical activities. Finally, the intellectual brand dimension refers to the degree to which a brand can arouse curiosity. Grounded on Schmitt’s (1999) definition of experience, a relational brand dimension was later proposed by some scholars (Nysveen et al. 2013; Schmitt et al. 2015). Although brand experience is one of the most prominent concepts in the consumer research over the last decade, little is known of how brand experience embeds socially constructed phenomena arising from the interaction between market-place actors in cultural contexts (Andreini et al. 2018). More specifically, the relationship between consumer culture theory (CCT) and brand experience remains almost unexplored (ibid).

Consumer culture theory is based on a postmodernist perspective of consumption (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Fuat Firat et al. 1995) that views consumption as social acts with experiential immersive practices (Carù and Cova 2007). These social acts are embedded in cultural, historical, and social contexts (Askegaard and Linnet 2011) and focus on the study of the experiential meanings of brands. Nevertheless, most of the studies conducted by consumer culture researchers neglect the sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual dimensions of brands (Andreini et al. 2018) as proposed by Brakus et al. (2009). The basic assumption is

that both the material and cultural dimensions of brands generate meaning and value at an individual, collective, and market level instead of the sensory, behavioural, affective, and intellectual responses to brands (Andreini et al. 2018).

Recently, the brand literature started to acknowledge the role of culture on brand experience dimensions. For instance, Saari and Mäkinen (2017) advocated that brand-related stimuli are culture-dependent and showed that the intellectual dimension of high-tech brands varied across national contexts. In the same stream of research, Rodrigues and Brandão (2021) conducted a cross-cultural study of the IKEA brand love and demonstrated that the intellectual dimension is the most relevant dimension of brand experience in Portugal, whereas in Sweden, the sensory experience is prevalent. Additionally, Safeer et al. (2021) investigated the influence of brand experience on brand love for global brands in the Asian market and concluded that sensory and affective experiences have a direct and significant impact on brand love. This emerging research shed light on the importance of understanding how consumers are impacted by different brand experience dimensions using the lens of consumer culture theory.

Perceived brand authenticity

Authenticity is a virtue, and this has been increasingly appreciated by consumers of the modern era. Earlier researchers have connected authenticity to emotions (Rose and Wood 2005) and to the art of communication (Schauch 2009), and bridged the aspects of the true self and personal identities to related objects and spaces. Whitmer (2019) stresses the forceful impact of authenticity especially in the era of the social media when the sharing of personal spaces, objects, and emotions became a norm through varied visual media such as pictures, candid photographs, blogs, vlogs, and narratives. In this scenario, new forms of media-based social identities have emerged that bring both presenters and audiences on the same platform (McCarthy 2009).

Consumption practices have also long been associated with the need to seek identification from one’s experiences, connect with the external audiences, and seek knowledge from them (Alexander et al. 2006). These activities lead to the formation of symbolic forms, popular characters and in-depth narratives, and this knowledge can be used to understand the cultural practices of the societies we live in (McCarthy 2009). Berger (1973) asserts that authenticity is an effort to bring “reality” close to consumers. This is imperative as consumers tend to focus either internally or externally when it comes to their consumption practices and preferences. Postmodern theorists posit that consumption structures must lure consumers to dreamlike and uncritical states of hypercreation through spectacular and enthralling experiences



to reengage them in the consumption process (Ritzer 2005). Obviously so, as more consumption practices are designed along the lines of authenticity, the stronger is the importance of self-authenticity as a precursor to the expression of consumption. Then, authenticity gets established through possession of objects, including brands, and the recognition or acceptance of such possessions by peers and affiliates. Thornton (1996) connects the reputation associated with “being authentic” to the consumers’ desire and eligibility for being accepted by established communities, as well as an appeal to some sense of social hierarchy and reference. The main rationale behind this acceptance is the trust that consumers within a group place on each other when it comes to consumption practices. Brands have affiliate groups that can consist of present, past and prospective consumers, and the authenticity of information naturally plays its part in describing brand characteristics, features, and values, and in creating brand loyalty and brand heritage.

Seminal works on brand authenticity focus on the trust that a brand is able to create through a truthful portrayal of itself and a committed service to its consumers. Popularly examined through the lenses of consumer culture theories, brand authenticity is linked with several aspects such as postmodern capitalism (Rose and Wood 2005) also discussed with reference to the sociological discourse of Baudrillard (cited by Kellner 1989); legitimacy (Kates 2004); socio-historical or ideological authenticity (Holt 2002); clarity and ambiguity (Brown et al. 2013); and through ethnocentricity and social constructionist paradigms (Södergren 2021). In specific relevance to culture-based paradigms, Groves et al. (2001) describe the role of reproducing authentic cultural contexts such as brands, logos, symbols, atmosphere, and artefacts to create a culture-based cognizance with brands and impress positively on the brand experience. This was proved by the studies of Kim and Baker (2017) that showed a positive relationship between culture-based brand authenticity and the consumer willingness to pay for the experiences in order to establish stronger self-identity. Thus, in line with the self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1991), a higher cultural fit was an assurance of higher brand authenticity among its consumers. In addition, higher cultural closeness of a brand increased the authenticity attributions of a brand (Fritz et al. 2017). This is more prominent when contemporary hyper-markets and consumption behaviour motivates consumers to find their cultural roots in products and services and seek continuity with their origins (Napoli et al. 2013; Riefler 2020). On the other hand, low willingness to associate with brands was observed when brand image failed to resonate with the expected signal value of authenticity required to express affiliation with a specific culture or sub-culture (Charmley et al. 2013), resulting in

brand-avoidance behaviour among consumers (Lee et al. 2009; Perry 2015).

Brand love

The concept of brand love initially grew out of theories of interpersonal love in the psychology literature (Shimp and Madden 1988; Sternberg 1986). In this context, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006, p. 81) defined brand love as “the degree of passionate, emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name”. Some years later, Batra et al. (2012) expanded on this conceptualisation capturing brand love both as a relationship and an emotion (affection, behaviour, and cognition). The relevance of brand love for product, service, and destination brands is well-established in the marketing literature. For example, it has been shown that brand love positively influences word-of-mouth (Bairrada et al. 2019; Coelho et al. 2019; Rodrigues and Rodrigues 2019; Amaro et al. 2021), purchase intention (Rodrigues and Rodrigues 2019), willingness to pay more (Bairrada et al. 2019; Wallace et al. 2022), resistance to negative information (Bairrada et al. 2019), active engagement (Bairrada et al. 2019; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010), forgiveness of brand failures (Bauer et al. 2009), and brand trust (Aboulnasr and Tran 2020).

Nevertheless, very few studies have accounted for the role of social-cultural characteristics on how consumers love brands. Brand love was measured in the USA, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France, and New Zealand by Vernuccio et al. (2015) but the authors did not incorporate country as a factor in their conceptual model. In addition, Zarantonello et al. (2016) measured the brand love in Russia, Indonesia, and the USA as part of the scale development process before collecting data to test the relationships between brand love, brand loyalty, and brand attitude. In another stream of research, a study from Pontinha and Vale (2010) tested, for the first time, an integrative model of brand love in consumers from Portugal, a collectivist society with high uncertainty avoidance and USA, an individualistic society with low uncertainty avoidance. The authors demonstrated that brand love differs significantly from culture to culture. More specifically, the study shows that the consumers’ commitment to brands and how they use them to express themselves are influenced by cultural characteristics. For example, American consumers (typically classified as an individualistic culture) seem to be much more affectionate and use a brand as a self-expressive tool than Portuguese consumers (collectivist culture). Another study by Oliveira et al. (2021) acknowledged the role of culture on how trustworthiness influences brand love for news media brands in Netherlands and Brazil. More recently, the brand love framework developed by Batra et al. (2012) was tested in its original format in six countries and emphasised large



differences on brand love conceptualizations in those cultural settings (Sajtos et al. 2021). More specifically, it is shown the meaning of brand love is the same for Australia and some parts of the USA. Contrastingly, UK, France, and China view brand love the least similarly which led researchers to conclude that brand managers should identify the strongest dimension of brand love in each cultural setting and design their marketing strategies accordingly.

Hypothesis development

Brand experience and perceived brand authenticity

Brand experience has emerged as an essential and central construct in marketing since the beginning of the 2000s as a natural consequence of the experiential value of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Pine and Gilmore 1998; Schmitt 1999). It has primarily focused on conceptualising and measuring brand experience (Brakus et al. 2009). Extant research has suggested that brand experiences have a positive impact on brand loyalty (Brakus et al. 2009; Ramaseshan and Stein 2014; Iglesias et al. 2011), brand credibility (Shamim and Mohsin Butt 2013), brand attitude (Zarantonello and Schmitt 2013), brand satisfaction (Brakus et al. 2009), affective commitment (Iglesias et al. 2011), brand attachment and brand commitment (Ramaseshan and Stein 2014), and brand equity (Zarantonello and Schmitt 2013). In addition, past research highlights the importance of understanding brand experience by considering it to be a critical influencer of brand love and identifies significant differences in the effects of the affective, sensory, intellectual, and behavioural brand dimensions of IKEA brand (Rodrigues and Brandão, 2021). In the decade since the pioneer work by Brakus et al. (2009), the marketing literature on brand experience has revealed little progress (Andreini et al. 2018) and neglected the growing quest of authenticity in the brand-building process. One notable exception is the study conducted by Safeer et al. (2021) conducted in the Asian markets which demonstrated that sensory, intellectual, affective, and behavioural brand dimensions positively affect brand authenticity, which in turn impact positively on brand love in the context of global brands. Due to the limited understanding of the relationship between the two constructs, this study considers that brand experience dimensions have a different role in building brand authenticity. Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H1 Brand Experience has a positive impact on Perceived Brand Authenticity.

Perceived brand authenticity and brand love

While much branding and marketing research has focused on understanding the antecedents and outcomes of brand love, very few papers have concentrated on mediating effects of PBA on brand love. Oh et al. (2019) explored the impact of PBA on forming self-reinforcement assets described by Park et al. (2013) attachment–aversion relationship model. They show that PBA predicts whether a brand entices, enriches, or enables the consumer self, which consequently intensifies the consumer–brand relationship, and increases consumers behavioural intentions towards the brand.

Moreover, research dedicated to study the influence of authenticity in the tourism field showed that PBA has a key role in developing love feelings towards Airbnb and hotel brands in USA (Mody and Hanks 2020). In the same vein of research, Manthiou et al. (2018) demonstrated that PBA is an antecedent of brand love in the luxury hotel setting. A recent study by Safeer et al. (2021) investigated the impact of brand experience on PBA and brand love. Their findings indicated that brand love is an outcome of PBA in the Asian market. While opening a new and fertile area for research, these works are still exploratory and have a number of limitations. For example, PBA and brand love should be investigated as multidimensional constructs to address the complexity of both theoretical constructs (Bagozzi et al. 2017; Morhart et al. 2015; Bruhn et al. 2012). We therefore posit that:

H2 Perceived Brand Authenticity has a positive impact on Brand Love.

The moderating role of relationship intensity

Literature on consumer–brand relationships views brands as potential relationship partners (Blackston 1992; Fournier 1994, 1998). According to Fournier (1998), a positive brand relationship enhances the emotional attachment between consumers and brands and increases the relationship quality. Conversely, it was empirically demonstrated that strong consumer–brand relationships positively influence the consumers' repurchase intentions (Huber et al. 2010). Nevertheless, studies on the dynamic nature of brand love within consumer–brand relationships are still very scarce (Whang et al. 2004; Rodrigues and Rodrigues 2019). In particular, research acknowledges that the degree of relationship intensity of neo-luxury consumer–brand relationships strengthens the effect of sensuality and intimacy on brand love, whereas it attenuates the effect of mystery on brand love (Rodrigues and Rodrigues 2019). The authors explain that mystery, as a cognitive-focused brand dimension, may dilute along the consumer–brand relationship span. These results confirm previous research conducted by Ramadan (2017),



who showed that strong consumer–brand relationships are affected by saturation with time. Additionally, Rodrigues and Rodrigues (2019) demonstrated that the moderation effect of relationship intensity of consumer–brand relationships varies among neo-luxury brands, which shows that some brands are more prone to have a long-lasting and strong relationship than others. Another stream of research posits that consumers tend to engage emotionally with brands that are gateways to express and enhance their identity (Belk 1988) or are perceived as more authentic (Oh et al. 2019). In other words, it is argued that consumers feel more emotionally attached to brands that are authentic and deliver positive experiences (Oh et al. 2019). In that regard, we posit that the PBA might be strengthened if consumers have a strong relationship with brands resulting from previous positive brand experiences. Hence, we hypothesise that:

H3 Relationship intensity moderates the relationship between brand experience and perceived brand authenticity.

The moderating role of self-authenticity

Self-authenticity (Wang, 1999; Arnould and Price 2000; Newman and Smith 2016) is identified as one of the most complex types of authenticities to be investigated in consumer research as it entails a high level of personal and subject related variations that surpass rationality and conformity. Leigh et al. (2006) make an extended discussion about consumption and authenticity and create a relationship between subjective consumer experiences, identity construction, and conformation to further build consumer cultures and subcultural capital. From a culture perspective, the overall construct of self-authenticity ushers in regionalisation related constructs that impact the expression of self, identity, and related consumption. While self-authenticity is specifically defined through the focus on the self and measured by the level of congruence between self-values and beliefs with self-actions (Vannini and Burgess 2009), Kuchmaner and Wiggins (2021) explore self-authentication as an impact of external feedback mechanisms on the validation of self-authenticity. In both situations, culture plays an important role in establishing self-authentication as a driving force behind identity-based consumption processes (Golomb 2012; Billore 2021).

Funnelling further into this discussion, there are researchers that focus on the impact of socio-cultural profiles such as individualistic cultures where self-authenticity is better manifested (Robinson and Clifford. 2012; Slabu et al. 2014) because it is easier to engage in self-expression and identity-based decision-making. On the other hand, collectivist cultures exercise a restraining effect on the “self” as actions are influenced by external impressions and expectations (Kokkoris and Kühnen 2014), even as people themselves believe

that they are essentially high in self-authenticity (Rathi and Lee, 2020). In addition, consumer’s sense of self-authenticity can also be dampened due to identity threats faced from culture-based cohorts, such as, through interpersonal interactions within social settings and narrow consumption sub-cultures (Petriglieri 2011). Thus, the overall reification of authenticity in contemporary social and consumption cultures manifests through its connection with identity, materiality, and praxis. In a highly globalised world, culture is composed of dynamic and indigenous elements such as practices, beliefs, and values, thereby making it important to analyse authenticity through varied cultural and subcultural contexts and examine the existing antecedents that lead to the conceptualisation of self-authenticity (Vannini and Burgess 2009). Thus, we expect that:

H4 Self-authenticity moderates the relationship between brand experience and perceived brand authenticity.

Methodology

Questionnaire and measures

The development of the survey instrument started with a detailed review of the literature on brand authenticity aiming at identifying relevant factors that could mediate the effect between brand experience and brand love. The survey was divided into four sections. The first section relates to the consumer–brand relationship intensity; the second section refers to brand love and brand experience; the third part focuses on brand authenticity and self-authenticity, and the fourth and last section relates to demographics.

Validated scales from previous studies were adopted to measure the five constructs as shown in “Appendix A”. The brand experience variable was modelled as composite factors according to the dimensions proposed by Brakus et al. (2009), namely intellectual, affective, behavioural, and sensorial. For the brand love variable, we opted for a unidimensional measurement scale from Bagozzi et al. (2017) since the aim is to obtain a global valuation of the respondents and analyse its relationship with other variables. Additionally, PBA was measured by adapting Morhart et al. (2015) and Bruhn et al. (2012) scales. It should be noted that there is not a consensus on how to measure PBA, and the authors choose to incorporate the most relevant dimensions identified in the literature in what concerns positive consumer–brand relationships. Moreover, brand experience and brand love scales were modelled with a reflective design. Finally, the self-authenticity (SA) was measured using Wood et al. (2008)’s scale.

All responses were recorded by means of an ordinal five-point Likert scale, which ranged from “strongly



disagree” to “strongly agree” at the exception of brand relationship intensity (1 = “This brand is not indifferent to me” to 5 = “I really love this brand”). Additionally, the survey was pretested twofold. To avoid potential misinterpretation of the survey by respondents, four professors and four marketing practitioners were asked to assess the adequacy of all the questions on the topic under investigation. Secondly, 25 respondents were asked to evaluate and give feedback on the survey’s ease of comprehension. Finally, the English questionnaire was translated into Portuguese and Japanese and pretested to assess the adequacy of the questions from the conceptual standpoint.

Data collection and sample

The survey was conducted in Portugal, India, and Japan and was carried out from 2018 to 2019. The sample (see Table 1) shows that there is a balanced number of respondents in what concerns gender ($N_{\text{male}} = 693$; 50.2%) and country of origin ($N_{\text{Portugal}} = 472$; 34.1%; $N_{\text{India}} = 426$; 30.8%; $N_{\text{Japan}} = 485$; 35.1%). Furthermore, the majority of respondents are between 18 and 24 years old ($N = 989$; 71.5%), followed by respondents that are between 25 and 35 years old ($N = 268$; 19.4%). Additionally, the majority of respondents hold a university degree ($N_{\text{educ}} = 999$; 72.2%).

Portugal, India, and Japan were chosen due to the fundamental cultural differences identified by Hofstede (2022), namely power distance ($p = 63$; $I = 77$; $J = 54$), individualism ($p = 27$; $I = 48$; $J = 46$), masculinity ($p = 31$; $I = 56$; $J = 95$), uncertainty avoidance ($p = 99$;

$I = 40$; $J = 92$), long-term orientation ($p = 28$; $I = 51$; $J = 88$), and indulgence ($p = 33$; $I = 26$; $J = 42$).

Data analysis and results

Hypotheses were tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) and specifically the SmartPLS software package (Ringle et al. 2005). PLS-SEM is deemed particularly appropriate for this specific study due to the composite model that allows to model the high-order aggregate constructs of our research model (i.e. Brand Experience and Brand Authenticity). This approach does not require distributional assumptions (Huang 2019). Additionally, PLS has been found to better explore high-complexity models’ underlying theoretical structures (Jöreskog and Wold 1982), since it is most often used to test and validate at a more theoretical level, the hypothesised relationships of exploratory models in the earlier stages of theory development (Hair et al. 2020). Finally, the use of PLS-SEM result in model convergence when a huge number of observed and/or latent variables is considered (Hair et al. 2020).

Measurement assessment

Three different studies were carried out. Firstly, we conducted an exploratory and a confirmatory factor analysis, followed by a partial least-square structural equation model analysis. Finally, a multi-group analysis was conducted. Relevant literature on the PLS-SEM approach cautiously advises researchers towards reporting model fit indices (Hair et al. 2016, 2017). Even though, some researchers have already started requesting to report model fit indices for PLS-SEM, the majority still refrain from reporting, considering that the proposed critical threshold values are still in their early stage of investigation, and thus often deemed as not totally useful. SmartPLS provides model fit indices, namely the Standardised Root-Mean-Square Residual (SRMR) and the Normed Fit Index (NFI). However, SmartPLS users are advised by the software developers that there is still much research necessary for such indicators to be properly applied. Hence, the authors have decided to withhold disclaiming model fit indexes.

Using SmartPLS 3, a factor analysis was conducted on all constructs to test for its reliability, which was initially measured via the Cronbach’s α . The Cronbach’s α indicates how a set of items within a specific group are closely related. The higher the value of α , the more reliable the scale is. According to Kline (2015), a Cronbach’s

Table 1 Sample profile of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender (N = 1383)		
Male	693	50.2
Female	688	49.7
Age (N = 1383)		
Less than 18	29	2.1
18–24	989	71.5
25–35	268	19.4
More than 35	97	7.0
Education (N = 1383)		
9th grade	127	9.2
Gymnasium	257	18.6
University degree	999	72.2
Country (N = 1383)		
Portugal	472	34.1
India	426	30.8
Japan	485	35.1



α comprised around 0.90 is considered to be excellent, while one around 0.80 is thought to be very good. SmartPLS 3 suggests a threshold of 0.7 for Cronbach's α . All our constructs match these Cronbach's α values since they ranged between 0.7 and 0.97. A combined analysis of each construct's pattern matrix and covariance matrix suggested the elimination of three items from the brand experience construct (Affect2, Sens3 and Int2) and one from the brand love latent variable (BL 18) to increase the Cronbach's α . The outer loadings of the model were calculated. Cronbach's α and composite reliability were then obtained.

To the best of our knowledge, PBA is operationalized for the first time in our study as a multidimensional, reflective-formative higher-order construct composed of two lower-order components, namely PBA Core and PBA Peripheral. In that regard, an analysis of the measurement model for the total sample was performed, more specifically the analysis of the reliability of each item, the reliability of the constructs, and the variance extracted. The first composite factor includes the credibility, integrity, symbolism, and naturalness dimensions and was named "Core Brand Authenticity". The second composite factor includes the continuity and originality dimensions and was named "Peripheral Brand Authenticity". The analysis of the measurement model demonstrates that the "Core Brand Authenticity" is the most relevant dimension of PBA with the highest outer loading and outer weight (Table 2).

Furthermore, the analysis also shows that the sensory dimension is the most relevant dimension of brand experience. All the other brand experience dimensions have almost equal weights, i.e. the affective (0.351), the intellectual (0.383), and the behavioural (0.326) dimension are perceived as almost equivalent for the brand experience latent variable. Subsequently, validity tests were conducted. Specifically, the calculation of the average variance extracted (AVE) through SmartPLS 3 allowed to assess the constructs convergent validity. Convergent validity refers to the degree to which two different variables that have been theoretically hypothesised are correlated. Convergent validity is achieved when the construct's AVE is superior to 0.5 (Barclay et al. 1995). AVE for all constructs exceeded 0.5, thus confirming that all measurements exhibited satisfactory convergent validity. Additionally, discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the AVE values to the corresponding squared correlations for all construct pairs (Fornell and Larcker 1981). We obtained evidence of satisfactory discriminant validity for all the constructs, since the maximum variance inflation factor (VIF) value for the aggregate multidimensional construct was 2.856, well below the threshold of 3.3. Moreover, the results of the measurement model were found to be valid according to the commonly accepted criteria (Hair et al. 2017).

Structural model assessment

The structural model from the PLS analysis is shown in Fig. 1, in which the explained variance of endogenous variables (R^2) and the standardised path coefficients (β) are depicted. The significance of estimates (t-statistics) was obtained by performing a bootstrapping analysis with 5000 resamples, two-tailed sample distribution, and percentile 95% confidence intervals. The R^2 values indicate the variance explained by each variable for the two endogenous constructs, i.e. PBA ($R^2=0.304$) and brand love ($R^2=0.103$). Moreover, all theoretical relationships between constructs were significant ($p < 0.05$) thus supporting H1–H3 (Fig. 1). Brand experience is found to have a positive impact on PBA ($\beta=0.427$, $t=17.42$, $p < 0.001$), whereas PBA has a positive impact on brand love ($\beta=0.313$, $t=13.62$, $p < 0.001$). To examine whether the effect of brand experience on brand love is explained through a mediation, bias-corrected and percentile bootstrapping approach was employed using 5000 bootstrap samples to calculate 95% confidence intervals (author). The results show that brand experience has a significant and positive total effect on brand love ($\lambda=0.744$, $t=46.65$, $p < 0.001$). When adding PBA as a mediator, the effect of brand experience on brand love decreases ($\lambda=0.157$, $t=10.24$), but still maintain a statistically significant effect on brand love ($p < 0.001$). Consequently,

PBA has a significant partial mediating effect as shown in Table 3.

Moderating effects of relationship intensity and self-authenticity

To add a more dynamic perspective to the analysis, the authors added relationship intensity (RI) and self-authenticity (SA) as a moderating variable to the model and tested the relevant conditional effects. In fact, the intensity of the relationship that consumers have with brands (RI) increases the impact of the brand experience on PBA ($M=0.097$, $p < 0.001$), whereas the degree of self-authenticity (SA) decreases the impact of the brand experience on PBA ($\beta=-0.088$, $p < 0.001$). Beside the statistically significant impact of both moderators, RI and SA, in increasing or decreasing the relationship between brand experience and PBA, the effect size (f-square) was additionally calculated. The results showed a small size effect of 0.014 and 0.01, respectively. In conclusion, H4 and H5 were validated (Table 4).

Multi-group analysis

The pool data was divided into separate covariance matrices of three countries (Portugal C1, N1=472; India C2, N2=426; Japan C3, N3=485) and two brands (Apple



Table 2 Descriptive, reliability, and convergent validity

Construct	Factor/Dimension	Items	Outer loading	α	CR	AVE	
Brand Experience (BE)	Affective	Affect 1	0.872	0.67	0.908	0.526	
		Affect 3	0.862				
		Behav 1	0.884				
	Behavioural	Behav 2	0.861	0.73	0.846	0.650	
		Behav 3	0.653				
		Int 1	0.877				
	Intellectual	Int 3	0.875	0.70	0.868	0.767	
		Sen 1	0.893				
	Sensory	Sen 2	0.894	0.75	0.888	0.798	
Perceived brand authenticity (PBA)	Brand authenticity core		0.89	0.96	0.959	0.513	
			0.94				0.943
	Credibility	Cred 1	0.667	0.91	0.927	0.612	
		Cred 2	0.764				
		Cred 3	0.766				
	Integrity	Integ 1	0.766	0.91	0.927	0.612	
		Integ 2	0.757				
		Integ 3	0.769				
		Integ 4	0.759				
	Nature	Nat 1	0.673	0.91	0.927	0.612	
		Nat 2	0.736				
		Nat 3	0.727				
	Symbolism	Symb 1	0.735	0.91	0.927	0.612	
		Symb 2	0.741				
		Symb 3	0.737				
		Symb 4	0.722				
	Brand authenticity peripheral			0.7	0.97	0.968	0.570
		Continuity	Cont 1	0.763			
			Cont 2	0.786			
			Cont 3	0.804			
Cont 4			0.797				
Originality		Orig 1	0.742				
		Orig 2	0.808				
		Orig 3	0.764				
	Orig 4	0.794					
Brand Love (BL)		BL 1	0.701	0.97	0.968	0.570	
		BL 2	0.755				
		BL 3	0.754				
		BL 4	0.773				
		BL 5	0.778				
		BL 6	0.779				
		BL 7	0.749				
		BL 8	0.767				
		BL 9	0.738				
		BL 10	0.731				
		BL 11	0.767				
		BL 12	0.747				
		BL 13	0.694				
		BL 14	0.723				



Table 2 (continued)

Construct	Factor/Dimension	Items	Outer loading	α	CR	AVE
		BL 15	0.795			
		BL 16	0.762			
		BL 17	0.793			
		BL 19	0.761			
		BL 20	0.791			
		BL 21	0.749			
		BL 22	0.764			
		BL 23	0.749			
		BL 24	0.737			

α Cronbach's alpha; CR Composite reliability; AVE average variance extracted

Fig. 1 Structural model

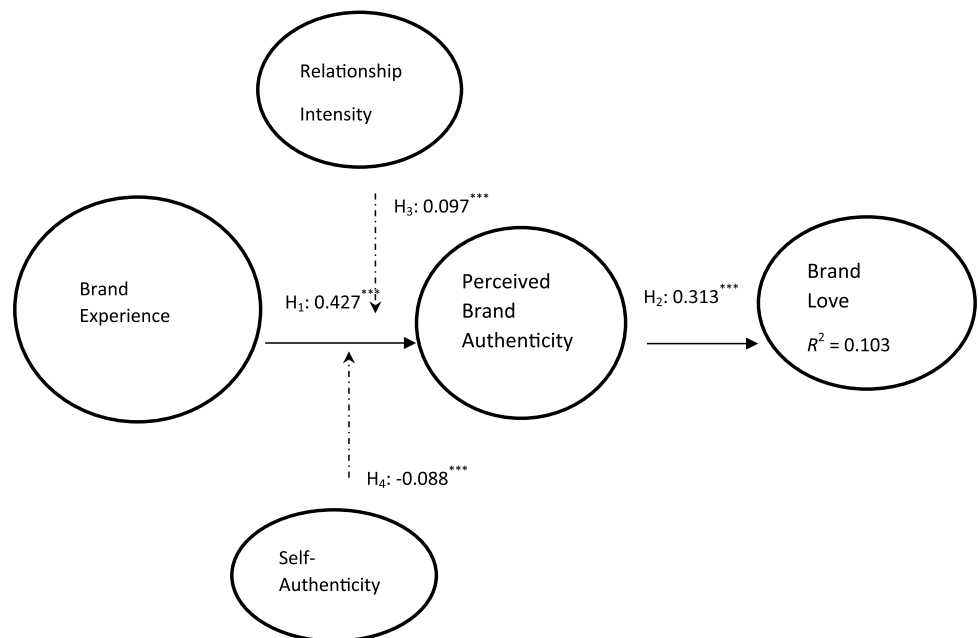


Table 3 Specific indirect effects

Variables	Estimate	Mean	t	Bootstrapping	
				Bias-Corrected 95% CI	
				Lower	Upper
Brand Experience—> Perceived Brand Authenticity—> Brand Love	0.157***	0.162	10.24	0.14	0.195
Moderating Effect 1_Intensity—> Perceived Brand Authenticity—> Brand Love	0.030**	0.039	3.965	0.013	0.047
Moderating Effect 2_Self-authenticity—> Perceived Brand Authenticity—> Brand Love	-0.027***	-0.027	3.583	-0.042	-0.014
Relationship Intensity—> Perceived Brand Authenticity—> Brand Love	-0.015*	-0.02	2.238	-0.036	-0.003
Self-Authenticity—> Perceived Brand Authenticity—> Brand Love	0.03***	0.046	4.614	0.016	0.047

5000 bootstrap samples; two-tailed; * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

N = 659; Samsung N = 724). It is worth noting that the measurement invariance of composite models (MICOM) is a logical and necessary step prior to conducting MGA

(Henseler et al. 2015). This test procedure is designed to analyse whether the measurement of the (outer) model is the same between groups. The indicators in the outer model



Table 4 Results of the hypotheses testing

Path	f-Square	SPC	P-value	Result
H1: Brand Experience—> Brand Authenticity		0.427	0.000***	Supported
H2: Brand Authenticity—> Brand Love		0.313	0.000***	Supported
H3: Moderating Effect 1_Intensity—> Brand Authenticity	0.014	0.097	0.000***	Supported
H4: Moderating Effect 2—> Brand Authenticity	0.01	- 0.088	0.000***	Supported

SPC Standardised path coefficient

*** p < 0.001

determine the meaning of the constructs in the structural (inner) model. Hence, the existence of measurement invariance means that the same constructs do not have significant differences in the different groups under analysis (Henseler et al. 2015). The SmartPLS 3.23 software automatically established the configural invariance. The standard SmartPLS3 MGA was conducted by using 5000 permutations for greater stability of results, in which we evaluated the p-value of the difference between the effects of all groups, i.e. countries and brands.

We have followed the MICOM analysis with the three mandatory steps (1) configural invariance, (2) compositional invariance, and (3) equal means and variance test. A configural invariance was achieved regarding both criteria, i.e. different brands and different countries. Thus, we have further proceeded to the next MICOM steps. The results showed that the path coefficients regarding the relationship between brand experience and PBA are significantly different for Portugal and India (p < 0.05) (Table 5). An interesting overall finding is that the influence of brand experience PBA is greater for Japan (γ = 0.481, p < 0.001) and Portugal (γ = 0.276, p < 0.001), as compared to India (γ = 0.076, p = 0.637). Regarding the influence of PBA on brand love, the results show significant differences among the countries. In other words, the influence of PBA on brand love is greater for Japan (γ = 0.374, p < 0.001), when compared to India (γ = - 0.299, ns) and Portugal (γ = 0.192, p < 0.001). The exception goes to the comparison between Portugal and India which is not statistically different regarding the

impact of PBA on brand love. Additionally, the results demonstrate that there are no significant differences among countries in what concerns the moderating effect of relationship intensity between brand experience and PBA. In fact, relationship intensity is positive and not statistically significant in Portugal (β = 0.015, ns), whereas it is negative and not statistically significant for Japan (β = - 0.042, ns) and India (β = - 0.09, p < 0.05). Furthermore, there are no statistical differences among countries. Regarding the self-authenticity moderating effect, the results revealed that there are no significant differences among Portugal vs. India and India vs. Japan. Nevertheless, there are statistical differences between Portugal and Japan (β = - 0.087, p < 0.1).

Our findings also demonstrate that there are significant differences between Apple and Samsung in what concerns the effect of brand experience on PBA and the effect of PBA on brand love (p < 0.001) (Table 6). Indeed, the influence of brand experience (BE) on PBA is greater for Apple (γ = 0.517, p < 0.001) when compared to Samsung (γ = 0.273, p < 0.001). The same occurs in relation to the effect of PBA on brand love (BL), which is greater to Apple (β = 0.423, p < 0.001) when compared to Samsung (β = - 0.131, p < 0.001). Finally, the multi-group analysis shows no significant differences in terms of the moderating effect of self-authenticity (M2) for Apple (β = - 0.081, p < 0.05) and Samsung (β = - 0.112, p < 0.001). In both cases, self-authenticity has a negative moderating effect between brand experience and PBA. On the other hand, the

Table 5 PLS multi-group analysis for countries

Main hypotheses	Path estimates Portugal	Path estimates India	Path estimates Japan	Estimate difference (Portugal-India)	Estimate difference (Portugal-Japan)	Estimate difference (India-Japan)
BA—> BL	0.192***	- 0.299 ^{ns}	0.374***	0.491 ^{ns}	- 0.183 **	- 0.673 **
BE—> BA	0.276***	0.076 ^{ns}	0.481***	0.2 *	- 0.206 **	- 0.406 ***
M SA—> BA	- 0.134 **	- 0.103 ^{ns}	- 0.047 ^{ns}	- 0.031 ^{ns}	- 0.087 *	- 0.056 ^{ns}
M Intensity—> BA	0.015 ^{ns}	- 0.009 ^{ns}	- 0.042 ^{ns}	0.023 ^{ns}	0.057 ^{ns}	0.033 ^{ns}
RI—> BA	0.091 *	0.036 ^{ns}	- 0.211***	0.054 ^{ns}	0.302 ^{ns}	0.248 ***
SA—> BA	0.110**	- 0.047 ^{ns}	0.046 ^{ns}	0.158 ^{ns}	0.064 ^{ns}	- 0.093 ^{ns}

N_{Portugal} = 472; N_{India} = 426; N_{Japan} = 485; 5000 bootstrap samples; *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.001; ns: not significant



Table 6 PLS multi-group analysis for brands

Main hypotheses	Path estimates Apple	Path estimates Samsung	Estimate difference (Apple–Samsung)
Perceived Brand Authenticity—> Brand Love	0.423***	0.131***	0.29***
Brand Experience—> Perceived Brand Authenticity	0.517***	0.273***	0.25 ***
Moderator SA—> Perceived Brand Authenticity	– 0.081**	– 0.112***	0.03 ^{ns}
Moderator Intensity—> Perceived Brand Authenticity	0.172***	– 0.076*	0.25 ***
RI—> Perceived Brand Authenticity	– 0.110**	0.063 ^{ns}	– 0.17 **
Self-authenticity—> Perceived Brand Authenticity	0.047 ^{ns}	0.136***	– 0.09 ns

$N_{\text{Apple Group}} = 659$; $N_{\text{Samsung Group}} = 724$; Bootstrap 95% with 5000 interactions; * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$; n.s.: not significant

results show that the moderating effect of relationship intensity significantly differs between brands. Whereas the moderating effect is positive and statistically significant ($\gamma = 0.172$, $p < 0.001$) for Apple, the moderating effect for Samsung is negative and statistically significant ($\gamma = -0.076$, $p < 0.01$).

Discussion

Theoretical implications

This study adds a few significant contributions to theory. First, this study found that the brand authenticity scale is a multi-dimensional, reflective-formative higher-order construct composed of two lower-order components, namely PBA Core and PBA Peripheral. The findings show that the composite factor including credibility, integrity, symbolism, and naturalness is the most relevant dimension of PBA (core brand authenticity dimension), when compared to the composite factor that aggregates continuity and originality (peripheral brand authenticity dimension). More specifically, this study offers a more comprehensive picture of how PBA is formed (Morhart et al. 2015; Bruhn et al. 2012). Thus, this study extends the applicability of PBA to the domain of consumer–brand relationships by unifying previous research conducted in this domain.

Second, the results support all the hypothesised relationships. Thus, the way consumers experience a brand affects how the brand authenticity is perceived, which may strengthen positive consumer–brand relationships such as brand love. One relevant finding is that the sensory brand dimension has a significant impact on how consumers perceive a brand to be authentic. All the other brand dimensions (affective, intellectual, and behavioural) affect brand authenticity almost similarly. One possible explanation is that the stimulation provided by the five human senses is the most authentic one since it allows consumers to learn about brands and gives them a real understanding of what the brand stands for. Consequently, this study expands on previous research conducted by Saffer et al. (2020) who found

that brand experience positively affects brand authenticity, which in turn impacts positively on brand love in the context of Asian markets.

Third, it examines for the first time the mediating effect of PBA between brand experience and brand love in different cultural settings. More specifically, the results show that the influence of brand experience on PBA is higher for Japan and Portugal, when compared to India. Moreover, it was demonstrated that the influence of PBA on brand love is greater for Japan, when compared to India and Portugal. Interestingly, the influence of PBA on brand love is negative for India. The underlying reason for this could be the high level of consumer subjectivity and lower levels of brand knowledge in developing nations, as well as the brand origin confusion that could cloud consumers brand relationship (Zhuang et al. 2008). In line with the observations of Safeer et al. (2021) brand authenticity is established when consumers can appreciate factors such as brand behaviour and attributes as quality commitment, brand history, and brand sincerity. That the brand authenticity had a negative impact on brand love in India can be an indication that consumers are not able to fully comprehend the value of these constructs through their brand experience. This also essentially points to the lack of a strong brand strategy that can fortify consumer's holistic awareness of the brand, and strengthen consumer's relationship with the brand. Overall, this study contributes to understand how consumers are impacted by different brand experience and brand authenticity dimensions using the lens of consumer culture theory and how brand love is formed as a social-cultural phenomena (Andreini et al. 2018; Södergren 2021).

Fourth, relationship intensity and self-authenticity moderates the effect of brand experience on PBA, which has not been previously examined. More specifically, the findings suggest that consumers with stronger emotional ties to brands perceive the brand experience to be more authentic. Nevertheless, the degree of self-authenticity has a lower impact on PBA. From a cultural perspective, it is shown that there are no significant differences among all the three



countries. This observation could be in line with how consumers with high self-authentication function differently from consumers with low self-authentication. For consumers with high self-authentication, the brand authenticity is itself a vehicle of self-verification and social impressionism. Consumers adapt their behaviours to become socially desirable, such as by investing in authentic brands (Wood et al. 2008). On the other hand, consumers with low levels of self-authentication are largely indifferent to brand authenticity as they do not try to use the medium of authentic brands for self-enhancement (Morhart et al 2015). As a result, this construct does not impact brand authenticity perception. Based on an empirical perspective, it could be possible to assume that the respondents across the three countries in this study did not reflect on their relationship with the brand based on self-authenticity although it is difficult to say if the respondents had high or low levels of self-authentication.

Additionally, it was found that the influence of brand experience on PBA is greater for Apple when compared to Samsung. The same occurs in relation to the effect of perceived brand authenticity on brand love, which is greater for Apple when compared to Samsung. For both brands, it is shown that consumers with a high level of self-authenticity did not perceive the brand as authentic resulting from their interaction with the brand. On the other hand, the moderating effect of relationship intensity significantly differed between brands. Whereas the moderating effect is positive and statistically significant for Apple, the moderating effect for Samsung is negative and statistically significant.

Practical implications

The quest for brand authenticity is an important engine for global brands in an era of growing scepticism among consumers. A growing body of the literature stresses consumption as a socio-cultural phenomenon that values authenticity (Bruhn et al. 2012; Fritz et al. 2017; Morhart et al. 2015). This branding shift challenges brand marketers to create and develop authentic brand experiences that drive strong and positive consumer–brand relationships. In fact, it is more crucial than ever to understand how brands can differentiate themselves from competitors based on their authenticity. More specifically, brand marketers should understand which brand experiences dimensions are most valued by consumers and which authenticity dimensions should be included in the brand-building process. By strategically defining the brand experience and PBA dimensions, brand marketers can develop effective brand strategies centred around passionate brand feelings. For example, brand strategies can focus on exploring sensory brand experiences that are perceived to be credible and original. By doing so, brand marketers would benefit from enhancing brand authenticity to secure consumers brand love in the long-term perspective.

Another important implication of our findings for practice is that culture plays a key role in how consumers perceive authentic brand experiences, and how passionate feelings for global brands can be strengthened. Hence, brand managers should emphasised the most relevant dimensions of brand authenticity for each culture. It is important for brand managers and brand strategists to understand the finer nuances of how brands become an integral part of their consumers' lives and lifestyles. Although Apple and Samsung are global brands and can survive with standardised global marketing approaches, a strategic adaptation to local practices, sentiments, and consumption requirements is essential in framing a brands' service offering to local markets. For example, the sharp rise in the wallet size of Indian consumers in the last decade and the intensive penetration of the internet access across the Indian market has heavily impacted the cell-phone market. Although Apple and Samsung are some of the top players in this third largest economy of the world by purchasing power, the number of new contenders and intense competitors is also on a steep rise (Rai, 2022).

Limitations and future research directions

Being one of the first studies to investigate the mediating effect of perceived brand authenticity in the context of global brands, this empirical study has some critical limitations. First, this study is limited to two high-tech global brands deliberately, and cautions must be taken in generalising findings to other categories. Therefore, future research should replicate this study in other settings to verify whether the results are consistent. This research approach could reveal some (di)similarities on how consumers experience brands and its impact on PBA. By understanding this process, brand experiences could be managed to be perceived as more authentic and thus enhance positive consumer–brand relationships. The second limitation refers to the fact that we use students as a sample which makes the generalizability of the findings questionable to other populations. Hence, it is recommended to validate these findings in a broader sampling before generalising them. Third, a broader study using several generational cohorts might be relevant to investigate potential differences among consumers. Finally, this study has exclusively focused on Portugal, India, and Japan as cultural settings to investigate the moderating effect of PBA between brand experience and brand love. Thus, we propose that the study is replicated in more countries to investigate the impact of culture on consumer–brand relationships using the lens of consumer culture theory.



Appendix A

Scales	Items
Brand experience (Brakus et al. 2009)	BE1: Brand x makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses BE2: I find brand x interesting in a sensory way BE3: Brand x does not appeal to my senses BE4: Brand x induces feelings and sentiments BE5: I don't have strong emotions for brand x BE6: Brand x is an emotional brand BE7: I engage in physical actions and behaviours when I use brand x BE8: Brand x results in bodily experiences BE9: Brand x is not action-oriented BE10: I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter brand x BE11: Brand x does not make me think BE12: Brand x stimulates my curiosity and problems solving
Brand Love (Bagozzi et al. 2017)	BL1: To what extent do you feel that brand x says something "true" and "deep" about whom you are as a person? BL2: To what extent do you feel that brand x is an important part of how you see yourself? BL3: To what extent is brand x able to make you look like you want to look? BL4: To what extent is brand x able to make you feel like you want to feel? BL5: To what extent is brand x able to do something that makes your life more meaningful? BL6: To what extent is brand x able to contribute something towards making your life worth living? BL7: To what extent do you find yourself thinking about brand x? BL8: To what extent do you find that the brand x keeps popping into your head? BL9: To what extent are you willing to spend a lot of money improving and fine-tuning a product from brand x after you buy it? BL10: To what extent are you willing to spend a lot of time improving and fine-tuning a product from brand x after you buy it? BL11: To what extent do you feel yourself desiring to use the products from brand x? BL12: To what extent do you feel yourself longing to use the products from brand x? BL13: To what extent have you interacted with brand x in the past? BL14: To what extent have you been involved with brand x in the past? BL15: Please express the extent to which you feel there is a natural "fit" between you and brand x BL16: Please express the extent to which brand x seems to fit your own tastes perfectly BL17: Please express the extent to which you feel emotionally connected to brand x? BL18: Please express the extent to which you feel you have a "bond" with brand x BL19: To what extent do you feel that brand x is fun? BL20: To what extent do you feel that brand x is exciting? BL21: Please express the extent to which you believe that you will be using brand x for a long time BL22: Please express the extent to which you expect that brand x will be part of your life for a long time to come BL23: Suppose that brand x was to go out of existence, to what extent would you feel anxiety? BL24: Suppose brand x was to go out of existence, to what extent would you feel apprehension?
Perceived brand authenticity (Morhart et al. 2015; Bruhn et al. 2012)	PBA1: Brand x is a brand with a history PBA2: Brand x is a timeless brand PBA3: Brand x is a brand that survives times PBA4: Brand x is a brand that survives trends PBA5: Brand x is a brand that will not betray you PBA6: Brand x is a brand that accomplishes its value promise PBA7: Brand x is a honest brand PBA8: Brand x is a brand that gives back to its consumers PBA9: Brand x is a brand with moral principles PBA10: Brand x is a brand true to a set of moral values PBA11: Apple is a brand that cares about its consumers PBA12: Brand x is a brand that adds meaning to people's lives PBA13: Brand x is a brand that reflects important values people care about PBA14: Brand x is a brand that connects people with their real selves PBA15: Brand x is a brand that connects people with what is really important PBA16: Brand x is different from all other brands PBA17: Brand x stands out from other brands PBA18: I think that brand x is unique PBA19: Brand x clearly distinguishes itself from other brands PBA20: Brand x does not seem artificial PBA21: Brand x makes a genuine impression PBA22: Brand x gives the impression of being natural



Scales	Items
Self-authenticity (Wood et al. 2008)	SA1: I think it is better to be yourself, than to be popular SA2: I always stand by what I believe in SA3: I am true to myself in most situations

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Declarations

Conflict of interest All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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