



Harnessing brand authenticity to promote prosocial service behavior

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Abstract

In today's fiercely competitive, customer-centric, and service-driven marketplace, where customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty are hard-won currencies, brand authenticity emerges as a pivotal cornerstone, potentially fostering prosocial service behavior among employees—a crucial driver of organizational success. Yet, the intricate link between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior remains a compelling and notably understudied frontier. To address this gap, we explore how prosocial service behavior can be shaped by brand authenticity. Using partial least squares–structural equation modeling based on survey responses from a random sample of 410 frontline employees in the hospitality industry, we found that brand authenticity alone cannot spark prosocial service behavior. Instead, brands must foster psychological empowerment and organizational commitment in order to activate and harness the power of brand authenticity in nurturing prosocial service behavior. This is because employees require both a belief in their own influence (empowerment) and a strong attachment to their organization (commitment) to fully express the genuine values of a brand through prosocial actions. However, caution should be noted: introducing job autonomy might diminish the impact of psychological empowerment. This counterintuitive effect could be attributed to the perception that excessive autonomy, while meant to empower, might be seen as a lack of guidance or support. Such a scenario may potentially make employees feel isolated or overwhelmed by decision-making responsibilities.

Keywords Brand authenticity · Frontline employee · Job autonomy · Organizational commitment · Prosocial service behavior · Psychological empowerment

Introduction

Frontline (or contact) employees are a source of differentiation and competitive advantage for brands in the service industry (Bowen and Schneider 2022), especially the hospitality industry, which is arguably one of the largest service industries in the world with its myriad subsectors. Customer perceptions and satisfaction with service quality, as well as

their trust and loyalty to the service provider, are profoundly influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of a service provider's frontline employees (Raza et al. 2023). In this context, frontline employees have the potential to craft a favorable image of the service provider in the customer's mind, particularly when they deliver exemplary service (Pangarkar et al. 2022).

Central to this study is the concept of prosocial service behavior, which we originally define as *actions that occur*

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when service providers, particularly frontline employees, perform behaviors as an individual or a team (e.g., assisting colleagues) that are not only expected of them (i.e., in role) but also go above and beyond their call of duty or prescribed responsibilities (i.e., extra role) in their service delivery to both internal and external customers such that the customers' welfare is enhanced in addition to being satisfied with the service that they receive. The impetus behind this definition arises from the desire to distinctly conceptualize and recognize the extra lengths service employees frequently pursue for the customers they serve. This distinction becomes vital when differentiating prosocial service behavior from similar but distinct constructs. These include *discretionary effort*, which captures the potential level of effort employees can offer (Sharafizad et al. 2020); *extra-role behavior*, embodying responsibilities undertaken beyond the formal role (Richardson et al. 2021); and *organizational citizenship behavior*, denoting voluntary actions that, while not acknowledged by the formal reward system, positively impact the organization (Abdullah and AL-Abrow 2023). By presenting a clear and encompassing definition of prosocial service behavior, our intention is to foster a standardized understanding that can seamlessly be adopted in both academic studies and practical applications across various service industries.

The literature consistently underscores the profound impact of service providers' behavior on shaping customer perceptions, both in the immediate aftermath and over the long term (Budur and Poturak 2021; Lemmink and Mattsson 2002). Indeed, the very essence of a customer's experience is molded by these service providers who design and bring services to life (Bitner et al. 1994; Kuppelwieser and Klaus 2021). Given that every interaction serves as a touchpoint influencing customer judgments, it's imperative for service providers to uphold impeccable standards. They must ensure that frontline employees not only meet but ideally exceed the anticipated service quality (Asante et al. 2023; Hartline and Ferrell 1996).

Among the pioneering researchers of prosocial service behavior, Bettencourt and Brown (1997) introduced three core tenets to describe prosocial service behavior: cooperation, role-prescribed service behavior, and extra-role service behavior. Intriguingly, there has been a tendency to conflate prosocial service behavior with organizational citizenship behavior (Finkelstein and Penner 2004; Kang et al. 2020), even though they differ in breadth. To elucidate, while prosocial service behavior envelops both role-prescribed and extra-role behaviors, organizational citizenship behavior centers solely around the latter. This makes prosocial service behavior a more encompassing metric for scholarly exploration and real-world application. Furthermore, with prosocial behaviors intrinsically aimed at aiding colleagues and enriching customer

experiences (Bettencourt and Brown 1997; Kang et al. 2020), it is imperative for service providers to hone in on nurturing such behaviors, ensuring customer perceptions, evaluations, and overall service satisfaction soar (Ackfeldt and Wong 2006; Kim and Qu 2020).

Given the pivotal roles of frontline employees and their prosocial service behavior in shaping service delivery, comprehending how to bolster such behavior becomes paramount. Our study narrows its lens on the hospitality industry, underscoring the significance of frontline employees and the notable rise of prosocial service behavior therein. Han et al. (2018) contend that a robust brand reputation is not just an asset—it is indispensable for service providers as they navigate customer interactions. However, this does not only pertain to external customers. Frontline employees, as internal customers, serve as the linchpin of service delivery (Hu et al. 2018). To fine-tune this dynamic, service providers invest in internal branding, striving to shape the perceptions of these internal stakeholders via mechanisms like communication and education (Baron et al. 2009; Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali 2021; Wang et al. 2019). Yet, there is a hitch: internal marketing alone does not make the cut anymore. Today's workforce, juxtaposed with the customers they serve, craves more. They seek a brand's authenticity, yearning to connect with employers that do not just talk the talk but walk the walk. It is this brand authenticity, stemming from authentic internal branding, that paves the way for employees to truly embody and rally behind a brand (King and Grace 2008). Such belief and alignment trigger behaviors that reinforce the brand, like psychological empowerment and organizational commitment (Amani 2018; Hu et al. 2018; Piehler 2018), and for these behaviors to truly bear fruit—translating into tangible organizational outcomes—a dose of job autonomy becomes crucial (Li et al. 2016). However, existing studies have treated these concepts and relationships in silos, overlooking their interplay in the realm of prosocial service behavior. This study contends that the fragmented approach necessitates a more holistic investigation. By amalgamating these concepts into a cohesive framework, we aspire to fill the gaps left by isolated research efforts. This integrated examination is pivotal, not only to avoid overlooking potential interactions (missing effects and equivalent evidence) but also to deepen our understanding of prosocial service behavior, especially among frontline employees.

Anchored on reasoned action (Ajzen 1985, 1991), our investigation centers on how brand authenticity propels prosocial service behavior, a factor integral to nurturing lasting customer connections and brand allegiance (Kang et al. 2020). Within service-driven sectors, especially hospitality, frontline employees act as the living, breathing embodiments of the brand they represent. Their commitment to the brand and the authentic manner in which they perceive and



communicate its values could greatly influence the quality of prosocial service they deliver to customers. But how does brand authenticity translate into such behavior? This is where the roles of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment come to the fore.

Brand authenticity fosters a sense of genuine attachment and belief in employees (Kim et al. 2020b). While research indicates that brand authenticity positively influences psychological ownership among consumers (Kumar and Kaushal 2021), this reasoning suggests that employees who perceive their brand as genuine could be similarly inclined to feel psychologically empowered. Noteworthy, this empowerment is not just about the authority to make decisions, but about believing in one's capacity to make a positive difference (Aggarwal et al. 2020). Consequently, this empowerment could heighten commitment (Oliveira et al. 2023; Qing et al. 2020), where employees identify closely with their brand's mission and values. Our study posits that it is this empowered state and heightened commitment that mediate the relationship between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior. That is to say, an authentic brand perception fuels empowerment, which in turn fosters commitment, and collectively, these factors drive employees to engage in prosocial service behaviors that exceed standard expectations.

Adding another layer to our exploration, we address the modern emphasis on job autonomy (Rattini 2023). We scrutinize its role as a potential moderator, gauging its influence over the dynamic between psychological empowerment and prosocial service behavior. Recognizing how autonomy might amplify or temper this relationship offers insights into crafting optimal organizational strategies, ensuring both employee independence and behaviors that resonate with the brand's essence. Thus, by cohesively weaving brand authenticity, psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, and job autonomy, our investigation offers brand managers an enriched strategic compass. This convergence seeks not only to deepen understanding but also to catalyze transformative strides in pragmatic brand management, charting a path for more effective and authentic brand-stewardship in dynamic service landscapes.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Brand authenticity

Brand authenticity is fundamentally tethered to the perception of employees and customers. Beverland (2005) posits that internal branding communications bolster employees' perception of brand authenticity. In essence, *brand authenticity relates to whether employees or customers discern that a brand genuinely epitomizes the values it claims in its*

positioning (Kim et al. 2020a). This perspective aligns seamlessly with Kelman's (1958, 1961) theory of social influence.

While the notion of brand authenticity is intertwined with the broader idea of authenticity, its interpretation can be bifurcated into two dominant views: one that is employee-based and another that leans toward the customer. A sizable body of research underscores the customers' perception of brand authenticity (Fritz et al. 2017; Morhart et al. 2015; Napoli et al. 2014). The consensus is clear: customer-based brand authenticity is pivotal in amplifying brand equity. Yet, understanding the brand authenticity perceptions of both frontline and backline employees cannot be sidelined. Their perceptions potentially mold the lens through which customers view the brand.

Beverland (2005) further advances the idea that disseminating brand information can accentuate consumer perceptions of brand authenticity, whereas Hughes (2013) discovered that internal communications can moderate the resonance of external brand advertising on a salesperson's affinity with the brand. Yet, it is imperative to tread carefully. While internal communications can wield significant influence over perceptions of brand authenticity, messaging that lacks genuine authenticity could corrode an organization's credibility (Balmer et al. 2009). As Thorbjørnsen and Supphellen (2011) astutely highlight, if employees find it challenging to decipher or resonate with these communications, they could dismiss such efforts as mere hollow rhetoric.

Prosocial service behavior

Prosocial service behavior encompasses the *helpful actions employees take either toward their organization or their peers; these behaviors are not just expected but are integral components of an employee's organizational role, aiming to boost either the organization's welfare or the welfare of individuals therein* (Brief and Motowidlo 1986; Organ 1988). To delve deeper into the nuances of prosocial service behavior, two primary distinctions emerge. The first is the *target of the behavior*. Prosocial behaviors of frontline employees might be directed at either their coworkers (internal customer) or the client (external customer) (Hazzi and Maldaon 2012; Kelley and Hoffman 1997; McNeely and Meglino 1994). The second is the *nature of the behavior*. There is a difference between role-prescribed behaviors and those that extend beyond the call of duty, termed as extra-role prosocial behaviors (Organ 1988; Tsaor et al. 2014; Wright et al. 1993). The latter, also known as citizenship performance behaviors (Organ 1988), encapsulate those discretionary actions of employees that transcend their primary obligations but are intended to benefit the organization (Brief and Motowidlo 1986).

The pivotal role of prosocial service behavior in the success of service-oriented organizations is undeniable (Manhas and Tukamushaba 2015). Yet, despite its monumental



significance, especially in the hospitality sector, there is a surprising dearth of research on the multifarious factors influencing the prosocial service behavior of frontline workers (Zou et al. 2015). Although a limited number of studies have broached the topic of cultivating prosocial service behavior among frontline employees (Cheng and Chen 2017), most existing literature is largely anchored in examining the relation between employee attitudes (organizational commitment and job satisfaction) and situational factors (internal communication practices). This study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by exploring the interplay between brand authenticity, psychological empowerment, and organizational commitment in shaping prosocial service behavior.

According to Bettencourt and Brown (1997), there are three components of prosocial service behavior. The first is *cooperation*, which signifies helpful behavior toward coworkers within a team and is perceived as behavior that is an extra role in nature, as there is no penalty for not exhibiting it and no extra reward for performing it. There are no evaluation criteria for such behavior. The second component is *role-prescribed service behavior*, which signifies behavior desired from employees serving their customers as specified in organizational documents such as forms for job evaluations and job descriptions. The third component is *extra-role service behavior*, which refers to the discretionary actions of service workers that exceed their basic responsibilities in a bid to deliver exceptional customer service. Considering that high-quality service—especially in the hospitality sector—is inextricably tied to both role-prescribed and extra-role behaviors, this study positions prosocial service behavior as the principal outcome variable under scrutiny.

Brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior

The perception of employees that a brand genuinely commits to honoring promises made to its external customers can significantly influence their own commitment levels. Such a conviction fosters psychological ownership and engenders a positive psychological environment. This alignment amplifies the harmony between employees and the core brand values. As a result, employee satisfaction surges, paving the way for a stronger sense of citizenship behavior.

In industries that center on services, especially in domains like hospitality, the interface between frontline service providers and customers is both regular and direct. This places employees in a prime position to discern customer needs keenly. Collaboratively, with their peers, they can innovate and conceive ideas to elevate the quality of services provided (Ampofo 2020). In certain scenarios, this enhancement may necessitate behaviors that venture beyond the realm of conventional job descriptions.

Delving into this further, Aggarwal et al. (2023) and Auh et al. (2014) elucidate that service-oriented citizenship behavior embodies the discretionary extra-role conduct displayed by service providers in the course of attending to customers. Such behavior, intrinsically voluntary, is hallmarked by a determined effort from employees to provide an unparalleled customer experience. An exemplary manifestation of this behavior is prosocial service behavior—a concerted effort by employees to assist both colleagues and customers (Bettencourt & Brown 1997). The significance of this ancillary behavior is universally recognized, particularly in the hospitality industry where customer satisfaction and a memorable experience reign supreme. While Nadiri and Tanova's (2010) study extensively delved into the ramifications of service-oriented citizenship behavior in the hospitality space, there is a noticeable paucity in research connecting brand authenticity with prosocial service behavior. Given the prior discourse, a logical inference would suggest a positive relationship between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior, especially among frontline service providers. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H1 Brand authenticity exerts a positive influence on the prosocial service behavior of frontline employees.

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment stands at the forefront as a pivotal consequence of employees' perceptions of brand authenticity. This study argues that organizational commitment plays a mediating role in bridging the gap between employees' perception of brand authenticity and their extent of prosocial service behavior. Rooted in the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1985, 1991), it is established that employee attitudes set the stage for subsequent behaviors. In our exploration of organizationally desired behaviors, specifically prosocial service behavior, we identify organizational commitment as an attitudinal construct influenced by brand authenticity.

Historically, the literature has positioned organizational commitment as representing intermediate outcomes, highlighting its inherently mediating nature (Hulin 1991). This underlines its elevated status in contemporary research, asserting its relevance and significance to corporate dynamics (Cohen 2017; Devece et al. 2016; Yousef 2017). Drawing from Allen and Meyer (1990), *organizational commitment* encapsulates "a psychological state that binds the individual to the organization" (p. 14). Furthermore, while affective commitment mirrors job attitudes the most accurately (Meyer and Allen 1991), the spotlight has often been on affective organizational commitment. This commitment signifies an employee's emotional bond with an organization,



arising from a deep-seated connection to that organization (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001).

Although some studies have treated ‘organizational commitment’ and ‘affective organizational commitment’ synonymously, our research asserts the former as a mediator between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior. We anchor this position in the foundational idea that employees naturally cultivate attitudes before manifesting behaviors (Ajzen 1985, 1991). This progression—where an employee’s attitude toward an organization precedes their actions—is at the heart of the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1985, 1991).

López-Cabarcos et al. (2015) postulated that employees exuding robust organizational commitment tend to take initiative based on their compensation perceptions, inter-relations, and overarching procedural justice sentiments. Bunderson (2001) observed that employees perceive organizational commitment as a natural reflection of the organization’s fulfillment of its pledges. Ulndag et al. (2011) connected organizational commitment to employees’ display of extra-role behavior, whereas Dhar (2015) further contended that service providers with employees who are deeply committed organizationally will invariably deliver superior quality to clients. Several other studies have also established a positive relationship between organizational commitment and service-oriented citizenship behavior (Harwika 2013; Ocampo et al. 2018; Pradhan & Pradhan 2015) based on which we may assume that organizational commitment will mediate the association between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior. As such, we posit:

H2 Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between the brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior of frontline employees.

Psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment is characterized as “*enhanced intrinsic task motivation comprising four cognitive components: competence, impact, meaningfulness, and self-determination*” (Thomas and Velthouse 1990, p. 671). *Competence* or self-efficacy pertains to an individual’s conviction in their ability to adeptly complete tasks (Bandura 1977, 1986; Spreitzer 1995). *Impact* highlights the capacity to influence work outcomes (Hall 2008). *Meaningfulness* represents the significance an individual places on work in alignment with their values and ideals (Thomas and Velthouse 1990). Finally, *self-determination* underscores an individual’s belief in initiating and adapting work-related behaviors (Spreitzer 1995). Ambiguity in task definition dampens psychological empowerment while clarity in roles and responsibilities enhances it (Humborstad and Kuvaas 2013; Wang et al.

2016). Each of these empowerment facets benefits from clear goals and procedures (Hall 2008).

Perceived organizational support can bolster employee prosocial service behavior. Workers who feel highly supported by their organization tend to showcase extra-role behavior (Karatepe 2015) and exhibit a deeper commitment to their work (Srivastava and Singh 2020). Moreover, employees who experience psychological empowerment often develop intrinsic motivation, which propels them to willingly help others (Lee et al. 2006). Such proactive behavior is pivotal in ensuring customer satisfaction through top-tier service delivery, especially in the hospitality industry (Malhotra and Ackfeldt 2016). Research suggests that employees feel empowered when they believe their organization stands behind them (Afzali et al. 2014) and when they clearly understand their role (Hall 2008). This sense of empowerment catalyzes their helpful behavior toward customers and peers (Chiang and Hsieh 2012). Consequently, psychological empowerment is instrumental in nurturing employee prosocial service behavior.

While psychological empowerment might instill a deep-seated motivation to fulfill tasks, employees who sense a lack of organizational concern might not see the merit in taking on job responsibilities, and thus, organizational support is pivotal to all aspects of psychological empowerment (Ro and Chen 2011). Hospitality workers often encounter scenarios where pausing to seek inter-departmental help is not feasible. Empowering these employees to assume greater responsibility and act independently can position them to provide enhanced services, leading to heightened customer satisfaction (Chiang and Hsieh 2012). Research indicates that psychologically empowered service employees tend to display more customer-focused behaviors (Chiang and Hsieh 2012; Kele et al. 2017). This is because psychological empowerment fuels intrinsic motivation, which is a robust predictor of employee behavior (Deci and Ryan 2004).

Within the hospitality industry, where guest expectations can be diverse, employees may need to venture beyond standard procedures, showcasing inventive extra-role behavior to address unique customer needs and unpredictable situations. Consequently, psychological empowerment can foster innovative behavior. It is logical to infer that since psychological empowerment pertains to task motivation (Thomas and Velthouse 1990), it can guide hospitality frontline staff to demonstrate supportive behaviors toward both guests and peers.

Given the existing literature, this study hypothesizes a positive relationship between brand authenticity and psychological empowerment, and between psychological empowerment and prosocial service behavior. Employees who sense a heightened authenticity in their brand are likely to feel more psychologically empowered and, therefore, more inclined to demonstrate prosocial service behavior (Bettencourt and



Brown 2003). It is essential to note that delivering exceptional service, which may involve stepping outside standard job descriptions, demands autonomy. Without this freedom, service delivery could be hindered (Zeglat et al. 2014). Consequently, we postulate:

H3 Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between the brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior of frontline employees.

Psychological empowerment and organizational commitment as sequential mediators

Empowered individuals often commit deeply to their workplaces, investing considerable psychological resources (Thomas and Velthouse 1990). Employees radiating high levels of psychological empowerment not only express increased satisfaction with their roles but also display an enriched sense of competence, meaning, impact, and self-determination. These attributes, in turn, forge a profound sense of satisfaction and commitment within them (Seibert et al. 2011).

Past studies underscore the strong bond between empowerment and the loyalty of frontline staff (Liden et al. 2000). Loyal employees display a heightened motivation and willingness to align with and achieve their organization's objectives (Laschinger et al. 2007). Such individuals perceive themselves as fully capable of accomplishing tasks independently, pouring additional energy and vigor into their responsibilities. Their loyalty not only manifests in dedicated effort but also in infusing deeper meaning into their tasks.

Furthermore, the research by Avolio et al. (2004) emphasized that a robust sense of workplace involvement and meaning, derived from psychological empowerment, catalyzes increased commitment levels. Moreover, employees manifesting higher psychological empowerment mirror a similar degree of initiative and focus, characteristics essential to enhancing their commitment. Research spanning various sectors such as business, education, and healthcare consistently demonstrates the significant tie between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment (Cho et al. 2006). Hence, we propose:

H4 Psychological empowerment and organizational commitment sequentially mediate the relationship between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior of frontline employees.

Job autonomy (JA)

Job autonomy refers to the degree of independence and discretion that employees possess in their roles. As

Hackman and Lawler (1971) elaborate, job autonomy is “the extent to which employees have a major say in scheduling their work, selecting the equipment they will use, and deciding on procedures to be followed” (p. 265). This autonomy not only gives employees a sense of control but can also lead to heightened intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and even improved job performance (Gellatly and Irving 2001; Langfred and Moya 2004; Saragih 2015).

Noteworthy, job autonomy augments prosocial service behaviors. As highlighted by Weinstein and Ryan (2010), prosocial service behavior significantly boosts well-being when performed autonomously. In a compelling study, Ko et al. (2021) experimentally revealed that acts of kindness, when executed autonomously, had a more profound positive impact on well-being. Such findings underscore the necessity for managers to offer ample job autonomy, allowing employees to exceed basic job demands and engage more actively in organizational citizenship behaviors (Malik 2018; Malik and Dhar 2017).

The idea is further solidified by research from Li et al. (2016). They found that when leaders delegated power and granted more job autonomy, employees thrived. Such empowerment not only led to change-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors but also fostered a self-regulating pattern among workers. In environments that fostered autonomy, these workers showcased heightened self-control, self-awareness, determination, and diligence. Essentially, more autonomy means enhanced self-leadership capabilities, empowering employees to navigate challenging, unforeseen circumstances. These skills are paramount, especially for roles requiring spontaneous, extra-role behaviors like prosocial service.

Drawing from these insights, the undeniable importance of job autonomy emerges in understanding the dynamics between behavior and outcomes. While its critical role is recognized, research examining job autonomy as a moderating factor remains sparse. Notably absent is research exploring the moderating effect of job autonomy on the relationship between brand authenticity, organizational commitment, psychological empowerment, and prosocial service behavior, especially among frontline employees in service industries. Addressing this void, the current study embarks on this pioneering endeavor. Thus, we put forth:

H5a Job autonomy moderates the relationship between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior of frontline service employees.

H5b Job autonomy moderates the relationship between psychological empowerment and prosocial service behavior of frontline employees.



H5c Job autonomy moderates the relationship between organizational commitment and prosocial service behavior of frontline employees.

The aforementioned hypotheses are depicted in Fig. 1.

Methodology

Survey measures

To investigate the significance of the relationships proposed within our conceptual framework, a comprehensive survey was deployed. The questionnaire incorporated a range of measures encompassing demographic questions (i.e., gender, age, marital status, education, and work experience) as well as items relevant to other constructs underpinning this study.

Brand authenticity was evaluated through a scale comprising four items, previously validated by Wood et al. (2008) and Sirianni et al. (2013). In terms of organizational commitment, three items were adapted from the work of Kim et al. (2020a). Psychological empowerment was gauged using a 12-item scale distributed across four dimensions: competence, self-determination, meaningfulness, and impact. This scale was adapted from the research by Kang et al. (2020). Items measuring job autonomy found their foundation in a six-item scale developed and validated by Karasek and Theorell (1990). Lastly, a scale with 15 items spread across three

dimensions—role-prescribed customer service, extra-role customer service, and cooperation—was used to measure prosocial service behavior, building upon the groundwork laid by Bettencourt and Brown (1997). All constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

To enhance the clarity and comprehensibility of our items, we pretested the survey instruments. This step is paramount to remove any potential ambiguity, ensuring respondents interpret the questions as intended. Citing the wisdom of Sekaran (2003), pretesting effectively “rectifies any inadequacies, in time, before administering the instrument orally or through a questionnaire to respondents, and thus reduces biases” (p. 249). Even when utilizing standardized scales, it is recommended that pretesting be conducted, as advocated by Kumar et al. (2013). The protocol method, as described by Hunt et al. (1982), was our chosen approach. Here, the respondent vocalizes their thoughts while navigating the survey, while the researcher meticulously documents their responses (Memon et al. 2017). Adhering to the guidelines set by Willis (2005), 20 respondents participated in this pretest, helping confirm the survey’s clarity and intention. Building on the insights gained from the pretest, a pilot study was subsequently conducted with a sample of 50 respondents—a number deemed sufficient by Cooper and Schindler (2011). Following encouraging results from this pilot study, data collection continued with the larger respondent pool (main study).

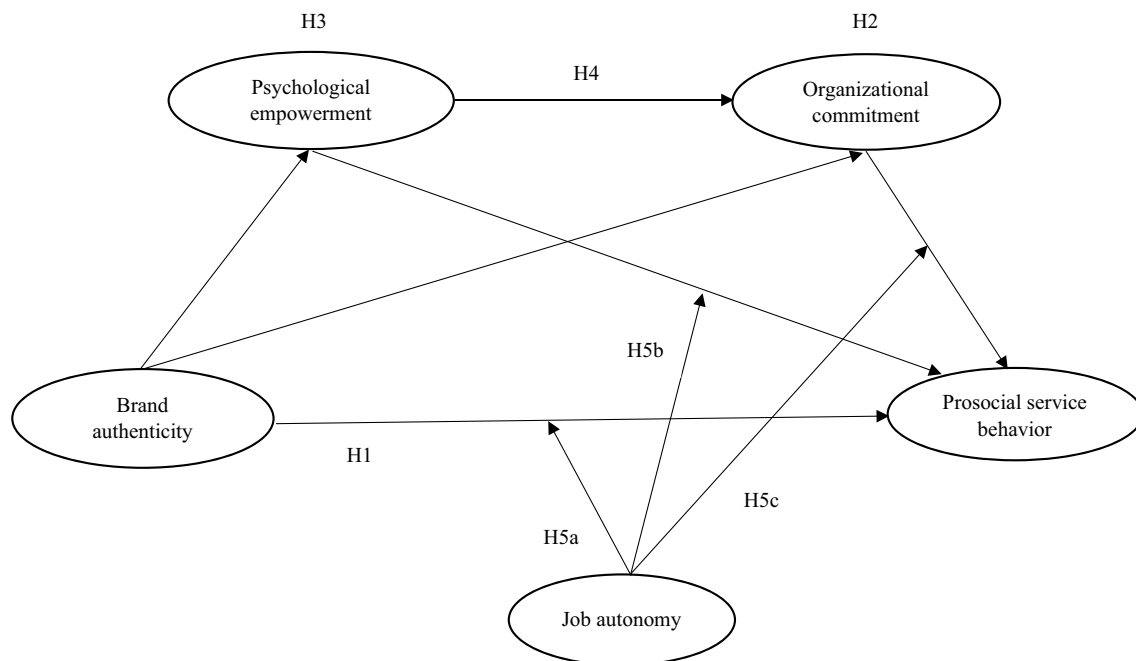


Fig. 1 The brand authenticity for prosocial service behavior framework



Sampling technique and procedure

This research recruited frontline employees (who were involved in the direct provision of service to hotel guests) and their immediate supervisors (who also operated on the frontline but with a supervisory focus) in branded hotels situated in Jharkhand, India. Out of the 22 hotels that were approached for participation, 15 expressed interest. A total of 600 questionnaires tailored for frontline employees were distributed, and an equal number of a different set of questionnaires were handed out to their supervisors. Out of the vast number of questionnaires disseminated, 410 matched questionnaires were deemed usable for the study.

Prior to administering the questionnaires, the research team obtained permission from the top management of the respective hotels. The importance and significance of the study were thoroughly communicated. Assurances were provided to maintain the confidentiality of the data and the identities of the participants. To ensure honest and unbiased responses, both frontline employees and their supervisors were informed that their anonymity is guaranteed as no one other than the research team will be able to view their individual responses.

After securing permissions, the research team personally visited the hotels. Before distributing the questionnaires, a brief meeting was held with the frontline employees and their supervisors. The primary purpose of this meeting was to underscore that the survey was strictly for research purposes. Every participant's informed consent was secured. Additionally, they were encouraged to seek clarification on any ambiguities they might encounter while filling out the questionnaire.

The questionnaire tailored for the frontline employees included 25 items related to brand authenticity, psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, and job autonomy. On the other hand, the questionnaire for the supervisors concentrated on 15 items concerning the prosocial service behavior demonstrated by their subordinates. By pairing these responses together—linking the supervisors' observations with the insights from the frontline employees—a dyadic set of 40 items was formed for comprehensive analysis. The dyad method of data collection and analysis offers a multifaceted approach that enhances the depth and breadth of insights. By pairing feedback from both frontline employees and their supervisors, the method ensures comprehensive insight, fosters cross-validation, and minimizes potential biases that might arise from a singular perspective. This amalgamation of viewpoints not only paves the way for a holistic analysis that encompasses both appraisee (frontline employee) and appraiser (supervisor) perspectives but also bolsters research evaluation, rooted in richer and more balanced data. In this regard, the dyad approach cultivates a robust,

all-encompassing understanding of the service organizational ecosystem.

Recognizing that a significant proportion of the respondents were more at ease responding in Hindi, the questionnaires were translated into that language. Subsequently, after the participants completed them, their responses were translated back into English. Following the methodology suggested by Brislin (1970), the translation process was executed with the assistance of two bi-lingual, native-speaking language experts.

Sample characteristics

The study's sample reported in Table 1 consisted of frontline employees from branded hotels in Jharkhand, India.

A notable majority of these participants were aged between 21 and 30, representing 57.1% of the sample. This was followed by individuals aged between 31 and 40 (33.2%), 41 to 50 (7.8%), and a smaller fraction between the ages of 51–60, accounting for just 2%. A striking observation was the male predominance, with men constituting 97.1% of the respondents. This is consistent with Gupta (2015), who indicated that more than 90% of employees in the Indian hospitality industry are men, and Haldorai et al. (2020), who reported five years later that the percentage of

Table 1 Profile of frontline employees

Categorical construct	Frequency (<i>n</i> = 410)	Percentage (%)
<i>Age</i>		
21–30 years	234	57.1
31–40 years	136	33.2
41–50 years	32	7.8
51–60 years	8	2.0
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	12	2.9
Male	398	97.1
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	256	62.4
Not married	154	37.6
<i>Education</i>		
Higher secondary	174	42.4
Senior Secondary	98	23.9
Diploma	92	22.4
Graduation and above	46	11.2
<i>Work experience</i>		
1–9 years	194	47.3
10–19 years	160	39.0
20–29 years	39	9.5
30 years and plus	17	4.1



male employees in the hospitality industry in India remains much higher than other service industries.

Regarding marital status, most respondents were married, with a percentage of 62.4%. When analyzing their educational background, 42.4% had been educated up to the higher secondary level. This was followed by 23.9% who completed the senior secondary level and 22.4% holding a diploma. Only a modest 11.2% pursued education up to the graduation level or beyond.

Lastly, in delving into their professional histories, nearly half of the respondents (47.3%) had work experience ranging between 1 and 9 years. This was trailed by 39% with a decade to almost two decades of experience, and 9.5% with 20–29 years of experience. A minimal portion, 4.1%, boasted an experience extending 30 years or more.

Data analysis technique and procedure

Partial least squares–structural equation modeling (PLS–SEM) was employed using the SmartPLS software to evaluate the proposed relationships. The choice of this method stemmed from the research’s focus on the frontline employees of branded hotels in Jharkhand, India. PLS–SEM stands out as a fitting approach, especially when dealing with non-normally distributed data—as in the case of the male-dominant sample in this study. Ali et al. (2018) elucidated that the aspects of “prediction orientation, high model complexity, and the use of formatively measured constructs support the use of PLS–SEM” (p. 518). This method’s inherent flexibility regarding data assumptions and techniques proves invaluable for theory development. Indeed, as this study is positioned to contribute to a better understanding of the multifaceted relationships among a set of theoretical constructs, it is essential to note the high statistical power of PLS–SEM, which makes it a frequent choice for such endeavors (Hair et al. 2011). This research involved an analysis of 40 items spanning five constructs with a sample size of 410, which is extrapolated into 5000 subsamples (Ringle et al. 2015). To provide an empirical lens to both exploratory and confirmatory research—which seeks to gauge the degree to which independent constructs influence the dependent ones—PLS–SEM emerges as the apt analytical technique (Aker et al. 2017; Hair et al. 2017).

The PLS–SEM procedure for evaluating the conceptual structure follows three steps. Initially, there is the identification of common-method bias. This is achieved through Bagozzi et al. (1991) collinearity of indicators by calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF) (Hair et al. 2017) and implementing Harman’s single-factor test (Harman 1976). Following this, the study seeks to ascertain the convergent validity discriminant validity, and reliability within the proposed measurement model. This involves undertaking correlational and confirmatory factor analyses while

juxtaposing the derived values against the prescribed benchmark values for average variance extracted (AVE), heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio, and composite reliability. The final step revolves around pinpointing the significance and magnitude of the path relationship in the structural model. This is accomplished through the application of blindfolding procedures and bootstrapping (Ringle et al. 2015). The overarching evaluative journey is two-pronged, wherein the measurement model undergoes scrutiny for discriminant and construct validity as well as internal consistency or reliability, which then sets the stage for subsequent hypotheses testing via the structural model.

Findings

Preliminary assessment

The normality of our data was confirmed through the analysis of kurtosis and skewness values. In this study, the values ranged between -2 and $+2$. These values sit comfortably within the accepted boundaries of -3 and $+3$. Additionally, we undertook measures to check for common-method bias within our dataset. The variance explained using the Harman’s single-factor test was found to be 44.76%. Given that Podsakoff and Organ (1986) posited that this variance should remain below the 50% threshold to be considered free of common-method bias, our data effectively fall within this safe zone. Further fortifying the integrity of our study, we applied both statistical and procedural remedies, aligning with the guidelines provided by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Lastly, in line with the recommendations of Hair et al. (2017), we gauged the indicator’s collinearity using the VIF. It is worth noting that all derived VIF values remained under the critical threshold of five, solidifying the robustness of our data.

Measurement model assessment

To ensure the validity and reliability of the measurement model in this study, we assessed convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability.

For the evaluation of convergent validity of all incorporated variables, the AVE values were examined. As indicated in Table 2, the AVE values for all variables surpassed the recommended threshold value of 0.5, as proposed by Hair et al. (2016). This points to a strong convergent validity within the measurement model.

To determine discriminant validity, two prominent criteria were employed: the HTMT ratio and the Fornell–Larcker criterion, as detailed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and later by Henseler et al. (2015). As displayed in Table 3, the analysis underscores that the square root of AVE scores surpassed



Table 2 Measurement model results

Construct	Item	Description	Factor loading	AVE	CR
Job autonomy (JA)	JA1	On your job, you often have to initiate things—such as coming up with your own ideas, or figuring out on your own what needs to be done	0.716	0.547	0.878
	JA2	You often have a choice in deciding how you do your tasks at work	0.826		
	JA3	You often have a choice in deciding what tasks you do at work	0.756		
	JA4	You often have a say in decisions about your work	0.706		
	JA5	You often have a say in planning your work environment—that is, how your workplace is arranged or how things are organized	0.703		
	JA6	You control the amount of time you spend on tasks	0.721		
Brand authenticity (BA)	BA1	The brand of my company genuinely embodies its image	0.865	0.622	0.867
	BA2	The brand of my company has integrity	0.682		
	BA3	The brand of my company is not fake or phony	0.874		
	BA4	The brand of my company exists in accordance with its values and beliefs	0.713		
Organizational commitment (OC)	OC1	I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization	0.718	0.558	0.789
	OC2	The people I work for do care about what happens to me	0.846		
	OC3	I feel like ‘part of the family’ at this organization	0.664		
Psychological empowerment (PE)	PE1	The work I do is very important to me	0.808	0.620	0.951
	PE2	My job activities are personally meaningful to me	0.775		
	PE3	The work I do is meaningful to me	0.823		
	PE4	I am confident about my ability to do my job	0.746		
	PE5	I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities	0.814		
	PE6	I have mastered the skills necessary for my job	0.789		
	PE7	I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job	0.799		
	PE8	I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work	0.797		
	PE9	I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job	0.761		
	PE10	My impact on what happens in my department is large	0.750		
	PE11	I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department	0.803		
	PE12	I have significant influence over what happens in my department	0.780		
Prosocial service behavior	PSB1	Voluntarily assists customers even if it means going beyond job requirements	0.888	0.614	0.958
	PSB2	Helps customers with problems beyond what is expected or required	0.850		
	PSB3	Often goes above and beyond the call of duty when serving customers	0.836		
	PSB4	Willingly goes out of the way to make a customer satisfied	0.805		
	PSB5	Frequently goes out the way to help a customer	0.805		
	PSB6	Performs all those tasks for customers that are required	0.858		
	PSB7	Meets formal performance requirements when serving customers	0.824		
	PSB8	Fulfills responsibilities to customers as specified in the job description	0.853		
	PSB9	Adequately completes all expected customer service behaviors	0.834		
	PSB10	Helps customers with those things that are required	0.835		
	PSB11	Helps other employees who have heavy workloads	0.862		
	PSB12	Always ready to lend a helping hand to other employees	0.850		
	PSB13	Helps orientate new employees even though it is not required	0.717		
	PSB14	Voluntarily gives time to help other employees	0.770		
	PSB15	Willingly helps others who have work-related problems	0.759		

AVE = Average variance extracted. CR = Composite reliability



the correlation coefficients among the constructs. Additionally, the HTMT values for all constructs were found to be below the threshold of 0.90, further validating the discriminant validity of the model (Table 4).

Finally, the composite reliability for each construct was evaluated to gauge their internal consistency or reliability. The data, as presented in Table 2, reveals that all the composite reliability values adhere to acceptable standards.

Taken collectively, the measurement model exhibits robust validity and reliability based on the examined criteria, thus solidifying its integrity for the study.

Structural model assessment

To assess the proposed hypotheses, we utilized structural path coefficients as demonstrated in Fig. 2 and Table 5. Our findings revealed that brand authenticity did not exert a direct and significant influence on prosocial service behavior ($\beta: -0.045, t: 1.325, p: 0.185 > 0.05$), leading to the conclusion that H1 was not substantiated.

Interestingly, while a common methodology outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) is often employed for assessing mediation, we opted against it for this particular research.

Table 3 Square root of AVE and correlation matrix

	Job autonomy	Brand authenticity	Organizational commitment	Psychological empowerment	Prosocial service behavior
Job autonomy	0.789				
Brand authenticity	0.249	0.845			
Organizational commitment	0.411	0.339	0.838		
Psychological empowerment	0.627	0.391	0.523	0.807	
Prosocial service behavior	0.669	0.274	0.588	0.742	0.826

Diagonal values in bold represent the square root of AVE while all the other values represent the correlation coefficient

Table 4 HTMT results

	Job autonomy	Brand authenticity	Organizational commitment	Psychological empowerment	Prosocial service behavior
<i>Job autonomy</i>					
Brand authenticity	0.284				
Organizational commitment	0.486	0.401			
Psychological empowerment	0.684	0.425	0.596		
Prosocial service behavior	0.736	0.296	0.666	0.757	

Fig. 2 Structural model results. Notes: BA = brand authenticity. PE = psychological empowerment. OC = organizational commitment. JA = job autonomy. PSB = prosocial service behavior

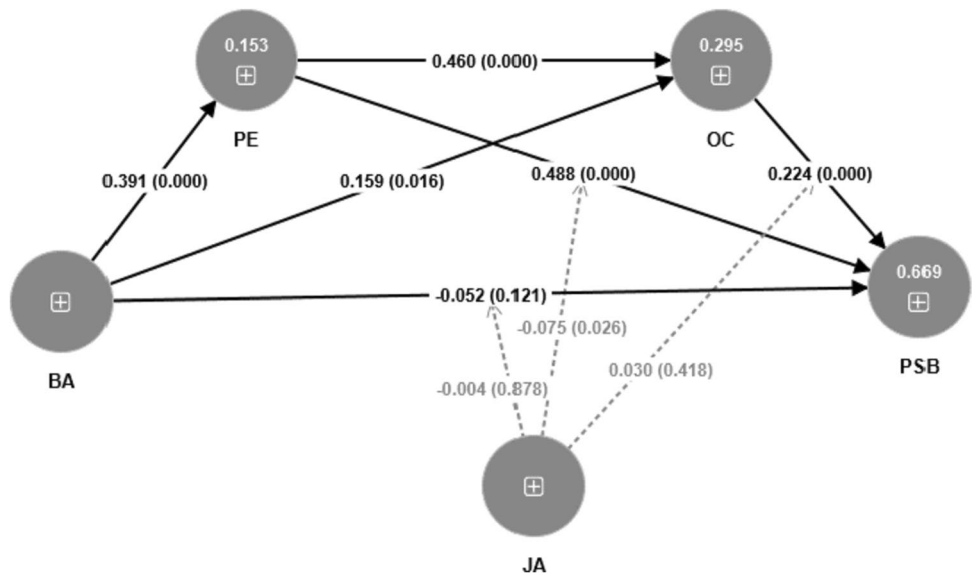


Table 5 Structural path estimates

Relationship	Path coefficient	Standard error	<i>t</i> -statistic	<i>p</i> -value	VIF	Hypothesis testing
<i>Direct effects</i>						
H1. Brand authenticity → Prosocial service behavior	−0.052	0.033	1.552	0.121	1.394	Not supported
Brand authenticity → Psychological empowerment	0.391	0.051	6.626	0.000	1.000	
Brand authenticity → Organizational commitment	0.159	0.066	2.407	0.016	1.180	
Psychological empowerment → Prosocial service behavior	0.488	0.062	7.867	0.000	2.367	
Organizational commitment → Prosocial service behavior	0.224	0.063	3.536	0.001	2.152	
<i>Mediating effects</i>						
H3. Brand authenticity → Psychological empowerment → Prosocial service behavior	0.191	0.036	5.268	0.000	NA	Supported
H2. Brand authenticity → Organizational commitment → Prosocial service behavior	0.036	0.016	2.176	0.030	NA	Supported
H4. Brand authenticity → Psychological empowerment → Organizational commitment → Prosocial service behavior	0.040	0.014	2.845	0.004	NA	Supported
<i>Moderating effects</i>						
H5a. Job autonomy × Brand authenticity → Prosocial service behavior	−0.004	0.028	0.154	0.878	1.529	Not supported
H5b. Job autonomy × Psychological empowerment → Prosocial service behavior	−0.075	0.034	2.232	0.026	1.949	Supported
H5c. Job autonomy × Organizational commitment → Prosocial service behavior	0.030	0.037	0.810	0.418	2.030	Not supported

This approach has been the subject of considerable scrutiny, especially in scenarios where multiple mediators come into play, as is the case in our study (Zhao et al. 2010). Instead, to analyze the mediating and moderating effects of variables, we employed the bootstrapping procedure, incorporating 5000 resamples in line with the guidelines by Preacher and Hayes (2008). One of the primary goals of our research was to ascertain the mediating role of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment in the relationship between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior of frontline employees. The results were telling: The mediating effects of both psychological empowerment (β : 0.187, t : 5.512, $p < 0.001$) and organizational commitment (β : 0.035, t : 2.144, $p < 0.05$) were significant when observed between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior. This provided robust support for H2 and H3. Moreover, our findings indicate that psychological empowerment and organizational commitment act in tandem, mediating the relationship between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior (β : 0.039, t : 2.799, $p < 0.01$), thereby supporting H4. Noteworthy, while the indirect influence of brand authenticity on prosocial service behavior emerged as significant (β : 0.261, t : 6.278, $p < 0.001$), the direct influence remained inconsequential (β : −0.045, t : 1.325, p : 0.185 > 0.05). This observation aligns with the findings of Zhao et al. (2010) and Nitzl et al. (2016), thereby suggesting a full mediation in our study.

Furthermore, while our research presumed a positive moderation effect, the moderating influence of job autonomy between psychological empowerment and prosocial service behavior was found to be contrary, displaying a negative trajectory (β : −0.082, t : 2.507, $p < 0.05$). This implies that even when frontline employees perceive a sense of psychological empowerment, it might culminate in reduced prosocial service behavior, thereby countering H5b. In contrast, the moderating effects of job autonomy on the relationship between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior, and between organizational commitment and prosocial service behavior, turned out to be negligible, hence not corroborating H5a and H5c.

In our endeavor to gauge the predictive accuracy of our model, we turned to R^2 , deploying the blindfolding procedure. The observed R^2 values stood at 0.153 for psychological empowerment, 0.295 for organizational commitment, and an impressive 0.996 for prosocial service behavior. With adjusted R^2 values being 0.151, 0.291, and 0.664 for psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, and prosocial service behavior, respectively, we were confident of the reliability of our model. To ensure no issues related to collinearity and to ascertain that all values fit within acceptable bounds, we scrutinized the VIF of all constructs as delineated earlier, in which our analysis affirmed that all values fell well within the recommended spectrum (Ringle et al. 2015).



Lastly, to determine the predictive accuracy of our model, we deployed the Stone-Geisser's Q^2 measure using the blindfold method. As advocated by Chin (2010), a Q^2 value greater than zero signifies a model's robust predictive validity. Our research yielded Q^2 values of 0.144, 0.105, and 0.351 for psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, and prosocial service behavior, respectively, further solidifying the strength and relevance of our findings.

Discussion

The aftermath of the global pandemic has ushered in a dramatically altered working landscape (Lim 2021, 2022, 2023). This pivotal juncture highlights the crucial role that frontline employees occupy in service industries like hospitality. Central to this discussion is the prosocial service behavior of these employees and the attitudes that shape such behavior.

Our study delves deeply into the intricate interplay between brand authenticity and the prosocial behavior of frontline employees in the hospitality industry. Contrary to what might be intuitively assumed, our findings suggest that brand authenticity, in isolation, is insufficient to ignite prosocial service behavior. Instead, there is a compelling need for brands to cultivate both psychological empowerment and organizational commitment among their employees to truly tap into the potential of brand authenticity and channel it toward fostering prosocial service actions.

The rationale behind our finding is twofold. First, employees must possess a genuine belief in their own ability to make a difference, which is encapsulated in the idea of psychological empowerment. Secondly, they need a profound sense of attachment and loyalty to their organization, underscored by organizational commitment. Only when these conditions are met can employees genuinely embody and convey a brand's authentic values through their prosocial actions.

However, it is paramount to strike a note of caution. Our research indicates that while job autonomy is often heralded as a mechanism to boost employee morale and initiative, it might, in fact, weaken the positive effects of psychological empowerment on prosocial behavior. This nuance is essential for businesses navigating the intricate dynamics of the new working world.

Consequently, this research does not just deepen our understanding of the dynamics driving prosocial behavior in the hospitality industry, but also offers actionable insights for both theoretical constructs and real-world applications. As businesses find their footing in this new era, the revelations from this study can act as vital guideposts in molding a culture that is both collaborative and proactive in its service ethos.

Theoretical implications

The influence of service provider behavior on customer perceptions has been a topic of rigorous study, with scholars such as Bitner et al. (1994), Hartline and Ferrell (1996) and Lemmink and Mattsson (2002) leading the discourse. This research enriches this body of work by delving into the effects of internal branding, specifically brand authenticity, on both the role-prescribed and extra-role service behaviors of frontline employees. Intriguingly, our findings suggest that while internal branding critically influences psychological empowerment and organizational commitment in service providers, it ultimately shapes their propensity for prosocial service behavior and their ability to deliver top-tier services to customers.

While a myriad of studies, like those by Auh et al. (2014), Bettencourt and Brown (1997) and Nadiri and Tanova (2010), have underscored the role of service-oriented citizenship behavior in shaping customer experience, our research makes a unique contribution. It illuminates that brand authenticity does not have an immediate and direct impact on the prosocial service behavior of frontline employees. Instead, this relationship is significantly modulated by the intermediary roles of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment.

The implications of affective organizational commitment on various organizational outcomes have been extensively explored (Cho et al. 2006; Tolentino 2013; Yang 2010; Yeh 2019). Parallel research has found a positive link between organizational commitment and service-oriented citizenship behavior (Harwiki 2013; Ocampo et al. 2018; Pradhan and Pradhan 2015). However, the bridging role of organizational commitment, especially in the relationship between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior, remains relatively untapped. Echoing the principles championed by Ajzen (1985, 1991) that behaviors spring from pre-existing attitudes, this research further teases out the intermediary role of psychological empowerment. This form of empowerment does not just kindle creative behavior connected to task motivation and will, as suggested by Thomas and Velthouse (1990), but it also equips frontline employees, those at the forefront of customer interaction, to showcase supportive behaviors for both guests and peers.

By connecting the dots, it can be inferred that employees who perceive higher degrees of brand authenticity simultaneously experience heightened levels of psychological empowerment. This, in turn, amplifies their inclination toward supportive (Bettencourt and Brown 2003) and prosocial service behaviors. Concurrent research underscores the necessity for managers to offer employees job autonomy and flexibility, propelling them to exceed basic role expectations and engage more in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Malik and Dhar 2017; Malik 2018; Gellatly and



Irving 2001). Such autonomy fosters attributes like self-control, self-awareness, resilience, and self-leadership, all of which are pivotal to behaviors exceeding role expectations, such as prosocial service behavior (Li et al. 2016).

Moving forward, scholars should contemplate applying the brand authenticity for prosocial service behavior framework proposed herein across diverse contexts. As the landscape of business and social interactions morphs in our ever-evolving world, this is not just about the resurgence of businesses in the post-pandemic era. It is about anticipating, strategizing, and implementing forward-thinking measures for any unforeseeable crises in future. This proactive approach ensures that businesses and societies are never as unprepared as they have been in recent times. It also mandates the examination of varied behavioral variables alongside simulated business scenarios, with the goal of drawing and theorizing the robust nuances between behavior and resultant outcomes.

Managerial implications

Our study's findings elucidate a multifaceted relationship between brand authenticity, psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, and prosocial service behavior, especially relevant for service industries. We unpack these findings and detail actionable strategies for managers aiming to foster a service-oriented workforce.

The limited role of brand authenticity

Observation and implication. Brand authenticity acts as the cornerstone in the relationship between an organization and its employees. Our research clearly asserts that while brand authenticity is crucial, it is insufficient on its own to catalyze prosocial service behavior among frontline employees. In the context of service industries, the authenticity of a brand might attract customers and employees alike, but to create lasting relationships and drive behavioral outcomes, deeper engagement is paramount. Authenticity might initiate trust, but like in any relationship, consistency, reliability, and depth are what sustains and deepens it (Solomon and Flores 2003).

Actionable strategy. To harness the full potential of brand authenticity, it must be viewed as part of an intertwined trinity with psychological empowerment and organizational commitment. Managers need to think beyond mere brand representation. One approach is ensuring internal brand consistency (Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali 2021). Organizations should ensure that what their brand promises externally mirrors what is practiced internally. A disconnect between external brand promises and internal realities can lead to disillusionment among employees. Moreover, it is beneficial to conduct regular internal audits to ascertain if the brand's

values and promises resonate authentically with the employees' daily experiences. These audits can identify and rectify gaps (Zozulov et al. 2022).

Further enhancing the role of brand authenticity involves allowing employees to participate in the brand's evolutionary journey (Afshardoost et al. 2023). Engaging them in discussions about brand values, vision, and messaging not only ensures brand values stay relevant but also fosters a sense of ownership among employees. Additionally, continuous learning and development can play a pivotal role. Organizing training sessions and workshops that focus on both skills and brand values can be transformative. Making these sessions interactive allows employees to understand, question, and internalize the brand's essence, ensuring they emerge feeling more aligned with the brand.

Moreover, a robust feedback mechanism can further reaffirm authenticity (Hsiung 2012). Establishing an open-door policy where employees can freely discuss their perceptions about the brand, suggesting improvements in its representation or realization, is invaluable. A culture that values feedback can adapt and ensure brand authenticity is always at its pinnacle.

To summarize, while brand authenticity lays the groundwork, it requires the pillars of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment to build a formidable edifice of prosocial service behavior. Managers must recognize this interdependence and craft strategies that treat these elements not as separate entities but as interconnected gears of the same machinery.

The power of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment

Observation and implication. The synergy between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment manifests as a cornerstone in brand management within service industries. Employees who are psychologically empowered feel an innate sense of control and influence over their professional roles and the outcomes of their actions. Such employees carry a belief that they can genuinely effect change. When this sense of empowerment aligns with organizational commitment—a profound loyalty and dedication to the organization and its aspirations—the outcome is transformative. Employees in this frame of mind do not merely understand the brand's core values, they internalize and exemplify them. Every interaction with a customer becomes an opportunity to act as a brand ambassador. They transcend the routine of their job description and suffuse the brand's ethos into every task, transforming standard service procedures into memorable brand experiences for customers.

Actionable strategy. To harness the full potential of psychological empowerment, organizations need to embrace a comprehensive approach. Training and development should



evolve beyond mere skill acquisition (Albrecht et al. 2015). Programs must be designed to deepen employees' understanding of the brand's values and mission. Such training should empower employees with not just the tools but also the mindset to address problems creatively, take initiatives, and suggest brand-aligned innovations. Concurrently, a robust recognition and reward system can be transformative. By consistently celebrating employees who exemplify the brand's values, organizations can motivate the workforce, boost morale, and set an aspirational standard (Sadri and Lees 2001).

Furthermore, fostering open channels of communication is pivotal (Hsiung 2012). Encouraging employees to articulate their opinions, share ideas, and voice concerns can naturally cultivate psychological empowerment. A receptive environment, where input is genuinely valued, can be a game-changer. Additionally, a strong organizational culture, rooted in a sense of belonging, can bolster commitment. Regular team-building exercises, workshops, and feedback sessions are instrumental in ensuring employees resonate with the brand's vision and recognize their role's significance within the broader brand narrative (Kantabutra and Avery 2010).

By adopting these strategies, organizations can not only amplify psychological empowerment and organizational commitment but can also set off a cascade of positive outcomes. Empowered and dedicated employees champion brand values with unwavering consistency (Saleem and Hawkins 2021), paving the way for heightened customer satisfaction, enduring loyalty, and proactive brand advocacy. In the service industry, where referrals and customer testimonials are paramount (Tóth et al. 2020), this combination might well be the catalyst that elevates a brand to unparalleled heights.

The double-edged sword of job autonomy

Observation and implication. Job autonomy has long been lauded as a catalyst for innovation (De Spiegelaere et al. 2014), increased job satisfaction (Kim et al. 2019), and elevated productivity (Galanti et al. 2021). While these benefits are undeniable, our study presents a nuanced perspective, especially when viewed in the context of the service industry. Higher levels of autonomy, paradoxically, might deter the very prosocial service behaviors that organizations aim to foster. When employees feel psychologically empowered but are also burdened with vast swathes of autonomous decision-making, there is a potential recoil effect. This recoil could stem from multiple sources: the apprehension of assuming added responsibility, the looming risk of mistakes in decision-making, or the inherent human tendency to avoid stepping out of defined boundaries. In other words,

while autonomy empowers, it can also paralyze if not balanced with support.

Actionable strategy. Managers face the challenging task of finding equilibrium between autonomy and empowerment. One way to tackle this challenge is to engage in guided autonomy by offering employees the freedom to make decisions but within certain structured parameters. Instead of an open-ended approach, provide clear guidelines, resources, and safety nets to ensure autonomous actions are channeled constructively. For instance, organizations can implement a mentorship program where experienced members guide those with less experience, ensuring that the autonomy granted does not become overwhelming. Regular training sessions can be organized to focus specifically on decision-making, risk assessment, and proactive problem-solving, equipping employees with the tools to handle the freedom they are given.

Moreover, leadership should cultivate a culture of trust, ensuring that even if missteps occur, they are treated as learning opportunities rather than punitive moments. Such a culture would embolden employees to harness their autonomy more confidently, knowing that the organization has their back. To complement this, feedback mechanisms should be in place. These can be periodic reviews, open forums, or digital platforms where employees can share their experiences, challenges, and insights regarding their autonomous roles. Such mechanisms not only provide employees a voice but also furnish management with invaluable insights to continually refine the balance between autonomy and structure.

In summation, while job autonomy can be a potent tool to drive innovation and engagement, its unchecked application, especially in the service industry, might be counterproductive. The key lies in evolving from mere autonomy to guided autonomy, ensuring that the freedom granted is productive, purposeful, and aligned with the organization's brand values and objectives.

Conclusion

In our quest to understand the relationship between brand authenticity and prosocial service behavior, this study explored the mediating roles of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment, and the moderating role of job autonomy. Contrary to the intuitive expectation, the results indicate that brand authenticity does not directly foster prosocial service behavior among employees. Instead, the influence of brand authenticity on prosocial service behavior materializes primarily through its interaction with psychological empowerment and organizational commitment.

Furthermore, the role of job autonomy emerged as a counterintuitive insight. While autonomy generally signifies



empowerment, in this context, it appeared to undermine the positive effects of psychological empowerment on prosocial service behavior. This underscores the nuanced relationships among these constructs, suggesting that brands aiming for prosocial behaviors must carefully navigate the dimensions of empowerment, commitment, and autonomy.

In light of the dynamic shifts in the business landscape, the significance of these findings gains momentum. As brands and organizations grapple with unprecedented challenges, the behavioral attributes of both management and employees will inevitably steer the direction of business revival and growth. This holds particularly true for industries like hospitality where customer service is at the forefront and thus paramount.

However, this study is not without limitations, offering avenues for further research. First, the research context was restricted to frontline employees in the hospitality industry. To validate the generalizability of these findings, similar research endeavors can be directed toward service sectors such as aviation or healthcare. Secondly, our sampling strategy and the predominantly male composition of our sample suggest the need for broader and more diverse sample considerations in future research. A gender-centric approach, comparing male and female responses, could shed light on potential differences in behavior and motivations. Thirdly, the dynamics of brand authenticity in relation to constructs like employee engagement remain uncharted territories, presenting opportunities for exploration. Finally, given the evolving nature of brands and business operations, it is imperative to examine this model across various contexts, identifying how newly emerging factors impact brand, organizational, and behavioral outcomes. To enrich our understanding further, future research can also harness qualitative methods or adopt mixed-method approaches to delve deeper into these constructs.

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