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The Influence of Brand Authenticity on Consumer Buying Behavior in Social Media Marketing

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Abstract

In today's digital age, social media platforms have revolutionized brand consumer interactions, positioning themselves as critical drivers of purchasing behavior. This study investigates the role of perceived brand authenticity on consumer buying decisions within social media marketing. Using a cross-sectional quantitative design, data was gathered from 50 active social media users through structured surveys. Descriptive and inferential analyses, including Chi-square tests, were applied to explore associations between variables. Findings reveal that 80% of respondents have purchased from brands on social media, with direct brand engagement showing a statistically significant relationship with buying behavior ($p = 0.038$). In contrast, the self-reported importance of authenticity did not exhibit a significant correlation with purchases. Results highlight that authentic action manifested through engagement and responsiveness rather than passive brand image, is the key driver of trust and consumer behavior. The study offers actionable insights for marketers on fostering trust through genuine, interactive strategies and leveraging user-generated content for business success.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Brand Authenticity, Consumer Trust, Buying Behavior, User-Generated Content, Engagement

Introduction

The digital revolution has profoundly reshaped marketing practices worldwide, with social media platforms emerging as vital spaces for brand-consumer engagement. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) have evolved from simple networking sites into sophisticated marketing ecosystems, offering brands unprecedented opportunities to connect with audiences. Unlike traditional advertising, social media marketing fosters two-way communication, enabling consumers to interact with brands, provide feedback, and influence brand narratives in real time. In this interactive digital



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environment, brand authenticity—the extent to which a brand is perceived as genuine, credible, and aligned with its values—has gained prominence. Authentic brands are expected to demonstrate consistency between words and actions, transparency in communication, and responsiveness to consumer needs. While authenticity has long been associated with building trust and loyalty, its specific impact on buying behavior within the context of social media marketing remains insufficiently explored.

Research Problem

Despite growing recognition of authenticity as a critical marketing asset, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how perceived brand authenticity drives actual consumer purchase decisions on social media. Prior studies have focused predominantly on trust and loyalty outcomes, leaving a gap regarding the direct link between authenticity and transactional behavior. Moreover, the relative influence of authenticity dimensions—such as engagement, user-generated content (UGC), and transparent practices—on consumer actions needs further clarifications

Research Objectives

- Examine the relationship between perceived brand authenticity and consumer buying behavior in social media marketing.
- Identify which elements of authenticity (e.g., engagement, UGC) most strongly influence purchase decisions.
- Provide actionable insights for brands to design authentic social media strategies that drive sales.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How frequently do consumers purchase products based on a brand's social media presence?

Research Question 2: How important is perceived brand authenticity in consumers' purchase decisions on social media?

Research Question 3: What specific elements (e.g., engagement, UGC) make a brand appear authentic on social media?

Research Question 4: Does direct brand engagement on social media increase consumer trust and purchase intent?

Research Question 5: How does authentic brand communication influence consumer perceptions and buying behavior?

Hypotheses

Hypotheses1: There is a positive association between perceived brand authenticity and consumer buying behavior in social media marketing.

Hypotheses2: Direct brand engagement on social media positively influences consumer trust and purchase decisions.

Hypotheses3: User-generated content moderates the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer buying behavior, strengthening the association.

Significance of the Study

This study bridges a critical gap in digital marketing research by quantitatively assessing how brand authenticity influences consumer purchasing behavior on



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social media. The findings will inform marketers and brand managers on how to design authentic, value-driven communication strategies that not only foster trust but also drive tangible business outcomes. The study offers insights essential for brands aiming to convert social media interactions into sales while maintaining credibility in highly dynamic online environments.

Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinnings of Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity is a multidimensional concept rooted in marketing, psychology, and sociology. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence purchase intentions. In digital contexts, authenticity impacts attitudes by enhancing trust and reducing perceived risk. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that individuals align themselves with brands that reflect their self-concept. Thus, authentic brands become extensions of consumer identity, fostering loyalty and advocacy. Cultivation Theory further explains how repeated exposure to consistent, authentic messaging on social media shapes consumer worldviews, embedding perceptions of brand genuineness over time.

Dimensions of Brand Authenticity

Beverland (2005) and Morhart et al. (2015) identify key dimensions: originality, sincerity, quality, heritage, and credibility. Originality reflects a brand's unique story or innovation; sincerity pertains to honesty and transparency; quality addresses product excellence; heritage highlights tradition and origin; and credibility relates to consistency between brand claims and actions. In the social media landscape, these dimensions materialize through UGC, interactive engagement, and transparent storytelling, where consumers scrutinize brands for alignment between stated values and actual practices.

Social Media's Role in Consumer Decision-Making

Social media influences the entire consumer decision journey: awareness, information search, evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase feedback. Platforms facilitate social proof—through likes, shares, reviews—which reduces uncertainty and enhances trust (Cialdini, 1984). Consumers rely on peer validation, influencer endorsements, and brand responses when evaluating authenticity. The immediacy of social media accelerates trust-building or erosion, as consumers expect real-time, authentic interactions.

Authenticity and Trust in Digital Environments

Authenticity is the cornerstone of consumer trust online. Studies (Edelman, 2019) show consumers prioritize authenticity over innovation or price when selecting brands on social media. Authenticity manifests not just in messaging but in behavior—responsiveness, ethical conduct, and consistency across platforms. Real-time engagement, transparent disclosures, and UGC reinforce perceived authenticity, translating into stronger trust and purchase intent.

User-Generated Content and Social Proof

UGC serves as a potent authenticity signal. Research (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020) indicates that UGC enhances brand credibility because it reflects real



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consumer experiences. Customer reviews, testimonials, and shared experiences provide social proof that validates brand promises. UGC not only influences individual perceptions but also amplifies reach and impact through peer networks, making it a critical component of authentic social media strategies.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Although brand authenticity's link to trust is well established, its direct connection to purchasing behavior remains underexplored, particularly in social media contexts. Few studies quantify how authenticity dimensions—such as engagement, UGC, or transparency—impact purchase decisions. Furthermore, the relative weight of different authenticity elements in shaping trust and intent varies across cultures, demographics, and platforms, signaling the need for nuanced, empirical exploration.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design aimed at understanding the relationship between brand authenticity and consumer buying behavior on social media platforms. A quantitative design was selected to allow for statistical analysis of the relationships between variables and to enhance the objectivity and generalizability of findings within the sample. The cross-sectional nature of the study enables the collection of data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of current consumer attitudes and behaviors in relation to social media marketing.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised active social media users aged 18 and above. A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed due to constraints in time, resources, and accessibility. Participants were recruited through online forums, social media groups, and academic networks. The final sample included 50 respondents who voluntarily completed the survey. While this sample size is adequate for descriptive statistics and exploratory inferential analysis, it limits the external validity and generalizability of results. Future studies are encouraged to use larger, randomized samples to address this limitation.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire. The instrument was designed based on validated scales from existing literature, modified for relevance to social media marketing. The questionnaire included five sections:

- **Demographic Profile:** Age, gender, education level, and frequency of social media use.
- **Purchasing Behavior:** Binary questions regarding purchases influenced by social media.
- **Perceived Importance of Authenticity:** Likert-scale items measuring how important authenticity is in purchase decisions.
- **Engagement and Trust:** Questions exploring whether brand engagement increases trust.
- **Authenticity Elements:** Multiple-choice items identifying content types (e.g., UGC, influencer endorsements, customer reviews) perceived



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as authentic and trustworthy.

The instrument was pilot tested with a small group (N=10) for clarity and reliability before distribution.

Data Collection Procedures

The survey was administered online over a two-week period. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No identifying information was collected, and data were stored securely in password-protected files. Ethical guidelines for research involving human participants were strictly adhered to.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using SPSS software.

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequency distributions, means, and percentages to summarize demographic characteristics and key variables.
- **Cross-tabulations:** Used to explore associations between purchasing behavior and other variables such as authenticity importance and engagement.
- **Chi-square Test of Independence:** Applied to assess the significance of relationships between categorical variables. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

The choice of analytical techniques was informed by the categorical nature of most survey items and the study's focus on identifying associations rather than causality.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was ensured through expert review and alignment with existing literature. The pilot test contributed to face validity and highlighted areas for refinement. Reliability was assessed through internal consistency checks for multi-item scales, though the small sample size limited the extent of these analyses. The standardized administration of the survey minimized potential researcher bias.

Results

Demographic Profile and Social Media Usage

Table 1 presents the demographic profile and social media usage frequency of the respondents. The sample was predominantly composed of young adults aged 18–34, with a majority reporting daily use of social media.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–24	17	34.0%
	25–34	23	46.0
	35–44	5	10.0
	45–54	4	8.0
	55+	1	2.0
Gender	Female	33	66.0
	Male	16	32.0
	Transgendered	1	2.0

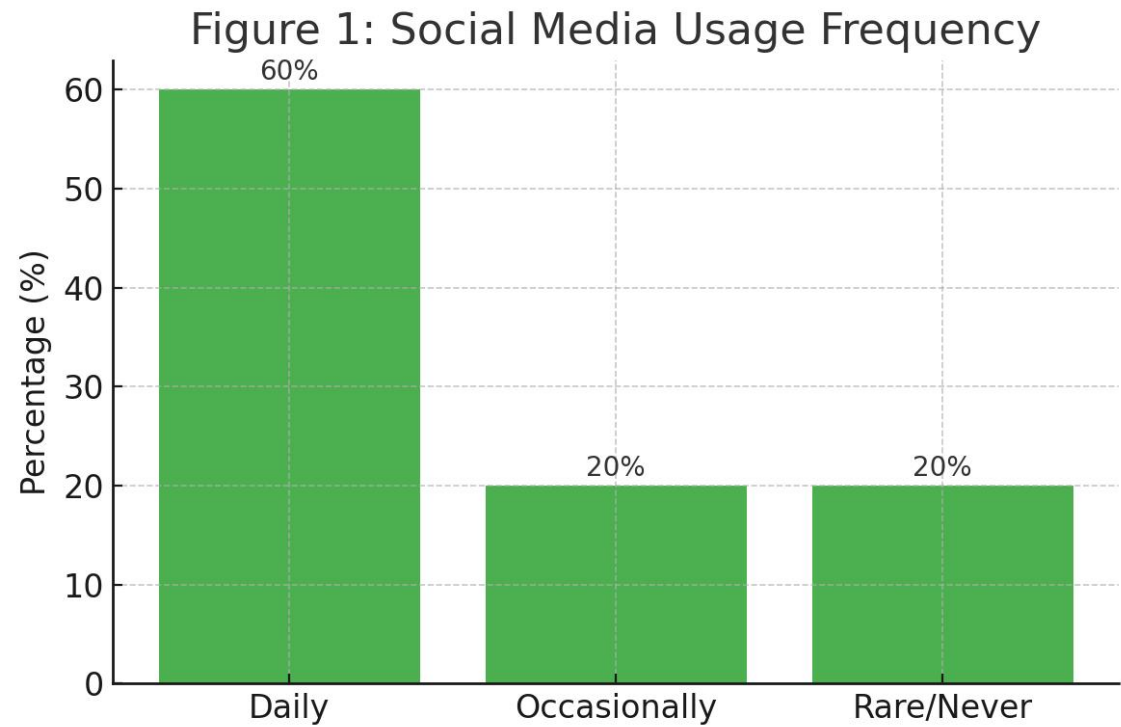


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Social User	Media	Daily	30	60.0
		Occasionally	10	20.0
		Rarely-Never	10	20.0

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic profile and social media usage patterns of the respondents. The table shows that the majority of participants were between the ages of 18 and 34, with 34% in the 18–24 category and 46% in the 25–34 category, collectively making up 80% of the sample. This reflects a youthful demographic that is highly engaged with digital platforms. The gender distribution was skewed towards females, representing 66% of the sample, with males comprising 32% and a small representation (2%) identifying as transgender. These figures suggest that social media marketing strategies targeting younger audiences and women may find particular resonance. Furthermore, the table highlights the frequency of social media use, showing that 60% of respondents reported daily use, while 20% used it occasionally, and another 20% rarely or never. This high level of daily engagement reinforces the importance of social media as a viable and potent platform for marketing and brand communication. The demographic insights in Table 1 set the foundation for understanding how these characteristics influence consumer perceptions of authenticity and their purchasing behaviors.

Figure 1: Social Media Usage Frequency



A bar chart representing daily (60%), occasional (20%), and rare/never (20%) usage among respondents. This figure visually emphasizes the dominance of daily users, highlighting the relevance of social media as a marketing channel.



Purchasing Behavior and Perceptions of Authenticity

Variables	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Purchased from Social Media	Yes	40	80.0
	No	10	20.0
Importance of Authenticity	Slightly important	13	26.0
	Very important	11	22.0
	Moderately important	10	20.0
	Not important	10	20.0
	Extremely important	6	12.0
Trust from Engagement Social Media User	Yes	27	54.0
	No	15	30.0
Perception Change due to Authenticity	Maybe	8	16.0
	Yes	33	66.0
	Not sure	9	18.0
Trust-Building Content	No	8	16.0
	Customer reviews	26	52.0
	Influencer endorsements	9	18.0
	Educational content- Live interactions	8	16.0
	Behind the scenes	7	14.0

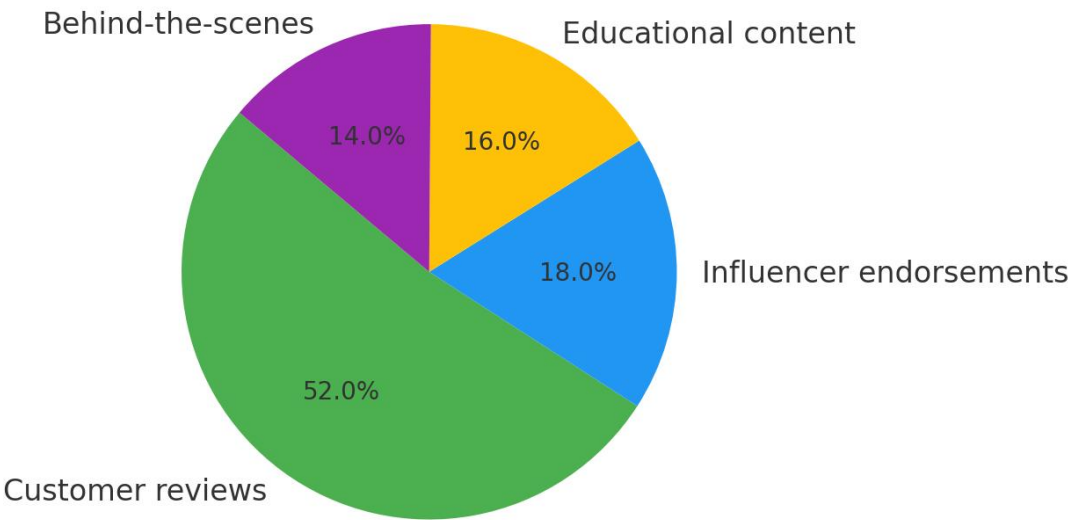
Table 2 summarizes the key variables studied in relation to brand authenticity and consumer buying behavior. It reveals that 80% of respondents had purchased a product based on a brand's social media presence, underscoring the direct impact of social media marketing on purchase decisions. The importance of authenticity varied among participants: 26% rated it as slightly important, 22% as very important, 20% each as moderately or not important, and 12% as extremely important. This variation suggests that while authenticity is valued, its priority differs across consumers. Trust gained through engagement was reported by 54% of respondents, indicating that active interaction with brands positively influences trust. Additionally, 66% noted that authenticity changed their perception of a brand, showing that authenticity contributes to shaping brand image even if it doesn't always drive purchases directly. Regarding trusted content types, customer reviews were the most trusted (52%), followed by



influencer endorsements (18%), live educational content (16%), and behind-the-scenes material (14%). This table highlights the importance of trust-building mechanisms and authentic engagement in social media strategies.

Figure 2: Trust-Building Content Preferences

Figure 6: Trust-Building Content Preferences



A pie chart illustrating trusted content types: Customer reviews (52%), Influencer endorsements (18%), Educational content (16%), and Behind-the-scenes (14%). The figure highlights the primacy of peer validation in trust formation.

Statistical Associations

Cross-tabulations were conducted to assess associations between variables. Table 3 presents the Chi-square results for direct engagement and purchasing behavior.

Engagement Trust	Purchased (Yes)	Purchased (No)
Yes	25	2
No/Maybe	15	8

Chi-square Test: $X^2(1) = 4.31$, $p = 0.038$. This indicates a statistically significant relationship between engagement-driven trust and purchasing behavior.

Table 3 illustrates the relationship between trust derived from engagement and actual purchasing behavior. Among those who reported gaining trust from engagement, 25 made purchases compared to only 2 who did not. Conversely, among those who reported no or uncertain trust from engagement, only 15 made purchases, while 8 did not. The Chi-square test result ($X^2 = 4.31$, $p = 0.038$) indicates a statistically significant association between trust through engagement and buying behavior. This finding underscores the critical role of active brand-consumer interaction in influencing consumer decisions. Brands that engage genuinely and transparently with consumers are significantly more



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likely to convert interactions into sales. The table provides clear evidence that engagement-driven trust is not just a theoretical concept but a measurable driver of consumer purchasing behavior on social media platforms

Table 4 presents the association between authenticity importance and purchasing behavior.

Importance of Authenticity	Purchased (Yes)	Purchased (No)
Extremely important	5	1
Moderately important	6	4
Not important	0	10
Slightly important	9	4
Very important		10

Chi-square Test: $X^2(4) = 6.80$, $p = 0.147$. This suggests no statistically significant relationship between perceived importance of authenticity and actual purchasing behavior.

Table 4 examines the link between consumers' perceived importance of authenticity and their purchasing behavior. The data shows varied purchasing patterns across authenticity importance levels: for instance, all respondents who rated authenticity as not important (10) still made purchases, while among those who rated it as extremely important, 5 purchased and 1 did not. The Chi-square test ($X^2 = 6.80$, $p = 0.147$) indicates no statistically significant association between the perceived importance of authenticity and purchasing decisions. This suggests that while consumers may value authenticity in theory, this perception does not necessarily translate into actual buying behavior. The table highlights the complexity of consumer decision-making, where other factors such as engagement, price, or convenience may override the abstract importance assigned to authenticity. For marketers, this reinforces the need to focus on actionable strategies rather than relying solely on projecting an authentic image.

Additional Insights

Respondents who purchased from social media brands commonly cited transparency in responses, timely replies, and visible customer service interactions as reasons for their trust. Conversely, those who did not purchase highlighted concerns over brand sincerity and consistency.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between brand authenticity, trust, and consumer buying behavior on social media. A central theme emerging from the analysis is that authenticity, while conceptually important, derives its power primarily through demonstrable brand actions rather than passive brand image. This discussion integrates these findings with existing theories, compares them to prior research, and highlights implications for marketing practice.

Alignment with Theoretical Frameworks

The results strongly support the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape



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intentions and behaviors. The significant association between direct brand engagement and purchasing behavior highlights that consumers' positive attitudes toward engaged brands translate into buying actions. Furthermore, the findings align with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), as consumers gravitate toward brands whose authentic interactions and values reflect their own identities. This connection fosters loyalty and advocacy, emphasizing the role of genuine community-building on social media platforms.

Comparison with Prior Research

Consistent with studies by Beverland (2005) and Edelman (2019), this research confirms that authenticity is crucial in fostering trust. However, it advances the conversation by demonstrating that perceived importance of authenticity does not automatically result in purchases unless accompanied by tangible, interactive behaviors. This nuance addresses a gap in prior literature, where authenticity was often treated as a uniform driver of consumer behavior. The preference for customer reviews over influencer endorsements resonates with research on social proof (Cialdini, 1984) and suggests a shift in consumer priorities toward peer validation over sponsored content.

Implications for Practice

For marketers, these findings highlight the need to move beyond static brand storytelling to actionable engagement strategies. Direct interaction, responsiveness, and promotion of user-generated content emerge as critical factors in building trust and driving purchases. Brands should reassess investments in influencer marketing, focusing instead on empowering real customer voices and fostering transparent communication. Social media strategies should prioritize dialogue, community participation, and ethical transparency to meet evolving consumer expectations.

Broader Context and Cultural Considerations

While this study offers important insights, it is necessary to acknowledge that authenticity and trust may manifest differently across cultures and demographic segments. What constitutes authentic engagement in one market may not resonate in another. This underscores the importance of context-specific strategies that account for cultural norms, values, and digital behaviors. Future studies should explore these nuances through cross-cultural analysis.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study's small, convenience-based sample limits the extent to which results can be generalized. The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential bias, while the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences. Future research should expand on these findings using larger, randomized samples and mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative surveys with in-depth qualitative exploration. Longitudinal studies could examine how authentic engagement shapes consumer relationships over time, and experimental designs could test the causal impact of specific authenticity-driven interventions.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the influence of brand authenticity on consumer



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buying behavior within the realm of social media marketing. Through a structured quantitative approach, key insights were uncovered about how consumers perceive authenticity and how these perceptions translate into actual purchasing decisions. The findings not only enhance our understanding of consumer psychology in digital environments but also offer actionable guidance for brands seeking to strengthen their social media strategies. The data analysis revealed that while a significant majority of respondents (80%) had made purchases influenced by social media, it was not the abstract notion of authenticity that drove these decisions. Instead, active and genuine engagement from brands emerged as the critical determinant. The statistically significant association between direct engagement and purchasing behavior ($p = 0.038$) underscores the importance of two-way communication. Brands that responded to customer queries, participated in conversations, and demonstrated transparency were far more likely to convert followers into buyers. This reinforces the idea that authenticity must be demonstrated through action rather than mere claims or image.

Conversely, the study found no significant relationship between consumers' self-reported importance of authenticity and their buying behavior ($p = 0.147$). This suggests a gap between consumer attitudes and their actual behavior—a reminder that what consumers say they value may not always predict what they do. It also highlights the complexity of authenticity as a construct; while consumers appreciate authentic values in theory, in practice, it is specific brand behaviors particularly engagement that earn their trust and business.

Customer reviews stood out as the most trusted form of content, selected by 52% of respondents as the top driver of trust. This aligns with principles of social proof, where consumers look to the experiences of peers to guide their own decisions. Influencer endorsements, often prioritized in marketing strategies, trailed significantly behind, suggesting that consumers place greater value on peer-generated validation than on paid partnerships.

This study's conclusions have several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the findings support frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Identity Theory, emphasizing the role of interactive communication in shaping consumer attitudes and intentions. The results also expand the discourse on brand authenticity by distinguishing between passive perceptions and active, trust-building actions. From a practical perspective, marketers should focus on fostering genuine engagement, amplifying user-generated content, and promoting transparency across digital channels. Rather than investing heavily in curated brand images or influencer collaborations alone, brands should prioritize meaningful interactions that resonate with consumers on a personal level. Several limitations must be acknowledged. The study's small sample size and use of convenience sampling limit the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, including social desirability bias. The cross-sectional design means that causal relationships cannot be definitively established. Future research should address these limitations by employing larger, more representative samples, longitudinal designs to track behavior over time, and mixed-methods approaches that combine surveys with qualitative insights.



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