

BRANDS AS HUMANS: HOW BRAND VIRTUOUSNESS RELATES TO BRAND AUTHENTICITY AND BRAND ATTACHMENT

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Received 29 March 2024; accepted 31 October 2024

Abstract

Research aim. Authenticity has become an essential quality for brands, with 86% of consumers preferring brands that are perceived to be authentic (Stackla, 2021). As a result, the drivers of brand authenticity are gaining momentum as an important research object. The role of brand virtuousness and its connection to brand authenticity and brand attachment has received limited attention from the consumer perspective. Meanwhile, the relationship between virtuousness and authenticity has been thoroughly investigated in other fields, such as personality research. Based on personality literature, comparable patterns of association can be anticipated when considering brands as relational entities. Therefore, the arguments elucidating the relationship between the virtuousness of personality and authenticity can be extended to the realm of brand. Given the above, this study aims to examine how brand virtuousness affects brand authenticity and brand attachment.

Design / Methodology / Approach. This study employed a quantitative research approach by administering an online questionnaire (www.qualtrics.com) to respondents randomly assigned to two conditions: one with instructions to choose an authentic brand and another to name an inauthentic brand. The data were obtained from a convenience sample of Lithuanian adults (N=461; women= 70.9%; men= 29.1%; age mean =33.26; SD=12.29). The study constructs were measured using pre-existing 5-point Likert-type scales that were adapted to the focus of the current research. PLS-SEM (SmartPLS Version 4.1.0.6) was employed to test research hypotheses.

Findings. Our findings show that brand virtuousness and brand authenticity have a positive and significant effect on brand attachment. Furthermore, brand virtuousness exhibited a positive and significant impact on brand authenticity. Finally, as expected, brand authenticity mediated the link between brand virtuousness and brand attachment. Consumers are drawn to brands that exude virtue, and the more authentic a brand is perceived to be, the more consumers tend to stick with it.

Originality / Value / Practical implications. This study contributes to the brand literature by expanding our understanding of personality theory-grounded antecedents in relation to brand authenticity and brand attachment. Drawing on personality literature, this study proposes novel explanations for the impact of brand virtuousness on brand attachment through brand authenticity. The findings suggest that marketers would benefit from incorporating virtuousness properties into their brand strategies and communication campaigns, as it aids in the establishment of a stronger consumer-brand connection and increases perceived brand authenticity.

Keywords: brand virtuousness; brand authenticity; brand attachment.

JEL code: M31.

Introduction

For many years, researchers have been studying the reasons why consumers become attached to a brand, of which there are many, and why they are more likely to make repeat purchases and be interested in a particular brand. In recent years, researchers have become increasingly involved in studying brand authenticity. Authenticity has become an essential quality for brands, with 86% of consumers preferring brands that are perceived to be authentic (Stackla, 2021). As a result, the drivers of brand authenticity are gaining momentum as an important research object. Brand authenticity is now considered to be one of the factors that determines the success of a brand and also influences the perception of brand value by consumers (Arya et al., 2019). Previous research has reflected the influence of brand authenticity on brand attachment (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022) by incorporating and exploring the role of nostalgia in this relationship (Chen et al., 2021). Research has examined elements of authenticity such as quality, heritage, sincerity, brand affection (Safeer et al., 2021) and loyalty (So et al., 2013). With the increasing focus on brand authenticity, it is important to analyse what authenticity is, what its antecedents are and how brand authenticity influences consumer behaviour. One possible antecedent of authenticity is virtuousness, which reflects the values, morals and beliefs held (Guevremont & Grohmann, 2016). Research on the phenomenon of virtuousness in relation to brands is very limited but relevant.

There has been little research into the moral aspect of branding in consumer behaviour research. As a result, it is difficult to explain how it influences consumers' attachment to a brand. The relationship between virtuousness and authenticity has been explored extensively in other contexts, such as personality research. Literature suggests that similar patterns can be expected for brands. Thus, the reasoning used to explain the nature of the link between personal virtuousness and authenticity could be extrapolated to branding. In light of the arguments put forward, the scientific problem is formulated in terms of the question: how does the *virtuousness* of a brand affect its *authenticity* and *attachment* to it. This study aims to investigate the effect of brand virtuousness on brand attachment through brand authenticity. Based on the theoretical foundation of personality, the current study hypothesises that brand virtuousness positively influences brand authenticity, which in turn positively affects brand attachment. The study applied a cross-sectional research design of the correlational type and the online questionnaire to test anticipated hypotheses.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of brand attachment. Jahn et al. (2012) describe brand attachment as a relational concept that reflects the emotional connection that a consumer has with a brand. A strong emotional connection between the consumer and the brand is a driver of consumer loyalty. Bairrada et al. (2018) point out that brand affection not only leads to consumer loyalty but also to positive word-of-mouth feedback, which makes a brand more resistant to negative information. Once a consumer's attachment to the brand is in place, the consumer will have a long-term relationship with the brand (Chen et al., 2022). Brand attachment refers to a strong emotional bond between the consumer and the brand, where the consumer sees the brand as part of himself or herself, feels a sense of commitment to the brand, recommends the brand to others and is willing to pay a premium price. Hung and Lu (2018) divide the phenomenon of emotional attachment to a brand into two dimensions: one is the rosy side (positive emotions) consisting of affection, passion and connection, and the other is the blue side (negative emotions) consisting of the separation distress and anxiety, anticipated regret, missing and sadness. In this study, the conceptualisation of brand attachment is in line with Hung and Lu (2018).

The concept of brand authenticity. Brand authenticity is a genuine brand that has its own unique style, is open and honest with consumers, and endures through changing times and trends (Campagna et al. 2021). According to Oh et al. (2019), brand authenticity is not only one of the criteria for choosing a product but also a valuable property of a brand that helps consumers express themselves. In the literature, the construct of authenticity has been interpreted in approximately forty different dimensions (Akbar & Wymer, 2017). For example, Nunes et al. (2021) define brand authenticity as the holistic construct which includes elements of accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency. Further, according to Campagna et al. (2021), brand authenticity, along with genuine uniqueness, possesses honesty and openness properties and is composed of three dimensions reflecting the following

brand authenticity facets: consciousness, longevity, and self-empowerment. Akbar and Wymer (2017) associate brand authenticity with uniqueness, legitimacy, truthfulness to its claims, and absence of falsity. Taken together, an authentic brand is primarily characterised by authenticity, originality, genuineness, and truthfulness. Therefore, the current study will refer to Bruhn et al. (2012) definition, which points out that authenticity is a multidimensional construct consisting of four dimensions: *continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness*.

Conceptualisation of brand virtuousness. One way of influencing consumer behaviour through feelings and emotions is to emphasise virtuousness. The concept of virtuousness is closely related to, if not synonymous with, ethics. To be in line with socially acceptable ethical standards, a brand should be sustainable, socially responsible, environmentally friendly, ecologically sound and take care of its employees (Garanti, 2019). According to Sit et al. (2021), brand virtuousness is equated with values, virtue, morality, and nobility, and is linked to a lack of interest in commercial matters and the deliberate disregarding of commercial motives. According to Spielmann (2021), virtuousness is associated with goodness and evokes positive emotions, which may determine the consumer's choice of a particular brand. Based on Spielmann (2021), brand virtuousness is defined by manifestations of *honesty, virtue, fairness, and righteousness*.

Hypotheses Development

The link between brand virtuousness and the consumer's attachment to the brand. Research shows that virtuousness has a positive impact on consumer brand attachment (Sodergren, 2021). Virtuousness influences brand attachment through loyalty because loyalty is perceived as a moral trait, which is also a sign of brand attachment (Akoglu & Ozbek, 2021; Japutra et al., 2018; Wolter et al., 2022). It should be noted that the moral character of a brand influences loyalty through the emotional connection felt by the consumer, which forms a long-term relationship (Chen et al., 2022; Hung & Lu, 2018; Malar et al., 2011; Park et al., 2010). Consumer attachment to a brand is based on fundamental human values such as love of family, respect for others, honesty, and moral and ethical behaviour, which are the basis of virtuousness (Berthon et al., 2021; Guevremont, 2018). Research shows that consumers who rely on virtue and morality in their daily lives are more likely to be attracted to brands that espouse and publicly declare the same values (Choi & Winterich, 2013). Given above, we suggest:

H1: Brand virtuousness positively influences consumer brand attachment

The link between brand authenticity and consumer brand attachment. Brand authenticity has been shown to influence consumer purchase intention, leading to brand attachment (Kim, 2021; Lee & Chung, 2019; Oh et al., 2019; Safeer et al., 2021). Perceived brand authenticity influences consumer attachment to a brand through active consumer engagement in brand-related activities on digital channels (Arya et al., 2019). Empirical studies show that consumers tend to be attracted to authentic brands because they are in line with social norms and standards, and because they embody uniqueness, originality, exclusivity, and long-standing traditions (Moulard et al., 2016; Nunes et al., 2021). Consumers tend to identify with authentic brands that reflect their individuality, self-concept, emotions, and behavioural changes (Arya et al., 2019; Assiouras et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2022). The literature suggests that brand attachment is a consequence of authenticity. Based on the literature review, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Brand authenticity positively influences consumer attachment to the brand

The link between the virtuousness of the brand and its authenticity. The relationship between brand virtuousness and its authenticity has not yet been widely researched. Virtuousness is understood as conformity to moral values (Tran & Keng, 2018). Empirical research has shown that brand virtuousness is a manifestation of values, morals and beliefs that have an impact on brand authenticity (Guevremont, 2018; Napoli et al., 2016; Sodergren, 2021). Social responsibility in brands reflects virtuousness, which has an impact on the perceived authenticity of the brand (Fritz et al., 2017). It can be assumed that authenticity is closely related to virtuousness or is even a consequence of it. Given the above, we hypothesise:

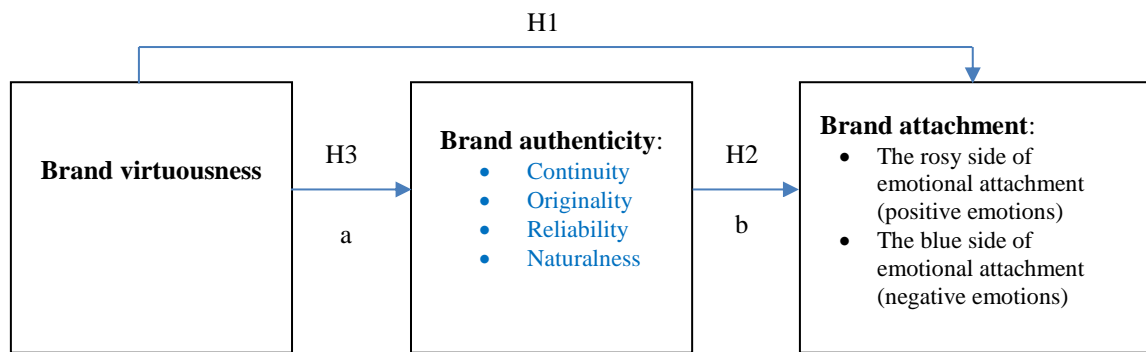
H3: Brand virtuousness positively influences brand authenticity

The literature review suggests that brand virtuousness enhances consumer-perceived brand authenticity, which, in turn, is expected to foster greater brand attachment. This pattern parallels personality research. For instance, virtue is understood as the internalization of moral traits, where an individual must possess the capacity to regulate their behaviour in order to align with a given set of standards (Baumeister & Juola Exline, 1999). Virtuousness, therefore, becomes a prerequisite for legitimacy and truthfulness, both of which are essential characteristics of authenticity.

In consumer research, brand virtuousness is proposed to act as a cue for authenticity due to its perceived integrity (Fritz et al., 2017). Consequently, brand virtuousness is regarded as an antecedent to brand authenticity (Sodergren, 2021). When consumers perceive a brand as authentic, they see it as being true to itself, sincere, and honest. These characteristics are expected to build trust and emotional closeness with the brand, leading consumers to view it as reliable and deserving of reciprocity. Empirical evidence supports this view, showing that celebrity authenticity positively influences emotional attachment (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Similarly, food brand authenticity has been found to predict consumer attachment to food brands (Assiouras et al., 2015). Based on the preceding discussion, we propose that brand authenticity plays a mediating role between brand virtuousness and brand attachment. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand virtuousness positively influences brand authenticity, which in turn positively affects brand attachment

Figure 1 below illustrates the hypothesised relationships between brand virtuousness, brand authenticity and the consumer's attachment to the brand.



H4: $a \times b$

Fig. 1. A conceptual model of the relationship between brand virtuousness, brand authenticity and consumer brand attachment (Source: Created by the authors)

Research Methodology

To test the hypotheses, a quantitative study was conducted using an online survey (www.qualtrics.com). The constructs were measured using the scales validated in previous studies. Brand virtuousness was measured using Spielmann's (2021) adapted four-item Likert-type 5-point scale (asking how honest, virtuous, fair, and righteous a brand is, where 1 - strongly disagree, 5 - strongly agree). Brand authenticity was measured using Bruhn et al. (2012) 5-point Likert-type scale, which has four dimensions: continuity (4 items), originality (4 items), reliability (4 items), and naturalness (3 items). Brand attachment was measured using Hung and Lu's (2018) Likert-type 5-point scale consisting of two dimensions, the rosy side of emotional attachment (5 items) and the blue side of emotional attachment (4 items) with a 5-point Likert scale.

All respondents were given a definition of brand authenticity in the preamble to the questionnaire. Then respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. One group of respondents was asked to think of an authentic brand, name it and answer the questionnaire questions (measuring the constructs of the study) with the selected authentic brand in mind, while the other group of respondents was asked

to think of an inauthentic brand, name it and answer the same questionnaire questions (measuring the constructs of the study) with the inauthentic brand in mind. The dataset was obtained from a convenience sample of 487 Lithuanian adults. The convenience sample is deemed acceptable for theoretical effect testing. Convenient samples, especially those from students, are commonly utilized in brand attachment studies (Hemsley-Brown, 2023).

We used the inverse square root method to calculate the minimum required sample size. If the minimum significant path coefficient is unknown, the default value of 0.197 is used, which leads to a minimum sample size of 160 (assuming $\alpha = 0.05$ and 80% power) (Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

After data screening, invalid cases were eliminated, resulting in a usable sample of 461 respondents (women= 70.9%; men= 29.1%; age mean =33.26; SD=12.29, with higher education 69.4%, income: >1000 € 39.3%; 1001-2000 € 50.3%; 2001 EUR and more 10.4%). Our sample size exceeds the minimum requirement, ensuring a power of more than 80%.

There were 269 cases in the authentic brand group subsample and 192 cases in the inauthentic brand group subsample. The questionnaire included an open-ended question asking respondents to think about and identify a brand that they consider to be authentic or inauthentic. Respondents consider Nike to be the most authentic (mentioned 28 times), followed by Apple (19), Coca-Cola (17), Samsung (9), Gucci (8), Uoga uoga (7), Chanel and Adidas (6 each). The most frequently mentioned inauthentic brands were Zara (mentioned 8 times), H&M (7 times), Pepsi and Vici (6 times each). The responses show that respondents have mixed perceptions of brands, with some perceiving the same brand as authentic and others as inauthentic.

Next, we used the PLS-SEM (SmartPLS Version 4.1.0.6 software) to test the conceptual model. SEM is preferred for analysing cause-effect relationships and mediation models that include latent variables (Sarstedt et al., 2020) thus it was used in our study as a more advantageous alternative to regression analysis. Following standard procedures, we estimated measurement models first, followed by the structural model for hypotheses testing.

Research Results

Measurement model. To test the conceptual model, we defined brand authenticity as a higher-order reflective construct, which is in line with the approach used by Oh et al. (2019). To reduce the complexity of the relationships within the model, we similarly defined brand attachment as a reflective-reflective higher-order construct, represented by two components—rosy and blue sides of emotional attachment. Therefore, the measurement models in this study involve two higher-order constructs where both brand authenticity and brand attachment are specified as reflective-reflective higher-order constructs (HOC).

For the estimation of the measurement model, we applied the two-stage disjoint approach as outlined by Sarstedt et al. (2019). In the first stage, we linked all lower-order constructs, such as brand virtuousness, to the dimensions of brand authenticity (continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness). Subsequently, we connected brand virtuousness to the next endogenous constructs, the two dimensions of brand attachment (the rosy and blue sides of emotional attachment), as per the conceptual model. Next, brand authenticity dimensions respectively were linked to both dimensions of brand attachment. The initial assessment of the model focused on the reflective measurement models of the lower-order components, which met all relevant criteria (for internal consistency and convergent validity, see Table 1, stage 1 results). Discriminant validity of the lower-order components was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (see Tables 2-3 respective 1st stage sections). As shown in Table 2, HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0,9, and in Table 3, the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its highest correlation with other constructs. Thus, the discriminant validity of the lower-order components was established.

Table 1. Reliability and validity results (Source: Created by the authors)

Coding	Constructs and items	Mean	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE
1st stage: lower-order reflective components							
BVirt	Brand virtuousness (BVirt)	3,682		0,907	0,909	0,935	0,783
BVirt1	Brand is honest		0,855				
BVirt2	Brand is virtuous		0,899				
BVirt3	Brand is fair		0,897				
BVirt4	Brand is righteous		0,888				
BAutCon	Brand authenticity-continuity (BAutCon)	4,082		0,847	0,854	0,897	0,686
BAutCon1	I think brand is consistent over time		0,800				
BAutCon2	I think the brand stays true to itself		0,851				
BAutCon3	Brand offers continuity		0,886				
BAutCon4	The brand has a clear concept that it pursues		0,772				
BAutOri	Brand authenticity-originality (BAutOri)	3,590		0,923	0,925	0,945	0,812
BAutOri1	The brand is different from all other brands		0,888				
BAutOri2	Brand stands out from other brands		0,882				
BAutOri3	I think the brand is unique		0,920				
BAutOri4	The brand clearly distinguishes itself from other brands		0,913				
BAutRel	Brand authenticity-reliability (BAutRel)	3,774		0,898	0,900	0,929	0,767
BAutRel1	My experience with the brand has shown me that it keeps its promises		0,893				
BAutRel2	The brand delivers what it promises		0,904				
BAutRel3	Brand's promises are credible		0,898				
BAutRel4	The brand makes reliable promises		0,803				
BAutNat	Brand authenticity-naturalness (BAutNat)	3,775		0,831	0,833	0,899	0,747
BAutNat1	The brand does not seem artificial		0,881				
BAutNat2	The brand makes a genuine impression		0,873				
BAutNat3	The brand gives the impression of being natural		0,839				
BAttRosy	Brand attachment-rosy side of emotional attachment (BAttRosy)	2,976		0,871	0,877	0,906	0,660
BAttRosy1	My feelings towards brand can be characterized by passion		0,835				
BAttRosy2	My feelings towards brand can be characterized by affection		0,859				
BAttRosy3	My feelings towards brand can be characterized by connection		0,834				
BAttRosy4	My thoughts and feelings towards brand come to me naturally and instantly		0,759				

BAttRosy5	My thoughts and feelings towards brand often come to mind on their own	0,770				
BAttBlue	Brand attachment-rosy side of emotional attachment (BAttBlue)	2,678	0,926	0,935	0,947	0,818
BAttBlue1	Losing brand forever would be distressing to me	0,881				
BAttBlue2	It is sad to imagine life without brand	0,910				
BAttBlue3	I will miss brand when brand is not around	0,915				
BAttBlue4	If brand was permanently gone from my life, I would be regretful	0,913				
2nd stage: higher-order reflective components						
HOCBAut	Brand authenticity		0,878	0,885	0,916	0,733
	LV_BAutCon	0,809				
	LV_BAutOri	0,856				
	LV_BAutRel	0,866				
	LV_BAutNat	0,892				
HOCBAtt	Brand attachment		0,806	0,827	0,911	0,836
	LV_BAttRosy	0,931				
	LV_BAttBlue	0,897				

In the second stage, we used the latent variable scores from the lower-order components of brand authenticity (continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness) and the two dimensions of brand attachment (rosy and blue sides of emotional attachment) derived from stage one to estimate the second-stage measurement model. The reflective measurement model for the higher-order component of brand authenticity revealed high outer loadings for all four lower-order dimensions, ranging from 0,809 to 0,892, all above the threshold of 0,708. Similarly, the outer loadings for the rosy and blue sides of the attachment were also high, with values of 0,897 and 0,931, respectively. The AVE for the higher-order constructs of brand authenticity and brand attachment were 0,733 and 0,836, respectively, both exceeding the 0,5 threshold. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability measures for both higher-order constructs were satisfactory, exceeding 0,7. The detailed results of the 2nd stage are presented in the lower section of Table 1. Further evidence of discriminant validity is provided in Tables 2 and Table 3 respective sections, confirming that discriminant validity was established for both higher-order constructs.

Table 2. Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Source: Created by the authors)

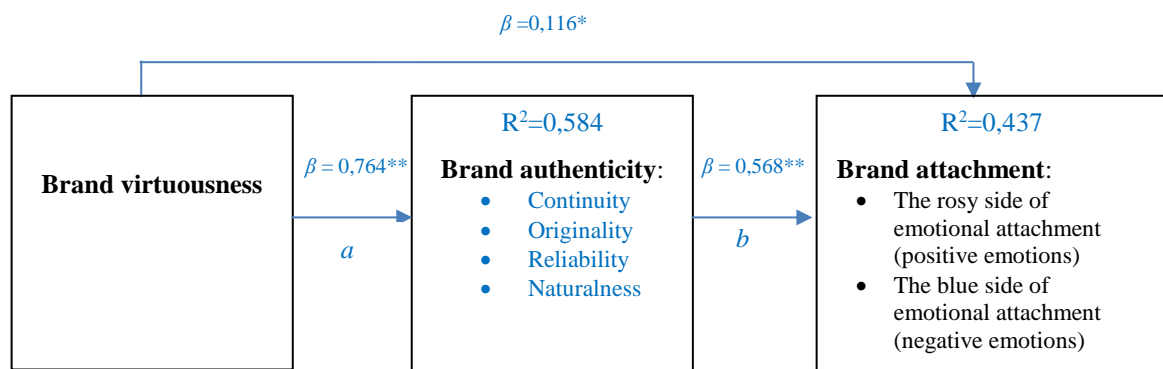
1st stage:							
	BAttBlue	BAttRosy	BAutCon	BAutNat	BAutOri	BAutRel	BVirt
BAttBlue							
BAttRosy	0,749						
BAutCon	0,425	0,536					
BAutNat	0,524	0,669	0,745				
BAutOri	0,544	0,651	0,679	0,799			
BAutRel	0,547	0,658	0,677	0,810	0,693		

BVirt	0,450	0,643	0,664	0,811	0,642	0,799
2nd stage:						
	BVirt	HOCBAAtt	HOCBAut			
BVirt						
HOCBAAtt	0,633					
HOCBAut	0,850	0,771				
<0,9 (Hair & Alamer, 2022)						

Table 3. Fornell -Larcker criterion (Source: Created by the authors)

1st stage:							
	BAttBlue	BAttRosy	BAutCon	BAutNat	BAutOri	BAutRel	BVirt
BAttBlue	0,905						
BAttRosy	0,675	0,813					
BAutCon	0,382	0,464	0,828				
BAutNat	0,465	0,572	0,630	0,864			
BAutOri	0,507	0,585	0,602	0,701	0,901		
BAutRel	0,505	0,586	0,593	0,701	0,633	0,876	
BVirt	0,418	0,575	0,584	0,706	0,589	0,722	0,885
2nd stage:							
	BVirt	HOCBAAtt	HOCBAut				
BVirt	0,885						
HOCBAAtt	0,550	0,915					
HOCBAut	0,764	0,657	0,856				

Structural model results. Next, we evaluated the structural model to test the hypotheses. The inner model VIF values ranged from 1,000 to 2,403, remaining below the threshold of 3, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern. The structural model results are illustrated in Figure 2.



H4: $a \times b = 0,434^{**}$, * $p < 0,05$, ** $p < 0,01$

Fig. 2. Structural model results (Source: Created by the authors)

Consistent with our hypotheses, the path coefficients supported the positive effect of brand virtuousness on brand attachment ($\beta=0,116$, $p=0,034$), **supporting hypothesis H1**. Furthermore, a positive effect of brand authenticity on brand attachment was observed ($\beta=0,568$, $p=0,000$), **supporting hypothesis H2**. The effect of brand virtuousness on brand authenticity was also positive and significant ($\beta=0,764$, $p=0,000$), **supporting hypothesis H3**. Finally, as anticipated, the indirect effect of brand virtuousness through brand authenticity on brand attachment was positive and significant ($a \times b = 0,434$, BCCI [0,355; 0,511]), **supporting hypothesis H4**. A summary of the hypotheses testing results is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of hypotheses testing (Source: Created by the authors)

	Hypothesised relationships	Path coefficient	<i>p</i> -value/ Bias corrected confidence interval	Results
H1	Brand virtuousness positively influences consumer brand attachment	0,116	$p=0,034^*$	Supported
H2	Brand authenticity positively influences consumer attachment to the brand	0,568	$p=0,000^{**}$	Supported
H3	Brand virtuousness positively influences brand authenticity	0.764	$p=0,000^{**}$	Supported
H4	Brand virtuousness positively influences brand authenticity, which in turn positively affects brand attachment	0,434	$p = 0,000^* /$ BCCI [0,355; 0,511]	Supported

* $p < 0,05$, ** $p < 0,01$

Conclusions

The literature review shows that brand authenticity and brand attachment are widely researched topics, however, virtuousness, which is addressed in the personality field, has been little studied in the context of brands. Analysis of the research suggests that although these constructs have been studied separately, the links between them have not been fully explored. Therefore, the aim was to examine the relationship between the constructs of brand virtuousness, brand authenticity and brand attachment.

Our study shows that brand virtuousness has a statistically significant positive effect on consumer brand attachment; likewise, brand virtuousness has a statistically significant and strong positive effect on brand authenticity. Our results on the effect of brand virtuousness on consumer brand attachment corroborate the findings of studies conducted by Japutra et al. (2018), Malar et al. (2011), Park et al. (2010), Sodergren (2021). Further, the results of the study on the effect of brand virtuousness on brand authenticity are in line with the findings of Akbar and Wymer (2017) and Guevremont (2018).

Our study found that brand authenticity has a statistically significant positive effect on consumer brand attachment. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Morhart et al. (2015). Thus, in line with the prediction, authenticity positively affects the consumer's attachment to the brand. Brand authenticity can evoke feelings in consumers towards brands. If consumers perceive a brand as authentic, they may be inclined to feel emotions such as passion, affection, and connection to the brand, and at the same time would be sad and regretful if the brand disappeared. The results obtained in this study confirm and are consistent with those of Arya et al. (2019), Assiouras et al. (2015), Guevremont & Grohmann (2016), and others. The findings also support the idea put forward by Arya et al. (2019) that the influence of brand authenticity on consumer brand attachment is due to the authentic qualities of a brand, which make consumers feel attached to it. Our study also supports the hypothesis that brand authenticity mediates the relationship between brand virtuousness and brand attachment. When a brand

is perceived as more virtuous, it is also perceived as more authentic, which, in turn, increases attachment to the brand.

As for further research, given that brand authenticity can be assessed on up to forty different dimensions, it is important to find out which of these have the greatest impact on consumer decisions. The results of the study could then be used to determine which of the identified dimensions is likely to have the greatest impact on consumer attachment to the brand.

The limitations of this study include research sampling conducted in a single country and cultural context. Thus, future research could focus on replicating and testing the relationship between brand authenticity, virtuousness, and brand attachment in different cultural contexts. Next, the limitations of the current study can also be attributed to the correlational research design that was used. Thus, the focus of future research could be to test the theoretically assumed causal-effect model by means of an experimental research design to claim causation. Another limitation of this study is the use of a convenience sample, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The gender imbalance among the respondents warrants further investigation.

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