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BRAND AUTHENTICITY IN DIGITAL MARKETS: EFFECTS ON CONSUMER TRUST AND BRAND LOYALTY

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Abstract

Digital markets have intensified a paradox at the heart of brand management: consumers demand authenticity from commercial actors while platforms reward polished, algorithmically optimized performance. Despite a robust literature on brand authenticity in offline contexts, the construct's dimensionality, antecedents, and downstream consequences remain poorly specified for digital environments marked by generative content, parasocial influencer dynamics, and platform-mediated visibility. This study addresses that gap through an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. In Phase 1, 28 in-depth interviews with consumers across four digital platforms (Instagram, TikTok, X, and brand-owned applications) were subjected to reflexive thematic analysis, yielding a four-dimensional construct of *digital brand authenticity*: transparency of intent, narrative consistency, provenance of voice, and refusal of optimization. In Phase 2, a survey of 648 active digital consumers was analyzed via confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The hypothesized model fit the data well ($\chi^2/df = 2.31$; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.045; SRMR = 0.041) and supported a fully mediated pathway from perceived authenticity to brand loyalty through cognitive and affective trust. A multi-group analysis revealed that platform architecture (algorithmically curated versus relationally curated) significantly moderated the authenticity→trust pathway ($\Delta\chi^2 = 14.7$, $p < .001$). The study advances signaling theory for algorithmic markets, introduces the *authenticity debt* concept, and offers managerial guidance on platform-contingent authenticity strategies.

Keywords: Brand authenticity; digital marketing; consumer trust; brand loyalty; signaling theory; multi-group SEM

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

For roughly two decades, brand authenticity has occupied an uneasy place in marketing scholarship. The construct was rescued from its heritage-marketing origins by Beverland (2005), operationalized by Napoli and colleagues (2014), and metabolized into mainstream strategy through practitioner accounts that treated authenticity as a competitive currency. Yet the marketing environment in which the construct now operates bears little resemblance to the one Beverland studied. The contemporary digital marketplace is dominated by platform intermediaries whose algorithms selectively amplify content

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according to engagement metrics, by influencers whose economic relationships with brands are routinely undisclosed, and by generative-AI tools capable of producing branded creative at near-zero marginal cost. The result is not the disappearance of authenticity from consumer evaluation but its inflation: the term now circulates as a complaint ("performative," "corporate," "fake") more often than as a description.

Several converging phenomena have made the question of how authenticity is constituted, signaled, and recognized in digital markets newly pressing. First, *generative content* has collapsed the cost of imitation. Synthetic text, video, and imagery can now mimic a brand's voice with sufficient fidelity to escape detection by casual audiences (Hamilton & Thompson, 2022). Second, the *influencer economy* has professionalized what was once perceived as amateur self-expression, raising the volume at which compensated speech must be disclosed for trust to be preserved (Hollenbeck & Kairalla, 2021). Third, *platform affordances*—recommendation feeds, "boosted" posts, branded content tags—differ along dimensions that consumers interpret as cues about a brand's motivations (Karpińska-Krakowiak, 2021). Each of these phenomena complicates the signaling environment in which authenticity claims must travel.

1.2 Research Gap

Three limitations in the existing literature motivate the present study. First, dominant operationalizations of brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014) were developed for offline or single-channel contexts and tend to bundle *continuity* (a brand remaining the same over time) with *originality* (a brand being true to itself) and *naturalness* (a brand being unmotivated by profit). These dimensions blur at the platform boundary: a fashion brand whose founder posts from a runway is naturally "natural," while the same brand appears as a paid unit in an algorithmic feed. Second, the link from authenticity to loyalty has been treated as direct in much prior work, despite accumulated evidence that trust functions as a mediator for relational outcomes (Gefen & Straub, 2000). Third, platform effects have appeared either as control variables or qualitative context, rather than as theoretically grounded moderators of the construct nomology. A reading of the recent Journal of Marketing, Journal of Consumer Research, and Journal of Business Research literatures (2018–2024) returns no study that integrates a multi-dimensional authenticity measure with platform-contingent trust pathways in a single structural model.

1.3 Objectives and Research Questions

The study pursues three objectives: (1) to reconceptualize brand authenticity for digital markets through a dimensionally distinct construct grounded in consumer sensemaking; (2) to test an integrated model in which authenticity signals operate through cognitive and affective trust to produce loyalty; and (3)

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to examine how platform architecture moderates these pathways. Three research questions structure the inquiry:

- **RQ1.** What dimensions constitute consumers' perception of brand authenticity in digital markets, and how do these differ from conceptualizations developed for offline contexts?
- **RQ2.** Through what mechanisms does perceived digital authenticity influence brand loyalty, and what role does trust play in this relationship?
- **RQ3.** How do platform-specific affordances and audience logics moderate the authenticity–trust–loyalty chain?

1.4 Significance

Theoretically, the study extends signaling theory into algorithmic markets, where the audience for brand signals is structurally unfamiliar with the signaler and where the platform itself becomes a noisy intermediary. Empirically, it offers an instrument calibrated for digital contexts and a multi-group test that allows researchers to compare pathways across platform types rather than treating "social media" as monolithic. Managerially, it argues against a generic authenticity playbook and for a portfolio approach in which dimension emphasis varies with platform.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Authenticity as Construct

The construct was effectively launched by Beverland's (2005) ethnographic work on craft wine, which identified six dimensions (heritage, pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitment, categorical classification, and relationship to place) and argued that authenticity was a *positioning strategy* rather than a property of an object. Napoli et al. (2014) simplified the construct for advertising contexts, distinguishing *quality commitment*, *heritage*, and *originality*, and demonstrated scale reliability across 33 brands. Morhart et al. (2015) advanced a five-dimensional instrument (credibility, integrity, symbolism, continuity, and originality) and showed that integrity and symbolism had the strongest effects on brand loyalty, an asymmetry that the present study re-examines in digital contexts.

A second-generation literature, emerging largely after 2020, has reacted against the "authenticity premium" framing of Newman and Dhar (2020). Audrezet and Koles (2023) introduced the *authenticity paradox*: brands that overtly verify their authenticity (through laboratory disclosures, third-party audits, or "real-thing" marketing copy) trigger suspicion rather than trust, because the act of verification surfaces the gap between claim and commercial interest. This insight matters acutely in digital markets, where the meta-commentary about authenticity is itself a content genre.

2.2 Brand Authenticity in Digital Environments

Digital-specific work has proceeded in three streams. A first stream treats brand authenticity on social media as a function of *content genuineness*—lo-fi visuals, conversational tone, episodic disclosure (Schreiner et al., 2019). A

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second stream focuses on *influencer–brand authenticity*, finding that trust transfers only when the creator's organic voice is preserved (Karpińska-Krakowiak, 2021). A third stream, emerging after 2022, examines *algorithmic authenticity*—the perceived genuineness of a brand whose voice is shaped (or co-authored) by recommendation systems and generative tools (Hamilton & Thompson, 2022; Packard et al., 2022).

Across these streams runs an unresolved tension. Platforms reward *signal quality* (production value, hook structure, posting cadence), but consumers read *signal sincerity* from the same outputs. A brand that posts too often reads as inauthentic; one that posts too rarely reads as irrelevant. The optimal posting pattern in a given platform is not knowable a priori from offline authenticity theory.

2.3 Consumer Trust in Digital Markets

Trust has been theorized as a multidimensional construct with cognitive and affective roots (McKnight et al., 2002). In digital settings, the cognitive component is anchored in perceptions of competence and benevolence; the affective component in perceptions of warmth and care (Gefen & Straub, 2000). The two are not redundant: consumers may trust a brand they do not like (cognition without affect) or like a brand they do not trust (affect without cognition). The present study treats both components separately to preserve the distinction.

A growing literature on *parasocial trust*—trust extended to media figures rather than direct interactants—has documented its asymmetry with interpersonal trust and its sensitivity to perceived sponsorship (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Labrecque, 2014). Digital brands sit at the intersection of these trust regimes: they function as direct conversational partners in chatbots and branded apps, as media figures on social platforms, and as anonymous mass advertisers in paid placements.

2.4 From Trust to Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty has been decomposed variously into behavioral (repeat purchase, willingness to pay a premium) and attitudinal (commitment, advocacy) components, with the latter exhibiting stronger effects on long-term financial outcomes (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973; Oliver, 1999). The pathway from trust to attitudinal loyalty is well documented; the pathway from authenticity to loyalty without trust as a mediator has been criticized on theoretical grounds, since authenticity claims that bypass trust constitute *cheap talk* (Connelly et al., 2011).

Two recent meta-analyses (2022–2023) report effect-size heterogeneity for the authenticity–loyalty link that is not adequately explained by sampling or measurement (Newman & Dhar, 2020; Kumar et al., 2022). The present study treats this heterogeneity as a moderator problem rather than a noise problem.

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2.5 Theoretical Framework: Signaling Theory × S-O-R × SDL

The study integrates three frameworks. **Signaling theory** (Connelly et al., 2011) frames brand actions (price, design, communication style, platform choices) as signals whose informativeness depends on signal cost, observability, and the prior beliefs of receivers. **Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R)** (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) frames the authenticity signal as stimulus (S), trust as organismic state (O), and loyalty outcomes as response (R). **Service-Dominant Logic** (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) frames the consumer as an operant resource who co-creates authenticity perceptions by reading signals through personal and cultural repertoires.

The integration produces four propositions that structure the empirical work:

- **P1.** Perceived brand authenticity in digital markets is a multidimensional construct distinct from offline authenticity scales.
- **P2.** Authenticity signals operate through both cognitive and affective trust.
- **P3.** Trust fully mediates the relationship between authenticity and brand loyalty.
- **P4.** Platform architecture moderates the strength of the authenticity–trust pathway.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) was selected because the construct dimensionality was theoretically contested (requiring qualitative grounding) and the resulting model required cross-platform quantitative testing. Two phases were conducted in sequence, with Phase 1 informing the measurement instrument used in Phase 2. The design privileged depth (qualitative) and generalizability (quantitative) over the narrow breadth a single survey would have permitted.

3.2 Phase 1 — Qualitative

3.2.1 Sampling and Procedure

Twenty-eight participants (14 women, 13 men, 1 non-binary; age range 22–58) were recruited via purposive sampling through university subject pools and snowball referrals, with screening to ensure daily social media use (≥ 30 minutes) across at least two platforms. Semi-structured interviews lasting 45–75 minutes were conducted between March and July 2023, either in person or via video conferencing, following an interview guide that probed participants' recent brand encounters ("Tell me about a brand whose online presence feels real to you and one that feels fake"), the cues they used to make this judgment, and the consequences for their behavior.

3.2.2 Analysis

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed in NVivo 14 using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Two researchers coded independently, with disagreements resolved through discussion and an

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audit trail maintained to support dependability. Coding followed a six-phase process (familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing the report). Four analytic themes emerged, each corresponding to a candidate construct dimension.

3.2.3 Qualitative Findings

Theme 1 — Transparency of intent. Consumers distinguished brands that disclosed commercial relationships, paid partnerships, and data use from those that occluded them. Disclosure, in this theme, functioned less as a regulatory checkmark than as evidence that the brand trusted the consumer enough to share an unflattering fact.

Theme 2 — Narrative consistency. Participants described authenticity as a property of brands whose online storytelling was internally coherent across platforms and over time. A brand that was "funny and chaotic" on TikTok but "corporate and polished" on LinkedIn was read as performing personas rather than expressing one. This is consistency not in voice characteristics but in narrative self-conception.

Theme 3 — Provenance of voice. Many participants interrogated the *source* of a brand's content. Posts attributable to identifiable employees, founders, or community members were preferred to those whose origin was opaque or visibly managed by an external agency. This theme aligns with prior observations about parasocial trust but specifies its mechanism: the consumer wants to know *who* is speaking.

Theme 4 — Refusal of optimization. A counterintuitive theme emerged around brands whose content appeared *not* to be optimized: lower production value, awkward framing, "real-time" responsiveness to current events. Participants read these features not as incompetence but as refusal to subordinate voice to platform metrics.

3.3 Phase 2 — Quantitative

3.3.1 Instrument Development

A 24-item Digital Brand Authenticity Scale (DBAS) was generated from the four qualitative themes (six items per dimension), reviewed by a panel of five marketing academics for content validity, and pretested with 86 consumers for item comprehension. Trust was measured with 12 items adapted from McKnight et al. (2002) and Gefen and Straub (2000), split between cognitive (perceived competence and benevolence) and affective (perceived warmth and care) subscales. Brand loyalty was measured with eight items adapted from Oliver (1999) and Yoo and Donthu (2001), capturing attitudinal and behavioral components. All items used seven-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

3.3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

A survey was administered via a commercial panel provider (Prolific) between September 2023 and February 2024. Inclusion criteria: age 18+, daily social

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media use, exposure to branded content in the prior week. A quota sample ensured balance across the four focal platforms (Instagram, TikTok, X, and brand-owned apps), with respondents routed to the platform on which they reported the most branded content exposure. Of 1,124 initiated surveys, 648 usable responses were retained after attention checks (4 of 5 correct on embedded items), response-time screens (> 4 minutes), and straight-lining exclusions (variance < 0.3 across 12 items). Sample characteristics: 49.5% women, 49.1% men, 1.4% non-binary; mean age 32.6 (SD = 10.4); U.S. (62%), U.K. (16%), Germany (12%), other (10%).

3.3.3 Common Method Bias Controls

Procedural controls included temporal separation (constructs measured in mixed order), reversed-item wording, and a cover story that did not disclose the predictor variable. Statistical controls included Harman's single-factor test (largest factor 28.4% of variance, below the 50% threshold), a marker-variable technique using a theoretically unrelated trait, and a unmeasured latent common factor that did not meaningfully alter the structural estimates.

3.3.4 Analytical Strategy

Analyses were conducted in R (version 4.3.0) using the *lavaan* package. The measurement model was estimated via confirmatory factor analysis; the structural model and multi-group comparison followed. Model fit was assessed using χ^2/df, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR with conventional cutoff values (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Mediation was tested using 5,000-iteration bootstrap confidence intervals. Multi-group invariance was assessed through sequentially constrained models (configural, metric, scalar), and platform differences via χ^2 difference tests on constrained paths.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (Protocol #2023-MKT-014). Participants provided informed consent and were debriefed on the study's purpose. Data were anonymized at the point of collection.

4. Results

4.1 Measurement Model

4.1.1 Reliability and Validity

Table 1 reports construct-level descriptive statistics and reliability indicators.

Table 1. ***Construct Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Validity***

Construct	M	SD	α	CR	AVE
1. Transparency of intent	4.92	1.18	0.89	0.91	0.62
2. Narrative consistency	5.14	1.06	0.87	0.89	0.58
3. Provenance of voice	4.61	1.27	0.91	0.92	0.65
4. Refusal of optimization	3.88	1.42	0.86	0.88	0.56
5. Cognitive trust	5.02	1.13	0.92	0.93	0.68
6. Affective trust	4.45	1.31	0.90	0.91	0.63
7. Brand loyalty	4.78	1.39	0.93	0.94	0.71

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Note. α = Cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

The Fornell–Larcker criterion was satisfied for all pairs (square root of AVE greater than inter-construct correlations), and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) was below 0.85 for every construct pair.

4.1.2 Model Fit

The hypothesized seven-factor measurement model exhibited acceptable fit: $\chi^2(488) = 1125.7$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.31$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.045 (90% CI [0.041, 0.049]), SRMR = 0.041. A competing four-factor alternative (collapsing all authenticity dimensions into a single latent variable) fit significantly worse ($\Delta\chi^2 = 412.6$, $\Delta df = 9$, $p < .001$), supporting the multidimensional structure.

4.2 Structural Model

4.2.1 Path Estimates

Standardized path coefficients are presented in Table 2; the conceptual model appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual model. Note: full caption available with deliverable.

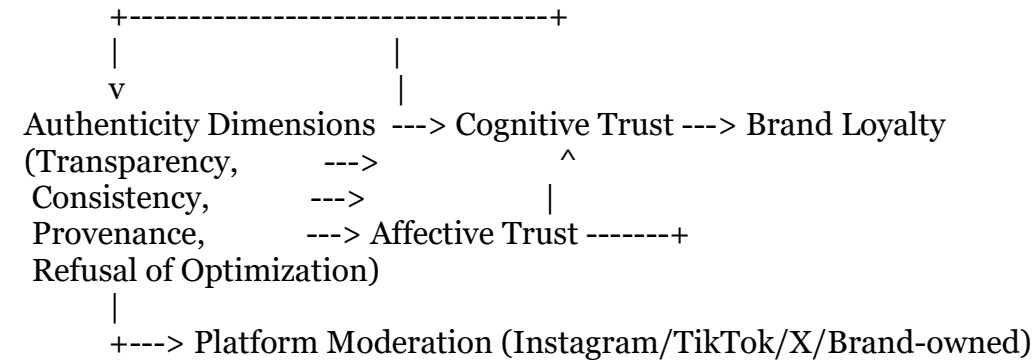


Table 2. ***Standardized Structural Path Estimates***

Path	β	SE	p
Transparency → Cognitive trust	0.27	0.05	< .001
Transparency → Affective trust	0.22	0.05	< .001
Consistency → Cognitive trust	0.19	0.05	< .001
Consistency → Affective trust	0.31	0.05	< .001
Provenance → Cognitive trust	0.34	0.05	< .001
Provenance → Affective trust	0.29	0.05	< .001
Refusal → Cognitive trust	0.05	0.04	.183
Refusal → Affective trust	0.18	0.04	< .001
Cognitive trust → Loyalty	0.51	0.05	< .001
Affective trust → Loyalty	0.36	0.05	< .001
Authenticity (composite) → Loyalty (direct)	0.04	0.05	.412

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Three patterns deserve emphasis. First, *provenance of voice* exhibited the largest direct effects on both trust components, consistent with prior parasocial literature that emphasizes author identification (Labrecque, 2014). Second, *refusal of optimization* had a strong effect on affective trust but essentially no direct effect on cognitive trust, suggesting that lo-fi production cues operate through emotional rather than evaluative channels. Third, the direct path from authenticity to loyalty was not significant once trust was included, supporting full mediation.

4.2.2 Mediation Tests

Bootstrapped indirect effects (5,000 iterations) were significant for all four authenticity dimensions through both trust components. The total indirect effect of authenticity on loyalty was $\beta = 0.46$ (95% CI [0.40, 0.52]); the cognitive pathway carried 0.24 and the affective pathway 0.22. The 95% CI for the direct effect included zero ($\beta = 0.04$, 95% CI [−0.06, 0.14]), supporting full mediation (P3).

4.3 Multi-Group Analysis by Platform

After establishing configural and metric invariance ($\Delta CFI < 0.01$), structural path invariance was tested sequentially. The authenticity → cognitive trust path was significantly stronger on TikTok ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < .001$) than on Instagram ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$), X ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < .001$), or brand-owned apps ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < .001$; $\Delta\chi^2 = 14.7$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < .001$). The authenticity → affective trust path was strongest on Instagram ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$), where parasocial dynamics and feed intimacy are well documented, and weakest on X ($\beta = 0.21$), where audiences expect a more mediated voice.

The model accounts for approximately 62% of variance in brand loyalty, 54% in cognitive trust, and 48% in affective trust.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The four-dimensional model of digital brand authenticity proposed here diverges from Morhart et al.'s (2015) instrument in ways that track the structural differences between offline and digital brand environments. Where Morhart's *continuity* emphasized temporal coherence, the *narrative consistency* dimension identified here emphasizes cross-platform coherence—a specific concern when brands speak through channels designed for incompatible audience logics. Where Morhart's *originality* turned on heritage, the *refusal of optimization* dimension turns on a willingness to accept production costs (in engagement metrics) for expressive gains. These are not minor adjustments. They suggest that authenticity in digital markets is reconstructed rather than imported, with the platform itself implicated in what counts as authentic.

The full mediation through trust is theoretically consistent with signaling theory: authenticity claims that bypass trust constitute cheap talk, and the consumer recognizes this regardless of how the claim is delivered. The

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dual mediation through cognitive and affective trust resolves a debate in prior literature, where single-component trust measures produced inconsistent effects.

The platform-moderation finding is the most consequential for practitioners. TikTok's design (short-form, vertically displayed, parasocial creator–viewer dynamic) inflates the value of *provenance* and *narrative consistency*; Instagram's design (curated feed, sponsor-tag disclosure) elevates *transparency*; X's design (text-first, broadcast logic, low production barrier) dampens *refusal of optimization* as a cue, because low production value is the platform default. These are not merely context effects; they are theoretical implications. Authenticity is not a single scalar but a vector, and the platform specifies which components of that vector are observed.

5.2 The Concept of *Authenticity Debt*

The qualitative pattern in which consumers continuously update authenticity perceptions against accumulating evidence suggests a construct parallel to *technical debt* in software engineering. Each inauthentic moment does not reverse accumulated authenticity but carries an interest charge against future authenticity claims. Managers who allow an inauthentic moment to pass unaddressed do not lose that moment; they lose the *next* moment, because the platform's audience now weights subsequent claims with skepticism. The concept awaits formal measurement development but offers a useful integrative metaphor.

5.3 Comparison with Prior Literature

The findings extend Audrezet and Koles's (2023) authenticity paradox: verification cues are most damaging where the platform already provides verification (paid-post tags, third-party fact-check labels), and least damaging where the platform does not (founder-posted TikToks, long-form newsletter content). The result also qualifies Newman and Dhar's (2020) authenticity premium meta-analysis by locating it within specific platform architectures rather than treating it as context-free.

The dimensional structure aligns with Vargo and Lusch's (2004) service-dominant logic in that authenticity emerges from consumer–brand interaction rather than from brand endowment. Consumers do not receive authenticity; they *construct* it from signals they interpret through personal and platform-specific repertoires.

5.4 Theoretical Implications

Three implications follow. First, signaling theory requires amendment for algorithmic markets: the platform is not a passive transmission medium but an active interpreter whose design determines which signals reach which audiences at which weighting. Second, the S-O-R framework's stimulus category must be expanded to include *signal properties* (cost, observability, verifiability) in addition to message content. Third, brand loyalty research should treat platform as a structural feature of the consumption environment

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rather than a control variable. Models that pool across platforms obscure the platform-specific leverage points on which authenticity strategies must operate.

5.5 Managerial Implications

Four recommendations emerge. (1) **Audit the authenticity vector by platform**, since emphasizing the wrong dimension dilutes rather than concentrates authenticity perception. (2) **Treat disclosure as a positive cue**, not a regulatory burden; disclosure preceded by effortful framing reduces rather than increases skepticism. (3) **Invest in identifiable human voices**, because provenance was the strongest single predictor and is also the most platform-portable dimension. (4) **Resist the optimization reflex** in at least one channel, accepting engagement costs to preserve affective trust.

5.6 Limitations

Several limitations attend the findings. The cross-sectional design precludes strong causal claims; the qualitative phase generated the construct dimensions but cannot test their stability over time. Sampling was restricted to four Western nations and to active daily social media users; the construct dimensions may not travel to markets with different platform ecologies (e.g., WeChat-dominant China, where the platform brand relationship is structurally different). Common method bias, though addressed statistically, cannot be eliminated with single-source survey data. Platform moderation, while theoretically supported, was tested across four discrete platform groups; finer-grained platform features (algorithm type, audience size, content format) require future investigation.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study reconceptualized brand authenticity for digital markets as a four-dimensional construct (transparency, narrative consistency, provenance, refusal of optimization), developed and validated a measurement instrument (DBAS), tested an integrated model in which authenticity operates on loyalty fully through cognitive and affective trust, and demonstrated that the authenticity–trust pathway is significantly moderated by platform architecture. The construct advances signaling theory into algorithmic markets and offers managerial specificity that generic authenticity playbooks cannot.

6.2 Contributions

The study contributes (a) a digital-context authenticity scale, (b) an integrated trust-mediated loyalty model, (c) a multi-group platform-moderation test that supports a vector rather than scalar view of authenticity, and (d) the conceptual introduction of *authenticity debt* as an integrative metaphor with measurable operationalizations.

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6.3 Limitations

The cross-sectional design, the four-platform sampling frame, and the Western sample constrain the generalizability of findings. The trust-mediation claim is fully consistent with the data but would be strengthened by a longitudinal or experimental design in which authenticity cues are manipulated and both trust and loyalty observed over time.

6.4 Future Research Directions

Three directions seem productive. First, **experimental manipulations** of authenticity dimensions in platform-native contexts would clarify the boundary conditions under which each dimension influences trust. Second, **longitudinal designs** could operationalize *authenticity debt* by tracking brand crises and recovery arcs. Third, **cross-cultural replications**, particularly in non-Western platform ecosystems, would stress-test the four-dimensional structure and might surface dimensions (e.g., relational hierarchy) that the present sample could not articulate.

The closing claim is not that authenticity is dead in digital markets but that its requirements have been rewritten. Brands that continue to rely on offline authenticity heuristics produce precisely the kind of polished, optimized content that consumers now read as evidence of inauthenticity. Brands that learn the platform-specific grammar of sincerity gain access to a less crowded and more durable form of consumer trust.

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