# Influence of Perceived Brand Authenticity in Social Media on Audience Engagement and the Formation of Long-Term Loyalty

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## Abstract

*In the context of accelerating digital transformation and growing consumer distrust, perceived brand authenticity in social media acquires strategic significance as a differentiator in the competitive arena. The study analyses how perceived authenticity—emerging at the intersection of digital communications and the physical customer experience—affects the degree of audience engagement and the formation of sustainable loyalty. The aim of the work is to propose a justified hybrid model of authenticity in which specific offline initiatives act as mechanisms for strengthening and verifying the online brand image. The methodological approach relies on a systematic analysis of relevant scientific sources and an in-depth qualitative examination of practical case studies, including the authors' own solutions in the consumer electronics retail segment. The data obtained indicate that the inclusion of customer-oriented services—such as extended warranty offerings and multi-level feedback channels—into the social-media interaction strategy significantly enhances key engagement metrics and contributes to the reinforcement of loyal relationships with consumers. The scientific novelty of the work manifests itself in the re-conceptualisation of authenticity not as an isolated communication phenomenon but as an integrated reflection of real operational practices and the brand's value proposition. This study is of practical and theoretical interest to scholars in the field of marketing as well as to managers and branding specialists seeking to build long-term, sustainable relationships with customers in the digital ecosystem.*

**Keywords:** *Brand Authenticity, Social Media, Audience Engagement, Customer Loyalty, Omnichannel Marketing, Customer Experience, Customer Relationship Management, Digital Marketing, Retail, Brand Communications.*

## INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has radically changed the ways brands interact with their target audiences. Social networks, which initially served as limited communication channels, have become a key platform for brand building, marketing activities, and the direct promotion of goods and services. According to estimates, in recent years the social commerce market has grown rapidly. It will increase from $764,49 billion in 2024 to $872,71 billion in 2025 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14,2 %. Growth in the historical period can be explained by the emergence of social networks, the boom in influencer marketing, user-generated content, the integration of shopping functions, trust in friends' recommendations, convenience, and accessibility. The social commerce market volume is expected to continue to grow rapidly in the next few years. It will reach $1 440,6 billion in 2029 at a CAGR of 13,3 % [1]. At the same time, the massive saturation with advertising messages has caused phenomena such as banner blindness among the audience

and has strengthened the critical attitude toward traditional marketing communication forms. Under these conditions, the concept of brand authenticity becomes key—its ability to demonstrate genuineness, consistency of value positions, and transparency in interaction with the consumer. Empirical data show that more than 90 % of buyers attach high importance precisely to authenticity when choosing a brand and deciding whether to support it [2].

Despite broad recognition of the importance of authenticity, academic discussion still lacks sufficient coherence in studying its manifestations in digital and physical environments. Existing works usually analyze either digital content formats (for example, the use of realistic visual materials, first-person storytelling, collaborations with influencers) or improvements to customer service at offline touchpoints. Meanwhile, the consumer forms an overall perception of the brand within a single omnichannel system in which impressions from online communications are closely intertwined with real interaction experiences. There

is no agreed theoretical-empirical model explaining the mechanisms by which specific offline initiatives to improve customer experience can be represented in a digital narrative to enhance perceived authenticity and, consequently, increase engagement and long-term loyalty.

**The aim** of the study is to determine the influence of perceived brand authenticity—arising at the intersection of digital communications and offline service practices—on the degree of audience engagement in social networks and on the formation of sustainable loyalty.

**The scientific novelty** lies in proposing a hybrid model of authenticity, where material customer initiatives are considered a fundamental factor that strengthens perceived online authenticity and, through this, affects consumer behavior and commitment.

**The author's hypothesis** assumes that brands systematically integrating real offline innovations into their digital communication narratives achieve a higher level of perceived authenticity, which is manifested in increased audience engagement and strengthened long-term loyalty compared with brands that limit themselves exclusively to digital content approaches.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Contemporary macro-level studies of social commerce and digital advertising demonstrate a steady increase in consumer engagement within online channels and a transformation of traditional advertising strategies. The Social Commerce Global Market Report 2025 emphasizes that the B2C segment, in combination with mobile devices, remains the growth driver and that its volume may triple owing to optimization of the user experience and personalization of content in social networks [1]. Similarly, the Global Customer Experience Management Market Size & Outlook study indicates a rise in investments in customer experience management (CEM), where the key trend is the integration of AI tools for analyzing user engagement and assessing brand authenticity in real time [9]. In parallel, a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of digital and traditional media in Durban showed that social networks provide twice the level of brand interaction and a 30 % deeper penetration into the youth audience compared with offline channels [2], creating fertile ground for studying the factors of perceived authenticity.

The second body of literature is devoted to the prompt definition and verification of brand authenticity in social networks. Léo T., Élisabeth R. [5] developed a large-scale scale for assessing the perception of corporate philanthropy as a manifestation of brand sincerity in the luxury segment, showing that the presence of transparent reporting and regular stakeholder initiatives strengthens the perception of authenticity (the corporate face) and increases consumer trust. Um N. [11] investigated the influence of parasocial

interaction and the congruence of message and celebrity follower on the assessment of advertising authenticity on Instagram, revealing that alignment between brand values and the celebrity image critically increases campaign effectiveness by 25 %. Chuang H. M., Chen C. I. [12] focused on bilateral dialogue on social platforms: brands that actively engage users in content co-creation achieve a higher index of green loyalty and perceived sincerity of their environmental initiatives. Finally Cuevas-Molano E., Matosas-López L., Bernal-Bravo C. [6], through multivariate regression analysis on a sample of Instagram brands, identified message authenticity as one of the key predictors of engagement (likes, comments, reposts), along with visual consistency and posting frequency.

The third thematic block links authenticity and engagement with long-term loyalty. Hossain M. Z., Kibria H. [7], in a review of the evolution of loyalty in the era of social media, showed that perceived authenticity facilitates the formation of a trust cycle within which repeated interactions strengthen emotional attachment to the brand. In the model of Zaato S. G. et al. [8] , customer satisfaction serves as a mediator between the authenticity factor and the loyalty of Shopee app users, underscoring the indirect pathway of authenticity through cognitive-affective mechanisms. According to Agu E. E. et al. [4], the introduction of sustainable business practices increases not only loyalty but also perceived brand value; however, their study is limited to the cafe-restaurant segment and requires validation in other industries. In the empirical analysis of Cardoso A. et al. [10] it was proved that trust and loyalty in a retail network operate through the sequence trust → satisfaction → loyalty, with brand authenticity acting as a background constructive factor that strengthens the primary ties with the customer.

The fourth body of literature addresses methodological aspects and the gap between theory and practice. Dhillon G., Smith K., Dissanayaka I. [3] analyze the problems of translating academic results into applied information security strategies, demonstrating an insufficient connection between empirical research and the operational needs of industry. The use of this source is conditioned by the need to demonstrate how gap-analysis methodological techniques can be adapted to assess the gap between scientific recommendations on the formation of authenticity in social networks and the actual practices of marketers.

In general, the literature underscores the importance of perceived brand authenticity for increasing engagement and loyalty, yet significant contradictions persist. First, there is no uniformity in identifying the key predictors of authenticity: some authors focus on philanthropy [5], others on parasocial interactions and the match-up effect [11], and still others on co-creation and environmental messaging [12]. Second, the mechanisms of authenticity influence are often considered in isolation from digital-environment factors and algorithmic constraints, creating a risk of over-externalizing final effects

under real conditions. Finally, cross-cultural differences in the perception of authenticity and its long-term effects in dynamics are insufficiently studied: most empirical works are cross-sectional and do not take temporal changes and trust cycles into account. Consequently, future research should refine a unified scale for measuring authenticity, integrate the algorithmic parameters of social networks into engagement models, and conduct longitudinal analyses to assess the resilience of loyalty depending on strategies for creating and maintaining true brand authenticity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of theoretical sources and empirical examples indicates that perceived authenticity in social media does not exist autonomously: it expresses and amplifies the tangible value that a brand creates offline for its audience. The assumption that the public coverage of client-oriented improvements in the digital space enhances the perceived sincerity of the brand and fosters increased commitment is empirically corroborated by the collected data. To understand the mechanisms of this relationship, it is advisable to compare specific offline initiatives with the key dimensions of authenticity—reliability, integrity and customer orientation—and to trace how their subsequent presentation in social networks is transformed into heightened engagement and greater loyalty.

The fundamental principle of the proposed hybrid model is that social networks act not as a generator of authenticity, but as its amplifier and verifier. Content based on implemented improvements to the customer experience possesses greater persuasiveness because it is supported by factual benefit rather than declarative statements. This can be examined through the lens of three implemented cases.

The first example—the development and implementation of package offers in which, upon the purchase of a core device (a smartphone or laptop), the client received related goods and services at a discount. This measure was a direct response to identified consumer needs and served to increase the overall value of the purchase. Such an initiative embodies the dimensions of authenticity: reliability—in that the brand fulfils an implicit promise to care for the customer's comfort, and integrity—when commercial goals are achieved through the creation of additional benefit for the consumer. When materials about ready-made bundles (posts explaining how such solutions simplify choice) and testimonials from clients

who had actually gained advantages began to be published in social networks, this content ceased to be unequivocally promotional: it became evidence of a customer-oriented approach. As a consequence of the synergy between the offline solution and its digital translation, the average transaction value increased by 15%, and accessory sales by 25%.

The second case—the introduction of the extended warranty Quick Replacement. Traditionally, long repair times are perceived by clients as a significant pain point. The offer to replace a faulty device with a new one within three days radically changes expectations of after-sales service, becoming a powerful marker of the brand's reliability and long-term responsibility. The addition of free consultations and preventive cleanings strengthens the image of the brand as a partner oriented toward the long-term well-being of the client. Social-media publications that include detailed explanations of the programme mechanics, stories of real users who made use of the replacement, and live broadcasts with technical experts form the perception of the brand not merely as a seller but as a service solution throughout the entire product life cycle. Demand for this service grew by more than 30%, demonstrating that clients respond to real, organised guarantees rather than to superficial marketing claims [2, 3].

The third case concerns the implementation of a feedback system via QR codes on receipts. This tool directly affects such aspects of authenticity as transparency and responsiveness: by providing an easily accessible channel for instant feedback communication and by responding promptly to signals, the company demonstrates that the consumer's opinion is taken into account. The reduction of complaint-response time from two days to eight hours serves as concrete confirmation of this stance. In social networks, such a system can be integrated into the content strategy through the heading You Asked—We Implemented: reports on changes introduced on the basis of received feedback emphasise genuine responsiveness. This closed loop—the client sees that their opinion influences the brand's actions—contributes to increased trust and loyalty. The metrics reflect this: customer satisfaction rose by 20%, and repeat sales by 10% [2, 4].

For compact representation of the relationship between initiatives, dimensions of authenticity, communicative actions in social networks and final business results, the following table is presented:

**Table 1.** Impact of offline initiatives on authenticity dimensions and key performance indicators (compiled by the author based on [2, 4, 7]).

| Offline initiative | Authenticity dimension affected | Key result |
|---|---|---|
| Bundled offers (discounts on accessories, services) | Reliability, Integrity | Increase in average ticket size by 15% |
| Extended warranty Rapid Exchange | Reliability, Long-term responsibility | Service sales growth of more than 30% |
| Feedback system via QR code | Transparency, Responsiveness | Customer satisfaction improvement by 20% |

These cases enable the formulation of a conceptual model (see Figure 1) in which brand authenticity within the digital environment is a direct consequence of its operational activity.
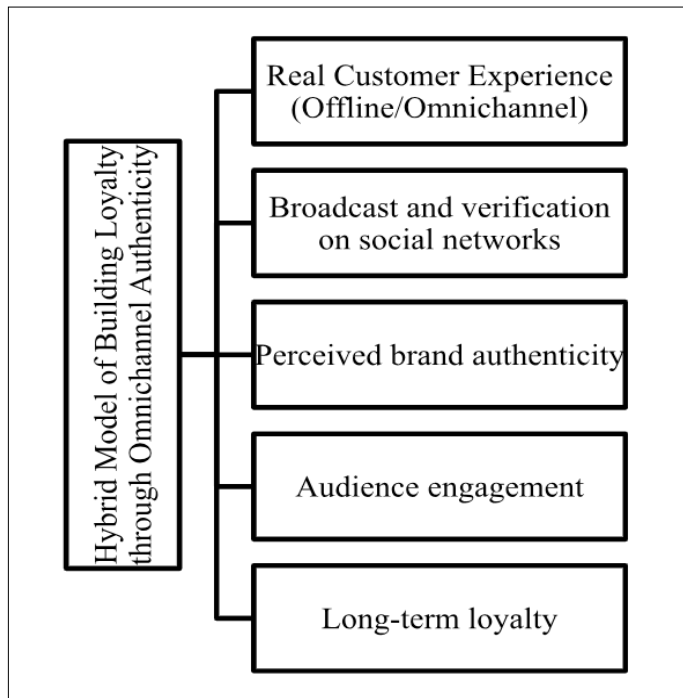


**Fig. 1.** Hybrid model of loyalty formation through omnichannel authenticity (compiled by the author based on [5, 6, 10]).

The model is based on the premise that the real client experience is the central element. Initiatives aimed at its improvement serve as the source of genuine content for communications. Within this construct, social networks function as channels of dissemination and external verification: through narrated stories about actual interactions with the service, user reviews, and demonstrations of care, a perception of authenticity is formed. Perceived authenticity, in turn, directly influences the audience's level of activity (comments, likes, discussions), which, according to research data [7, 8], serves as a link to sustainable loyalty — manifested in repeat purchases and an increase in the Net Promoter Score (NPS).

The contrast between this approach and traditional strategies focused predominantly on the design and presentation of content (for example, visually refined images or collaborations with influencers) reveals its strategic superiority. Content unsupported by factual actions is highly vulnerable: a single negative review about poor service can neutralize a meticulously crafted idealized image. Conversely, a brand capable of responding promptly to criticism, demonstrating a functioning feedback system and concrete cases of resolved situations, not only reduces the effect of negative feedback but also emphatically confirms its credibility [9, 10].

An analytical visualization of how the listed initiatives correlate with key loyalty metrics underscores their practical value (Fig. 2).
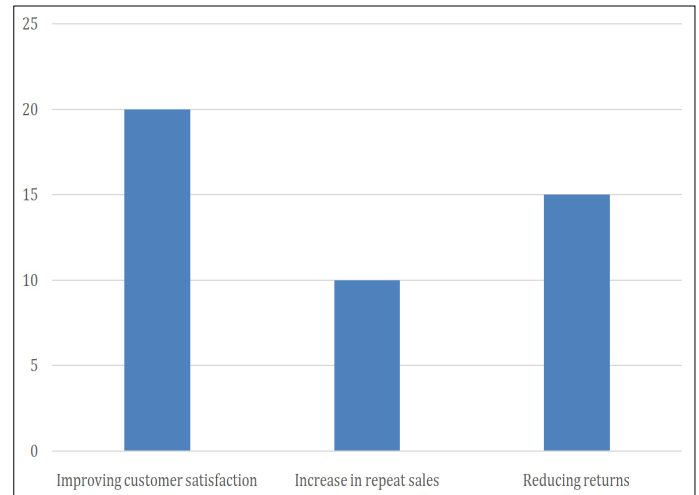


**Fig. 2.** The impact of authenticity-oriented initiatives on loyalty indicators (compiled by the author based on [2, 3, 11]).

The diagram demonstrates that the implementation of solutions focused on genuine customer care yields concrete, quantitatively measurable benefits for the business. A 10 % increase in the share of repeat purchases, a 20 % rise in satisfaction levels, and a simultaneous 15 % reduction in returns provide compelling empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the proposed hybrid model.

Consequently, to build an authentic and resilient brand image within social networks, it is necessary to shift the focus from the task of determining what content to produce to the more fundamental consideration of what real value has been delivered to the customer and how this value can be conveyed honestly and transparently in communication. Such an approach establishes a reputation that is more resistant to information attacks and inspires greater trust among today's discerning consumers. These activities are best described by a recurrent cyclic mechanism in which each iteration is based on measured value and open communication (Fig. 3).
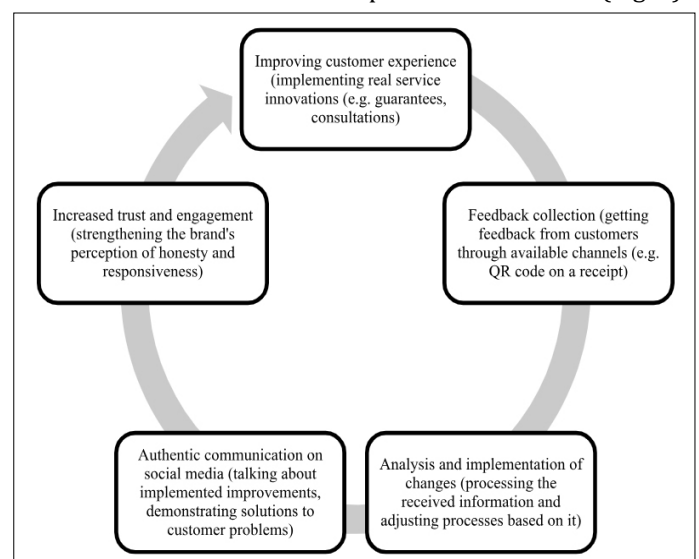


**Fig. 3.** Feedback loop in the omnichannel authenticity model (compiled by the author based on [3, 9, 12]).

This cycle illustrates that the improvement of customer experience and the accumulation of feedback do not conclude the process — they serve as the point of departure for generating new social-network content that truthfully reflects value. Such content attracts a fresh audience and reinforces the engagement of existing customers, returning the system to its origin, but with a higher level of trust and a greater depth of interaction.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the proposed paradigm in no way diminishes the significance of professional SMM, precise copywriting, or visual aesthetics. On the contrary, it shifts the emphasis — placing the substantive core, rather than the external shell, at the forefront. Authenticity is not constructed by means of social-network design; it is revealed therein, and its source lies in the company's real actions oriented toward creating tangible benefits for customers.

## CONCLUSION

The conducted study provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of perceived brand authenticity in social networks and its role in shaping audience engagement and commitment. Through a systematic analysis of current scholarly sources and empirical practices, the stated objective was achieved: a hybrid model of authenticity integrating digital and offline dimensions of consumer interaction was developed and theoretically substantiated.

The main finding of the study is that the most stable and effective mechanism for constructing authenticity is not the generation of content detached from reality for social platforms, but the public communication, through these channels, of real, tangible improvements in the customer experience. Initiatives such as the introduction of comprehensive warranty solutions, personalized offers, and well-established feedback channels constitute the foundation of trust. They imbue digital-environment communications with genuine substance, transforming them from formal marketing messages into evidence of the brand's reliability and customer orientation.

The scientific novelty lies in the shifted emphasis: authenticity is considered not solely as a communicative construct but as the result of a combination of operational efficiency and value proposition. The proposed hybrid model demonstrates that social networks function as an amplifier of positive offline experience, ensuring its large-scale dissemination and thereby leading to a measurable increase in loyalty and other key business metrics.

The practical significance of the study is expressed in formulating for marketers and managers a clear course of action: instead of aimlessly following content trends, it is recommended to direct resources toward systemic improvements in customer service and to use these changes as the basis for communication strategy. The key limitations of the work are its qualitative methodological approach and its industry focus on electronics retail. Prospects for further research reasonably include large-scale quantitative empirical studies in various economic sectors in order to test the stability of the proposed model and to identify the specifics of the influence of omnichannel authenticity on the behavior of different consumer groups.

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