Enhancing brand equity through multidimensional brand authenticity in the fashion retailing

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Excessive marketing competition among brands has recently increased consumer demand for brand authenticity. Brand authenticity has become a precondition for successful business practice. Consequently, any brand uses brand authenticity to decrease consumer distrust regarding marketing strategies and strengthen brand power and image. Accordingly, in relation to fashion brands, the objective of this study is to explore the association between multidimensional brand authenticity (i.e., authenticity toward product and corporate) and customer based brand equity (CBBE) components. In this research, the impacts of CBBE were assessed by conducting an online survey with the participation of 1733 Korean fashion brand shoppers. Additionally, the study explores the moderating influence of service providers' authenticity on the relationships between multidimensional brand authenticity and CBBE. The outcomes reveal that multidimensional brand authenticity effects perceived quality, brand association, and awareness. Additionally, brand association and awareness affect loyalty. Multi-group analysis is conducted to identify the difference between customers with low and high service providers' authenticity. By revealing a role for multidimensional brand authenticity and CBBE, this research adds to the existing literature on fashion brand. Furthermore, practitioners and marketers can derive valuable insights for developing marketing strategies across various brands from the outcomes of this research.

1. Introduction

Brand authenticity has become a new and significant value in the industrial field and other areas of politics and society due to the increasing need for transparent businesses, honest, and genuine (Pérez et al., 2020). It is a positive characteristic that refers to truthfulness, credibility, genuineness, and trustworthiness (Alhouti et al., 2016). Excessive marketing competition among brands has recently increased consumer demand for brand authenticity (Powell et al., 2013). It has become a precondition for successful businesses (de Kerviler et al., 2022; Sit et al., 2021). Consequently, brands use brand authenticity to decrease consumer distrust regarding marketing strategies and strengthen brand trust and image (Leigh et al., 2006; Eggers et al., 2013). Brand authenticity is important to appeal to target consumers (Safeer et al., 2021). According to Kovács et al. (2013), consumers prefer products and services that seem authentic. In the study by Kraak and Holmqvist (2017), brand authenticity plays a crucial role in assessing the credibility of service providers in relation to service industry. Wong et al. (2018) confirmed that brand authenticity influences customers'

satisfaction, perceived quality, and value of services. Thus, promoting service providers' authenticity is important because it is key in determining perceived service quality (Price et al., 1995). Despite its industrial significance, research on brand authenticity is limited. Most studies on authenticity have been conducted in philosophy and cultural anthropology (Wang, 2011). However, literature on marketing and consumer studies is still sparse.

Brand authenticity has several dimensions. Depending on the situation, a particular dimension can be more apparent (Beverland, 2005; Su et al., 2014). This multi-dimensionality makes it difficult to conduct comprehensive research. Research regarding brand authenticity in the service industry is concentrated on some of its sub-dimension, such as consumers' brand authenticity (Alexander, 2009; Leigh et al., 2006; Beverland, 2005). Research regarding brand authenticity in the service industry is also limited to certain industries (e.g., restaurants, repair services, and festivals) (Bae, 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2018). Taking these constraints into account, this study divides customers' perception of brand authenticity into brand authenticity for products and corporate within the fashion industry, closely examines the

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multidimensional aspects of brand authenticity as perceived by consumers, and offers a comprehensive interpretation.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1) Is there a variation in how consumers perceive a brand based on the target through which authenticity is communicated?
2) Can the authenticity of a brand, through the mediation of brand equity, lead to increased brand loyalty?
3) Does the authenticity of the service provider have a moderating effect on the formation of consumer brand perception?

In this study, the aim is to examine the relationships among customer based brand equity (CBBE), authenticity, and loyalty, focusing on fashion apparel brands to clarify the research objectives. To achieve the research objectives, data was collected through a survey from consumers who used a specific fashion apparel brand, resulting in 1733 responses. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method was employed to test hypotheses derived from a comprehensive model built on previous research. In addition, the study used multi-group analysis (MGA) to examine how service providers' authenticity affects the relationship between brand authenticity and CBBE. This study seeks to enhance the comprehension of the literature on brand authenticity and CBBE, offering valuable insights for brand management strategies.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1. Brand authenticity

Consumers' perception of a brand's faithfulness and genuineness towards itself and its customers is encompassed in the definition of brand authenticity, which ultimately helps consumers stay true to themselves (Morhart et al., 2015). It is increasingly highlighted because consumers' desire to find "authenticity", a value usually associated with popular brands (Price et al., 2000). Potter (2010) explain that customers recognize brand authenticity as more important than quality and is significant in present-day popular marketing. Most studies on brand authenticity have primarily explored its psychological aspects, specifically its connection to individual identity (Robinson et al., 1995). In the marketing context, brand authenticity is connected to consumption (e. g., advertising, luxury items, and tourist attractions) (Beverland, 2005; Södergren, 2021; Zebal and Jackson, 2019).

Previous research on brand authenticity is usually aimed at finding its sub-dimensions. Four sub-dimensions of brand authenticity were identified by Bruhn et al. (2012): (i) reliability, (ii) continuity, (iii) originality, and (iv) naturalness. Napoli et al. (2014) proposed (i) heritage, (ii) quality commitment, and (iii) sincerity. Meanwhile, Morhart et al. (2015) (i) symbolism, (ii) continuity, (iii) credibility, and (iv) integrity. As such, these dimensions help strengthen customers' brand recognition and influence brand equity (Lu et al., 2015a). Therefore, brand authenticity is becoming increasingly important in relation to brand management (Hernandez-Fernandez and Lewis, 2019).

2.2. Customer based brand equity

Interest in research related to CBBE is growing due to its impact on various aspects, including business performance (Kim et al., 2003), brand extension (Kim and Brandon, 2010), consumers' brand choice and brand commitment (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995), and consumers' brand attitude (Augusto and Torres, 2018). CBBE is the value that a brand offers to its customers beyond the functional or physical benefits of its services or products (Keller, 1993). CBBE is built through a series of interactions between the brand and its customers over time, resulting in a set of experiences, feelings, and beliefs associated with the brand (Keller, 2008). Xi and Hamari (2020) mentioned that CBBE means a brand linked to a brand symbol and name. CBBE, as defined by Keller (1993), refers to the distinctive influence of consumers' brand equity on

their responses to the marketing activities and initiatives of a brand. Furthermore, brand equity is formed through the combination of rational and emotional brand awareness. It is a powerful intangible asset and marketing tool influencing consumer behavior (Agmeka et al., 2019). In the study by Vredenburg et al. (2020), brand equity is the result of various marketing activities that can be perceived positively by consumers. For this research, perceived quality, brand association, awareness were utilized as common dimensions of CBBE. The aspects of CBBE mentioned above provide businesses with a competitive advantage (Huang and Cai, 2015).

2.3. Brand association

Brand association enhances a brand's distinctiveness, resulting in a robust correlation between brand association and brand equity (Aaker, 1996). Core elements of brand equity, centered around image dimensions exclusive to a brand, primarily encompass association and differentiation (Shahrokhi, 1998). Brand association resembles elements strongly linked to brand performance (Atilgan et al., 2005). This role of brand association serves as a data-gathering tool for assessing brand extension (Severi and Ling, 2013). Consumers are familiar with the definition of brand association, ingrained in their thoughts. Enhancing consumer brand awareness directly amplifies attention toward the specific brand (Hossien et al., 2012). Brand association can pave the way for increased consumer purchasing and, concomitantly, elevate the company's value, Furthermore, brand association influences a broader spectrum of advantageous outcomes specific to a brand (Dada, 2021).

2.4. Perceived quality

Quality greatly affects a company's profitability since consumers rely on it to assess products or services (Ophuis and Van Trijp, 1995). Zeithaml (1988) defines perceived quality as consumers' assessment of a product's overall superiority compared to others in the market. Aaker (1996) mentioned that a key component of brand equity is perceived quality, which holds significance in studies assessing brand equity. Several research studies have contended that perceived quality constitutes a significant element within the framework of CBBE (Altaf et al., 2017; Buzdar et al., 2016). Past research has contended that perceived quality can play a pivotal role in shaping consumer decision-making (Pappu et al., 2005). For instance, Siali et al. (2016) highlighted that perceived quality significantly impacts consumer purchase decisions when it comes to buying international brand shoes. Moreover, Lee et al. (2010) stated that consumers are likelier to purchase in a branded product at an elevated cost when they perceive the brand as being of superior quality. Positive customer perceptions of quality offer brand development benefits, including establishing a distinct brand position and enabling potential brand extensions (Supiyandi et al., 2022).

2.5. Brand awareness

Brand awareness constitutes a primary cornerstone and essential element of brand equity (Sürücü et al., 2019; Tong and Hawley, 2009). Brand awareness refers to consumers' capacity to recall and recognize a brand across various contexts, associating it with its brand name, logo and related elements (Altaf et al., 2017). Brand awareness aids in aligning customer expectations with the company's brand, fostering familiarity among customers, and showcasing brand commitment (Supiyandi et al., 2022). Seetharaman et al. (2001) highlight that fostering brand awareness and customer acceptance leads to heightened demand for a particular brand.

2.6. Hypotheses on brand authenticity and customer based brand equity

This study verified the factors that influence consumers' perception of authenticity in these three aspects: product authenticity, corporate

authenticity, and service provider authenticity. Product authenticity, corporate authenticity, and service provider authenticity all aim to shape consumer perceptions of authenticity, though they share a common goal, their approaches in achieving this are distinct. Firstly, product authenticity relates to the tradition, craftsmanship, superiority, style, and story of a product. Therefore, the authenticity of a product originates from the tangible and intangible characteristics of a company's product. Secondly, corporate authenticity can be explained as a company's efforts to improve customer satisfaction, which can be formed through communication with customers. Consequently, the perception of corporate authenticity can vary depending on the quality of the company's communication. Lastly, service provider authenticity is related to the capabilities of individual employees who interact face-to-face with customers, as it is conveyed through the expressions and attitudes of the service providers. Since service providers represent the company at the frontline, the perception of the product or service can vary depending on their capabilities. In this context, this study aims to examine the differences in the contribution to brand equity formation by each entity, based on the distinctions made according to the target of authenticity transmission.

Product authenticity can be evaluated in various dimension, such as product style, value, location, and method (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Belk and Costa, 1998; Peterson, 2005; Beverland, 2005, 2006; Wang, 1999). Furthermore, tradition, craftsmanship, superiority, style, and story associated with a product affect customers' product authenticity. Tradition, in particular, refers to style, production method, and story that are connected to a specific time, place, or person (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Spiggle et al., 2012). Product authenticity fosters consumers' friendly attitude towards a brand (Carsana and Jolibert, 2018; Lundqvist et al., 2013). Thus, it affects their purchasing decision. The stronger the product authenticity, the stronger their emotional attachment to the brand (Dion and Borraz, 2015); the brand and the product becomes known to consumers via word of mouth (Morhart et al., 2015). Similarly, product authenticity positively affects brand attitude and image (Chiu et al., 2012; Pace, 2015). According to Napoli et al. (2014), an increase in authenticity leads to higher preference for the brand and purchase intention. It also leads to high credibility and expected quality (Moulard et al., 2016). Therefore, product authenticity improves a brand's value and credibility (Erdem and Swait, 2004).

Multiple research studies have contended that product authenticity exerts a favorable impact on brand equity (Heinberg et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2020). For instance, Tran and Nguyen (2022) affirmed the direct influence of authenticity on brand equity. Brand authenticity towards product also has a positive effect on some constituent variables of brand equity (Bruhn et al., 2012). For instance, Chen et al. (2021) demonstrated that authenticity yields a favorable influence on brand awareness and perceived quality, integral aspects of brand equity. Similarly, Lu et al. (2015a) indicated that authenticity notably enhances brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality. Phung et al. (2019) asserted that authenticity influences product choice via the component elements of brand equity. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated.

H1. There is a significant, positive relationship between brand authenticity toward product and brand association in the fashion industry.

H2. There is a significant, positive relationship between brand authenticity toward product and perceived quality in the fashion industry.

H3. There is a significant, positive relationship between brand authenticity toward product and brand awareness in the fashion industry.

Corporate authenticity is positively linked to enhanced customer preference (Kovács and Horwitz, 2021), and it serves as a behavioral trait that contributes to increased customer satisfaction (Frazer Winsted,

2000). Goffee and Jones (2005) referred to corporate authenticity as a concept akin to trustworthiness and sincerity. In addition, Kim and Cho (2017) consider corporate authenticity as a favorable element concerning corporate management and a significant variable within customer relationship management. Numerous firms prioritize authenticity due to the potential ambiguity in customers' perceptions of a firm's underlying motivations (Yoon and Lee, 2019). Customer reactions to a company can differ based on service or product type, along with individual consumer traits like cultural, involvement, and knowledge influences (Solomon, 2018). Corporate authenticity can be conveyed through brand communication. In the study by Yang and Battocchio (2021), it was explained that brand marketing communication, based on signaling theory (Spence, 1974), significantly influences consumers' perception of brand authenticity. For example, consumers can evaluate brand authenticity through diagnostic information and cues provided in brand marketing communications (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Brand communication serves as a signal that encourages consumers to participate in the brand's decision-making process, which can help in perceiving authenticity. Therefore, the authenticity conveyed through a company's brand communication can have a significant impact on consumer responses. A brand's inherent value and identity also influence brand authenticity. For instance, the identity and values that a brand possesses, such as its heritage and innovative technology, affect its brand authenticity (Yi et al., 2018; Napoli et al., 2016). However, brand authenticity becomes questionable when it is not maintained (Beverland, 2006). Brand authenticity can be bolstered externally through marketing activities. For example, brands seek to reinforce positive brand perception and brand authenticity among consumers through CSR activities as part of marketing (Thomas and Tahir, 2019). According to Bigné et al. (2012), consumers are more likely to put high regard to brands whose values align with their personal values. As a result, brands conduct various CSR activities (e.g., responsible use of natural resources). According to Smilansky (2009), consumers have higher brand authenticity when advertisements are creative and realistic. When they believe a brand is authentic, their brand experience becomes fun and positive (Lu et al., 2015b). According to Keller (1993), brand equity can be created when consumers have a positive, friendly, and strong association memory about the brand (Kayaman and Arasli, 2007). Therefore, we study the following hypotheses as well:

H4. In the fashion industry, there is a significant, positive relationship between brand authenticity toward corporate and brand association.

H5. In the fashion industry, there is a significant, positive relationship between brand authenticity toward corporate and perceived quality.

H6. In the fashion industry, there is a significant, positive relationship between brand authenticity toward corporate and brand awareness.

2.7. Hypotheses on customer based brand equity and brand loyalty

Brand association, as defined by Chen (2001), refers to a consumer's memory of a specific brand. It refers a consumers' information about a brand, which can be negative, positive, or both (Hossien et al., 2012). As suggested by Van Osselaer and Janiszewski (2001), it is based on brand differentiation and expansion, helps create related brand assets, and is directly connected to brand image. A friendly brand image leads to brand preferences or repeat purchase (Diallo et al., 2013; Luarn and Lin, 2003; Burt and Davies, 2010). Therefore, a stronger and more positive brand association leads to more customers remembering the brand, leading to brand loyalty (Sasmita and Suki, 2015; Hossien et al., 2012). Thus, the following hypothesis is tested:

H7. In the fashion industry, brand association has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Zeithaml (1988) stated that perceived product quality is a consumers' judgment of a product's overall superiority or excellence relative to other products in the market based on personal experience

(Konuk, 2018). Creating a highly perceived product quality is important in order to increase customer satisfaction with services and products (Omar et al., 2021; Kasiri et al., 2017). Perceived product quality is important in determining customer preferences, attitudes, and affective involvement. Consequently, it is connected to consumers' emotional values (Konuk, 2018). Positive perceived product quality has a favorable influence on attitude towards the brand (Supiyandi et al., 2022), which is why it leads to brand loyalty (Zhang et al., 2020). Previous research has demonstrated that it influences credibility, brand loyalty, and purchasing behavior (Lu and Seock, 2008; Pooya et al., 2020). Thus, a significant positive correlation is expected among perceived product quality and brand loyalty.

H8. In the fashion industry, perceived product quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

The capacity of a consumer to recall and identify goods from a particular brand is known as brand awareness (Tritama and Tarigan, 2016; Romaniuk et al., 2017). It must be encouraged, especially when consumers generally want to own any product from the brand. It directly affects consumers' positive behavior intention (Pouromid and Iranzadeh, 2012). Thus, it is an essential component of marketing (Netemeyer et al., 2004; Macdonald and Sharp, 2003). For instance, TV advertisements help with brand awareness (Buil et al., 2013). Brands launch new products or services mainly to build brand loyalty and encourage repeat purchases. Brand awareness has a significant and positive connection with brand loyalty (Alalwan, 2018; Chierici et al., 2019), making it important from the early stages of product launch.

H9. Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand loyalty in the fashion industry.

2.8. Moderating role of service providers' authenticity

In various studies focusing on services, the authenticity of service providers, which pertains to their ability to deliver an "authentic" service, has been shown to significantly impact the credibility of service providers (Bowen, 2016). Especially, in the fashion industry, which falls under high-involvement products, the authenticity of service providers who interact with customers can contribute to the formation of brand equity (Bea., 2019; Price et al., 1995). In this context, it is meaningful to examine the impact of service provider authenticity on consumer brand perception. The authenticity of the service provider can be perceived through the genuineness of the service provider's behavior (Price et al., 1995). Particularly, it concentrates on the authenticity of the service provider's positive emotional expressions during the provision of services to customers (Grandey et al., 2005; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Consequently, favorable employee behaviors such as friendly communication and welcoming expressions contribute to an "authentic" service. This positively affects the customer experience and is linked to the authenticity of service providers (Sirianni et al., 2013). In the pursuit of creating a positive service encounter, the significance of service providers' authenticity surpasses conventional service guidelines. The authenticity of service providers encompasses emotional and functional aspects, both being critical components of perceived service quality (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Notably, service providers' authenticity cannot be easily replicated. An authentic service is readily distinguishable from a non-authentic one. As proposed by Sirianni et al. (2013), service providers' behaviors play a positive role in influencing brand authenticity. In Morhart et al.'s (2015) study on brands, it was expounded that a pivotal factor in determining brand trust is the service provided by service providers. Therefore, the capabilities and authenticity of service providers delivering products/services to consumers are anticipated to exert both direct and indirect influences on the establishment of brand equity, encompassing brand trust. Consequently, the authenticity of service providers is expected to moderate the relationship between multidimensional brand authenticity and CBBE. We propose the following hypotheses:

H10a. The authenticity of service providers positively moderates the relationship between brand authenticity towards the product and brand association within the context of brand equity.

H10b. The authenticity of service providers positively moderates the relationship between brand authenticity towards the product and perceived quality within the context of brand equity.

H10c. The authenticity of service providers positively moderates the relationship between brand authenticity towards the product and brand awareness within the context of brand equity.

H11a. The authenticity of service providers positively moderates the relationship between brand authenticity towards the corporate and brand association within the context of brand equity.

H11b. The authenticity of service providers positively moderates the relationship between brand authenticity towards the corporate and perceived quality within the context of brand equity.

H11c. The authenticity of service providers positively moderates the relationship between brand authenticity towards the corporate and brand awareness within the context of brand equity.

Fig. 1 describes the proposed model examining brand loyalty in relation to fashion brand.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and data collection

This study examines the relationship between CBBE, authenticity, and loyalty in the fashion industry. The authors selected Fashion Apparel Brand H as the focus of the study. Over the past three decades, this brand has established itself as a prominent fashion apparel brand in South Korea after separating from its parent company. Since its launch in 2000, it has achieved significant vertical growth and is now recognized as one of the top three casual wear brands in South Korea. Due to its strong brand awareness among South Korean customers, it was chosen as the subject of this research.

The survey design was aligned with the study's context. Each assessment item was adapted from previous research, resulting in seven constructs extracted from 21 items (Gilmore and Pine, 2007; Lee and Chung, 2020; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). More specifically, the method adopted by Lee and Chung (2020), modified from Gilmore and Pine (2007), was applied to measure the authenticity of the product (4 items) corporate (3 items). To measure the authenticity of service provider, four items measuring this construct are adopted from Price et al. (1995) and Bae (2021). Brand association (3 items), perceived quality (2 items), brand awareness (2 items), and brand loyalty (3 items) were assessed using a set of ten items adopted from Yoo and Donthu (2001).

To ensure accuracy, a multilingual expert translated the scales used in the study into Korean, and measurements were derived from the English versions. A second multilingual expert then back-translated the Korean measurements into English. By comparing the back-translated English measurements with the original English measurements, this investigation confirmed that the translated Korean measurements aligned consistently with the original English measurements after repeated testing. The items from the English version of the questionnaire are provided in the Appendix.

4. Result

4.1. Sample characteristics

A total of 1733 data points were gathered. Respondents' demographics are as follows: 32.7% aged 40–49, with 45.1% male and 54.9% female. Earning over $50,000, 40.6% of participants constituted the highest income group. The $20,000-$29,999 bracket ranked second
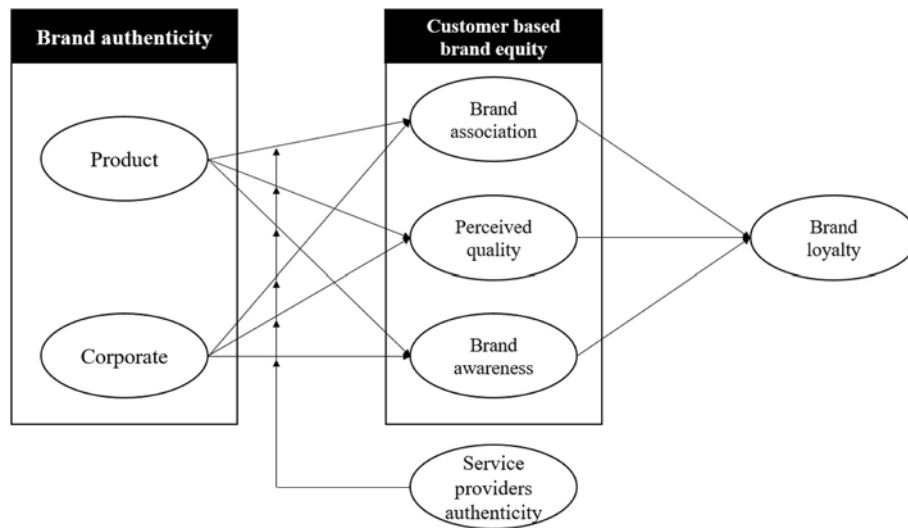
Fig. 1. A comprehensive model for fashion brands based on multidimensional authenticity.

(16.6%), followed by $30,000-$39,999 (10.3%). The majority of participants held a college/university degree (74.0%), with 16.2% possessing a graduate degree; other groups represented a minority (see Table 1).

4.2. Data analysis

SPSS and AMOS were used to analyze the data. The questionnaire's internal consistency and validity were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), correlation tests, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and reliability tests. Path analysis was conducted to examine each pathway in the established causal structure.

The SEM method was used to test hypotheses. Jiang et al. (2021) suggest SEM's utility for analyzing experimental and survey data, assessing structural measurement scale reliability, validity, and predictability. SEM includes two types: partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM) and covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM). PLS-SEM suits exploratory research, uncovering and assessing early causation (Hair et al., 2014). CB-SEM fits confirmatory studies, aligning data-based model explanation with theory (Astrachan et al., 2014). Furthermore, CB-SEM assesses dissimilarities between observed and implied covariance matrices through chi-square analysis, offering rigorous analytical prerequisites along with a range of Goodness-of-Fit indicators. This study relies on theory and data, opting for CB-SEM to verify hypotheses and test measurements.

4.3. Measurement assessment

Following the suggestions of Hair et al. (2012), a revised scale based on current measurements was examined for construct reliability and validity in this study. An EFA was used to verify reliability utilizing the Varimax rotation approach and major component analysis extraction. Consistent with Hair et al. (2013), a threshold of 0.5 was set for factor loadings, leading to the removal of BASS3 due to loadings below this threshold. Table 2 presents the values of Cronbach's alpha, standard deviations, and means. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess reliability, with values ranging from 0.707 to 0.911, surpassing the threshold of 0.7 as suggested by Hair et al. (2011).

Table 3 presents the results of our six-component measurement model, which demonstrated a good fit. The Chi-square (X2)/degree of freedom (CMIN/DF = 2.321) and all fit indices (CFI = 0.992; IFI = 0.992; and NFI = 0.985) exceeded the threshold of 0.9 (Hooper et al.,

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 1733).

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	782	45.1
	Female	951	54.9
Age	20–29 years old	285	16.4
	30–39 years old	491	28.3
	40–49 years old	566	32.7
	50–59 years old	354	20.4
	60 years old or older	37	2.1
Income	Less than $ 20,000	256	14.8
	Between $ 20,000 and $ 29,999	287	16.6
	Between $ 30,000 and $ 39,999	260	15.0
	Between $ 40,000 and $ 49,999	227	13.1
	Over $ 50,000	703	40.6
Education level	Less than High school	1	0.1
	High school	169	9.8
	College	203	11.7
	University	1080	62.3
	Graduate school	280	16.2

Table 2
Summary of measurement and factor loadings results.

Dimension/items	M	SD	Cronbach's α	Factor loading
Brand authenticity product	5.218	1.178	0.855	
BAP1				0.761
BAP2				0.831
BAP3				0.805
BAP4				0.834
Brand authenticity corporate	5.250	1.182	0.872	
BAC1				0.842
BAC2				0.849
BAC3				0.843
Brand association	5.091	1.672	0.911	
BASS1				0.949
BASS2				0.954
Perceived quality	5.144	1.117	0.707	
PQ1				0.879
PQ2				0.880
Brand awareness	5.613	1.120	0.825	
BAW1				0.868
BAW2				0.867
Brand loyalty	5.251	1.276	0.881	
BLO1				0.907
BLO2				0.896
BLO3				0.893

M: Mean; SD: Standard deviation.

Table 3
Confirmatory factor analysis results.

	CR	AVE	BLO	BAP	BAC	BASS	BAW	PQ
BLO	0.887	0.723	**0.850**					
BAP	0.860	0.606	0.093	**0.778**				
BAC	0.872	0.695	0.181	0.525	**0.834**			
BASS	0.920	0.853	−0.045	0.0208	0.087	**0.924**		
BAW	0.826	0.704	0.136	0.457	0.576	0.117	**0.839**	
PQ	0.717	0.559	−0.030	0.130	0.066	0.020	0.110	**0.748**

BLO: Brand loyalty; BAP: Brand authenticity product; BAC: Brand authenticity corporate; BASS: Brand association; BAW: Brand awareness; PQ: Perceived quality; AVE: Average variance extracted. The square roots of the AVE for each construct are presented in bold on the diagonal of the correlation matrix.
Measurement model fit indices: CMIN/DF: 2.321; GFI = 0.985; NFI = 0.985; RFI = 0.980; IFI = 0.992; CFI = 0.992; RMSEA = 0.028.

2008). Convergent validity, assessed by average variance extracted (AVE), surpassed the threshold of 0.5, ranging from 0.559 to 0.853. According to Hair et al. (2011), the latent variable explains more than half of the variance in its indicators, indicating its strong influence. The high reliability of the latent variables was confirmed by the composite reliability indices exceeding 0.7 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). To ensure discriminant validity, the correlations between latent variables were lower than the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

4.4. Structural model assessment

The research data was fitted to a structural model after assessing the validity and reliability of the questionnaire used to evaluate the proposed hypotheses. Table 4 presents the results of the study. More specifically, this study's model fit showed a CFI of 0.990, NFI of 0.983, and IFI of 0.990, yielding an acceptable model fit. First, it was predicted that all dimensions of CBBE would positively affect multidimensional brand authenticity (i.e., brand authenticity toward product and corporate). First, it was predicted that all aspects of brand authenticity (i.e., brand authenticity toward product and corporate) would favorable impact CBBE. More specifically, brand authenticity toward product was found to have a positive effect on brand association (H1: β = 0.223, t = 6.965), perceived quality (H2: β = 0.138, t = 3.303), and brand awareness (H3: β = 0.217, t = 6.958). Thus, H1, H2, and H3 are supported. In addition, brand authenticity toward corporate was found to have a positive effect on brand association (H4: β = −0.030, t = −0.957), perceived quality (H5: β = −0.007, t = −0.178), and brand awareness (H6: β = 0.463, t =

14.329). Consequently, H6 is supported while H4 and H5 are not supported. We also confirmed whether the three CBBE factors affected brand loyalty. Brand awareness was found to have a favorable impact on brand loyalty. Thus, H9 is supported (β = 0.163, t = 5.815). However, the hypothesis that perceived quality would significantly and favorably impact brand loyalty is not supported (H8: β = −0.043, t = −1.424). H7 postulated a favorable influence of brand association on brand loyalty within the fashion industry. However, as a result of analysis, brand association had a negative effect on brand loyalty, so H7 was not supported (H7: β = −0.061, t = −2.403).

4.5. Moderation analysis

A MGA using AMOS examined how service providers' authenticity moderates the relationship among product and corporate brand authenticity, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand association. To explore the variance in authenticity among service providers, a multiple-group confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. This analysis involved assessing measurement invariance, as proposed by Davidov (2008), to confirm that the same construct is being measured in each group. This analysis involved assessing measurement invariance to confirm that the same construct is measured in each group, enabling comparisons of means and factor loading path coefficients (Chen, 2011). To establish measurement invariance, three conditions (metric invariance, scalar invariance, and structural covariances) were tested (Davidov, 2008).

Metric invariance constrained factor loadings to be equal across groups, while scalar invariance constrained both loadings and intercepts to be equal. Structural covariances constrained loadings, intercepts, variances, and covariances. The goodness-of-fit index difference was used to assess measurement invariance, following criteria by Chen (2007) and Comşa (2010). A good fit was indicated when ΔRMSEA was less than 0.01 and ΔCFI and ΔTLI were less than 0.02, confirming measurement invariance (see Table 5).

After confirming measurement invariance, respondents for service providers' authenticity were categorized into low and high groups using a median-split (Yi and Jeon, 2003). The median value for service providers' authenticity was 5.00. Accordingly, the low group, with a median value for service providers' authenticity below 5.00, comprised 790 individuals, and the high group, with a median value of 5.00 or higher,

Table 4
Structural equation modeling results.

Hypothesized paths	β	t-value	p	Result
H1. Brand authenticity product → Brand association	0.223	6.965	***	Supported
H2. Brand authenticity product → Perceived quality	0.138	3.303	***	Supported
H3. Brand authenticity product → Brand awareness	0.217	6.958	***	Supported
H4. Brand authenticity corporate → Brand association	−0.030	−0.957	0.338	Not Supported
H5. Brand authenticity corporate → Perceived quality	−0.007	−0.178	0.859	Not Supported
H6. Brand authenticity corporate → Brand awareness	0.463	14.329	***	Supported
H7. Brand association → Brand loyalty	−0.061	−2.403	0.016*	Not Supported
H8. Perceived quality → Brand loyalty	−0.043	−1.424	0.154	Not Supported
H9. Brand awareness → Brand loyalty	0.163	5.815	***	Supported

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.
Model fit indices for hypothesized model: CMIN/DF: 2.472; GFI = 0.983; NFI = 0.983; RFI = 0.979; IFI = 0.990; CFI = 0.990; RMSEA = 0.029.

Table 5
Measurement invariance based on service providers' authenticity.

Model	N	χ^2	DF	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Single group CFA						
Low	790	133.250	88	0.993	0.990	0.026
High	943	146.893	88	0.992	0.989	0.027
Multi-group CFA						
Baseline (Unconstrained)	1733	280.144	176	0.992	0.990	0.018
Metric invariance	1733	295.389	186	0.992	0.990	0.018
Scalar invariance	1733	354.496	224	0.991	0.990	0.018
Structural covariances	1733	312.092	207	0.992	0.991	0.017

included 943 individuals.

The decision to accept or reject hypotheses influenced by moderating variables hinges on the chi-square values of both the constrained and unconstrained models. An influential moderating effect is indicated by a difference in chi-square values greater than 3.84 (Hair et al., 2013). The results of the moderation study are presented in Table 6. The outcomes of the data analysis showed that the following relationships are moderated by the service providers' authenticity: (i) brand authenticity toward product and brand awareness and (ii) brand authenticity toward corporate and brand association. Therefore, H10c and H11a are supported.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In relation to a specific fashion brand, the impact of multidimensional brand authenticity on CBBE is examined in this study. More specifically, this research explored the influence of brand authenticity on both product and corporate aspects on brand association, perceived quality, and brand awareness. Furthermore, the study analyzed the reciprocal relationship between brand association, perceived quality, and brand awareness, and their impact on brand loyalty. Based on the analysis, product authenticity demonstrated a favorable impact on the configuration variables of CBBE, while corporate authenticity exhibited a positive and notable influence solely on brand awareness. As brand equity is established through robust customer affinity, positive brand sentiment, and brand association retention (Lu et al., 2015a), it is reasonable to infer that product authenticity would logically play a role in shaping brand equity. Consequently, in alignment with our study's findings, it can be deduced that the perception of product authenticity is likely to positively influence brand association, perceived quality, and brand awareness. In addition, the presence of a positive relationship between corporate authenticity and brand awareness is anticipated to amplify customers' recognition of the brand. This heightened brand awareness occurs when customers perceive corporate authenticity, characterized by integrity, transparency, and a sincere dedication to the company's proclaimed values within the fashion industry context. However, concerning the fashion industry, it was observed that corporate authenticity had no influence on brand association and perceived quality. This finding implies that while corporate authenticity holds inherent significance, it is not the sole determinant shaping brand association and perceived quality. For instance, alternative factors like product design, pricing strategies, and prevailing fashion trends might exert a more potent impact on the manner in which customers define a brand's essence and formulate opinions regarding product characteristics.

The research unveiled a positive predictive link between brand awareness and brand loyalty. These outcomes lend credence to the findings of Alkhawaldeh et al. (2017) and affirm the assertions of earlier research that heightened brand awareness can amplify loyalty and

diminish susceptibility to competitive marketing endeavors (Bernarto et al., 2020; Bilgin, 2018). The intriguing aspect of this study lies in the observation that brand association exerts a negatively influence on brand loyalty. This implies that when customers establish mental connections between attributes and a specific brand, it does not automatically result in heightened brand loyalty. In other words, such associations do not ensure that customers will maintain their mental link with the brand and exhibit sustained loyalty over an extended period. In addition, it was discovered that perceived quality does not impact brand loyalty. In other industry contexts, Xixiang et al. (2016) arrived at a similar conclusion, highlighting that perceived quality might not be the sole determinant of brand loyalty. This could be attributed to the existence of additional factors, rooted in a cultural context, that contribute to the formation of brand loyalty beyond perceived quality.

The study employed MGA to assess the impact of service providers authenticity on the connection between two facets of brand authenticity (i.e., product and corporate) and brand equity (i.e., brand association, perceived quality, and brand awareness). The outcomes indicate that service providers authenticity moderates the positive correlation between the product dimension of brand authenticity and brand awareness. In addition, it was discovered that the authenticity of service providers has a moderating impact on the relationship between the corporate aspect of brand authenticity and brand association. These findings can be understood as indicating the significance of employees' role in establishing customer relationships. For instance, Rambocas and Arjoon (2020) pointed out that if the service delivered by employees to customers results in an unfavorable customer experience, it can harm favorable brand perceptions and raise the probability of behavioral switching. That is, it indicates the importance of one-time and individual service experiences that employees deliver to customers in customer evaluation.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The following are the theoretical implications of this study: First, it divides and verifies brand authenticity in two dimensions (i.e., product- and corporate-level brand authenticity). Authenticity in marketing has been studied in various contexts (Eggers et al., 2013; Beverland, 2005; Bruhn et al., 2012; Alexander, 2009). However, most studies have focused on constitutive variables of authenticity. This study divides brand authenticity into multiple dimensions and verifies them to propose a new framework and expand the boundaries of research on authenticity. Second, this study enhances our understanding of multidimensional CBBE within the realm of fashion brands. While previous research has addressed the adaptation and expansion of multidimensional CBBE, limited attention has been given to exploring the specific contributions of each dimension to fashion consumers' brand loyalty. In relation to fashion brand shopping, this study contributes to the existing literature by empirically evaluating the theoretical proposition, thereby

Table 6
Results for the multi-group analysis.

Service providers authenticity		Low		High		Unconstrained model	Constrained model	$\triangle \mathscr{X}^2 (1) = 3.84$	Hypothesis
		ß	*t*-value	ß	*t*-value				
H10a	BAP → BASS	0.270	5.172***	0.184	4.753***	$\mathscr{X}^2 (186) = 305.082$	$\mathscr{X}^2 (187) = 305.401$	$\triangle \mathscr{X}^2 (1) > 0.319$	Not Supported
H10b	BAP → PQ	0.190	2.639**	0.096	1.879		$\mathscr{X}^2 (187) = 305.655$	$\triangle \mathscr{X}^2 (1) > 0.573$	Not Supported
H10c	BAP → BAW	0.285	6.132***	0.160	3.823***		$\mathscr{X}^2 (187) = 309.159$	$\triangle \mathscr{X}^2 (1) < 4.077$	Supported
H11a	BAC → BASS	−0.132	−2.662**	0.039	1.058		$\mathscr{X}^2 (187) = 312.296$	$\triangle \mathscr{X}^2 (1) < 7.214$	Supported
H11b	BAC → PQ	−0.067	−1.154	0.038	0.769		$\mathscr{X}^2 (187) = 306.972$	$\triangle \mathscr{X}^2 (1) > 1.890$	Not Supported
H11c	BAC → BAW	0.421	8.995***	0.496	11.162***		$\mathscr{X}^2 (187) = 305.862$	$\triangle \mathscr{X}^2 (1) > 0.780$	Not Supported

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.
BAP: Brand authenticity product; BAC: Brand authenticity corporate; BASS: Brand association; PQ: Perceived quality; BAW: Brand awareness.

providing valuable insights.

Finally, this study examines the role of service provider authenticity. Understanding the role of service providers' authenticity is important, as various studies have demonstrated that it affects behavioral intentions (Matthews et al., 2020; Turel et al., 2013; Yagil, 2014). For instance, Yagil and Medler-Liraz (2013) demonstrated that an authentic service strengthens consumer loyalty. This research follows a holistic approach in studying service providers' authenticity by inspecting its role in the association between brand authenticity (i.e., product and corporate) and CBBE that induces customers' behavioral intention for fashion brands. This study's findings can help future researchers understand customer behavioral patterns in the fashion industry.

5.2. Managerial implications

Both business practitioners and researchers can derive important practical implications from this research. First, in the fashion industry, the study's findings regarding the effects of product authenticity on brand association, perceived quality, and brand awareness have significant managerial implications. These results underscore the pivotal role of product authenticity in shaping customers' perceptions and connections with a brand. Managers and industry practitioners gain strategic insights from the proven impact of product authenticity on enhancing brand equity across various aspects. The noted positive influence of product authenticity on brand association suggests that emphasizing it can foster stronger mental connections between customers and the brand. Specifically, the link between product authenticity and perceived quality indicates that highlighting the authentic nature of products can enhance customers' quality perceptions. This finding holds notable implications for the fashion industry, where product quality deeply influences customer choices. Furthermore, the discovery that product authenticity also boosts brand awareness implies that effectively conveying it can enhance brand visibility and recognition among consumers. This highlights the necessity of transparently communicating product authenticity through marketing and communication approaches. Based on these findings, industry practitioners should integrate product authenticity into their brand development and marketing endeavors. By genuinely showcasing product authenticity, managers can reinforce brand associations, elevate perceived quality, and enhance brand awareness in the dynamic fashion industry. This approach can heighten brand competitiveness, attracting and retaining the loyalty of fashion-conscious customers.

Second, the study's findings, which highlight the impact of corporate authenticity on brand awareness, provide essential managerial insights. This underscores the importance of fostering and conveying a strong sense of authenticity to shape customer brand awareness. It suggests that communicating the company's integrity, transparency, and commitment to its values can strongly resonate with customers, thereby enhancing brand visibility and recognition. Furthermore, emphasizing corporate authenticity can differentiate the brand in the competitive fashion market, allowing it to stand out and capture the attention of potential customers. Ultimately, recognizing the connection between

corporate authenticity and brand awareness offers a practical pathway for managers to enhance their brand's prominence in the fashion industry. By leveraging authenticity as a strategic asset, brands can effectively attract and retain customer attention, thereby strengthening their position and competitiveness in the dynamic marketplace.

Finally, this research reveals the importance of service providers' authenticity. Since service providers' authenticity is may involve personal costs (e.g., emotional costs among employees) (Yagil and Medler-Liraz, 2012) and multifaceted adequate management is essential. By authentically embodying and communicating the brand's essence, service providers enable companies to offer a comprehensive and consistent brand experience for customers. Managers can cultivate a better comprehension of the brand's values and messaging among service providers, enabling them to authentically represent the brand in relations with customers. Therefore, brands should conduct service and brand education so employees can become effective frontline advocates of authentic service. Just compensation would also motivate them to conduct authentic service.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Although this research has various implications, it also has several limitations. First, although it is interesting to look into the role of CBBE in relation to fashion brand management, future research should include cross-sectional studies on CBBE to deepen our comprehension of CBBE in a variety of other industries. Second, it is significant because it collected a relatively large number of samples. However, it was only conducted for a specific brand. Generalization of the results to various brands is not appropriate. Therefore, we recommend selecting a global brand and collecting data from a wider area to verify our research model.

Finally, this research explored the moderating influence of service providers' authenticity on the connection among brand authenticity and CBBE, as proposed in the framework. In this study, it was found that the authenticity of service providers has a positive moderating effect on the transfer of brand authenticity of both product and corporate to brand equity (e.g., Brand association, Brand awareness). This implies the significant role of service providers in accurately conveying the brand's intended message. This finding can be applicable not only to fashion brands but also to industrial brands. Conducting future research on the role of service provider who interact with end customers across various industries, is to be an interesting topic.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix

Table A1
Constructs and measurement items

Constructs	Measurement Items (From 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)	Sources
Brand authenticity product		Gilmore and Pine (2007) and Lee and Chung (2020)
BAP1	Brand X has a natural image in packaging and design.	
BAP2	Brand X has historical authenticity and memories.	
BAP3	Brand X accurately indicates the source of ingredients.	
BAP4	Brand X produces ethically.	
Brand authenticity corporate		

Table A1 (*continued*)

Constructs	Measurement Items (From 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)	Sources
BAC1	Brand X delivers responsible advertising.	
BAC2	Brand X facilitates opinion sharing through its brand community.	
BAC3	Brand X does sustainable management.	
Brand association		Yoo and Donthu (2001)
BASS1	Some characteristics of brand X come to my mind quickly.	
BASS2	I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of brand X.	
BASS3	I have difficulty in imagining brand X in my mind.	
Perceived quality		
PQ1	The quality of brand X is extremely high.	
PQ2	The functionality of Brand X products will be very good.	
Brand awareness		
BAW1	I can recognize brand X among other competing brands.	
BAW2	I am aware of brand X.	
Brand loyalty		
BLO1	I consider myself to be loyal to brand X.	
BLO2	Brand X would be my first choice.	
BLO3	I will not buy other brands if brand X is available at the store.	
Service providers authenticity		Price et al. (1995) and Bae (2021)
SPA1	Brand X provides differentiated services.	
SPA2	Brand X provides a service that exceeds expectations.	
SPA3	Employees at brand X are well aware of new trends.	
SPA4	Brand X provides a service in which employees match their insides and actions.	

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