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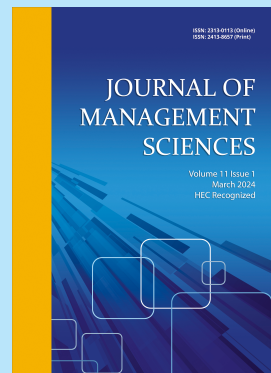
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From Runway to Click-way: Unraveling the Power of Authenticity in Digital Marketing

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Abstract: In today's competitive digital market, brands need to stand out by giving their customers unique and valuable experiences. The study explores the role of online brand experience and brand consistency in improving brand love by examining the direct and mediated effects of brand authenticity on an online platform. The study also looked at the role of self-congruence in moderating the linkage between brand authenticity and brand love. This study uses stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory to explore conceptual relationships. Using a purposive sampling technique, this study collected 372 consumers' responses who had at least 4 months of online experience with the global fashion brands. The proposed logical relationships were tested using structural equation modeling through SmartPLS-4 on 360 responses. Results revealed the significant direct impact of online brand experience and brand consistency on brand love. Moreover, brand authenticity performed a significantly partially mediated role in relationships of online brand experience, brand consistency, and brand love. The moderated role of self-congruence was found to be insignificant. The research guides marketers to enhance brand love by focusing on customer-perceived authenticity, crafting compelling online experiences, and ensuring consistency.

Keywords: Online brand experience, brand consistency, brand authenticity, brand love, self-congruence. stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory.

Introduction

In today's digital era, the rapid advancement of technology has reshaped consumer-brand interactions, with online platforms serving as the epicenter of these transformative dynamics (Yu & Yuan, 2019). In a dynamic environment, the reassessment of marketing strategies and the exploration of innovative techniques are encompassed by the notion referred to as Marketing 5.0 (Verhoef et al., 2021). Digital Marketing brings about considerable transformations in how businesses communicate with their customers (Morgan, Whitler, Feng, & Chari, 2019). Companies currently emphasize the significance of establishing a "digital connection" with their customer base (Wu, Botella-Carrubi, & Blanco-

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González-Tejero, 2024). Consumers can utilize social media and digital resources throughout the purchasing journey. The responsibility of marketing strategy lies in integrating and establishing connections between customers and brands. Various digital platforms, including but not limited to Google, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, provide avenues for marketing campaigns aimed at engaging with consumers.

The significant growth in e-commerce and social media usage, particularly in regions like Pakistan, has redefined the way businesses engage with their customers. With approximately 71.70 to 72.9 million active social media users in Pakistan monthly, spending considerable time on these platforms, e-commerce businesses have an opportunity to tap into this vast and engaged audience. Within this context, the fashion industry stands as a captivating example, where the blending of digital platforms, consumer preferences, and brand strategies forms intricate relationships (Xue, Li, & Zeng, 2023). Previous studies have emphasized the pivotal role played by online platforms in shaping brand-consumer relationships (Sikandar & Ahmed, 2019). These platforms have transformed into immersive environments where consumers engage in multifaceted brand experiences, extending far beyond mere transactions.

These interactions involve a complex interplay of engagements and emotions, making it imperative for businesses to optimize each stage of the customer journey on online platforms (Yu, Yuan, Kim, & Wang, 2021). Creating a unique online experience becomes vital for brands to establish a strong competitive position in the market. Building love is crucial in how consumers engage with brands, and this can be achieved through distinct, intimate, and personal experiences. The significance of brand experience and brand love has been underscored in prior studies (Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019), although the exploration of their relationship in the context of online platforms remains limited. One fundamental aspect that warrants meticulous examination is brand consistency, especially within the context of online platforms. Brand consistency involves maintaining a unified brand image across various touchpoints, encompassing elements such as product quality, service delivery, and communication. This uniformity is pivotal for building a robust brand. When a brand maintains consistency in its performance and communication, customers find it easier to form emotional connections. Despite its significance, research exploring brand consistency within online platforms has been limited, leaving a notable gap in our understanding of its influence on brand love. Most firms continuously seek novel approaches to convince customers (Fritz, Schoenmueller, & Bruhn, 2017). As long as customers continue to want high-quality products, marketers intend to emphasize authenticity in their businesses.

In an era overwhelmed by marketing messages, authentic brands stand out by embodying genuine brand behavior and transparent communication. In recent research, brand experience has been associated with numerous aspects of brand authenticity to developing brand love (Rodrigues, 2018; Safeer, He, & Abrar, 2021) in the offline platform. However, some research investigates brand authenticity as a mediator in the online context. However, in online platforms, the notion of authentic brands is still significantly underdeveloped. To respond to this call (Sohaib, Safeer, & Majeed, 2022) and to bridge the gap, this study used brand authenticity as a mediator. Gaining insights into the pivotal role of authenticity in mediating the relationship between online brand experiences,

brand consistency, and brand love is crucial for businesses striving to establish meaningful and trust-based connections with their customers.

Consumer-brand interactions are integral to individuals' lives, shaping their identities and providing a platform for self-expression (Aaker, 1999). This understanding offers valuable insights into consumer behavior, illuminating how individuals form emotional connections with brands based on their self-identity. Such insights empower businesses to tailor their marketing strategies effectively, nurturing brand loyalty and advocacy. A previous study suggests that when assessing brands, the role of self-congruence is crucial. However, from the perspective of brand authenticity, scarce research utilizes self-congruence as a moderator (Kumar, 2019). By addressing this gap, our study contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer-brand relationships and provides practical guidance to businesses seeking to enhance their brand authenticity and strengthen connections with consumers.

In light of these considerations, the current research significantly enriches the body of branding literature through several theoretical contributions. Our study adopts a three-fold approach to address key objectives. Firstly, we aim to explore the impact of online brand experience and brand consistency on brand love within the online platform. Secondly, we endeavor to investigate the mediating role of brand authenticity between online brand experience, brand consistency, and brand love. Thirdly, our study pioneers the examination of self-congruence as a moderator, shaping brand love relationships with brand authenticity on online platforms. To structure our exploration, we utilize the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory, integrating these variables into a comprehensive theoretical framework. The SOR theory posits that external stimuli (S) act as triggers, activating internal states or organisms (O) within a consumer. Subsequently, these activated internal states lead the consumer to display either approach-avoidance behavior or evoke an emotive response (R) (Fu, Chen, & Zheng, 2021).

This study specifically focuses on the well-known brand "Junaid Jamshaid" and delves into the intricacies of online brand experiences across social media platforms, i.e., Facebook, and Instagram. Through these objectives, we aim to contribute valuable insights to the understanding of brand-consumer relationships in the digital realm, providing a solid foundation for future research endeavors. From a managerial perspective, social media has revolutionized the way companies manage customer information (Athanasopoulou, Giovanis, & Ioakimidis, 2021). It has also highlighted the significance of authenticity as a cornerstone for crafting an integrated brand strategy. Businesses can draw strategic insights from the analysis of online customer behaviors and brand experiences on social sites, guiding them in the use of digital marketing strategies to cultivate and strengthen customer loyalty, ultimately nurturing a deep affection for their brands. The study's remaining part is structured as follows: a review of prior research on the subject, research methodology, the study's findings, a discussion, and a research conclusion.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Online Brand Experience

Brand experience is “the customers’ perception of the brand at every contact point, whether it is in brand pages when viewed online or brand image displayed in advertisements, or during the first contact with the brand, or the quality of experience they witness/receive while interacting with the brand”. There are two types of consumer reactions to stimuli associated with brands, behavioral and internal responses (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zaran-tonello, 2009). Internal responses pertain to people’s feelings, sensations, and cognitions about the brand. In contrast, behavioral responses refer to how people feel about the brand’s identity and looks, such as its packaging and logo. Online brand experience is becoming crucial for brands in a virtual world. The online brand experience was described by Morgan et al. (2019) as “an individual’s internal subjective response to interacting with an online brand.” Online platforms allow the consumer to interact with other consumers, be empowered, and be attached to a brand. Different schools of thought have developed in the marketing literature to explain customers’ reactions when they visit brand websites.

Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit (2009) evaluated 736 statistical connections between variables in their meta-analysis of 50 empirical publications and revealed that three elements affect customer behavior response in online brands: a) Website features determine the website experience, b) The customer’s psychological states when navigating and how such feelings affect their experience on brand websites, taking into consideration elements like the amount of interest, perceived interaction, and flow status, c) Online brand experience is determined by the customer internal reactions such as cognition, emotion, and feeling to the brand’s website. In some instances, models for a brand experience developed for offline environments (Brakus et al., 2009) were modified for use in an online environment (Yoon & Yoon, 2016).

As multichannel buying grows, consumers want consistent experiences across channels. Information technology has enabled brands to provide their consumers with better online experiences. Consumers will be more confident in their brand attitudes throughout long-term exposure if the information they get from multichannel brand experiences is more consistent. Trudeau H and Shobeiri (2016) suggest that customers progressively establish long-term brand relationships. Consumers decide which brands to buy or how to evaluate based on the increasing quantity of brand experiences. Consumers are motivated to learn more about the brand and find solutions to concerns they have experienced through sharing brand-related information (Chen & Lee, 2021). At every point of interaction, consumers’ decisions or responses should be actively captured to evaluate the brand experience accurately.

Marketing professionals create an engaging communication environment using online platforms, which is full of the potential to strengthen customer relationships. Brands should explore ways to create an attractive online platform to engage consumers, creating memorable and distinctive brand experiences. Customers’ good or bad experiences with a product shared online may create brand buzz and influence others’ buying behavior.

Online Brand Experience and Brand Love

Brand directors and marketers prefer to create a strong, emotional brand relationship that allows customers to fall in love with them to generate a long-term commitment to their brand. Brand love research suggests consumer interaction with a brand is predicted by emotional attachment to the brand (Wong, 2023). Customers are more emotionally and psychologically engaged with a brand when brand actions and qualities are true, genuine, and meet the promises made to them. The brand love links are strong, long-lasting, and unreplaceable, creating a favorable perception of the brand. Product or service consumption generally results in a brand experience that might differ from consumer to consumer. Sometimes, consumers seek brand experience rather than reasonable pricing to meet their consumption requirements (Kim & Chao, 2019). Customer brand experiences are based on sensory, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual aspects.

Consumers are motivated to learn more about the brand and find solutions to concerns they have experienced through sharing brand-related information (Trudeau H & Shobeiri, 2016). An online brand interaction may be seen as a continuous relationship where the brand's experiences help the user develop emotional attachments with the brand. Several brand experience dimensions that influence consumer brand love have been revealed by prior research (Bıçakcıoğlu, İpek, & Bayraktaroğlu, 2018). Those consumers with favorable enduring emotional links with the brand usually have a better image of it through brand experience. Different consumer segments often have different brand experiences. Specifically, each customer experience relies on their emotional links with the brand.

Earlier research asserts that customers' brand love is derived from their positive brand experiences. Studies by Roy, Sural, Chhaya, Natarajan, and Ganguly (2021); Bıçakcıoğlu et al. (2018) stated that a good brand experience increased brand love, which is evidence-based support for the present claim. Thus,

H1. Online brand experience has a positive impact on brand love.

Brand Consistency and Brand Love

Brand consistency is becoming crucial as the brand strives to strengthen market recognition. Brand consistency stands as a cornerstone in the modern branding landscape, profoundly influencing customers' evaluations of product/service attributes, emotions, and performance reliability (Liu, Li, Chen, & Balachander, 2017). These evaluations, in turn, shape customer loyalty toward the brand and significantly impact their future behavioral intentions. Maintaining consistency is not merely a matter of upholding a brand's image; it is a fundamental aspect associated with standardization and repeated use, conveying brand information over time through the brand's personality, values, and operational procedures (Roy et al., 2021). A great brand relies heavily on consistency. Importantly, if the brand fails to maintain its consistency over time, the repercussions can be profound. Such failures can have a butterfly effect, damaging the brand's reputation and eroding its ability to build emotional connections with customers. In essence, brand consistency is not a mere marketing tactic; it represents a strategic imperative demanding the attention of

senior leadership. Brand consistency might be described as high-level marketing.

Furthermore, brand consistency is more than just a visible and relevant substance passed on to potential and current consumers; it serves as the very essence that sets a company apart from its competitors. The firm's meticulous engagement with the brand at every touchpoint is critically examined through the lens of brand consistency. When a brand consistently fulfills its promises and maintains uniformity in its offerings over time, customers are more likely to support its objectives (Mafael, Raithel, Taylor, & Stewart, 2021). This consistency not only satisfies their requirements but also evokes enduring emotional connections. Consequently, consumers develop a profound attachment to brands that consistently fulfill their promises, making brand consistency a pillar for building lasting customer relationships.

Previous research examines brand consistency in various contexts, such as longitudinal consistency, examines consumer perceptions that the brand has not changed, the role of brand consistency in the Olympic games, the role of luxury brand consistency across countries, analyzed how brand consistency differ across national borders, perceived consistency in marketing communications affects consumer brand relationships. Although, the effectiveness of brand consistency in enhancing consumer-based brand outcomes has not been thoroughly studied. Over time, consumers develop a love for consistency and familiar patterns, which will help a consistent brand develop confidence and retain customers (Roy et al., 2021). Consistent branding reinforces brand values, creating a sense of belonging with consumers who share those values which leads to increased brand love. This hypothesis is derived from the discussions above:

H2: Brand consistency has a positive influence on brand love.

Brand Authenticity as a Mediator

According to a previous study, there are several ways to determine a brand authenticity. The brand develops through a productive item expansion procedure, and its authenticity is grown through quality commitment, coming from consistency (Athwal & Harris, 2018). Brand authenticity means "the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and its consumers, and to support consumers being true to themselves". Moreover, being true to oneself and being genuine are both qualities of authenticity. For someone to be authentic, their motivation must be based on their thoughts and feelings (Kumar, 2019). That's how consumers believe in you and see you as an authentic brand. An authentic brand is open and clear about its mission and ideals. Their policies are open and genuine, and they build an intimate connection with their customers. The previous study stated that (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2014) brand authenticity identifies itself via sincerity, integrity, and heritage likewise it has the potential to emotionally engage with customers. The dimensions that make a brand authentic were recognized by certain scholars. For instance, Napoli et al. (2014) provide three dimensions: quality commitment (high standards are kept), sincerity (brand committed to its beliefs and ideals), and heritage (the brand's ties to history and the past).

In particular, previous studies have demonstrated a significant relationship between

brand authenticity on a variety of marketing/branding outcomes, including positive brand attitude, brand credibility, brand trust, brand loyalty.

Moreover, when a brand is authentic, it keeps its promise and gains customers' trust, increasing its importance and evoking positive feelings (Fritz et al., 2017). Prior studies stated brand experience significantly influenced brand authenticity in several contexts; in a global brand, brand authenticity is significantly affected by brand experience (Tran & Nguyen, 2022), and online destination brand experience has a significant impact on destination brand authenticity; some research addresses the links between brand experience and brand authenticity (Khan & Fatma, 2021). Positive brand experiences lead to authentic brand aspects and consistent brand behavior. Therefore, when consumers have positive experiences and see a brand as authentic, they are more likely to become attached to and fall in love with it.

Brand authenticity refers to the perceived consistency in which a brand behaves in a manner that aligns with its core principles and standards, accurately reflecting its core identity and substantive nature (Fritz et al., 2017). Ensuring the brand is perceived consistently throughout all brand contact points is essential for consumers. Previous research found that brand consistency is critical to brand authenticity, affecting customer behavior. Moreover, findings from the prior study that looked at the antecedent of brand authenticity indicate that consistency in a brand is a sign of authenticity (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). Prior studies have examined brand authenticity and brand love in various ways. It highlights the significance of brand authenticity in fostering brand love, as it positively influences brand love through factors like lifestyle congruence and memorable impressions (Manthiou, Kang, Hyun, & Fu, 2018).

According to previous studies, early perceptions of brand authenticity are crucial for creating brand-loving consumers (Rodrigues, 2018). The growing demand for authenticity in brands is expanding, highlighting the importance of brand authenticity in creating consumer interactions (Oh, Prado, Korelo, & Frizzo, 2019). The existing literature on the causes and effects of brand authenticity perceptions has covered a lot of ground. More specific research is required to learn how online brand experience and brand consistency can build consumer perception of brand authenticity. Thus, this study contributes to brand authenticity research by exploring online brand experience and brand consistency on the online platform and how brand authenticity influences consumer behavior outcomes such as brand love.

The S-O-R paradigm is mainly employed to explore how physical and online environments eventually affect consumer behavior (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2003). In the earlier studies, the S-O-R theory was used in the e-retail context and some studies have employed the S-O-R paradigm to explore how customers respond to online marketing strategies. Some studies have expanded this paradigm in the online experience and customer behavior (Eroglu et al., 2003; Rose, Clark, Samouel, & Hair, 2012). Based on the S-O-R theory, we have proposed that brand authenticity is a mediator between online brand experience, brand consistency, and brand love. S-O-R theory asserts external stimuli (online brand experience/brand consistency) affect internal organismic processes (brand authenticity), which then influence emotional and behavioral responses (brand love) (see Figure 1 for proposed framework). According to prior studies, brand authenticity was a

mediator in several situations (Fritz et al., 2017; Khan & Fatma, 2021; Safeer et al., 2021). However, brand authenticity has not been widely shown to mediate the linkage between online brand experience, brand consistency, and brand love in online platforms. Thus, we hypothesize.

H3: Brand authenticity mediating the relationships between online brand experience and brand love.

H4: Brand authenticity mediating the relationships between brand consistency and brand love.

Self-congruence as a Moderator

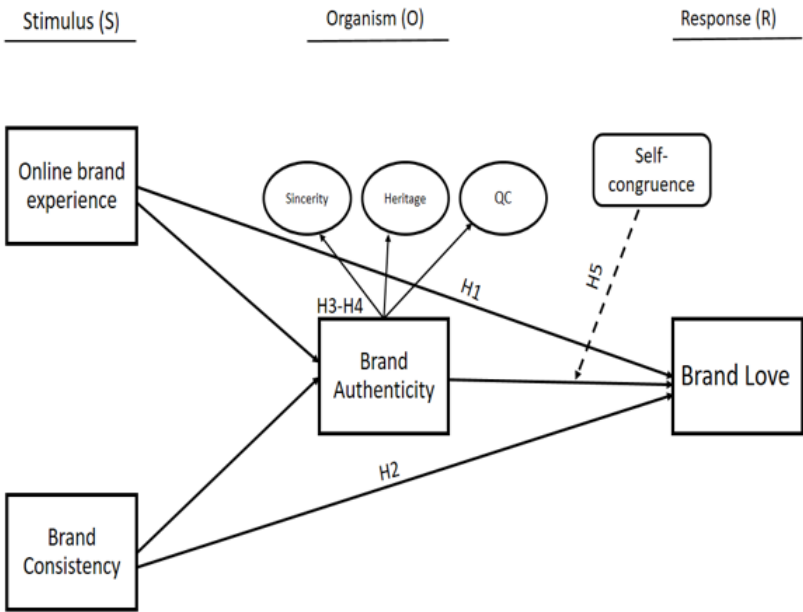
Self-congruence asserts that a customer's self-concept and alignment with the brand personality or image substantially influence them to buy a product or utilize a service (Aaker, 1999; Sirgy et al., 1997). When it comes to brand self-congruence, "the brand image is perceived as in line with the way the consumer perceives him/herself to be but not necessarily in line with what others perceive him/her to be". Brand self-congruence is how consumers evaluate themselves relative to brands. According to Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, and Nyffenegger (2011) Self-congruence may be achieved by choosing brands with brand identities that match consumer ideals or actual selves. Moreover, congruence requires that brand aspects match the consumer's characteristics, and higher self-congruence (HSC) may strengthen consumers' emotional ties to brands. If brands' communication style is aligned with how the customer perceives them, they are considered unique, real, and authentic.

Customers with HSC tend to respond positively to the brand (Malär et al., 2011). Moreover, the emotional relationship between a customer and a brand is more significant when their self-congruence and brand perception are more in line, which may further encourage mutual induction to express the emotional relationship. Customers who consider that a particular brand matches their self-concept are more inclined to believe it has enabled them to explore self-improvement and self-verification. As a result, people will be more motivated to interact with that brand they believe to be authentic.

Hence, the possibility of such customers falling in love will improve if they believe in the brand authenticity. To our knowledge, no studies have examined the role of self-congruence as a moderator between Brand authenticity and brand love. Thus, we hypothesize.

H5: Self-congruence moderates the linkage between brand authenticity and brand love.

Figure 1
Proposed Framework



Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

The study examines the influence of online brand experience, brand consistency on brand love, and the mediating role of brand authenticity within the context of Pakistan. Our primary focus is on the consumer perspective within the fashion industry, with university students and lecturers serving as representative samples of online brand consumers. This approach enables a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and perceptions of individuals actively engaged in online brand interactions, contributing valuable insights into the dynamics of brand love in the digital context.

Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, specifically targeting Pakistani online brand consumers to ensure relevance to the study’s objectives (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). The selection criteria emphasized individuals with substantial online engagement with renowned global fashion brands, such as Junaid Jamshaid. This demographic, comprising university students and lecturers, possesses a high level of proficiency in online activities, regularly using the internet and social media platforms, including purchasing branded items. Their familiarity with online marketplaces and products like Junaid Jamshaid made them ideal respondents for assessing online brand experiences. Additionally, the inclusion of university students and lecturers enhances demo-

graphic inclusivity, considering their diverse age groups and backgrounds (Kumar, 2019).

The data collection process utilized an online questionnaire, strategically designed to efficiently gather data from a wide audience while minimizing fieldwork and human error (Kumar, 2019). The questionnaire, generated in English through Google platforms, commenced with an initial section providing an overview and goals of the research. During the initial survey phase, respondents were directed to identify the online platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) where they predominantly interacted with the globally recognized fashion brand, Junaid Jamshaid, by following its activities. Following As Hair Jr, Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2021) recommendation of a sample size of 10 responses per question, this target was achieved.

Table 1
Demographic characteristic of respondents

Dimension of Instructor	Frequency	Percent	Dimension of Students	Frequency	Percent
Total lecturer	112		Total students	248	
Gender			Gender		
Male	65	58.3	Male	155	62.5
Female	47	41.9	Female	93	37.5
Age			Age		
Less than 25	30	26.7	18-22	55	22.6
26-30	35	31.2	23-27	60	24
31-35	22	19.6	28-32	62	24.3
More than 36	25	22.3	More than 32	71	28.6
Qualification			Qualification		
Master	30	26.7	Graduate	125	50.4
PhD	50	44.6	Master	100	40.3
Post-doctoral	32	28.5	PhD	23	9.2
Marital status			Marital status		
Single	42	37.5	Single	198	79.8
Married	70	62.5	Married	50	20.2
Online brand experience			Online brand experience		
04 month to 1 year	55	49.5	04 month to 1 year	102	41.3
1-3 years	40	35.1	1-3 years	90	36.2
3-5 years	17	15.4	3-5 years	56	22.5

The online survey link was distributed using respondents' email addresses. We targeted 400 respondents with prior online experience with global fashion brands (Junaid Jamshaid) and received 372 responses from 02 universities (i.e. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Rahim yar khan campus, Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology). We removed the biased responses from the data before analysis. Respondents in this study who had not at least 4 months of online experience with fashion brands (Junaid Jamshaid) were not allowed to participate. After data screening, 360 responses were found to be valid (see Table 1).

Measurement and Analysis

Reliability and validity concerns need to be addressed, so we acquired well-known scales from previous research. In this survey, we adapted the effective dimension of online brand experience from Brakus et al. (2009) measured with 03 items. Brand consistency is adapted from Hernandez-Fernandez and Lewis (2019) and measured with 03 items. The

construct of brand authenticity is measured by (quality commitment, heritage, and sincerity). Quality commitment is measured by 09 items, heritage is measured by 06 items, and sincerity is measured by 04 adapted items (Napoli et al., 2014). Self-congruence is adapted from Sirgy et al. (1997) and measured with 03 items. Brand love is calculated with 10 items and adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). We used five-Likert scale (e.g., "1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree") to check the respondent response.

To evaluate the response and non-response biases, we followed established guidelines as outlined in previous research studies. We employed smartPLS 4 to examine the research model PLS-SEM. PLS-SEM is well-suited for exploratory research, providing the flexibility needed for our study's objectives. Importantly, unlike CB-SEM, PLS-SEM is a non-parametric method and does not mandate adherence to normal data distribution (Hair Jr et al., 2021). This characteristic is particularly advantageous when working with small sample sizes, ensuring the robustness of our analysis.

Furthermore, the choice of PLS-SEM aligns with the complexities of our research model. PLS-SEM allows for the assessment of constructs and linkages in complex structural models, making it invaluable for early-stage theory construction and evaluation. These factors, combined with its non-parametric nature and flexibility, rendered PLS-SEM the most suitable method for our study, justifying our decision not to conduct a normality test analysis as required by CB-SEM guidelines. We adhered to the principles and reporting guidelines for PLS-SEM. PLS-SEM analysis requires two phases, evaluations of the measurement model and the structural model.

Data Analysis and Results

Common Method Bias

In addressing potential biases in our study, we conducted a Common Method Bias (CMB) test, specifically the Harman single-factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). This test suggests the presence of common method bias if a single merge factor explains more than 50% of the covariance. To conduct this assessment, all 38 items were combined, and only one factor was extracted through an un-rotated principal component exploratory factor analysis. The resulting factor accounts for 39.55% (i.e., less than 50%) of the variance, affirming that there is no concern regarding common method bias.

Additionally, we implemented stringent screening measures to identify and remove any biased responses from our dataset, further ensuring the reliability and integrity of our analysis. These efforts bolster the validity of our results and affirm the credibility of our findings.

Table 2
Results of measurement model

Construct	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE	C α	VIF
Online brand experience			0.879	0.708	0.794	
OBE1	"The brand has a special meaning to me".	0.842				1.733
OBE2	"I've had a strong feeling for the brand through the platform".	0.871				1.961
OBE3	"It's fun to engage in brand-related activities on the platform".	0.812				1.536
Brand consistency			0.914	0.781	0.859	
BC1	"Brand a fulfills its promise consistently".	0.889				2.190
BC2	"The current brand behavior fits its brand promise".	0.881				2.180
BC3	"The brand promise and its present actions are in line with each other".	0.879				2.111
Brand authenticity						
<i>Heritage</i>			0.91	0.676	0.873	
HER1	"The brand has a strong connection to a historical period in time, culture, and/or specific region".	0.849				2.658
HER2	"The brand has a strong link to the past, which is still perpetuated and celebrated to this day".	0.913				3.803
HER3	"The brand exudes a sense of tradition".	0.892				2.985
HER4	"The brand reminds me of a golden age".	0.868				2.657
HER5	"The brand reflects a timeless design".	0.624				1.224
HER6	"The brand reinforces and builds on long-held traditions".	Removed				
<i>Quality Commitment</i>			0.894	0.553	0.857	
QC1	"Quality is central to the brand".	0.812				3.080
QC2	"Only the finest ingredients/materials are used in the manufacture of this brand".	0.833				2.914
QC3	"The brand is made to the most exacting standards, where everything the firm does is aimed at improving quality".	0.843				1.460
QC4	"The brand is manufactured to the most stringent quality standards".	0.767				1.852
QC5	"It feels like artisan skills and customized manufacturing processes have been retained in the production of this brand".	0.753				1.851
QC6	"The brand is a potent symbol of continued quality".	0.827				2.632
QC7	"The brand is made by a master craftsman who pays attention to detail and is involved throughout the production process".	Removed				
QC8	"The firm is committed to retaining long-held quality standards for the brand"	Removed				
QC9	"The brand has a mark of distinction that signifies quality"	0.612				1.190
<i>Sincerity</i>			0.915	0.728	0.875	
SIN1	"The brand remains true to its espoused values".	0.859				2.312
SIN2	"The brand refuses to compromise the values upon which it was founded".	0.864				2.387
SIN3	"The brand has stuck to its principles".	0.876				2.633
SIN4	"The brand builds on traditions that began with its founder".	0.813				1.862
Brand love			0.944	0.629	0.934	
BLOV1	"This is a wonderful brand".	0.753				2.007
BLOV2	"This brand makes me feel good".	0.723				2.011
BLOV3	"This brand is totally awesome".	0.767				2.265
BLOV4	"I have neutral feelings about this brand".	0.795				2.376
BLOV5	"This brand makes me very happy".	0.827				2.79
BLOV6	"I love this brand".	0.824				2.649
BLOV7	"I have no particular feelings about this brand".	0.825				2.786
BLOV8	"This brand is a pure delight".	0.853				3.518
BLOV9	"I am passionate about this brand".	0.806				2.807
BLOV10	"I'm very attached to this brand".	0.745				1.942
Self-congruence			0.902	0.755	0.839	
SC1	"The personality of a brand X is consistent with how I see myself".	0.889				1.952
SC2	"The personality of a brand X is a mirror image of me."	0.886				2.180
SC3	"The personality of a brand X is close to my own personality."	0.831				1.877

Notes: OBE= Online brand experience, BC=Brand consistency, BA=Brand authenticity, HER= Heritage, QC= Quality commitment, SIN=Sincerity, SC=Self-Congruence, BLOV=Brand Love CR= Composite Reliability, AVE=Average variance extracted, C α = Cronbach's alpha, VIF= Variance Inflation Factor.

Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's Alpha and Composite reliability (CR) were used to evaluate the reliability. At first, Items having factor loadings < 0.600 throughout the sample were removed. Table 2 shows the reliability and validity values with the factor loadings for each item and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Alpha values and CRs were higher than the 0.7 cutoffs.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and CRs demonstrate convergent validity, which was all greater at 0.500 and 0.700, respectively. Every indicator had a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of less than 5, which indicates non-collinearity problems. Additionally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Method (HTMT) and the criteria proposed by Fornell & Larcker were used to assess the discriminant validity of the data. Table 3 & 4 show the results of the test, respectively.

Table 3
Discriminant validity-HTMT ratio

	BC	BLOV	HER	OBE	QC	SC	SIN
BC							
BLOV	0.719						
HER	0.648	0.694					
OBE	0.651	0.733	0.616				
QC	0.617	0.684	0.738	0.626			
SC	0.393	0.534	0.431	0.476	0.398		
SIN	0.547	0.606	0.599	0.539	0.61	0.331	

Table 4
Discriminant validity-Fornell-larcker criterion

	BC	BLOV	HER	OBE	QC	SC	SIN
BC	0.883						
BLOV	0.647	0.793					
HER	0.57	0.638	0.822				
OBE	0.538	0.633	0.527	0.842			
QC	0.528	0.608	0.628	0.518	0.744		
SC	0.341	0.481	0.379	0.398	0.331	0.869	
SIN	0.476	0.551	0.527	0.452	0.529	0.282	0.853

Note. Main diagonal: in bold, square root of the AVE.

Evaluation of Structural Model

The results have shown that R² values for brand authenticity and brand love were .485 and .637. The R² values demonstrate that exogenous factors in the research are responsible for a 48% change in brand authenticity and a 63% change in brand love; since they exceed (Falk & Miller, 1992) declared thresholds of 0.10 or 10%, the variances reported are deemed satisfactory. The bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrapping approach was used to evaluate the theoretically proposed hypotheses using 5,000 subsamples at a 0.05 level of significance. Table 5 revealed hypotheses about direct relationships. According to the findings, online brand experience has a significant positive impact on brand love ($\beta = .218$, $t = 4.728$, $p = .000$). Thus, H1 is supported. Similarly, brand consistency has a strong positive and direct influence on brand love ($\beta = .244$, $t = 4.451$, $p = .000$). Hence, H2 is supported.

Brand Authenticity as a Mediator

In this study, the linkages of online brand experience and brand love, as well as brand consistency and brand love, are mediated by brand authenticity. In Table 5 the results

Table 5
Ypohthesis testing (Direct and indirect effects)

Hypothesis	?	T-Value		P-Value	Support
H1: OBE $\rightarrow$ BL	0.218	4.728		0.000	Yes
H2: BC $\rightarrow$ BL	0.244	4.451		0.000	Yes
Mediation results					
Total effect (Online brand experience) & (Brand consistency) on brand love					
	Coefficient	T-value	P-value		
OBE $\rightarrow$ BLOV	0.350	7.425	0.000		
BC $\rightarrow$ BLOV	0.401	7.408	0.000		
Indirect effect of (Online brand experience) & (Brand consistency) on brand love					
	Coefficient	SE	T-value	P-value	
	0.132	0.025	5.244	0.000	
	0.157	0.030	5.266	0.000	
Percentile bootstraps 95% confidence interval					
	Lower				Upper
	0.084				0.183
	0.101				0.217

Note. Online brand experience (OBE), brand authenticity (BA), brand consistency (BC), BLOV (BL).

revealed that the total effect of online brand experience on brand love was significant ($\beta = 0.350$, $t\text{-value} = 7.425$, $p < .001$), and brand consistency on brand love was also significant ($\beta = 0.401$, $t\text{-value} = 7.408$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$). With the inclusion of a mediator (brand authenticity), the impact of online brand experience on brand love and brand consistency on brand love remained significant ($\beta = 0.218$, $t\text{-values} = 4.728$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$) and ($\beta = 0.244$, $t\text{-values} = 4.451$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$) respectively. The indirect effect of online brand experience and brand consistency on brand love through brand authenticity is significant ($\beta = 0.132$, $t\text{-values} = 5.244$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$) and ($\beta = 0.157$, $t\text{-values} = 5.266$, $p\text{-value} < 0.001$) respectively. The findings show that brand authenticity partially mediates the linkages in online brand experience and brand love, as well as brand consistency and brand love. Thus H3 and H4 are supported.

Self-congruence as a Moderator

Moderation occurs when there is inconsistency or weakness in the relationships between constructs and a dependent variable. Therefore, the statistical values of the moderator variable in the research define the strength of linkages between these variables. In addition, testing moderating factors may lead to new theoretical understanding. The results indicated that self-congruence does not significantly moderate the link between brand authenticity and brand love ($\beta = 0.01$, $t\text{-value} = 0.264$, $p < 0.792$). Hence, H5 is rejected.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications

The research explores the role of brand love antecedents in enhancing brand love on the online platform. It investigates the indirect influence of online brand experience and brand consistency on brand love through the mediating effect of brand authenticity. Furthermore, the research investigates the moderating role of self-congruence in the relationships between brand authenticity and brand love. The finding shows that online brand experience and brand consistency have a significant direct effect on brand love. In the first hypothesis, our study uniquely explores how online brand experiences directly influence brand love. While existing research supports the impact of brand experiences on brand love (Iqbal, Malik, Yousaf, & Yaqub, 2021), our focus on online platforms sheds light on a specific and critical aspect of consumer-brand relationships. This highlights the evolving landscape of brand interactions, underscoring the vital role of online experiences in cultivating strong emotional connections and, in turn, brand love.

Second hypothesis, while empirical studies on brand consistency and brand love are limited in the literature, our findings align with fundamental marketing principles. Brand consistency, as an antecedent of authenticity, has long been regarded as a cornerstone of building consumer trust and loyalty (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019), creating emotional connections with consumers. Our study uniquely contributes by empirically demonstrating brand consistency's significant positive impact on brand love, reinforcing established marketing theory. Consistency in delivering brand information aligned with fundamental brand values and brand promise may establish confidence and retain cus-

tomers over time. The consumer will be more likely to support brand objectives if they consistently evoke emotional feelings. When a brand can satisfy its requirements and fulfill its promise, they feel more attached to it. People prefer consistency and familiar patterns; therefore, brand consistency enhances love (Roy et al., 2021).

The third and fourth hypotheses reveal a significant and positive mediating effect of brand authenticity, emphasizing its pivotal role between online brand experience and brand love, as well as between brand consistency and brand love in the online context. This alignment with prior research (Fritz et al., 2017; Safeer et al., 2021) underscores the potency of brand authenticity as a key driving force. This interconnectedness highlights how consumers are naturally drawn to authentic online experiences promised by consistent brands (Roy et al., 2021). This finding supports the argument that the development of online platforms has strengthened brand experience innovation to enhance brand love (Mustafa et al., 2022). Brands establish online platforms, such as social media and websites, to engage with customers and provide superior value (Bruce & Lauretta, 2023). Such findings underscore the significance of authenticity as a bridge connecting brand experience and consistency to the emotional resonance of brand love, reinforcing the role of brand authenticity as a linchpin in brand-consumer relationships.

According to the findings, self-congruence does not significantly moderate brand authenticity and brand love, so the fifth hypothesis is thus rejected since the statistics do not support it. These results conflict with previous research findings, (Kumar, 2019). This difference in results, however, may be the consequence of the diverse research contexts. This previous research concerns other countries; however, Pakistani consumers place a somewhat different value on self-congruence. The findings support the argument that brands perceived as authentic and consistent in their messaging and actions are more likely to evoke emotional attachment from customers, irrespective of alignment with their self-concept.

Theoretical Implications

This research significantly contributed to the existing literature since it empirically explored the effect of online brand experience and brand consistency in enhanced brand love among Pakistani customers and mediating part of brand authenticity in this context. Firstly, the study extends the use of SOR theory in the context of providing service values through online platforms, demonstrating its adaptability in understanding various internal and external factors that influence consumer reactions (Fu et al., 2021).

Secondly, prior studies have highlighted how crucial brand experience and brand love are to the success of organizations (Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019). However, this study specifically explores how online brand experience enhances brand love in the digital environment. Thirdly, the study addresses the relatively underdeveloped concept of brand consistency, particularly in online platforms, despite its significance in shaping brand love. It fills the gap in marketing literature by examining the relationship between brand consistency and brand love in online settings.

Fourthly, the study advances our knowledge of brand authenticity as a mediator on digital platforms (Khan & Fatma, 2021). The concept of authentic brands is still relatively

underdeveloped in the online context, and this study bridges the gap by demonstrating how brand authenticity mediates the relationship between brand consistency and brand love. Customers perceive a brand as authentic when they observe consistent brand behavior and traits of heritage, sincerity, and quality commitment, which leads to emotional attachment and brand love.

Lastly, the study proposed for the first time to investigate the role of self-congruence being a moderator in brand authenticity and brand love relationships in online platforms.

Practical Implications

The study holds important implications for consumers, decision-makers, and managers. It helps customers understand the importance of online brand services in shaping their perceptions, experience, authenticity, love, and overall brand value. Marketers can enhance brand love by improving their online offerings. Consistent with earlier findings (Chen & Lee, 2021) aligning website and social media messaging, design, and functionality with the brand's identity and overall values helps establish brand authenticity and credibility.

Moreover, our findings emphasize the substantial impact of brand consistency on fostering brand love. Managers are encouraged to utilize visual and contextual content consistently across various platforms. This consistency not only differentiates the brand from competitors but also enables effective communication with both existing and potential customers. Notably, brand consistency profoundly influences brand authenticity, further emphasizing the need for brands to consistently deliver on their promises. Brand authenticity, as illuminated by our research, emerges as a linchpin in cultivating brand love and stands as a strategic cornerstone for global brand managers and marketers. Embracing authenticity in branding efforts serves as a powerful tool, fostering emotional connections with consumers and reinforcing brand loyalty (Chen & Lee, 2021). Particularly in the Pakistani market, managers can tailor their positioning strategies to align with customer preferences. Leveraging the brand's heritage, sincerity, and commitment to quality can significantly enhance authenticity, thereby establishing robust and enduring consumer-brand relationships. These implications provide actionable insights for shaping effective marketing strategies and enhancing brand-consumer relationships in the digital landscape.

Limitation and Future Direction

This study has a few limitations that indicate areas for future investigation. The findings are specific to Pakistani consumers and may not be generalized to other nations. Future studies should conduct cross-national research. Future research should explore diverse industries, cultural influences, and emerging technologies like augmented reality. Investigating mediators such as community engagement on online platforms could provide a more comprehensive understanding and enhance marketing strategies. Moreover, the exploration of user-generated content (UGC) as a variable presents an intriguing avenue. In the age of social media dominance, it could be crucial to explore the impact of UGC on

brand authenticity and love. Examining how customer reviews, social media posts, and other UGC influence customer-brand relationships could offer nuanced insights.

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