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BRAND AUTHENTICITY: A CO-CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING THROUGH THE COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTION OF BRANDS AND CONSUMERS

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Acceptance Page

This paper prepared by **RONALD A. UNTIVERO** with the title: **"BRAND AUTHENTICITY: A CO-CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING THROUGH THE COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTION OF BRANDS AND CONSUMERS"** is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Communication.

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Biographical Sketch

The researcher, Ronald A. Untivero, also known as Ron, is a seasoned sales and marketing management practitioner and consultant, an experienced business and marketing educator, and an author with a working knowledge of the other functions of management. He is the first Certified Professional Marketing Educator (CPME) in the Philippines and in Asia, an Associate Fellow in Business Education, a Certified Guest Service Professional, and a Certified Meta Digital Marketing Associate. He also has certifications in Digital Marketing and Entrepreneurship and Small Business.

His industry, entrepreneurial, and consultancy experience was gained from various business organizations such as LG Electronics (formerly GoldStar Philippines Sales Corp.), Values Media, Inc., Magnolia-Nestle Corporation, Nestle Philippines, Inc., Mars, Inc. (Master Foods Philippines, Inc.), Arctic Ice Cream Runner, The Insular Life Assurance Company, Ltd., Ateneo Center for Continuing Education, The AdviServant Publishing, RevUP Academic Mentoring Services, MarkMav – Marketing Mavericks RMP Review, U-Retrieve Information Solutions, and Electronic Information Solutions, Inc. On the other hand, his service as a business and marketing educator was rendered in higher education institutions like Treston International College, De La Salle University – Dasmariñas, De La Salle University – Laguna, Malayan Colleges Laguna (now Mapua Malayan Colleges Laguna), Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Manila, Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Calamba, Polytechnic University of the Philippines – San Pedro, Colegio San Agustin – Biñan, Rogationist College, and San Pablo Colleges. As a marketing educator, he also served as National President of the Association of Marketing Educators (AME) of the Philippines, Inc. during the academic

year 2015-2016. He has also served as a Board Director and Officer in other business education organizations.

Ron is also the author of “The SECRET Formula of Achievers”, a self-management book that combined sound management practices and spiritual values, applied them to the individual person, formulated conceptual frameworks, and advocated a paradigm or practical philosophy for achievement. To supplement this book, he conducts seminars further discussing the tenets presented in the book in order to guide aspiring achievers in pursuit of their dreams. He has also been involved in numerous scholarly researches in the capacity of author, adviser, external consultant, and chairman or member of the panel of examiners.

In terms of training and education, he has attended various management and leadership training seminars as well as earned the following degrees: Bachelor of Science in Economics at the University of the Philippines Los Baños and Master in Business Administration (Magna Cum Laude & Meritissimus Outstanding Thesis Awardee) at Colegio de San Juan de Letran – Calamba.

In the aspect of physical training and discipline, he has trained in four styles of Karatedo, namely Shotokan Karate, Streetfighting Karate, Shito Ryu Karate, and Goju Ryu Karate, as well as two styles of Aikido, namely Japanese Aikido and Tapondo Combat Aikido. He currently holds a 6th Dan Black Belt in Tapondo Combat Aikido, a 2nd Dan Black Belt (Lakan 2) in Arnis International Gavileño System, and a 1st Dan Black Belt in Karate. He is currently the Chief Instructor of the PEACE Paradigm Dojo, the Chief Instructor of Tapondo (Combat Aikido) San Pedro, Laguna Chapter, the Officer-in-Charge/Sensei of the Philippine Karatedo League (PKL) San Pedro, Laguna Dojo, and an instructor of Arnis. Integrating his knowledge, skills, and experience in

the various martial arts that he trained in with his pedagogical competency in teaching and training adults, he developed and founded the STRAIKIDO Street Defensives program and style of Aikido which can be described as 80% Aikido, 10% Karate, and 10% Arnis combined and adapted to be quite effective in the street setting.

Currently, he is pursuing the degree of Doctor of Communication at the University of the Philippines Open University since he believes in lifelong learning. He intends to use the knowledge and wisdom that he has gained and is continuing to gain from this degree program in enhancing the learning of his students and consultancy clients by combining insights from the field of communication with insights from the field of marketing and business.

Despite all of these achievements, Ron does not claim the credit for them. According to him, these are simply attempts to make wise use of the talents, opportunities, resources, and guidance bestowed to him by the Creator. Rather, all of these are geared towards the accomplishment of his personal mission of serving and contributing to the greater glory of God by creating significant positive impact in the lives of people and organizations.

Acknowledgment

I, the researcher, wish to acknowledge everyone who has contributed to the success of this research in various ways. For the divine guidance and wisdom, I am humbled and profoundly grateful to the Creator who has made all things possible when aligned with His will.

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My gratitude also goes to all the participants of this research who made this study possible through their honest and insightful responses in the interviews and in the sentence completion process.

My mind might forget but my heart will always be grateful to all my friends, relatives, colleagues, mentees, students, and former students who have in one way or another assisted me in this dissertation and in my pursuit of this DComm degree, whether through prayers or otherwise.

As for everyone I mentioned and forgot to mention, thank you very much.

Dedication

This dissertation is meant for the honor and glory of the Almighty God who provides me with everything according to His will through my Lord Jesus Christ. I also dedicate this research to my family, particularly my wife Rachel, son Ron Russell, brother Rowen and his family Gina, Marq, Marty, Moira, Lui, and Alonzo. This study is also dedicated to my late parents, Daddy Rolly (Rolando) and Mommy Rony (Rowena) who raised me and trained me to be the kind of person that I am today.

I also dedicate this study to all my friends, relatives, colleagues, mentees, students, and former students who made my personal and professional life memorable and fulfilling.

To everyone I have mentioned and failed to mention, I share this milestone with all of you.

To God be the glory!

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Abstract

Brand authenticity is a phenomenon within the specialization of brand management, which belongs to the field of marketing, which in turn belongs to the broader discipline of business. Brand management has been a growing field of inquiry in both the industry and academe from the time the term brand management was coined up to the present era. In fact, theories and models have been formulated about brand management. However, not much attention was given to the phenomenon of brand authenticity. The limited studies that probed into the topic of brand authenticity were, as expected, designed and conducted from a business and marketing standpoint. Hence, less emphasis has been given to how brand authenticity may be communicatively constituted and recursively negotiated.

This research approached brand authenticity using a different perspective inspired by a parallel viewpoint in the area of organizational communication called the Constitutive Communication of Organizations or CCO, particularly anchoring on the Luhmann's Theory of Social Systems. Aligned with CCO, the Communication as Constitutive of Brands or CCB also laid some foundation for the way this study treated brand authenticity.

This investigation into brand authenticity was designed as an exploratory qualitative research that utilized a dual approach by inquiring separately into both the brand side and the consumer side to be able to explain how brand authenticity emerges from the communicative interaction of brands and consumers. Using thematic analysis, the researcher was able to formulate the Brand Authenticity Social Emergence or BASE Theory and its component models derived from the separate but

later on integrated findings in the interviews with 7 Gen Z brand communication managers and sentence completion responses from 74 Gen Z consumers. The BASE Theory and its component models were constructed from the study's findings that brand authenticity is not a fixed attribute, but rather a continuously negotiated meaning that emerges through ongoing cycles of communicative interactions between brands and consumers. These communicative interactions, according to the study's findings, need to be balanced in terms of the brand's consistency and adaptiveness as the brand conceptualizes and enacts brand actions, as the consumers interpret and respond to them, as the brand adjusts its brand actions accordingly, as the consumers interpret and respond to the adjusted brand actions, and as both the brand and the consumers repeat this negotiation cycle. The study also found that brand authenticity is both co-constructed and socially emerges through the communicative interaction between brands and consumers. The brand authenticity phenomenon can be inferred as socially emergent because it arises from the interaction of 2 agents, the brands and the consumers, in a self-organized manner without any centralized planning or leadership dictating their actions. Their communicative actions spontaneously take place in response to each other's negotiation and feedback.

In line with this, the researcher recommends that this constructivist communication and socially emergent perspective on brand authenticity be considered by brand managers and those involved in brand communication functions to better understand and examine the balance between the consistency and adaptiveness of their brands as their brands continue to communicatively interact with its consumers. On the other hand, the researcher recommends consumers to also adopt the said perspective on brand authenticity so that they will have an empowered consumer's mindset that actively influences the meaning of brand authenticity instead

of simply accepting what the brands dictate to them. Future studies are also recommended to compare the findings of this study with insights from other generations, to qualitatively examine actual brand-consumer interactions over time, and to quantitatively validate the proposed BASE Theory and its component models.

Keywords: brand authenticity, co-construction of meaning, brand communication, communicative interaction, social construction of authenticity

Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Marketing is essentially communication (Hackley, 2013). A market is fundamentally a forum of discourse. Marketing can be viewed from different perspectives. For one, marketing fascinates its audience with moments of self-realization. From another viewpoint, marketing is criticized for its trite theories, impudent tactics, and the tendency to employ sneaky and intrusive strategies. Hackley (2013) adopted a contextualized perspective by utilizing an analogy between marketing and the mise-en-scene concept from theater/film criticism, he pointed out that marketing should be designed within its environmental context just like theater and film productions use the physical space of a theater stage or a film set to tell a story by conveying nuances of emotion, characterization, plot, and other storytelling elements through the actors, lighting, cinematography, depth of field, scenery, costume, script, blocking of actors, their gestures, and also sound. Hence, for a theater or film director to effectively influence the emotions of the viewers, he has to intimately understand the audience, its social milieu, and the craft of producing stage plays or movie making. Parallel to this, marketing practitioners utilize their tools with due consideration of the prevailing social, cultural, and physical environment to influence the responses and behavior of the target audience. However, the challenge is, unlike a theater or film director who controls all aspects of the play scenes including the props and the stage set, marketing practitioners do not actually control the social, cultural, and physical environment. Nevertheless, both are essentially communication.

A similar metaphor was proposed by Wirtz and Lovelock (2021). In marketing services, the product offering is intangible, making its quality more difficult to communicate to the target market. A service business like a restaurant utilizes not just the product, price, location/distribution, and promotions to communicate to the target customers but also the restaurant's people, processes, and physical environment. Likened to a theater, the restaurant's employees assigned at the dining area or the frontline people are the actors in the front stage while the kitchen and office staff are the back stage crew; the tables, chairs, utensils, and other equipment are the props; the rendering of the service to the customers follow an established process just like scripts in a theater; and physical environment, specifically the facility layout and overall ambience are the stage setup. In this illustration, Wirtz and Lovelock (2021) are aligned with the Hackley's (2013) mis-en-scene theater/film metaphor. Marketing, just like theater and film making, therefore, is indeed a form of communication.

Aligned with this notion that marketing is essentially communication, Seidu (2014) asserted that marketing serves as a bridge between producers and consumers to satisfy customer needs profitably. To achieve this goal of satisfying customers profitably while maintaining good customer relationships, marketing entails several functions. From an agricultural marketing perspective, these functions include researching, pricing, buying, promotion, distribution, storage, processing, product development and management, standardization and grading, market information, financing, selling, risk-bearing, and after sales service. All these functions serve to bridge the gap between the producers and consumers through the exchange of information and tangible objects.

These functions are streamlined and summarized by Kotler, et al. (2021) into the 4 Ps of the marketing mix. The 4 Ps of the marketing mix are Product, Price,

Place/Distribution, and Promotions. Product refers to the vehicle carrying the value being offered to the customer, where value is the ratio between the benefits and costs of the product. Price usually involves the monetary component of the cost of acquiring the product. Place entails bringing the product closer to the customer and making it available for purchase. Informing, persuading, and reminding the customers about the product and its details fall under Promotions.

For businesses that offer an intangible product, known as service, either by itself or as an accompanying product, the marketing mix was expanded to include People, Process, and Physical Environment/Evidence (Wirtz and Lovelock, 2021). The service providers of the business make up the People that directly and indirectly affect customer satisfaction. Process involves planning and executing the steps and interactions that customers undergo when availing of the product, whether tangible or intangible. Physical Environment/Evidence refers to the elements in the customer's environment when availing of the product, such as the venue, facilities, equipment, visual elements, auditory elements, overall ambience, etc. Integrating the additional 3 Ps in the service marketing mix with the basic 4 Ps of the marketing mix, the resulting 7Ps all enable the communication between producers and consumers, supporting the notion that marketing is basically communication.

Parallel and, at the same time, closely intertwined with the concept that marketing is essentially communication, brand management is likewise an avenue of communication, bridging the brand itself and the consumer. However, brands have already existed prior to the establishment of the brand management system (Low and Fullerton, 1994). In other words, companies have been developing and leveraging on brand attributes and brand marketing long before the institutionalization of the brand manager position in the organizational structure. Such practice, whether during the

informal or the formal era of brand management, is essentially communication between the brand and the customer. The difference lies in the brand manager role. The brand manager role in the informal brand management setup is shared among those involved in making decisions about the brand while the brand manager role for the formal brand management setup is centralized in the brand manager position. The estimated starting point of the formal brand manager position was during the 1930s while its popularization became widespread during the 1980s. Through the decades, companies adopted and tailored the brand manager model successfully across different industries, an indicator that the inherent communicative nature of brand management is not just flexible but “pandisciplinary” or present in everything as well (Flor, 2024). Similarly, aside from the concept that the communicative nature of brand management is pandisciplinary, the managerial nature of brand management can also be viewed as boundary spanning. Boundary spanning is about the creation of linkages across boundaries (Beechler, et al., 2004) of disciplines. Zooming in on the modern management functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (Lloyd and Aho, 2020), it can be seen that these functions are broad and flexible enough to be applied in various disciplines and fields of practice. This boundary-spanning characteristic of management can be linked to the multi-disciplinary origins and bases of management theories and concepts since significant sources of management fundamentals can be traced back to related disciplines such as economics, psychology, and sociology (Agarwal and Hoetker, 2007). Hence, management manifests its boundary-spanning nature through synoptic interdisciplinarity by encouraging holistic thinking about management problems and through instrumental interdisciplinarity by using knowledge from different disciplines pragmatically to solve managerial problems (Baalen and Karsten, 2012). Going back to brand management,

according to Veremchuk and Grigoriev (2024), effective brand management requires constant market monitoring with particular focus on consumer needs, adapting brand strategies to changes in the market, and making creative decisions with a considerable degree of flexibility. This shows that brand management is about observing, interacting, and communicating with the market.

To better understand the communicative nature of brand management, key concepts have to be established. According to the American Marketing Association, a brand can be a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of them (Keller and Swaminathan, 2020). The purpose of a brand is to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers while differentiating them from the goods and services of competitors. The components that serve this purpose of identification and differentiation are known as brand elements. Hence, a brand is bigger than the product, encompassing and integrating the 7 Ps of the extended marketing mix mentioned earlier to create competitive advantages using product and non-product-related means. Therefore, if the purpose of a brand is identification and differentiation, then it is essentially communication with the market.

Logically, since brand management is both a business strategy and a communicative activity, it is critical for practitioners to look into evaluating its effectiveness. Across different industries, there are plenty of brand performance indicators being used in determining whether a company's brand strategies are effective or not. The integration of these indicators is brand equity. Brand equity is the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response towards the marketing efforts of the said brand (Keller and Swaminathan, 2020). It is composed of brand awareness and brand associations/image. Better brand recognition and brand recall by the market tend to increase brand awareness. On the other hand, strong, favorable,

and unique associations or impressions by the market tend to improve brand image. When both brand awareness and brand image are high, brand equity is also high. Most, if not all brand performance indicators being used in the industry, contribute to brand equity by increasing brand awareness and/or enhancing brand image.

Currently, brand management is in the process of shifting from a narrow customer-centric focus towards a more holistic perspective (Popoli, 2017). This emerging perspective considers brand as a conceptual construction not just between the brand and its customers but among various stakeholders. Influenced by R. Edward Freeman's Stakeholder Theory, which views the firm as connected networks of stakeholder interests (Mele, 2009), the advancement towards the multiple stakeholder viewpoint puts forward the argument that a brand, including its value and meaning, is not solely created by the company's actions. This emerging holistic stakeholder perspective suggests that brands are co-constructed through dynamic interactions and processes among various stakeholders including customers, employees, suppliers, distribution channels, communities, the media, and many others (Popoli, 2017). Hence, the multiple stakeholder perspective of brand management is aligned with the theory of Constructivism (Bodie and Jones, 2015) where communication is framed as a cognitive, interpretive, and goal-directed process that focuses on how individuals construct social reality through meaning-making. Likewise, the said multiple stakeholder perspective of brand management can also be parallelized with the Interpretive School of Thought in Organizational Communication where communication produces the organization or the brand for this matter, as well as the Constitutive Communication in Organizations or CCO School of Thought where the organization or the brand is co-constructed through communication (Deetz, 2001).

Heidi Hansen (2022) supports both the multiple stakeholder view and the constitutive communication view of brand management by proposing the Communication as Constitutive of Brands or CCB. Her book claims that a brand is formed through communication processes across multiple human and non-human actors, not just the company. Hence, she treats brands as discursive spaces, not static objects. The implication of this claim is that brands do not just communicate to consumers. More importantly, brands are constituted through communication.

Since branding, brand communication, and brand management are essentially communication, the term “Brand Communication Management” is treated as a synonym and used interchangeably with these three terms in the context of this study. Similarly, brand managers and other people performing roles or functions contributing to the planning, implementation, and/or evaluation of the brand communication efforts of a brand are also called “Brand Communication Managers” in this study, regardless of their position, title, rank, and nature of employment.

As this emerging multiple stakeholder perspective on brand co-construction gains popularity, the role and importance of authenticity takes center stage. The Communication Accommodation Theory (Dragojevic, et al., 2015) suggests that stakeholders will likely converge or engage more in positive brand co-construction through communication if the brand or company itself is seen as authentic and can be trusted because authenticity reduces social distance and increases communication satisfaction.

The concept of authenticity, rooted from the Latin word *authenticus* and the Greek word *authentikos,* conveys a sense of trustworthiness (Bruhn, et al., 2012). Although authenticity spans broadly across the fields of humanities and social sciences, the term is infrequently defined in marketing and marketing communications

research, thereby often yielding numerous interpretations. Furthermore, academic research on brand authenticity is still considered in its infancy, with the existing studies predominantly of general nature and mostly designed from a business/marketing perspective.

Although brand authenticity is inherently a business/marketing concept, this study intends to investigate brand authenticity through the lens of constructivist communication. The study recognizes that there is a need to qualitatively explore the dynamics of the communicative interaction between brands and consumers that co-construct a brand's authenticity by probing the two perspectives separately and integrating the findings.

However, brand authenticity may be perceived differently by different generations. Hence, due to time and resource constraints, this study needs to prioritize its focus on a particular generation that has a potentially significant impact on the business environment in the coming years and decades. The selected generation for this study is the Generation Z or Gen Z since it is already on its way to dominating the consumer market and the working sector in terms of the number of people.

In relation to this study, the researcher has a strong interest in branding and consumer perception, especially in approaching the concept of brand authenticity not as a fixed attribute, but as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped through interaction and interpretation. Being a student of the Doctor of Communication program with particular exposure to the Communication as Constitutive of Organizations or CCO perspective, as well as having worked in the field of marketing and branding before shifting careers towards marketing education, not to mention being an active consumer who values transparency and consistency in brands, the researcher recognizes that there is a need to remain reflexive throughout the research

process. The researcher intends to maintain reflexivity by critically examining his own assumptions and ensuring that interpretations are grounded in participants' perspectives instead of his own predispositions. Additionally, since the researcher is currently serving as a college faculty member who handles mostly Gen Z students, he has gained substantial insights into how this cohort interacts with brands and responds to perceived authenticity in communication. Although this sustained experience with Gen Z as an educator may help the researcher better understand the participants' responses, it may also shape his assumptions about the said group. To manage these above-mentioned potential biases, the researcher adopted a reflexive stance by being mindful of potential biases, critically examining and noting assumptions, and clearly linking actual quotes from the participants' responses to the resulting interpretations and themes while performing the thematic analysis on the data.

Statement of the Problem

Brand authenticity has become critically important in contemporary brand communication, especially when engaging with consumers who actively interpret, evaluate, and respond to brands' communicative actions. Past studies have positioned brand authenticity either as a strategic brand attribute or an outcome of brand marketing efforts. However, from a communicative and constructivist perspective, brand authenticity is not independent from communication. Brand authenticity is constituted, challenged, and re-negotiated through interactions between the brand and its consumers.

This study explores and answers the general question: “How is brand authenticity co-constructed through the communicative interaction between brands and consumers?”

Specifically, this qualitative research answers the following questions:

1. How do brand communication managers conceptualize and enact their brands’ communicative actions in engaging consumers?
2. How does brand authenticity become meaningful through brands’ communicative actions?
3. How do consumers interpret brand authenticity in relation to brands’ communicative actions?
4. How do consumers respond to brands based on their interpretations of brand authenticity?
5. How is brand authenticity co-determined through the integration of brands’ and consumers’ perspectives in their ongoing communicative interaction?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to develop a grounded theoretical understanding of how communicative interaction between brands and consumers co-construct brand authenticity. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. To examine how brand communication managers conceptualize and enact their brands’ communicative actions in engaging consumers
2. To explore how brand authenticity emerges and becomes meaningful through brands’ communicative actions

3. To investigate how consumers interpret brand authenticity in relation to brands' communicative actions
4. To analyze how consumers respond to brands based on their interpretations of brand authenticity
5. To theorize how brand authenticity is co-determined through the integration of brands' and consumers' perspectives in their ongoing communicative interaction.

Significance of the Study

This study sheds light into the co-construction process of brand authenticity arising from the brand's communicative actions and the consumers' responses. The theory, models, and insights generated this study can be added to the body of knowledge in the fields of communication, brand management, marketing, and business. This study can also serve as a reference for future studies on brand authenticity, particularly for those taking on constructivist and communication perspectives.

In the field of communication, this study contributes to communication theory, particularly to the Communication as Constitutive of Organization or CCO perspective of communication. This research supports and widens not just the CCO perspective but also extends the Communication as Constitutive of Brands or CCB theory (Hansen, 2022) by providing its own theory with component models on a specific aspect of branding, which is brand authenticity.

This study, likewise, adds on to existing brand authenticity and branding studies with a different perspective. Instead of approaching branding and brand authenticity

from a managerial and fixed-attribute viewpoint, this study explores brand authenticity as a negotiated meaning between brands and consumers.

In terms of practical application, this study can help guide brand communication managers to shift their paradigm from designing “authentic” brand attributes, messages, and strategies to co-constructing brand authenticity as their brands interact with consumers. On the other hand, this study also enables consumers to better understand and co-influence the authenticity of brands they encounter.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This qualitative research focuses on how brand authenticity is co-constructed by brands and consumers under a constructivist mindset. The study probes brand authenticity from both sides of the fence - the side of the brand communication manager and the side of the consumer. By looking at both the consumer’s and the brand communication manager’s perspectives, this research intended to create a theory explaining the co-construction process of brand authenticity through the communicative interaction between brands and consumers. The resulting theory is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge in the fields of communication, brand management, marketing, and business.

While much focus was given to the co-construction of brand authenticity, the study did not include other brand communication concepts. Furthermore, given the previously identified time and resource constraints, pursuing this study entailed focusing on a particular generation of brand communication managers and consumers. Among the current generations, the youngest generation is Generation Beta, consisting of those born from 2025 onwards (Tunac, 2025). As babies, they

definitely cannot participate yet in this study. The second youngest generation is composed of those born from 2013 to 2024, known as the Generation Alpha or Gen Alpha (USC Libraries, n.d.). Since the members of Gen Alpha are currently 13 years old and below, they are still considered minors and dependent on their parents for their purchasing power. The next youngest generation, Gen Z, is the emerging dominant generation of consumers while also supplying an increasing percentage of the workforce and thereby possessing a growing amount of purchasing power in the economy. This was the reason why this qualitative study tapped on Gen Z participants.

Although they were separate groups of participants in this study who underwent different methods of collecting responses, both the brand communication managers and the consumers belong to Generation Z. The consumer participants were not necessarily consumers of the same brands represented by the brand communication managers. The differences in the data collection methods used for the two separate groups of participants yielded different kinds and depths of data. The integration of these two separate perspectives served as the theoretical interpretation to form the study's proposed theory and its component models.

Gen Z is distinguished from previous generations in terms of values, attitudes, and behaviors (Jayatissa, 2023). Born from 1997 to 2012 (Slepian, et al., 2024), Gen Z members are considered as digital natives proficient in the use of technology and social media. They are entrepreneurial, socially conscious, pragmatic, and diverse. Being an emerging influence among consumers and the workforce, this generation requires further research into their nature and perspectives (Jayatissa, 2023), hence making them the chosen participants of this study to the exclusion of other generations.

Operational Definition of Terminologies

7 Ps marketing mix. Communicative strategies of brands engaged in service businesses or tangible goods with accompanying services; classified into product strategy, pricing strategy, place/distribution strategy, promotions/marketing communications strategy, people strategy, process strategy, and physical environment/evidence strategy

Abductive theorizing. Conceptualization of theories by undergoing the process of data-theory-data or theory-data-theory, where the former starts with empirical data to formulate a theory and gathers empirical data again to test the theory, while the latter starts with an existing theory and gathers data that would yield a modified or totally new theory

Autopoiesis. The self-producing nature of brand meanings as they are sustained through ongoing communication

Brand. More than just a name, a brand is the totality of the customer experience that brand communication managers want to impart to their target market/audience by using brand elements, brand associations, and marketing mix strategies

Branding as communication. The act of creating, growing, and maintaining a brand using brand elements, brand associations, and marketing mix strategies to convey brand messages to its target market/audience

Brand associations. Thoughts, ideas, notions, and impressions associated with a brand

Brand communication manager. A person working or has worked in a role or function that contributes to the planning, implementation, and/or evaluation of the brand communication efforts of a brand from the brand's side, regardless of position, title, rank and nature of employment.

Brand elements. Communicative symbolic devices of brands that may be expressed in visual, auditory, and other sensory means such as but not limited to brand name, logo, symbol, character/mascot, slogan, use of colors, font style, URL or uniform resource locator, and brand jingle

Brand equity. The total evaluation by consumers of a brand composed of brand awareness, which is the result of brand recall and brand recognition, and brand associations/image

Brand image. The totality of consumers' positive and negative thoughts linked to a brand, strengthened by unique strong, and favorable brand associations

Brand management. The activities involved in communicating a brand's essence to its stakeholders, from the brand's creation to its growth and eventual termination, with the aim of increasing brand equity and connecting with its target market

Brand management models. Diagrams and/or theories trying to explain the relationships of different variables involved in brand management

Co-construction. The interactive process through which brands and consumers jointly participate or where organizational communication and consumer responses intersect to produce brand meanings and experiences, as well as to shape understandings of brand authenticity

Communication as Constitutive of Brands or CCB perspective. The perspective viewing brands as emerging from communication among multiple stakeholders, as proposed by Heidi Hansen in 2022, derived from the Communication as Constitutive of Organization or CCO perspective

Communication as Constitutive of Organization or CCO perspective. The perspective adopted by this study where brands are seen as coming into being through communication and the meanings of brand authenticity as being negotiated through communicative interactions and discourse

Constructivist approach. The approach that this study adopts by treating brand authenticity as a meaning that is co-constructed and emergent from the communicative interaction between brands and consumers instead of a pre-existing brand attribute

Criterion selection. A kind of purposive selection technique that bases the selection of participants on a specified set of criteria

Exploratory research. A type of qualitative research, usually conducted when existing knowledge about the subject matter is limited or confusing, that uses open-ended inquiry to allow participants to express their thoughts freely without the researcher influencing them

Emergence. The appearance of coherent patterns, such as a system or a phenomenon, from the interaction of 2 or more agents acting in a self-organized manner with no centralized planning or leadership governing their communicative actions towards each other, where positive feedback amplifies change and negative feedback resists change

Gen Z or Generation Z. Group of individuals, born between 1997 and 2012, who are digital natives, entrepreneurial, socially conscious, pragmatic, diverse, and collectively considered as an emerging dominant force in the economy due to their increasing participation in the workforce and purchasing power as consumers

In-depth interview. A qualitative data gathering technique that involves asking mostly open-ended questions and follow-up questions to encourage comprehensive responses from participants

Marketing. The set of communicative activities of a company or brand through product strategy, pricing strategy, place/distribution strategy, and promotions strategy for tangible products, with the inclusion of people strategy, process strategy, and physical environment/evidence strategy for businesses with service component – all

of these being aligned with the company/brand's positioning in order to connect with its pre-identified target market/audience segment/s

Purposive selection. A type of non-probability sampling that selects participants based on their degree of being suitable and qualified to answer the questions in the research instrument

Reflexivity. The researcher's continuous and deliberate process of examining how personal background, professional experiences, assumptions, and theoretical orientations may influence the research process, thereby necessitating the researcher to identify and bracket preconceptions about brand authenticity and Generation Z as well as to document transparently the analysis of data to ensure that interpretations remain grounded in the participants' perspectives

Sensemaking. Refers to the process through which consumers and brand/organizational representatives interpret, organize, and assign meaning to brand-related communication and experiences

Sentence completion method. A type of data gathering method, originally used in psychology tests and was found later as applicable to marketing and marketing communications research, that entails asking participants to supply words or phrases to complete the given open-ended sentence stems

Stakeholder. Any person, whether from inside or outside of the brand's organization, involved in the continuing co-construction of the brand and its brand essence and identity through communication and interaction

Thematic analysis. Data analysis method for processing the responses of the consumers and the responses of the brand communication managers separately, following the steps: data familiarization to initially identify the themes, coding for easy reference, collating similar topics into meaningful themes, reviewing the themes, labeling and defining the themes, and creating a write-up containing the findings and other realities emerging from the analysis

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Brand Management Models as Communicative Frameworks

A practice of growing importance in the field of marketing and marketing communication is the idea of branding. Branding has become a priority among businesses over the past decades. A major reason behind this occurrence is the increasing awareness about the role that brands play as one of companies' most valuable intangible assets (Cid, et al, 2022). Practically speaking, branding has been capitalized on to promote goods and services for profit. However, beyond commercial purposes, branding approaches can also be seen being utilized to promote the personal brand, corporate brand, investor brand, industry brand, employer brand, non-government organization or NGO brand, government or public brand, nation brand, activist or purpose brand, place or destination brand, celebrity brand, and many others (Di Somma, 2025). This spectrum of applications suggests that brands do not only function as economic tools but as socially meaningful constructs operating across various communicative situations.

The academe and the industry have been attempting to break down brands into its component parts to simplify the complexity of brands into a smaller number of parts (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998). In doing so, they proposed models based on different sets of tangible and intangible elements which extend functionality to the brand (Cid, et al, 2022). From a constructivist communication perspective, brand management models can be viewed not just as managerial tools but also as communicative frameworks that organize, stabilize, and circulate meanings about what a brand is and what it stands for. Instead of treating brands as fixed entities, this

perspective highlights that brands exist through ongoing communicative processes between organizations and consumers within the broader cultural setting. Hence, brand models contribute to the constitution of brand reality by shaping how brands are articulated, interpreted, and enacted.

However, just as there are many brand definitions as there are brand experts (Kapferer, 2008), there are also many brand management models that tend to focus on particular dimensions while underrepresenting others. Many of these models are limited by unidimensional perspectives or static assumptions, hindering them to fully capture the dynamic, interactional, and meaning-making nature of brands as they occur in practice (Cid, et al., 2022).

To address this concern, a study by Cid, et al. (2022) reviewed five widely cited brand management models and extracted their views on 12 dimensions of branding to propose a multidimensional framework of brand management. The top 5 brand management models used were those of Keller (2008), Aaker (2010), Fournier (1998), Kapferer (2008), and De Chernatony (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998 and De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). From these models, the following 12 dimensions of branding were extracted and analyzed by Cid, et al. (2022): legal instrument, logo, company, shorthand, risk reducer, identity system, image, value system, personality, relationship, adding value, and evolving identity.

As Cid, et al. (2022) summarized the legal instrument dimension of branding, brands should be protectable both legally and competitively since protectability is a key criteria for brand elements (Keller, 2008). A strong legal trademark contributes to brand strength (Aaker, 2010) while trademark quality and registration mitigate risks related to brand value. Hence, brands are legal devices protecting the brand against counterfeit and competition, serving as tools for ownership, differentiation, and

strategic advantage (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). From a communication-focused perspective, aside from protecting ownership, legal instruments symbolically signal legitimacy, credibility, and continuity as they enter communicative circulation and shape consumers' interpretation of the authenticity and seriousness of a brand relative to its competitors.

For the logo dimension, Cid, et al. (2022) noted that logos support the building of brand awareness and brand equity, identifies the origin, and communicates ownership and association (Keller, 2008). Identity cohesion, recognition, and recall are enhanced by strong symbols like logos while conveying functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefits (Aaker, 2010). Logos also communicate corporate identity (Kapferer, 2008) and company objectives (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). Looking at logos from a constructivist perspective, they serve a symbolic anchors whose meanings are continuously interpreted and re-interpreted as brands and consumers interact across contexts and media.

Moving to the company dimension of branding, Cid, et al. (2022) emphasized that corporate brands that have established high brand equity lay the foundation for the extension of the corporate personality (Kapferer, 2008) and the said brand equity to the company's new products and product lines (Keller, 2008). Brands are valuable assets for strategic success because they establish and maintain the company's relationship with the consumers (Fournier, 1998) as they reflect the corporate identity which encompasses the founder's values, ethics, company focus, and company culture (Kapferer, 2008). By leveraging the corporate name and positive brand evaluations, brand extensions help the brand evolve, increase equity, and differentiate from competitors (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). Through the CCO lens, it can be said that the company itself is communicatively constituted while the

brand becomes a key medium for narrating, enacting, and making the organizational identity recognizable to consumers.

In the shorthand dimension of branding, Cid, et al. (2022) highlighted the shorthand role of brands in aiding consumer decision-making and enhancing brand value. Brands simplify functional and emotional characteristics to enhance quick recall and faster purchase decision (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998). In other words, brands provide a shorthand device to make purchase decisions easier (Keller, 2008) through helping consumers process large amounts of information by summarizing brand attributes and relationships (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). This shorthand role influences customer choices and brand valuation, thereby making brands key assets for companies (Kapferer, 2008). From a communication standpoint, this shorthand function shows how meanings are stabilized through repetition, hence enabling shared understandings that guide action although open reinterpretation in new interactional contexts.

In the risk reducer dimension, Cid, et al. (2022) cited that brands can instill consumer confidence in their products to mitigate the feeling of uncertainty in making purchase decisions (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998). The credibility of a brand, based on the company's expertise and trustworthiness, enhances consumer trust and mitigates perceived risks in the brand and its brand extensions (Keller, 2008). Credibility also strengthens the brand's value proposition and customer relationships (Aaker, 2010). Consumers engage in strategies that either reduce uncertainty or minimize the probability of unpleasant outcome (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). In high-risk situations, brands need to convey certainty to gain consumer trust, but in the absence of risk, branding may be unnecessary (Kapferer,

2008). Communicatively, trust is not a static attribute. Trust is an emergent outcome of consistent, transparent, and credible interactions over time.

Focusing on the brand identity system dimension, Cid, et al. (2022) reiterated that building a brand identity or a unique set of brand associations (Aaker, 2010) is the first step in brand development where creating a strong brand identity means creating salience among customers, with the indicators showing high brand awareness, recall, and recognition (Keller, 2008). Aaker's (2010) brand identity system provides a value proposition to customers using the brand's identity. Kapferer's (2008) identity model forms an identity prism composed of pictures of the sender, the recipient, externalization, and internalization, based on six facets: physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection, and self-image. Hence, brand identity embodies the uniqueness and value of a brand (Kapferer, 2008). According to De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace (2011), enduring core values shape corporate brand identity to form the brand promise, which contributes to brand success. The brand identity system dimension is aligned with the constructivist view wherein brand identity is not unilaterally imposed by the organization but co-shaped through communicative interactions with consumers.

The dimension of brand image is important, as highlighted by Cid, et al. (2022), since consumers do not react to reality but to their perceived reality (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998). A positive brand image is achieved by implementing marketing programs that link strong, favorable, and unique associations – whether brand attributes or benefits - to the brand in the mind of the customer (Keller, 2008). Brand image reflects customers' current perceptions about a brand (Aaker, 2010), coming from their decoding of all signals emanating from the products, services, and communication covered by the brand (Kapferer, 2008). Simply put, brand image is

how consumers perceive who the brand is and what it stands for in such a way that it reflects how it satisfies consumers' functional and representational needs. Hence, as sales increase, the brand's image should be protected against inferior look-alike competitors (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). The brand image dimension reinforces the constructivist assumption that brand meanings are actively constructed through decoding, sensemaking, and social interaction instead of being passively received.

In terms of the value system dimension, Cid, et al. (2022) indicated that a brand serves as a mental reference for consumers, based on tangible and intangible values. In classifying 30 brand values into four levels of a pyramid, Keller (2008) positioned functional values at the bottom level, followed by emotional values, life-changing values, and topped off with social impact values. The value proposition of a brand states the functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits delivered by the brand to provide value to the customer, leading to a brand-customer relationship that motivates purchase decisions (Aaker, 2010). Kapferer (2008) adds that a brand must also be aspirational on top of providing functional and experiential rewards since the brand's intangible values help consumers forge their identities, especially when the inherent identities are weak. For De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace (2011), knowing the values that customers adhere to aids in understanding their brand choices, thereby helping in brand development by addressing the functional, conductional, social, emotional, and epistemic consumption values. Relevance of these values is gained through communication as consumers interpret, appropriate, and even contest brand values in relation to their own actual experiences.

In the dimension of brand personality, Cid, et al. (2022) mentioned that brands may adopt personality traits or human values to appear modern, old-fashioned, lively,

or exotic through their marketing activities that influence consumer experience (Keller, 2008). Brand personality, or the set of distinctive and enduring human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 2010), has 5 components: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Keller, 2008). According to Fournier (1998), consumers perceive brands as if they were human characters to articulate their own relationship views with the brand, making brand personality a strong metaphor to communicate the brand's values (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). For instance, behavioral loyalty programs help deepen the customer-brand relationship and create emotional connections between the brand and its consumers (Kapferer, 2008). Hence, brand personality is a communicatively constituted identity, emerging from narratives, interactions, and symbolic cues that allow consumers to position brands within their social spheres.

Looking at the relationship dimension, Cid, et al. (2022) stressed that since a brand is an expression of the relationship between the company and the customer, a successful brand manifests a strong company-customer relationship (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998). Keller (2008) considers that an intense active loyalty relationship between the brand and its customers is the last stage in brand development. For Aaker (2010), the bottom line of a brand identity system is the development of a brand-customer relationship. Anthropomorphizing objects such as brands facilitates interactions and gives rise to brand-customer relationships that provide structure and meanings in a psycho-social-cultural context, making brand relationship quality similar to brand loyalty (Fournier, 1998). Kapferer (2008) sees brands as the crux of transactions and exchanges between people that defines the way a brand acts, delivers services, and relates to customers. In line with this, relationship marketing is unlike traditional marketing since the former focuses on creating a loyal customer base

by identifying individual customers and going beyond simple transactions through the creation of mutually beneficial relationships where customers feel a sense of belonging, commitment, and even passion for the brand (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). In other words, brand relationships are ongoing communicative milestones, continuously reproduced, strengthened, or weakened through interaction.

The dimension of adding value, as accentuated by Cid, et al. (2022), involves the delivery of benefits beyond the functions of the brand's products (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998). Keller (2008) considers that added value, which is endowed to a product as a result of the brand's past marketing activity, is the first principle of branding and brand equity. Brand equity refers to the set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand's name or symbol that adds to or subtracts from the value provided by a product to a company and/or that firm's customers (Aaker, 2010). Aaker (2010) created a model on brand equity that is based on understanding brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other brand assets. Added value, together with brand reputation and superior quality, justifies premium pricing (Kapferer, 2008). Added value is considered a multi-dimensional concept comprised of functional and emotional benefits as perceived by customers and differentiated with competitors' offerings brought about by the emphasis on name distinctions (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011). Being grounded on consumer perceptions, value emerges through meaning-making communicative processes that differentiate a brand form competitors and justify consumer commitment.

Viewing the evolving entity dimension, Cid, et al. (2022) echoed that brands can evolve from an unbranded commodity to a reference, personality, icon, company, and ultimately a policy (Kapferer, 2008). The brand development cycle of Keller (2008) shows 4 phases: new/unfocused, niche, leadership, and commodity/eroded. The way

a brand's identity is developed and allowed to evolve influences its ability to extend beyond their competitors (Aaker, 2010). Repeated interactions between brands and consumers may grow their relationships and may change in type and intensity over time (Fournier, 1998). According to Kapferer (2008), brands may be based on products but they expand beyond a single product and follow a life cycle (De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011) composed of four phases: development and launching, growth, maturity, and decline. The four stages require different types of marketing activities depending on the newness or maturity of the player in the market. Brand returns are influenced by where they are in the life cycle. From a systems-oriented communication perspective, the evolution of a brand can be likened to an autopoietic process wherein brand identities are continuously modified and reproduced through recursive communicative interactions with their environments (Schoeneborn and Vasquez, 2017).

Brand Management Models' and the Under-Theorization of Brand Authenticity

As evidenced by the existence of numerous models and frameworks, brand management is truly multidimensional (Cid, et al., 2022). Kapferer's (2008) words "It takes more than branding to build a brand" and "It is not simply a matter of communication" actually mean that building a brand takes more than just informing and persuading customers to patronize the brand. Brand communication is about ensuring that the right message or impression is relayed effectively through both words and actions at every customer touchpoint to yield a positive customer experience and foster a good customer relationship. Failure to achieve this puts a brand in danger of being grouped with mediocre brands in a world of empowered customers who have little tolerance for the mediocrity of hollow brands that have no clear identity. This

means that in brand building, communication should not be treated as mere message transmission. Rather, communication constitutes the very conditions wherein brands acquire meaning, credibility, and legitimacy.

In today's world of empowered consumers, mediocre brands with no clear identity face the risk of being treated with skepticism. The study of Han and Broniarczyk (2022) revealed that consumers in the modern consumption environment are being empowered by broadened consumer choice, access to marketplace information, enhanced consumer voice, and more deliberate consumer experience. In the said study, consumer empowerment was defined as the strengthening of a person's rights, abilities, or authority to consume and fulfill their goals as a marketplace actor. One of the factors that empowers consumers is the broadening of consumer choice by having access to more consumption options or choices, as well as the increasing availability for customization. Another empowering factor is more access to marketplace information through the increased number and richness of information sources including those coming from other consumers and consumer watchdogs. The third factor is enhanced consumer voice through greater self-expression and consumer co-construction. Greater control over and subsequently enriched consumption experiences contribute to a more deliberate consumer experience. These four factors comprise the four domains of consumer empowerment. Consumer empowerment poses both an upside and a downside for brands, the upside allowing consumers to better appreciate brands with genuine and sincere customer concern, while the downside pushes consumers to become skeptical and critical about mediocre brands. These consumer-empowering factors clarify that consumers are not mere recipients or evaluators of brand messages but active co-creators of brand meanings.

Skeptical consumers pose a threat to brands, more especially to those with low brand equity. However, contrary to the common perception that skepticism is always negative or destructive, Khoirina, Handriana, and Usman (2025) concluded, from their systematic literature review of 32 reputable empirical studies, that skepticism has a dual nature. Skepticism has a constructive or functional side that encourages consumers' critical thinking, deeper information processing, brand claim evaluation, and third-party verification of brand information. This constructive nature empowers consumers to make informed decisions. On the other hand, skepticism also has a destructive or dysfunctional side that may breed cynicism, distrust, emotional discomfort, and disengagement towards both dubious and genuinely trustworthy brands. Such a destructive nature of skepticism can disrupt brand engagement and ruin purchase intentions. Furthermore, skepticism's effects on consumers manifest in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, influencing consumers' thoughts, feelings, and actions. Consequently, the authors recommended that brands should view skepticism not as an obstacle but as an opportunity to enhance transparency, secure third-party validations, and communicate authentically and consistently to build long-term trust. Thus, the third recommendation highlights the importance of brand authenticity in the field of brand management. In this context, brand authenticity can be considered not as a fixed managerial attribute but as a communicative achievement that must be continuously negotiated, validated, and reaffirmed through transparent and meaningful interactions between the brands and the consumers.

It is important to note that although not all past scholarly works treated brand authenticity as a fixed attribute but rather, most of them did not focus on how brand authenticity may be communicatively constituted and recursively negotiated. Some of

the past studies emphasized on brand authenticity being based on the consumers' perceptions but not necessarily being continuously negotiated.

In 2022, Hansen discussed the Communication as Constitutive of Brands or CCB perspective. She proposed that brands are not just designed but co-constructed by saying that communication does not simply reflect a brand but creates it. The CCB theory claims that the participants in the co-construction of brands involve both human and non-human actors. The human actors are the various stakeholders of the brand while the non-human actors include brand artifacts, technologies, and structures. From the CCB perspective, the brand manager is not a controller of messaging but a practical author who guides and shapes ongoing communication processes but unable to fully control them. The CCB theory is a paradigm shift from the traditional view of brand management where the company manages and controls the brand. However, brand management, even when viewed through the CCB lens, still remains as a broad discipline, thereby necessitating further studies that zoom in on various brand management constructs such as brand authenticity.

Communicatively Constructed Values and Meanings of Brand Authenticity

In an attempt to conceptualize brand authenticity from consumers' perspective, Bruhn, et al. (2012) conducted a literature review followed by empirical research. Their findings revealed that brand authenticity is a multi-faceted construct that influences consumer-brand relationships significantly. The study conceptualized that brand authenticity has four dimensions. The first one is continuity, wherein a brand's consistency over time signals authenticity. In communicative terms, this dimension reflects how consumers interpret a brand's consistency over time through repeated communicative cues such as narratives and symbols. A brand's uniqueness and

innovation, or originality, is the second indicator of authenticity, which emerges as consumers negotiate a brand's distinctiveness relative to competing brands and prevailing cultural discourses. The brand's reliability, including trustworthiness and the ability to keep promises, is the third indicator. Reliability is produced through encounters, stories, and shared evaluations of the behavior of brands. Lastly, the brand's genuineness or naturalness and the lack of artificiality also signify brand authenticity to a certain extent. Expressed from a constructivist perspective, genuineness or naturalness can be seen as a socially constructed judgment arising from consumers' interpretations of the sincerity of the brand communications. Looking at these dimensions from a constructivist and communicative standpoint, they can be regarded not as inherent brand attributes but as meaning structures that emerge through ongoing brand-consumer communicative interactions.

Morhart, et al. (2014) proposed in their research composed of qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys that perceived brand authenticity has four key dimensions: continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. Continuity is being able to maintain the brand's heritage and consistency for the long term. Communicatively speaking, continuity is constituted through the reproduction of brand heritage in discourse. Credibility refers to trustworthiness and the ability to deliver what was promised. This is also negotiated through communicative trust-building processes. Adherence to moral and ethical principles is considered integrity, but can also be described as emerging from interpretations of moral alignment conveyed in brand actions and messages. Symbolism involves the ability to resonate with the self-concept and values of consumers. In short, when consumers relate brand meanings to their own identities, values, and social worlds, symbolism is constructed. The study argued that focusing on these dimensions that signal brand authenticity can foster

stronger consumer-brand relationships. Expressing this from a co-constructive perspective, these dimensions serve as communicative reference points for consumers to make sense of brands within brand-consumer interactions.

In trying to measure brand authenticity for the purpose of investigating its hypothesized indirect relationship with SME growth, mediated by small and medium-sized enterprise or SME brand trust, Eggers, et al. (2013) proposed to operationalize and measure brand authenticity through brand consistency, brand customer orientation, and brand congruency. Brand consistency refers to aligning the promise made to stakeholders with its corporate values, strategy, and defined vision. Brand customer orientation involves generating and sustaining an organization-wide sense of brand meaning that provides superior value to customers and stakeholders. Brand congruency is the alignment between the values of the brand and the employee, manifested in the employees' commitment to the brand's values. This is particularly important for brands in service industries as well as those catering to B2B or business-to-business clients. These proposed operational indicators of brand authenticity can be viewed not as fixed attributes of brands but as negotiated meanings through communicative interactions.

Adding to the potential list of brand authenticity signals, Sansome, Conduit, and Wilkie (2024) discovered, through their qualitative study comprised of ten exploratory interviews and twenty in-depth interviews with consumers, that clarity, accuracy, accessibility, and timeliness are key characteristics of brand transparency. Brand transparency is considered to be a sign of brand authenticity. Clarity refers to the extent to which brand information is understandable while accuracy pertains to its truthfulness and correctness. The ease of accessing brand information is described as accessibility while the provision of up-to-date information is called timeliness.

Together, these brand transparency characteristics support the idea that brand authenticity is multi-faceted. The degrees of clarity, accuracy, accessibility, and timeliness, as well as the consequential brand transparency, are perceived from two perspectives – the organization's and the consumer's. Hence, they are negotiated and co-constructed through the communication and interaction between the two sides.

According to Frontify (2025), certain actions lead to creating authentic branding. These antecedent actions include defining the brand's core values and purpose, ensuring consistency across all touchpoints, empowering employee brand ambassadors, practicing transparency and owning up to mistakes, and emotionally connecting with audiences using storytelling. All these touchpoints involve communicative interactions between the brand and the consumers, making the creation of authentic branding a negotiated process between the brand and its consumers.

In relation to storytelling, Schaefer (2024) emphasized the importance of brand storytelling to create emotional connections with audiences. In using storytelling to build trust and loyalty, the brand should use authentic stories that reflect the brand's true values and mission. Gupta (2022) and Lundqvist (2013) suggested a similar idea that brands' authentic, compelling, and engaging stories aligned with consumer values resonate with the latter. Such kind of storytelling conveys brand values and create meaningful consumer experiences. The use of culturally relevant and emotional storytelling that enhances brand loyalty and emotional contagion can be seen being applied by Jollibee, a leading global fast-food chain based in the Philippines, as it builds lasting customer relationships while promoting its products (Banguis, 2023). These studies imply that storytelling is a socially situated process wherein brand authenticity is communicated, interpreted, and sustained.

Further values related to brand authenticity were yielded by the multimethod study of Nunes, et al. (2021) by identifying six components that collectively define consumers' authenticity perceptions. The six components were listed as: accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency. Accuracy refers to the truthfulness of brand information while connectedness entails the emotional link between the consumer and the brand, product, or service. Integrity is the perception that the brand acts honestly and within sound moral principles while legitimacy is the conformance of the brand with established norms, traditions, or standards. The uniqueness and novelty that differentiates the product or service from mainstream offerings is called originality while proficiency demonstrates the skill, expertise, or craftsmanship in the product or service. According to the study, each of these contributes to the construct of authenticity with varying relevance depending on the consumption context. Through these six proposed components that the study found to collectively define consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity, communicative interaction is triggered between the brand and consumers, leading to the negotiation and co-construction of the brand's authenticity.

Focusing on the mass market scenario while using interviews, documentary analysis, and participant observation in a qualitative study, Alexander (2009) gathered and triangulated research data to identify stylistic consistency, relationship to place, and downplaying commercial motives as attributes of brand authenticity contributing to the creation of a brand aura that resonates with consumers. The study showed that stylistic consistency serves to maintain a coherent brand style over time while relationship to place gives importance to being linked with a specific geographic or cultural origin and downplaying commercial motives presents the brand as passionate rather than profit-oriented. The resulting aura, coherent style, and passion-over-profit

image of the brand are co-constructed by both the brand and the consumers through ongoing interactions.

In contextualizing brand authenticity, Gilmore and Pine (2007) proposed four situation-based descriptions of brand authenticity: authentic, self-deluded, commercial, and fake. When a brand is consistent internally and externally by aligning its actions with its message and value, it is considered authentic. A brand that believes in what it does but sends mixed or dishonest signals may confuse consumers and is described as self-deluded. Brands that project an image that they do not live up to internally may be seen as inauthentic, trying too hard, or over-polished, and thus described as commercial. Fake is the description for brands that do not live by their values and communicate dishonestly. All four possible scenarios identified by the study are interpreted, negotiated, and co-constructed through communication.

For Gen Z consumers, attributes like diversity, equity, and inclusion are important values they seek in a brand (Magid, 2024). Living up to these values consistently through communication and tangible actions across digital and physical channels enables brands to manifest authenticity since Gen Z consumers seek brands that are both transparent and aligned with their personal values. Similar to the previously cited studies, diversity, equity, and inclusion are not fixed brand attributes but negotiated through communicative interaction.

In utilizing a mixed-method multi-stage process research combining qualitative exploration and empirical validation among consumer participants, Tran and Keng (2018) came up with six dimensions of brand authenticity. Virtue, connection, realism, aesthetics, control, and originality make up the six dimensions. Virtue aligns the brand with ethical and moral values, while connection establishes the bond with consumers. Realism is about perceived genuineness and everyday relevance, while aesthetics

provide artistic appeal. Control maintains consistency and reliable stewardship, while originality pertains to uniqueness and individuality. At the end of the study, the authors recommended further research to validate the six dimensions across different industries and situations. Although recommended for further study, the six brand authenticity dimensions raised by Tran and Keng (2018) are likewise not inherent brand attributes. They are subject to consumers' continuous interpretation and negotiation.

Drawing insights from in-depth interviews and case studies, Beverland (2009) recommends, in his book, seven habits for brands to build and maintain authenticity. These are authenticity of stories, appearing as artisanal amateurs, sticking to roots, loving the doing, market immersion, being one with the community, and indoctrinating the employees into the brand cult. Authenticity of stories entail creating compelling narratives that reflect the heritage and values of the brand. Showing passion and dedication instead of polished perfection makes the brand appear as an artisanal amateur. Sticking to roots means being consistent with the brand's origin and core values. Manifesting genuine enthusiasm about the brand's origin and core values is all about loving the doing. Market immersion involves deep understanding of the market and responsive customer engagement. Contributing to the community and fostering strong community relations form the essence of being one with the community. Indoctrinating the staff into the brand cult ensures that they would embody and advocate for the brand's authentic values. These enumerated insights recommend brand actions. However, they only show one side of the story because the brand authenticity that these recommendations aim to build and maintain is subject to ongoing negotiation with the consumer side.

Napoli, et al. (2014) consider brand authenticity as multidimensional. For them, the construct of authenticity has three dimensions. These are quality commitment, sincerity, and heritage. However, despite proposing these dimensions, their study still recommended that future researchers examine sector-specific dimensions such as service brands in comparison with product brands. Nevertheless, brand actions regarding quality commitment, sincerity, and heritage are also being continuously interpreted and negotiated with the consumers.

Probing into the consumption subculture of MG or Morris Garages, a brand of personal and family land transportation vehicles, the study of Leigh, Peters, and Shelton (2006) found out that MG enthusiasts' perception of authenticity is multi-faceted. For them, the facets of authenticity with respect to the MG brand, encompass the product itself, the experiences it facilitates, and the social identity it helps construct. Hence, an MG car is deemed authentic by consumers when it adheres to an ideal standard and preserves the brand's heritage. The experiential authenticity of the MG enthusiasts is derived from their driving and maintenance interactions with the car, which deepen connections between the owner and the vehicle. Their vehicle ownership and participation in the MG community also contribute to the construction and confirmation of the owners' identity, which reinforces their perception of authenticity. The study clearly showed that the creation of brand authenticity is a participative communication process between the brand MG and its consumers.

Authentic engagements within consumption-oriented subcultures, such as the previously cited MG subculture (Leigh, Peters, and Shelton, 2006) and the subcultures of surfers, skaters, and snowboarders in the study of Beverland, Farrelly, and Quester (2010), require more than marketing. Gaining authentic engagements in these subcultures involves aligning with the subculture's identity and supporting the

experiences that the members consider meaningful. Aligning the brand with the subculture's identity and supporting the members' meaningful experiences entail an ongoing communicative interaction.

In the case of Starbucks, a global brand of coffee-related products and consumer service establishments, Shirdastian, Laroche, and Richard (2019) looked into a large data set of tweets mentioning the brand Starbucks on Twitter. Utilizing text mining and sentiment analysis, they concluded that consumers perceive Starbucks' brand authenticity through three distinct facets. These are quality commitment, heritage, and uniqueness. Quality commitment cues influence consumer sentiments in both positive and negative ways. Likewise, heritage and uniqueness cues also shape consumer sentiments, with the latter leaning to the positive side. Communicatively speaking, the level of influence of quality commitment, heritage, and uniqueness cues on consumer sentiments is subject to the consumers' evaluation and interpretation of the said cues, thereby making it a negotiation process that co-constructs brand authenticity.

With private label brands, whether their products carry the retail store/chain's brand name or a separate brand name also owned by the retailer (Ndlovu and Magigaba, 2023), the quantitative study of Carsana and Jolibert (2018) discovered that there are two sets of cues that influence authenticity dimensions. Iconic cues, such as advertising or design features that create impressions about the brand's essence, contribute to the integrity dimension of private label brands' authenticity. Indexical cues, such as factual evidence that supports the brand's claims, influence the credibility dimension of private label brands' authenticity. The study further revealed that brand-schematic consumers, or consumers who are more receptive to brand information and consider perceived brands as important, are more influenced

by iconic and indexical cues than brand-aschematic consumers. Whether iconic or indexical cues exert more influence on either type of consumers, the type and level of influence that these cues have on consumers' authenticity perceptions depend on the communicative interactions that take place.

Prior to the quantitative study of Carsana and Jolibert (2018), Grayson, et al. (2004) already investigated iconic authenticity and indexical authenticity by interviewing visitors at the Sherlock Holmes Museum and Shakespeare's Birthplace. Their study treated indexical authenticity as consumers' perceptions based on direct evidence of an object's origin or history, while iconic authenticity is perceived through resemblance or symbolic representation of the original object. From their interviews, they concluded that authenticity can be both a social construction and a source of evidence since the perception of authenticity depends on the simultaneous application of imagination and belief. These findings provide an opportunity for brands to design their market offering based on which type of authenticity their target customers value. However, when consumers sense commercialization or too much profit-oriented manipulation of branding strategies to appeal to their sense of authenticity, the value of authenticity is undermined. This particular study acknowledges that brand authenticity can be viewed as a construct that is socially created through communication.

The concept of brand authenticity also applies to brand extensions. A brand extension is a new or modified product or service with strong associations with an existing brand (Healey, 2015). Brand extensions usually adopt the brand name of the parent brand to benefit from the positive associations customers hold for the existing brand. Spiggle, Nguyen, and Caravella (2018) found that brand extension authenticity drives customer acceptance of brand extensions, rooted in cultural legitimacy and past

customer experience. They further proposed that brand extension authenticity has four distinct dimensions: maintaining brand standards and style, honoring brand heritage, preserving brand essence, and avoiding brand exploitations. Maintaining brand styles and standards means being consistent in style and aesthetics by using uniform designs and sensory elements. Honoring brand heritage entails being true to itself by creating and maintaining connections with its origins in terms of specific places, specific times, and particular production methods, styles, and designs. Preserving brand essence requires being true to the soul and fundamental values of the brand in all of its market offerings which are considered as identical replicates of itself. When a brand extension is at odds with its essence, its uniqueness erodes and its authenticity is threatened. Avoiding brand exploitation can be described as practicing restraint in pursuing commercial or financial opportunities at the expense of compromising the brand's quality, heritage, and essence. Brand extensions that appear to be highly externally-driven and profit-focused are perceived as inauthentic. Regardless whether brand extensions align or conflict with a brand's essence, their influence on the brand's authenticity is subject to consumers' interpretation about the brand extensions' communicative actions, hence co-constructing the authenticity of both the brand extensions and the parent brand.

Shifting to the perspective of creative brand campaign planners, creativity in brand campaigns or creative control, boosts creative authenticity (Vaslesia, Nunes, and Ordanini, 2016). Creative authenticity then increases recognition or awards given by award-giving bodies, but does not necessarily increase liking or sales. The reason behind this is the need for trust – without the audience's trust, creative control does not automatically translate into perceived authenticity. In other words, creative control may create a semblance of authenticity and win awards, but if the audience does not

trust the brand or the source of brand communication, then real brand authenticity is not achieved. In other words, creative control enhances creative authenticity, thereby increasing the probability of winning awards given by mostly industry-based entities. However, that is only one side of the equation. The consumers have to trust the brand in order for brand authenticity to be co-constructed via communicative interactions.

According to the study of BBC Studios (TVA Editor, 2022), authentic brands are more likely to favorably influence Gen Z consumers in the Asia Pacific region in terms of loyalty, recommendations, and repeat purchases. The study further revealed that Gen Z sees authenticity as encompassing honesty, originality, trust, and quality, while preferring brands that reflect their values and sense of community. Authenticity is also associated with trust in the media sources of brand information, with particular preference for fact-checked stories and credible sources. This means that brand authenticity is co-constructed when Gen Z consumers see honesty, originality, quality, and trust among both the media sources of brand information and the brands themselves when they align with the Gen Z's values and promote belongingness with the community.

Newman and Dhar (2014) proposed the concept of contagion effect wherein products from the original factory were seen as more authentic and valued more compared to identical ones from newer or foreign production plants. This was due to the belief in contagion or essence transfer and not because of inferred quality or evidence. Individuals with high contagion sensitivity are temporarily primed for contagion where they show stronger preferences for the originals. This kind of consumers believe that products made in the original factory absorbs the brand's essence. In a later study conducted by Newman alone (2016), he argued that authenticity judgments are fundamentally essentialist. This means that consumers

believe that objects such as products harbor an invisible valued essence, aligning with the previously proposed contagion effect while coming from an essentialist perspective. Adding a constructivist perspective, individuals with high contagion sensitivity are more prone to interact with brands whose products are believed to be originals or coming from the original factory, thereby leading to the co-construction of brand authenticity.

Beverland and Farrelly (2010) offered a more proactive consumer's perspective by asserting that authentic consumption is a purposive behavior wherein consumers actively seek products or experiences aligned with their desired identity outcomes. Because of this, the perception of authenticity is subjective and dependent on the individual goals and cultural contexts. Consumers actively look for authentic cues in products and experiences to express control, foster connections, and uphold virtues in order to achieve personal identity goals. For consumers, expressing control means establishing a sense of autonomy and personal agency; fostering connections involves forging relationships and a sense of belonging; and upholding virtues necessitates aligning with moral or ethical standards. When consumers fail to find control, connection, and virtue in a brand, they usually do not identify themselves with that particular brand. Expressing control, fostering connections, and upholding virtues are the consumers' communicative actions in response to the brand's communicative actions in the form of cues that attempt to project authenticity in their products and promised experiences. When the consumers' response is positive, the co-construction of brand authenticity is realized. Hence, the proactive consumer's perspective of Beverland and Farrelly (2010) aligns with the constructivist communication viewpoint.

. In 2021, Moulard, Raggio, and Folse acknowledged that previous literature has not clarified the confusion about what brand authenticity truly means. Attempting

to shed light on the matter, they proposed three types of authenticity, each tied to a particular referent. The first type, true-to-ideal, corresponds with societal or cultural standards to show how closely a brand matches an ideal archetype. The second type, true-to-fact, corresponds with objective accuracy to demonstrate that the brand's claims match reality. The third type, true-to-self, corresponds with intrinsic motivation to manifest alignment of the brand's behavior to its core identity and not to external pressures. The true-to-ideal type of authenticity is co-dependent with the consumers' ideal standards; the true-to-fact type of authenticity is, likewise, co-dependent with the consumers' acceptance whether or not the brand's claims vis-a-vis its actual performance are real; and the true-to-self type of authenticity is co-dependent with the consumers' assessment whether or not the brand's actions match with its core brand identity. This co-dependent role of consumers complement the brands' communicative attempts towards brand authenticity through interactive co-construction.

The behavior of Gen Z consumers manifests the previously mentioned types of authenticity as Gen Z seeks authentic brands they can trust (Vasey, 2023). They prefer brands that uphold product quality, demonstrate transparency, receive positive reviews, render excellent customer service, and align with Gen Z values. These brand characteristics build trust among Gen Z consumers and, in turn, drive brand authenticity. But then again, brand authenticity is co-constructed only when the consumers seek, find, and decide to accept the above-enumerated communicative actions of the brands as authentic.

The article of Rome Business School (2023) confirms that positive peer feedback about brands influences Gen Z consumers. Genuine storytelling and peer-generated content contribute to a brand's authenticity. Intertwined with authenticity, Gen Z values transparency and social responsibility among brands. Likewise,

personalized experiences and active engagement on social media are quite important for them. Hence, sharing genuine stories, engaging with customers, personalizing experiences, and maintaining an authentic social media presence can build trust and lasting relationships with the Gen Z. The storytelling on the part of the brands and peer-generated content on the part of the consumers are some of the ways by which communicative interactions take place between brands and consumers as well as among consumers' peers. These communicative interactions contribute to the co-construction of brand authenticity.

Similar to other literature on Gen Zs' take on brand authenticity, Eblen, et al. (2024) claims that authenticity entails honesty, transparency, and consistency rather than attempts to mimic peer relationships. Valuing community over influence, Gen Z favors content that fosters genuine community connections rather than broad campaigns carried out by influencers, although influencer marketing works for Gen Z when the influencers have authentic ties with the communities they represent. However, the concept of brand authenticity still evolves, especially with the rise of artificial intelligence or AI, bringing with it the proliferation of synthetic content. As cited, Gen Z prefers brands that build genuine community connections as these bonds empower consumers to have a say in the co-construction of brands' authenticity levels, assuming the brand's communicative content is organic. Synthetic content using AI, on the other hand, may or may not necessarily lead to genuine community connections though, thus suggesting further probing.

Blanchbennett, Lees, and Moeladi (2022) distinguished Gen Zs' perception of authenticity from that of millennials. A generation ahead of Gen Z, millennials view authenticity as curated perfection, preferring minimalist aesthetics and polished presentations. On the contrary, Gen Z values the imperfection of raw unfiltered content

while embracing the messy reality. Hence, while millennials put value on carefully produced but honest brand communication materials, Gen Z appreciates the candid realism of transparent unscripted content. Although varying in terms of how brand authenticity is perceived, both millennials and Gen Z participate in the co-construction of brand authenticity through interactions with the brand.

In the field of organizational communication and public relations, authenticity is crucial in building trust and credibility (Molleda, 2010). Authenticity encompasses consistency between an organization's claims and its actual behavior. Authenticity is perceived when messages and actions are aligned with stakeholder expectations. Hence, organizations should ensure that their communications are genuine and reflect their true values and practices. In short, organizations design the communication messages while consumers decide whether or not an organization's claims are consistent with its behavior and whether or not brands' communications genuinely reflect their values and practices, leading to the co-construction of brand authenticity.

In viewing a brand's authenticity in terms of its corporate social responsibility or CSR, two core dimensions impact stakeholders' perceptions about CSR's authenticity (Mazutis and Slawinski, 2015). The first core dimension is distinctiveness. Distinctiveness refers to the degree of alignment of a firm's CSR activities with the company or brand's core mission, vision, and values. The second core dimension is social connectedness. Social connectedness is the extent to which the CSR efforts are embedded in a broader social context while addressing certain societal needs. Individually, these two dimensions are insufficient to make the CSR activities authentic. CSR programs should be both distinctive and socially connected to be perceived as genuine and authentic. The task of perceiving and deciding whether CSR

programs are both distinctive and socially connected lies on the consumers. This task is their contribution to the co-construction of the CSR's authenticity.

In advertising, brands use textual persona to speak to audiences (Stern, 1994). Although being overtly authored, this textual persona mimics sincerity. Consumers recognize these voices as "true" even though it is "made" as the brand communicates with them. In this kind of engagement, there are core tensions as the brand oscillates between genuineness and artifice. These core tensions can be seen as Genuine vs. Constructed and Authorial vs. Communal. Using both genuine and constructed messages builds real emotional connections while transparently showing its own artifice. Mitigating authorial vs. communal tension entails brands speaking alternately, coming from an authoritative crafted position and trying to sound like regular people. Paradoxically, authenticity emanates from these contradictions since postmodern audiences expect this fragile balance as they examine the text for sincerity while appreciating its crafted nature. Hence, in advertising, authenticity is performative as brands navigate the tension between realism and performance when they engage consumers using contradictory voices and transparent artifice. When consumers examine a brand's advertising message for sincerity while appreciating and looking beyond its crafted nature, they are deciding and co-constructing the authenticity of the said advertising material and the brand behind it.

When brands advertise, they normally make claims about their brand's mission, values, promise, product characteristics, and performance, among others. Consumers' evaluation of the authenticity of these claims is influenced by the type of claim and its alignment with the particular consumer's values and expectations (Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink, 2008). In advertising, there are three forms of authenticity. Pure or literal authenticity refers to the degree of factual accuracy and

verifiability of the claim. Approximate authenticity shows that the claim is generally true but may manifest varying levels of precision. Moral authenticity assesses the extent to which the claim is aligned with ethical standards and social values. Therefore, aligning a brand's advertising message with consumers' values and expectations influences the latter's authenticity perceptions about the advertisement and the brand. Verifying the factual accuracy of a brand's advertising, deciding to accepting its precision level, and assessing its alignment with ethical standards and social values are the responses of the consumers that contribute to co-constructing the authenticity of the said brand and its advertisement.

Zooming in on TV advertising, Becker, Wiegand, and Reinartz (2018), proposed a set of brand authenticity dimensions specific to television commercials. These dimensions are: preserving the brand's essence, honoring brand heritage, showing a realistic plot, and presenting a credible message. Preserving the brand's essence means ensuring that the ad is aligned with the brand's core values and identity. Honoring brand heritage entails referencing the history and traditions of the brand. Showing a realistic plot involves depicting scenes that mirror real-life situations. Presenting a credible message requires delivering honest and believable content. Some of these dimensions overlap with previously mentioned indicators of brand authenticity, contributing to the unorganized richness of ideas surrounding this matter. These dimensions fall within the realm of the brand's attempts to communicate authenticity which, when responded to positively by the consumers, will lead to the negotiation and co-construction of the brand's authenticity.

Related to TV advertising is reality TV although the latter, in this case, is not the advertising medium but the brand itself. Parallel to the core tensions in advertising messages, as previously cited by Stern (1994), between being true and being made,

a similar contradictory situation can be seen in reality TV shows where the simultaneous appeal of fantastic, constructed dramatic scenes is in constant tension with the indexical, documentary-style of everyday elements (Rose and Wood, 2005). In reality TV, authenticity is not resolved but instead, it is negotiated, with the tension actually enhancing viewer engagement. In these situations, viewers blend these elements to create “self-referential hyper-authenticity” or a kind of authenticity defined by their own interpretive engagement. Reality TV’s power lies in paradoxical authenticity where there is a mix of dramatic construction and everyday realism. Viewers do not expect pure reality but rather negotiate between performance and indexicality to form a personalized sense of authenticity. This process reveals how modern consumers engage with media and impose their own reality frames. The negotiation that takes place between the reality TV show and the viewer, regarding performance versus indexicality, reflects the communicative constructivist view of co-constructing the authenticity of the said TV show.

Moving to the platform of social media, Scott (2020) argues that authenticity or showing the real side of a brand or business in social media platforms is crucial because the trend shows that the era of perfectly curated content is already declining (Kerpen, 2019). Scott (2020) further stated that consumer trust is low, hence authenticity is a very important consideration for consumers when choosing brands. At Sendible, a social media management firm, they emphasize being one’s self online to build trust. They implement this through consistently authentic storytelling, not just a one-time stunt. They have observed that, by showing real people and values, they can achieve higher engagement, stronger connections, and better business impact. Looking at this holistically from both sides of the fence, when a brand shows its real side in social media through consistent storytelling and other content, brand

authenticity is not automatically created. Rather, the consumers respond, negotiate, and co-construct the brand's authenticity through back-and-forth communication with the brand.

As for social media influencers, they themselves can be considered as brands. They may be promoting or endorsing product brands, but they also need to take care of their own personal brand as influencers at the same time. In the study of Audrezet, De Kerviler, and Moulard (2020), which combined interviews of social media influencers with observations of partnerships between social media influencers and product brands, the researchers discovered that there are two authenticity approaches that contribute to their own brand authenticity as social media influencers endorse product brands. The first approach is passionate authenticity. Passionate authenticity demonstrates their genuine enthusiasm for the product brands they promote, aligning endorsements with their personal values, interests, and advocacies. The second approach is transparent authenticity. Transparent authenticity happens when social media influencers openly disclose their commercial relationships and provide honest opinions about the product brands they endorse, thereby maintaining transparency with their audience. The study recommended for both the social media influencers and the product brands to partner with each other only when the personal brand of the influencer and the brand's essence are aligned with each other. When influencers manifest their passion about their craft and disclose their commercial relationships with the products they feature in their content, they are actually trying to project an authentic image as influencers, which will be negotiated as their audience assesses their message, responds to it, and co-constructs the perceived reality about the authenticity of their personal brands as social media influencers.

It is no secret that online communication, such as social media, has broken down barriers between brands and consumers or between public figures and society, making it risky to carry out the “fake it until you make it” tactic (Pettrone, 2015). In the arena of political leadership, Donald Trump, the 45th and 47th President of the United States of America (The White House, n.d.), can be considered a breath of fresh air among politicians because no matter how brash or unscripted his speech is, he is, or at least comes across as, honest (Pettrone, 2015). Citing the metaphor of Will Burns (2015), an advertising veteran and CEO of a web-based creative idea generation business, Donald Trump plays the banjo well amidst an entire orchestra of violin-playing politicians. He does not play the violin because that is not who he is. He plays the banjo despite everybody else playing the violin. That is what makes him authentic. It is impossible not to notice the banjo plucking in the middle of all the violins playing. This implies that politicians and other public figures who are not afraid to stand for what they truly believe, and not simply say what they think the public wants to hear, will likely resonate well with their constituents, negotiate a better image, and co-construct a more authentic public perception of themselves as true public servants.

A study by Yang, et al. (2021) on the impact of Instagram advertising models’ genuineness and trustworthiness on perceived brand authenticity hypothesized that the visual presentation of models or endorsers influences model genuineness and model trustworthiness, consequently influencing brand authenticity, brand attitude, and behavioral intent of consumers in a chain reaction sequence. Using an experimental method to analyze Instagram images with varying facial expressions and photographic styles, the study concluded that the visual representation of models in social media advertisements significantly impacts the perceptions of consumers about the model and the brand itself. Specifically, the study revealed that models with

genuine expressions and appearing in snapshot-style pictures, as opposed to studio setup photography, foster better perceptions of authenticity and stronger connections with consumers. The models' genuine expressions and the snapshot-style pictures are actually attempts to better negotiate with the audience towards co-constructing the models' genuineness and trustworthiness, and consequently also co-constructing the authenticity of the brands that the said models are endorsing.

The findings of the previously cited study by Yang, et al. (2021) are aligned with the Meaning Transfer Model of Grant McCracken (1986). Applying the said theory to the field of advertising, the consumer good/brand being advertised and a representation of the culturally constituted world embodied in the model/endorser are being brought together within the frame of a particular advertisement. In other words, the perceived attributes of the culturally constituted world embodied in the model/endorser are being transferred to the consumer good/brand through advertising. McCracken (1989) further claimed that his model illustrates how meaning is passed on from the endorser to the brand and from the brand to the consumer. Jain and Roy (2016) probed deeper, using focus group discussions, into the meanings being transferred as described in the Meaning Transfer Model of McCracken (1986, 1989). The study (Jain and Roy, 2016) identified seven themes of endorser meaning. These were personality, credibility, physical appearance, feelings, performance, values, and cogent power. These meanings, which are being transferred from the endorser to the brand and from the brand to the consumer, are all associated with authenticity. Under a constructivist and constitutive communication perspective, the seven themes of endorser meaning (Jain and Roy, 2016) being transferred from the endorser to the brand and eventually to the consumer (McCracken (1986, 1989) are not actually fixed attributes of the endorser and the brand. They are subject to

interpretation and negotiation via communicative interactions with the consumer to co-construct the authenticity of both the endorser and the brand.

In the luxury wine industry, authenticity is an important characteristic of wine brands. However, in a competitive market, influencing consumer perceptions of authenticity is a challenge. In 2005, Beverland conducted a qualitative study that probed into the branding strategies and communications of luxury wine producers. The study revealed that luxury wine brands craft authenticity by using sincere narratives that blend industrial and rhetorical attributes. In those narratives, they emphasize handcrafted techniques in wine production and unique products. They also strongly associate their brands to their respective place of origin/production and its traditions. Highlighting their passion for wine-making, they also avoid being associated with overt commercial motives, rational production methods, and modern marketing techniques. Aligned with previously cited studies in this literature review, a brand's products coming from the original source and crafted with great skill and passion are claimed to be perceived as more authentic by luxury wine consumers. However, this consumer perception of authenticity is not automatic. It is co-constructed through communicative interactions between the consumers and the brand.

In a further qualitative study on ultra-premium wineries, Beverland (2006) expanded his findings by identifying six key attributes that influence brand authenticity among luxury wine brands. The first attribute is heritage and pedigree or the emphasis on communicating the brand's long-standing history and lineage in wine-making. The second attribute is stylistic consistency, which refers to maintaining a consistent wine style for the long term. The third attribute is commitment to quality, shown by steadfast implementation of high quality production. The fourth attribute is relationship to the place, communicated by highlighting the connection to a specific geographic origin.

The fifth attribute is loyalty to traditional or artisanal production methods. The sixth attribute is downplaying commercial motives or avoiding overt commercialism. These six key attributes identified in this 2006 study of Beverland are not automatic or fixed attributes of those luxury wine brands. They are subject to interpretation, negotiation, and co-construction with the consumers.

In the field of tourism, Kolar and Zabkar (2010), using a survey conducted across 25 Romanesque heritage sites in four European countries, found that authenticity is not just an objective attribute but also a subjective experience influenced by tourists' cultural motivations. The study further revealed that both object-based or tangible authenticity and existential authenticity derived from personal experiences positively affect tourist loyalty. The study concluded that objective attributes and the subjective experiences of tourists in cultural heritage sites influence their perception of authenticity, which subsequently affects tourist loyalty. This study by Kolar and Zabkar (2010) confirms that authenticity is not a fixed attribute even for heritage sites, which can be considered as brands of tourist destinations. Authenticity is based on the subjective experiences of the tourists. The tourists' subjective experiences that co-construct a heritage site's authenticity is a form of interpretation and negotiation between the said heritage site and its tourists.

In trying to make sense and order of the values and indicators associated with brand authenticity, Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn (2017) formulated a survey based on existing literature to identify the antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity. Their findings showed the following antecedents of brand authenticity: brand heritage, brand nostalgia, brand commercialization, brand clarity, brand's social commitment, brand legitimacy, actual self-congruence, and employees' passion. Brand heritage includes the brand's history and traditions, while brand nostalgia is the

brand's emotional connection to the brand's past. Brand commercialization is the extent to which the brand is seen as profit-driven. Brand clarity is all about having a clear and consistent brand messaging, while the brand's social commitment entails the brand's involvement in social causes. Brand legitimacy refers to the brand's credibility and authenticity in its actions, while actual self-congruence requires the alignment between the brand image and the consumer's self-image. Employees' passion is manifested through the enthusiasm and commitment of the brand's representatives. With the exception of brand commercialization, which indicated a negative effect, all these antecedents showed a positive influence on brand authenticity. On the consequence side, the study revealed that brand authenticity influences brand relationship quality. In turn, brand relationship quality influences consumers' purchase intention, willingness to pay a premium price, and willingness to forgive mistakes on the part of the brand. Similar to other studies that proposed dimensions or factors influencing brand authenticity, all these identified antecedents of brand authenticity are not direct and automatic precursors that give birth to a brand's authenticity. These antecedents serve as a brand's communicative messages that consumers interact with by interpreting them, negotiating them, and co-constructing the brand's authenticity through them.

The numerous and unorganized listing of values, dimensions, antecedents, indicators, concepts, and constructs associated with brand authenticity can be collectively described as brand experience. According to Tran and Nguyen (2022), brand experience has a significant positive relationship with brand authenticity. This implies that brand authenticity can be enhanced through strategies that provide the customer with a satisfying brand experience. Co-constructing and not just enhancing brand authenticity through such strategies actually happen if and when consumers

interact with them by interpreting them to negotiate and co-construct their customer experience with the brand and the brand's authenticity as well.

Taken together, what these studies commonly label as meanings and values associated with brand authenticity can be reinterpreted as a dynamic outcome of communicative processes which are continuously produced, challenged, and stabilized through interactions among brands, consumers, and the broader social and cultural contexts.

Consequences of the Co-Constructed Meaning of Brand Authenticity

On the other side of the fence, brand authenticity, or the lack thereof, has consequences. In the hospitality industry, Manthiou, et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study among 412 American guests of different luxury hotel brands and discovered that brand authenticity indirectly affects brand love. It has a direct effect on impression in memory and lifestyle congruence, which moderate the influence of brand authenticity on brand love. In the language of brand managers, a favorable impression in memory can be described as brand recall containing positive brand associations, while lifestyle congruence can be viewed as the alignment between brand identity and the consumer's identity and values. Similarly, brand love can also be considered as brand loyalty (Keller, 2008, Keller and Swaminathan, 2020). From a co-construction perspective, these cause-and-effect dynamics show how consumers actively interpret brand cues and integrate them into their own personal narratives. Authenticity is, therefore, highlighted by these processes as negotiated through consumer sensemaking and not just managerial intent, cultivating relational outcomes like brand love and brand loyalty.

In exploring the consequences of brand authenticity, Pratomo and Magetsari (2020) surveyed 280 participants who had purchased Adidas apparel or footwear within the previous year. Their study focused on Adidas since it was recognized among the top brands in the 2019 Top Brand Awards. The study revealed that brand authenticity positively influences brand relationship quality and brand trust, with only brand trust, but not brand relationship quality, positively affecting purchase intention. The study inferred that the relationship between brand relationship quality and purchase intention is not significant when it comes to luxury brands because of the possible influence of mass production diminishing the exclusivity. The research concluded that brand authenticity has a positive effect on brand trust, which, in turn, has a positive effect on purchase intention. In other words, the co-construction of brand authenticity by brands and consumers positively influences the negotiation of brand relationship quality and brand trust, although only brand trust, and not brand relationship quality, serves as a significant consideration of consumers in deciding on their purchase intention for luxury brands.

The quantitative study of Nabih and Alhosseiny (2024) administered a survey among 100 consumers of Eva Cosmetics, a popular Egyptian personal care brand. Their findings confirmed the conclusion of Pratomo and Magetsari (2020) that brand authenticity positively affects brand trust, which, in turn, also positively affects purchase intention. Additionally, the study of Nabih and Alhosseiny (2024) also concluded that brand authenticity has a direct positive effect on purchase intention. Communicatively speaking, the co-construction of brand authenticity positively influences brand-consumer negotiations towards brand trust, which consumers consider when weighing their purchase intention.

In the study of Eggers, et al. (2013) that collected 285 complete responses from German CEOs of small and medium enterprises or SMEs, two out of the three constructs they used to operationalize brand authenticity were discovered to foster brand trust and consequently SME growth. Only brand consistency and brand congruency, but not brand customer orientation, significantly contribute to brand trust, which, in turn, fosters SME growth. These 3 constructs of brand authenticity were cited and described in the previous section of this literature review. Hence, the study of Eggers, et al. (2013) showed that the negotiated meanings of brand consistency and brand congruency are consumers' significant considerations in deciding whether or not to trust a brand.

Cinelli and LeBoeuf (2019) revealed that brands perceived by consumers as driven by intrinsic motivation, such as the passion for product creation, rather than extrinsically motivated, are deemed as more authentic. In situations where objective product information is not available or limited, perceived brand authenticity significantly affects consumer expectations about the product quality. In other words, consumers use perceived brand authenticity as a heuristic to infer product attributes when objective product information is limited. This shows that aside from brand authenticity being negotiated and co-constructed, the perception about product quality is likewise negotiated and co-constructed.

In treating brand attitude and purchase intention as consequences, relational authenticity has a stronger influence over consumers' brand attitudes as compared to the influence of commitment to the brand, while relational authenticity also has a stronger influence on purchase intention than brand trust has. The implication of these findings suggest that a brand's relational authenticity can be used as a basis for developing the brand positioning (Ilicic and Webster, 2014). Brand positioning is

essentially how a brand distinguishes itself from its competitors and inculcating this differentiation in the mind of its target market (Kotler, Keller, and Chernev, 2021). Since relational or negotiated authenticity, as compared to the company's commitment to the brand, shows a stronger influence on consumers when they form their attitudes towards the brands, this means that not only brand authenticity is co-constructed but also brand attitudes. Similarly, the study also confirms that negotiated meanings of brand authenticity strongly influence consumers when making their purchase intent, implying that purchase intent is also negotiated and co-constructed. Furthermore, as the study recommended for brand managers to use relational authenticity as a major basis for brand positioning or differentiating their brands, the study indirectly acknowledged that brand authenticity and even brand positioning are co-constructed through brand-consumer interaction.

As consequential effects of brand authenticity, Tran and Nguyen (2022) hypothesized and confirmed in their study that brand authenticity has a significant direct positive effect on both brand equity and customer satisfaction. Aside from its direct positive effect, brand authenticity also has an indirect positive effect on customer satisfaction through brand authenticity's influence on brand equity which has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. Since brand equity and customer satisfaction are both formed in the minds of consumers based on brand and product cues (Keller and Swaminathan, 2020), they are both negotiated and co-constructed, just like brand authenticity itself.

Probing into the consequences of brand authenticity among ethnic restaurant customers, Lu, Gursoy, and Lu (2015) concluded that consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity significantly and positively affect brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Brand awareness includes

recognition and recall of the brand. Brand association refers to the strength and favorability of brand-related thoughts. Perceived quality is the consumer's overall judgment about the brand's overall excellence and superiority. Brand loyalty is the consumers' commitment to repeat purchase and continued patronage of the brand. Aligned with the previous study cited, the consequences of brand authenticity identified by Lu, Gursoy, and Lu (2015) such as brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty are not fixed attributes of the brand but negotiated and co-constructed meanings.

Just like social media influencers, as discussed in the previous section of this literature review where the said influencers themselves are personal brands that have their own levels of perceived authenticity (Audrezet, De Kerviler, and Moulard 2020), celebrities are also brands that have their own authenticity as perceived by their audience and followers (Ilicic and Webster, 2016). When celebrities endorse brands or products, their celebrity brand authenticity positively influences consumers' purchase intentions. These findings of Ilicic and Webster (2016) are can be explained by the Transfer Model of Grant McCraken (1986, 1989) and the study of Jain and Roy (2016) that assert that meanings or perceptions about the endorsers are being transferred to the brand/product that they are endorsing. Through the lens of constructivism and constitutive communication, this transfer of meaning from the endorser towards the brand is viewed as negotiation and co-construction of meaning.

Along the line of influencer authenticity, Baghel (2023) claimed that influencers perceived as authentic and trustworthy can significantly enhance brand trust and influence the purchasing decisions of Gen Z consumers. In other words, brands being endorsed by influencers with the same values as embodied by the brand are more likely to build lasting relationships with Gen Z consumers. Hence, influencer

authenticity contributes to brand trust, which, in turn shapes consumer behavior including purchase decisions. Another way to put it is when influencers are perceived as authentic and trustworthy, or their co-constructed brand authenticity is deemed high, they can co-construct lasting relationships with Gen Z consumers as well as negotiate for brand trust, purchase decisions, and other favorable consumer behaviors.

In terms of online consumption behavior, Davis, Sheriff, and Owen (2019) argued that authenticity is a multi-dimensional construct composed of iconic authenticity, identification authenticity, practical/impersonal authenticity, production/situation authenticity, social authenticity, moral authenticity, pure approximate authenticity, and virtuous-self authenticity. Despite being multi-dimensional, their study claimed that the said dimensions collectively influence consumers' online consumption behaviors while being mediated and moderated by the consumers' rational and experiential thinking processes. The rational and experiential thinking processes that mediate and moderate the influence of the multi-dimensional constructs of authenticity on consumers' online consumption behaviors are actually the consumers' contribution to the process of co-constructing brand meanings and negotiating consumption behaviors.

While the previous section of this literature review interprets the various values associated with brand authenticity not as fixed attributes but as communicative brand cues subject to consumers' interpretation and negotiation to continuously co-construct the meaning of a brand's authenticity, this section shows that the consequences of brand authenticity are also continuously co-constructed through the interactive communication between brands and consumers.

The Authenticity of Staged Authenticity

In the field of tourism, MacCannell (1973) claimed that tourists often search for authentic experiences but are usually offered staged or carefully constructed versions of authenticity. Although the front regions of tourist destinations, such as hotel lobbies, souvenir areas, and guided cultural shows, are clearly presented as public spaces where performances are designed for tourists, the back regions are private spaces where real life supposedly takes place. These back regions are designed to make the tourists believe that they are witnessing a raw and more authentic experience, hiding its state of being an engineered form of spontaneity. Examples of these back regions of tourist destinations that are strategically staged are traditional village performances, recreated historical environments, and controlled cultural interactions projected as genuine local life. MacCannell (1973) further emphasized that authenticity is not black or white or simply real or fake, but rather a continuum between front and back regions with intermediate spaces designed for tourists. This implies that authenticity is socially constructed, with authenticity perceptions being dependent on presentation and belief. The idea of a socially constructed authenticity or engineered spontaneity can also be applied to brands.

Probing into how tourists perceive staged or reconstructed cultural experiences, Chhabra, Healy, and Sills (2003) challenged the assumption that only historically original traditions are authentic and staged cultural experiences are automatically fake. They argued that staging does not necessarily destroy authenticity because authenticity is perceived, making it a subjective reality rather than universally agreed upon. According to them, being staged does not necessarily mean superficial as cultural traditions can retain meaning even when relocated and re-created. Furthermore, cultures evolve naturally over time, debunking the idea of a single fixed

original authenticity. Relating this to brands, authenticity does not require historical purity among brands since consumers mostly evaluate authenticity through symbolic meaning and interaction, thereby forming their perceived authenticity and coherence about the brand rather than basing it on objective originality.

Agreeing with MacCannell (1973) that authenticity is not a simple distinction between real and fake, Atasoy (2021) argued that since people define authenticity in different ways, they may still perceive staged and commercialized tourism experiences as authentic as they seek meaningful experiences, emotional connection, cultural depth, and escape from the perceived artificiality of modern everyday life. This suggests that authenticity is subjective, socially constructed, emotionally experienced, and negotiated continually among tourists, hosts, cultures, and tourism destinations and establishments.

Moving beyond staged authenticity, Indika (2025), emphasized the shifting from seeing culture performed in staged commercialized tourism experiences to living culture with the locals through immersion. Contradicting the concept of MacCannell (1973) regarding front stage cultural performance, Indika (2025) claims that authenticity can exist in unperformed lived reality where tourists experience and value living the ordinary local life, blurring the boundary between the tourist space and the local space. This presents a broader tourism trend where everyday experiences, participation, and emotional connection with the locals define authenticity better than staged cultural displays. In the context of brand authenticity, living and experiencing the brand through interaction may be interpreted by consumers as more authentic as compared to simply watching the brand's advertisements and marketing communications.

Conceptualizing and Theorizing Brand Authenticity

In conceptualizing authenticity, there are three perspectives (Morhart, 2014) that have emerged in the past decades, which Yuan, et al. (2015) referred to as archetypes. First, the objectivist perspective sees authenticity as a quality of an entity that can be objectively measured and evaluated by experts (Trilling, 1972). Second, the constructivist perspective considers authenticity as the projection of one's own beliefs, expectations, and perspectives onto an entity (Wang, 1999). Third, the existentialist perspective treats authenticity as being related to the self or being true to one's self (Golomb, 1995, 2012). Considering all these perspectives, Leigh, Peters, and Shelton (2006) claimed that the three perspectives are intertwined, each contributing to the authenticity of brands.

Yuan, et al. (2015) traced the evolution of authenticity as a theoretical concept through an extensive review of literature. In the process of doing so, they came across the three archetypes of authenticity in the academic discourse: objective authenticity, existential authenticity, and constructive authenticity. Objective authenticity is rooted on tangible factual features. Existential authenticity emphasizes personal, subjective, and lived experiences. Constructive authenticity refers to the type of authenticity that is socially constructed and shaped by narratives and interpretations. The study spanned and probed the historical progression from early concerns about genuineness and heritage to the post-modern concept of co-constructed authenticity. Authenticity, as discovered in literature, is no longer a marginal attribute but a central multi-dimensional concept in marketing theory that emphasizes both attributes and processes. Authenticity has also evolved by emphasizing consumer interpretations and interactions, and no longer confined to producer intent. The implication of these developments for businesses is the need for authenticity to be integrated in strategic

decision-making and not just treated as a marketing embellishment. Despite these developments in the concept of authenticity, Yuan, et al. (2014) identified areas for potential enlightenment through further research. First, conceptual clarity is needed to better define brand authenticity and establish an organized taxonomy of antecedents and consequences. Second, there is the need to investigate how brand authenticity plays out in different contexts such as services, global markets, digital spaces, and even different audiences such as the Gen Z and future generations. Third, there is a need for empirical studies focusing on consumer-based perceptions aside from producer-based perceptions of brand authenticity. Eventually, there is also a need to develop tools to measure brand authenticity in different situations using different bases.

Collating and summarizing the three authenticity perspectives, Table 1 shows a typology of the three archetypes of authenticity:

Table 1

Archetypes of Authenticity

Archetype of Authenticity	Definition of Authenticity	How Authenticity is Produced	Key Risk	View on Brand Authenticity
Objective	Fidelity to origin or true form	Verification against history, origin, or standards	Over-reliance on essentialism (too rigid)	Fixed attribute planned by the brand side
Constructive	Socially agreed meaning of authenticity	Negotiation, interpretation, shared belief	Relativism (anything can be authentic)	Continuously negotiated
Existential	Being true to one's self in lived experience	Self-reflection, lived experience, emotional truth	Subjectivism (hard to evaluate externally)	Alignment and consistency of brand actions with the brand's values

Sodergren (2021) conducted a review of literature on brand authenticity published from 1994 to 2019. Three primary streams of research were identified. One of the research streams identified was about the characteristics that distinguish the real thing from the fake. This stream focused on identifying cues and attributes associated with authentic brands. Another research stream identified was the legitimizing function of authenticity, where studies examined how authenticity serves as a legitimizing force for brands that influence consumer perceptions and brand equity. The third research stream was the emotional and moral aspects of authentication. Researches in this stream emphasized on the emotional connections and moral considerations that consumers associate with authentic brands. In the end, Sodergren (2021) concluded that although brand authenticity has become a central concept in marketing, there is a lack of consensus on its definition and measurement. The article identified opportunities for future research in developing more generalizable frameworks, exploring the role of consumer participation in co-constructing brand authenticity, investigating brand authenticity in different marketing and cultural contexts such as Gen Z and other emerging market segments, and looking into the potential consequences of inauthentic brand practices.

Despite around 25 years of academic interest on brand authenticity, there is no universally accepted definition or measurement scale for it, as found out by Campagna, et al., (2023) when they conducted an extensive literature review on brand authenticity. Existing definitions and scales only address specific aspects, yielding a fragmented understanding of the concept. They are often disjointed and outdated, unable to capture brand authenticity in a holistic way. Campagna, et al. (2023) came up to the conclusion that there is a need to re-conceptualize brand authenticity to address the needs of today's consumers.

Synthesis of Literature Cited

Branding has become a central part of marketing practice. Brands are now being treated by companies as one of their most valuable assets (Cid, et al., 2022). Aside from its commercial role in promoting goods and services, brand strategies are also now being practiced for personal brands, corporate brands, investor brands, industry brands, employer brands, non-government organization or NGO brands, government or public brands, nation brands, activist or purpose brands, place or destination brands, celebrity brands, and many others (Di Somma, 2025). Because of this growing interest in brand management, academicians and practitioners have probed into the said field and created models in an attempt to simplify the complexity of brands by capturing the tangible and intangible elements. However, the most popular brand management models are often unidimensional, thereby failing to address the inherent multidimensional nature of branding. One of the past studies (Cid, et al., 2022) about brand management reviewed five influential brand management models (Keller, 2008; Aaker, 2010; Fournier, 1998; Kapferer, 2008; De Chernatony and Riley, 1998; De Chernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011) and extracted 12 dimensions in branding: legal instrument, logo, company, shorthand, risk reducer, identity system, image, value system, personality, relationship, adding value, and evolving identity (Cid, et al. 2022). Although these frameworks have substantially expanded the theoretical base of branding, they largely adopt a managerial and structural perspective. They often treat brands as strategic entities rather than socially constructed phenomena emerging through interactive communication.

The past studies and frameworks may have contributed to the richness of the body of knowledge in brand management, but lack the explicit emphasis on brand

authenticity. In line with this, Kapferer (2008) asserted that it takes more than branding to build a brand, accentuating that customer trust is gained through delivering authentic and consistent experiences at every touchpoint. Amplifying this issue is the growing trend of consumer empowerment, characterized by the strengthening of consumers' rights, abilities, and authority in the marketplace. Broadened choice, access to information, enhanced voice, and deliberate experience are the 4 dimensions that empower consumers (Han and Broniarczyk, 2022) but also lead to increased skepticism towards brands that lack authenticity.

Skepticism has a constructive nature and a destructive nature (Khoirina, et al., 2025). Constructive skepticism drives critical evaluation and informed decision-making. On the other hand, destructive skepticism fosters cynicism, distrust, and disengagement. To mitigate the risks posed by destructive skepticism, scholars emphasized that skepticism should be treated as an opportunity to demonstrate transparency, seek third-party validation, and communicate authentically with consistency. Hence, it is crucial to integrate brand authenticity into brand management models to help brands build long-term trust and resilience in this era of empowered consumers. These discussions imply that brand authenticity is a relational outcome influenced by how consumers interpret and evaluate brand actions and communications over time, rather than simply a managerial input.

In investigating brand authenticity, various scholars, researchers, and authors have cited their own lists of antecedents, values, and concepts associated with brand authenticity based on their research findings and conceptualization. Instead of viewing the brand authenticity antecedents, values, and concepts as fixed inputs under the complete control of the brands, they can be re-conceptualized as symbolic, relational,

and communicative resources through which brand authenticity is co-constructed and negotiated by consumers. These resources include:

- Values, heritage, and purpose
    - Reflects the company's core values, purpose, and mission
    - Embodies the brand's heritage, triggers nostalgia, and shows cultural roots
    - Preserves brand essence and honors traditions
    - Fulfills social commitment and corporate social responsibility or CSR
- Consistency, clarity, and reliability
    - Consistent across all touchpoints
    - Maintains brand and stylistic consistency
    - Shows continuity and remains consistent over time
    - Manifests brand clarity
    - Maintains brand congruency with customers
    - Accurate in communication and actions
- Integrity, trust, and ethics
    - Practices transparency and honesty; owns up to mistakes
    - Integrity, credibility, and legitimacy
    - Keeps promises
    - Follows moral and ethical principles
    - Uses/relays fact-checked information
    - Avoids exploitative actions and downplays commercial motives
- Genuineness, originality, and naturalness
    - Genuineness/naturalness

    - Sincerity/lack of artificiality
    - Originality, uniqueness, and innovation
    - Sincerity
    - Distinctiveness and aesthetics
    - True-to-ideal, true-to-fact, true-to-self
    - Pure/literal, approximate, and moral authenticity
- Connection and relationships
    - Connects emotionally with audiences using storytelling
    - Social/community connectedness and consumer identity expression
    - Brand symbolisms aligned with consumer values
    - Subcultural and peer-group alignment of the brand
    - Geographic or cultural relationship to place of origin
- Employees, ambassadors, and passion
    - Employees as brand ambassadors
    - Employees show passion about the brand
    - Congruency between employees and brand values
- Quality, craftsmanship, and proficiency
    - Commitment to quality and excellence
    - Reliability and proficiency
    - Product, experiential, and social identity authenticity
    - Uses handcrafted/artisanal methods
    - Aesthetics
    - Cultural legitimacy of brand extensions
- Representation, media, and cues

    - Credible and realistic messages
    - Peer feedback and peer-generated content
    - Endorser meanings and credibility
    - Personalization and engagement in social media
    - Iconic and indexical cues in brand communication
    - Balancing creative control and narrative authenticity such as contradictions and paradoxes in brand advertising and communication

On the other hand, the consequences and effects of brand authenticity, as identified in the various literature reviewed, can be understood not as linear effects, but as emergent outcomes of ongoing interactions between brands and consumers. These outcomes are reflective of how consumers internalize, validate, or contest brand meanings through multiple encounters, mediated experiences, and social discourse. These emergent outcomes include:

- Brand-consumer relationships
    - Lifestyle congruence or the alignment between the brand and consumer identity/values
    - Brand love – indirectly through impression in memory and lifestyle congruence
    - Brand relationship quality
    - Brand loyalty or commitment to repurchase and continued patronage as a consequence of brand love
- Trust and credibility
    - Brand trust

    - Purchase decision indirectly motivated by authenticity through brand trust
    - Transfer of meaning from endorser/celebrity authenticity to the brand
- Consumer perceptions and attitudes
    - Impression in memory – favorable brand recall with positive brand associations
    - Brand attitude
    - Consumer expectations about product quality, especially when objective information is limited
    - Perceived quality
    - Brand associations or the strong and favorable thoughts about the brand
    - Brand awareness composed of brand recognition and brand recall
- Satisfaction, brand equity, and growth outcomes
    - Customer satisfaction – directly and indirectly through brand equity
    - Brand equity – directly and indirectly through customer satisfaction
    - SME growth through brand trust
- Behavioral intentions and actions
    - Purchase intention – directly and indirectly through brand trust
    - Consumers' online consumption behaviors - mediated by rational and experiential thinking

- Strategic implication
    - Being an authentic brand as a brand positioning strategy

A practice in the tourism industry that provides staged cultural experiences for tourists by designing front stages or tourist spaces and back stages or local spaces (MacCannell, 1973) is not necessarily perceived by tourists as inauthentic (Chhabra, et al., 2003) since the authenticity of staged experiences is perceived subjectively and not confined to a universally defined standard of authenticity. In effect, because authenticity is subjective, socially constructed, emotionally experienced, and continually negotiated, staged commercialized cultural tourism experiences may still be perceived as authentic when tourists find in them meaningful experiences, emotional connection, cultural depth, and escape from the perceived artificiality of modern everyday life (Atasoy, 2021). However, beyond staged authenticity, Indika (2025) found that having everyday experiences, participation, and emotional connection with the locals through living and interacting with them in their daily activities tend to define authenticity perceptions better than staged cultural experiences.

In conceptualizing and theorizing about brand authenticity, past literature shows three major perspectives: the objectivist perspective wherein authenticity is seen as objectively measurable (Trilling, 1972), the constructivist perspective wherein authenticity is viewed as a projection of beliefs and expectations (Wang, 1999), and the existentialist perspective wherein authenticity is being true to oneself (Golomb, 1995, 2012). These three perspectives are interrelated and have their respective contributions to brand authenticity (Leigh, et al., 2006). They are not mutually exclusive as they intersect in shaping how brands enact authenticity and how consumers interpret them. Aligned with these three perspectives, the concept of brand authenticity

evolved into three archetypes: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity, and existential authenticity (Yuan, et al., 2015). Objective authenticity sees brand authenticity as a planned fixed attribute; constructive authenticity sees brand authenticity as continuously negotiated; and existential authenticity sees brand authenticity as being aligned and consistent with the brand's values. As the body of knowledge about brand authenticity grew, Yuan, at al. (2015) highlighted the need for further research on the conceptual clarity of brand authenticity, preferably through consumer-centered studies.

In tracing the progress of research about brand authenticity, three research streams were identified by Sodergren (2021) from existing literature: studies focusing on authenticity cues and attributes, probes into authenticity as a source of legitimacy, and investigations into the emotional and moral dimensions of authenticity found in brand-consumer relationships. Although these streams offered an advanced understanding of brand authenticity, they are, to a great extent, quantitative and variable-centered, providing limited insight into how brand authenticity is communicatively co-produced in everyday brand-consumer interactions.

In 2023, Campagna, et al. confirmed the lack of a unified definition and comprehensive measurement of brand authenticity. They argued that existing frameworks are either fragmented, outdated, or both. They particularly highlighted the need for re-conceptualizations of brand authenticity that would provide a holistic point of view and would reflect current expectations and practices, especially those of Gen Z, a generation that prefers sincerity, consistency, and relational alignment enacted through communication rather than picture-perfect brand claims.

In response to these gaps, this present study positions brand authenticity as a co-construction of meaning emerging through the communicative interaction between

brands and consumers. Although some existing studies have touched on brand authenticity as perceptions of consumers, for this research, brand authenticity is not treated as an inherent brand property nor simply based on consumer perceptions. Alternatively, this investigation seeks to understand how brand authenticity is constructed, reinforced, or diminished through direct interactions, discourse, relationships, and mediated encounters. By drawing insights from consumers and brand communication managers, the study aims to develop a model or theory that would holistically represent the co-construction process that gives meaning to brand authenticity.

Chapter III

FRAMEWORKS OF THE STUDY

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded on the Communicative Constitution of Organizations or CCO perspective, particularly Luhmann's point of view. Basing this study on the CCO perspective is quite timely since CCO is currently growing in terms of focus and attention in the area of theoretical development in organizational communication studies (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014, Schoeneborn and Vasquez, 2017). The CCO perspective has three main schools of thought, namely the Montreal School of Organizational Communication, the Four-Flows Model, and Luhmann's Theory of Social Systems (Schoenborn, et al., 2014). Specifically utilizing Luhmann's Theory of Social Systems as a foundation for theorizing in this study is appropriate since brand-consumer interactions can actually be considered as a social system, although not a formal organization.

Niklas Luhmann's Theory of Social Systems was inspired by the concept of autopoiesis developed by Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (Schoeneborn and Vasquez, 2017). Autopoiesis is the process by which systems reproduce their own elements such as carbohydrates and nucleic acid (Eusebius, et al., 2014). Luhmann applied this notion of autopoiesis to the social realm, calling the said process of internal determination of the order of reproduction as self-organization. This means that in social systems, communication constitutes the systems that produce the very elements they consist of. According to Luhmann, social systems are constituted by interconnected and recursively related events of

communication (Schoeneborn and Vasquez, 2017). In other words, communication is the basic element that drives the autopoiesis of social systems. Furthermore, this communication that constitutes the social system is composed of three components: information, utterance, and understanding. These three components are selected from a repertoire of options: the information that is communicated is selected from different options; utterance is a selection of a particular reason and method of communication from a number of options; and understanding is selected from several possible meanings of the communication. When all these three components occur, they constitute communication. Luhmann, therefore, views society as composed of multiple interacting systems continuously constituted through communication (Eusebius, et al., 2014).

Linking the CCO perspective with brand management, the CCB or Communication as Constitutive of Brands perspective (Hansen, 2022) applies the main idea of CCO to brand management. CCB shifts brand management from being static and sender-oriented to seeing brands as dynamic and socially negotiated. This means that communication creates rather than reflects brands, wherein the brand manager is a practical author who shapes but does not fully control the brand and its meanings. CCB also recognizes that brands are co-constructed by multiple human stakeholders and non-human agents like brand artifacts, technologies, and structures that interact in conversational spaces such as online, offline, internal, and external arenas where meanings are negotiated. The role of the non-human agents is sense-giving or influencing how humans interact and interpret brand messages. The CCB theory serves as a new theoretical basis for brand strategy-making and brand research. The author of the CCB theory encourages the continued development of branding research using a communication perspective instead of purely marketing,

management, or design perspectives. Hence, the CCB theory paves the way for brand authenticity research from a communication perspective.

Summarizing the relationships among the Communication as Constitutive of Organization or CCO perspective, Luhmann's CCO perspective, Luhmann's Theory of Social Systems, and the Communication as Constitutive of Brands or CCB perspective, it can be said that Luhmann's Theory of Social Systems is the broader theory on which Luhmann's CCO perspective was based. It treats social systems as communications that recursively connect with other communications. On the other hand, Luhmann's CCO perspective is one of the major schools of thought, belonging to the CCO perspective. Luhmann's CCO perspective applies Luhmann's theory to understand how communication constitutes organizations. The CCB perspective is the application or extension of the CCO perspective to the phenomenon of brands and branding.

Conceptual Framework

Adopting Luhmann's CCO perspective, this study treats the co-construction of brand authenticity as constituted by the continuing communication between brands and consumers. This continuous reproduction of brand meaning through communication is the "autopoiesis" of brand authenticity. In using Luhmann's viewpoint, brand authenticity cannot be considered as a stable brand attribute, a sender-controlled message, or an objective property of products. Instead, brand authenticity is a temporarily stabilized meaning that is reproduced through recurring communicative events. Hence, it is dependent on the continued recognition by consumers. In other words, brands do not have authenticity, nor do consumers

possess authenticity judgments. Rather, authenticity occurs when continuing communication is understood as authentic. Hence, brand authenticity is fragile or provisional and must be continuously re-negotiated and reproduced.

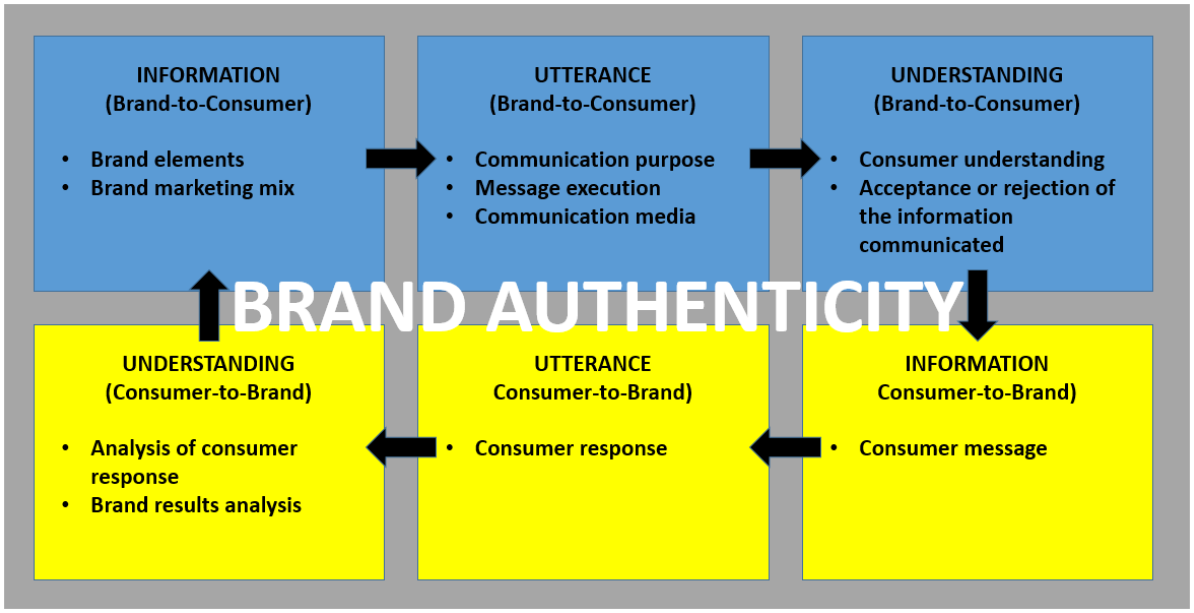
Aligned with the CCB theory (Hansen, 2022), this study adopts the approach that treats brands as dynamic, negotiated, and co-constructed through constitutive communication. This study applies the CCB perspective on the brand authenticity phenomenon by viewing brand authenticity as co-constructed through the continuous communicative interaction between brands and consumers.

Breaking down the brand-consumer communication, the study investigates the components of the said communication: Information, Utterance, and Understanding. These three components are present in both sides of the brand-consumer interaction covering both the brand-to-consumer communicative actions and the consumer-to-brand communicative actions. The Brand-to-Consumer Information includes the brand elements and the marketing mix strategies of the brand; the Brand-to-Consumer Utterance covers the purpose, message execution, and media used in the communication; the Brand-to-Consumer Understanding is the consumer's acceptance or rejection of the information communicated. On the other side, the Consumer-to-Brand Information refers to the consumer's feedback message; the Consumer-to-Brand Utterance includes the reason behind and the delivery of the consumer feedback manifested through words, actions, or otherwise; the Consumer-to-Brand Understanding is the interpretation of the consumer feedback by the brand communication managers, which may trigger reinforcements or adjustments in the brand's succeeding Brand-to-Consumer Information to keep the communication loop process going. This recurring communication process, manifested through the communicative interaction of both parties, constitutes the authenticity of the brand.

Hence, the conceptual framework of this study operationalizes information, utterance, and understanding into a recurring brand-consumer communication loop, thereby serving as the analytical adaptation of the above-mentioned theoretical concepts for the purposes of this study. Figure 1 illustrates the components of the Brand-to-Consumer and Consumer-to-Brand communicative actions. The arrows in the diagram indicate that this communicative process occurs in a continuous recurring loop.

Figure 1.

Conceptual Framework



Chapter IV

METHODOLOGY

Research Locale

The study was conducted among the members of Generation Z in the Philippines. Gen Z was the chosen group for the study because this generation is currently embracing the role of decision-makers, watchdogs, and catalysts for reform in society. They are not passive citizens but rather, they expect participatory governance, timely feedback mechanisms, and the opportunity to influence policies and strategies (Britanico, 2025). Hence, this study probes into the perspectives of both the Gen Z consumer and the Gen Z brand communication manager about brand authenticity.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority 2020 census (Juego, 2024), Gen Z consumers comprise 38% of the Philippine population and consequently the Philippine consumer market since everyone is essentially a consumer. Additionally, John Brylle L. Bae, the Research Director of The Fourth Wall, shared that Gen Z is not just a significant portion of the consumer market but is also already shaping market trends (Liamzon, 2024). For the workforce, Seek Employer (2025), the Australian company that acquired Jobstreet and JobsDB, cited that 18% of the Philippine labor force comes from Gen Z as reflected in the 2018 Philippine census. Among the jobs preferred by the Gen Z workforce is in the field of Advertising and Marketing, which encompass brand management. These data justify the research locale of this study which zooms in on Gen Z for both the consumer and the brand communication manager sides.

Gen Z is composed of individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Jayatissa, 2023, Slepian, et al., 2024). Gen Z is a unique generational cohort with particular attributes that differentiate them from the generations that came ahead of them. Gen Z individuals are digital natives proficient in technology and social media (Jayatissa, 2023). For Gen Z, social media platforms such as Instagram are quite influential, especially for the females when it comes to fashion purchases (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). Gen Z has the entrepreneurial spirit, social consciousness, pragmatism, and diversity that distinguish their generation (Jayatissa, 2023, Prasanna and Priyanka, 2024). Furthermore, they value authenticity and transparency, emphasize diversity and inclusion, and prefer personalization and interactivity (Prasanna and Priyanka, 2024). It is important for businesses to understand these differences so they can better connect with their Gen Z stakeholders (Jayatissa, 2023).

In terms of behavior towards the pursuit of truth, Gen Z is observed to be more inclined to express themselves individually and avoid labels. They believe in the power of open dialogue in resolving conflicts and driving societal improvements. They analyze matters and decide pragmatically. They also engage in social mobilization in support of social and environmental causes (Francis and Hoefel, 2018).

As consumers, Gen Z has a strong inclination towards brands that prioritize social, environmental, and sustainability concerns. They value experiential value over physical products, making them prefer personalized experiences that cater to individual needs. They also rely on social media influencers for brand recommendations and engagement (Salam and Ar, 2024).

Research Design

This research can be considered as exploratory since brand authenticity as an area for research has not yet been fully studied (Singh, 2021), especially from a communication perspective. There may have been studies related to brand authenticity in the past, but since consumer needs and environments change (Williams, 2024), exploratory qualitative research is needed. Being exploratory in nature, this study has a qualitative focus and an open-ended nature to generate new ideas and insights without being limited by preconceived notions (Dokter, 2023).

This qualitative research on brand authenticity primarily utilized the thematic analysis process of familiarization, coding, developing themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing in organizing and interpreting the separate data sets from the brand communication managers' interview responses and the consumers' sentence completion responses. From the resulting themes, the study's proposed theory was developed. In relation to the theoretical framework of this study, Luhmann's Information-Utterance-Understanding model served as lens to interpret emerging categories not as a pre-set coding structure.

The experiences of the brand communication managers were obtained through recorded face-to-face and online in-depth interviews conducted in a conversational format using open-ended questions (Rutledge and Hogg, 2020) while the perceptions and insights of the consumers were gathered using sentence completion method via Google Forms to reach a wider and more diversified participant pool (Kujala, et al., 2013). The brand communication managers, in the context of this study were not limited to people holding brand management positions in companies but also included individuals who performed functions within the realm of communicating a brand to its

audiences, regardless of their position, title, rank, and nature of employment. However, due to ethical considerations, the researcher first obtained informed consent from the interview participants and maintained the confidentiality (Osborne and Smith, 2021) of their identities for those who chose to remain anonymous. Furthermore, all the research participants belonged to the adult age range where the brand communication managers were between 22 and 30 years old while the consumers were at least 18 years of age. The purpose of using in-depth interviews with the brand communication managers was to draw detailed information about their perspective, experiences, and insights in relation to the authenticity of their brands, having performed the tasks related to brand communication.

This study adopted a dual perspective approach by looking into the viewpoints of both the brand communication managers representing their respective brands and the consumers. The brand communication managers' side was explored using in-depth interviews while the consumers' side was probed using sentence completion method. The purpose of adopting a dual perspective approach with two different qualitative data collection methods was to help surface multiple realities about how brand authenticity is perceived and co-constructed, not to verify a single fixed truth. Using both sentence completion methods and in-depth interviews allowed the study to capture brand authenticity as co-constructed, through the collective discursive patterns where brand authenticity is socially negotiated and through the individual sensemaking processes where meanings are interpreted and enacted.

Inquiring into the experiences of the brand communication managers, the study utilized in-depth interview method which entailed a significant time investment in a single conversational session compared to other qualitative approaches in gathering data. The purpose of using in-depth interviews was to obtain detailed information

based on the participant's experiences and insights about the brand communication strategies that enhance brand authenticity and the actions to avoid to mitigate the risk of coming across as inauthentic. The in-depth interviews formed a valuable component, together with the sentence completion method, in this qualitative research study (Ruthledge and Hogg, 2020). Furthermore, in-depth interview method matched well with the exploratory nature of this study as this method allowed deeper probing through clarification and follow-up questions (Osborne and Smith, 2021).

Sentence completion method was employed in gathering data from the consumers wherein the participants were asked to complete the given sentence stems, thereby revealing their attitudes, beliefs, and motivations (University of Guelph, n.d.). Sentence completion tests have been used as early as 1897 to assess the reasoning ability and intellectual capacity of school children (Lah, et al., 2001). Emerging applications of the sentence completion method are notable in the fields of business research, marketing, and consumer studies (Piotrowski, 2018). Kujala and Nurkka (2012) found that sentence completion method is effective in uncovering symbolic meanings that users associate with products, thereby equipping businesses to better align product designs with users' identities and values. This capability of the sentence completion method supported its use in this study to uncover the consumer respondents' identities and values that brands can align with to enhance authenticity.

Generally, sentence completion tests are more time-efficient in yielding rich qualitative data than conventional interviews (Dumitrescu, 2023) and easier to interpret due to their more detailed responses when compared to word association tests. Sentence stems are usually phrased in the third person and are designed as somewhat ambiguous to elicit more detailed responses (University of Guelph, n.d.) and complex answers (Veeform, 2024). In formulating the sentence stems for the

sentence completion method, the use of first-person pronouns had no significant impact on the nature of the responses, although varying the stem formats could enhance the variety, quantity, length, and novelty of ideas in the responses (Schmidt, et al., 2024). However, Rogers, Bishop, and Lane (2003) cautioned against the unintended stimulus pull wherein the positive or negative connotations of sentence stems can possibly influence responses.

Sentence completion method belongs to the category of projective techniques used in personality assessment and other studies (Kline, 2013). Being a projective technique, sentence completion method prompts participants to interpret or create stories about the given ambiguous stimuli, allowing them to project their unconscious thoughts, feelings, and desires (McLeod, 2015). The surfacing of their unconscious thoughts, feelings, and desires, helps researchers to gain insight into their social behavior, thoughts, emotions, and possible internal conflicts (McLeod, 2024a). Hence, sentence completion tests are widely used as they can provide rich qualitative data that may be even be quotable. These rich data may not necessarily be captured by other assessment tools (Holaday, et al., 2000), especially in situations where social desirability bias or other factors may inhibit honesty among the participants (Hyman and Sierra, 2016).

Aside from its usefulness in psychology and marketing research, the sentence completion method also proved to complement user experience or UX evaluation techniques by providing insights that might not be drawn using traditional quantitative measures, especially when administered via online platforms to reach a wider and more diversified set of participants (Kujala, et al., 2013). In a study about e-reading experiences by Lallemand and Mercier (2022), the flexibility of the sentence completion method allowed participants to express their thoughts freely, leading to the

discovery of unexpected themes and user sentiments and uncovering nuanced insights into the participants' needs, preferences, and challenges. In other words, this flexibility of the sentence completion method gives participants the freedom to complete the given sentence beginnings using their own words to share their personal experiences and perceptions (Lallemand, 2023).

In summary, this research is an exploratory qualitative research which adopted a dual perspective approach utilizing two different qualitative data collection methods that yielded two separate data sets, particularly the in-depth interviews and the sentence completion method, to theorize about brand authenticity using constructivist and abductive theory-building principles which guided the integration of higher-order themes into the study's proposed theory (Okoli, 2023).

Participant Selection Design

In pursuing this exploratory and qualitative study, the researcher utilized purposive selection in choosing the study participants. Purposive selection allows researchers to identify and focus on participants who are most likely equipped or in a position to provide relevant data, thereby minimizing the time and costs of data collection. Particularly, the type of purposive selection used for this study is criterion selection wherein pre-defined criteria directly related to the research objectives were utilized in selecting the participants (Memon, et al., 2025).

For the brand communication managers, the purposive selection criteria were: Gen Z or must have been born between 1997 and 2012 and must have worked in the field of brand communication management for at least 1 year in a capacity that contributed to the planning, implementation, and/or evaluation of the brand

communication efforts of a brand, regardless of position, title, rank, and nature of employment. There were 7 brand communication manager participants, all within the age range of 22 to 30 years old, who provided the richness of information through the in-depth interviews, enabling the study to reach adequacy for the data set in the brand communication managers' side.

For the consumers, the selection criteria for the purposive selection method were the following: Gen Z or must have been born between 1997 and 2012 and must have been exposed to at least 10 brands within the last 12 months. The selection of consumers was composed of 74 individuals who met the selection criteria mentioned above although none of them were below 18 years old. According to Moser and Korstjens (2017), the sufficiency of selection sizes to reach theoretical saturation in qualitative researches depends on the richness of data, heterogeneity/homogeneity of participants, broadness/specificity of the research question and phenomenon, data collection method, and selection strategy. Since, the study participants were homogeneous with all of them belonging to Generation Z, the research question was quite specific and focused on brand authenticity, the data collection method provided participants the freedom to elaborate, and the 18 sentence stems to be answered by each of the 74 participants were quite extensive, the researcher expected that the 74 consumer participants may not meet theoretical saturation but would suffice to demonstrate pattern stabilization at the very least, wherein recurring patterns in the data have become sufficiently consistent across additional cases with few or no meaningful changes to the emerging interpretation (McLeod, 2024b).

Research Instruments

The study employed two kinds of research instruments to obtain the needed data. The first one was the in-depth interview guide composed of open-ended questions to be asked during the interview with the brand communication manager. The in-depth interview probed into the brand communication managers' side. Below are the interview guide questions:

BRAND AUTHENTICITY AS MEANING (Organizational Sensemaking)

1. From your perspective, how do you make sense of brand authenticity in the context of your brand's everyday communication practices with Gen Z consumers?
2. Can you recall a situation where your brand's communicative actions were interpreted by Gen Z consumers as authentic or inauthentic? What happened and how did your team interpret and respond to that situation?

BRAND ELEMENTS AS COMMUNICATIVE FORMS

3. How do brand elements such as brand names, logos, symbols, characters, packaging, or slogans function as communicative forms through which Gen Z consumers interpret brand authenticity?
4. How does your team conceptualize and enact these brand elements as part of your brand's broader communication with Gen Z consumers?
5. Based on your experience, which of these brand elements tend to support shared understandings of authenticity, and which tend to raise questions or challenges from Gen Z consumers? Why?
6. How does your team observe, interpret, and make sense of Gen Zs' reactions to these brand elements in both the physical and digital realms?

7. Can you describe a time when a brand element decision unexpectedly affected perceptions of brand authenticity among your Gen Z consumers?

MARKETING MIX STRATEGIES AS ONGOING COMMUNICATION

8. In your experience, how do your product, pricing, distribution, promotion, people, process, and physical environment strategies become part of the brand's ongoing communication through which Gen Z consumers interpret brand authenticity?
9. How does your team conceptualize and enact marketing mix strategies as part of your brand's broader communication with Gen Z consumers?
10. Based on your experience, which of these marketing mix strategies tend to support shared understandings of authenticity, and which tend to raise questions or challenges from Gen Z consumers? Why?
11. How does your team observe, interpret, and make sense of Gen Zs' reactions to these marketing mix strategies in both the physical and digital realms?
12. Can you describe a time when a marketing mix decision unexpectedly affected perceptions of brand authenticity among your Gen Z consumers?

CONSUMER RESPONSES AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE

13. How do Gen Z consumers typically express or communicate perceptions of authenticity or inauthenticity in response to your brand's actions?
14. How does your brand interpret and negotiate meaning internally from these responses (e.g. feedback, comments, engagement patterns, criticism)?
15. What kinds of adjustments or changes does your brand make in response to Gen Z consumers' feedback related to authenticity?

CO-CONSTRUCTION AND ONGOING INTERACTION

16. How would you describe the ongoing communicative interaction between your brand and Gen Z consumers in shaping what counts as “authentic”?
17. In what ways do Gen Z consumers influence, negotiate, or reshape how your brand understands and enacts authenticity over time?
18. Would you say that brand authenticity is something your brand enacts, negotiates, or continuously adapts through interaction with Gen Z consumers? Why?

REFLECTION AND PROCESS CLOSURE

19. Looking back, what have Gen Z consumers taught your brand about authenticity, through your brand’s interactions with them, that you did not initially anticipate?
20. If you were advising another brand targeting Gen Z, what would you say about how brand authenticity emerges through communication and interaction in practice, rather than how it is planned?

The second research instrument was the sentence completion test. The sentence completion test served as an exploratory inquiry into the perspective and experiences of the consumers. This research instrument contained 18 sentence stems that the participants completed with their own words to bring out their perceptions and insights. The sentence completion test was administered via Google Forms. Below are the sentence stems used in gathering data from the 74 Gen Z consumer participants:

INSTRUCTIONS: There are no right or wrong answers. Please complete the following statements as honestly and as comprehensively as you can.

INTERPRET (Meaning Construction)

1. A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when it is _____.
2. A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as _____.
3. A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as _____.
4. A brand feels LESS authentic to me when it is _____.
5. A brand feels LESS authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as _____.
6. A brand feels LESS authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as _____.

NEGOTIATE/RESPOND (Internal Response and Sensemaking)

7. When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I usually think _____.
8. When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I usually feel _____.
9. When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as _____.
10. When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I usually think _____.
11. When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I usually feel _____.
12. When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as _____.

CO-CONSTRUCT/CO-DETERMINE (Interaction-Based Judgment)

13. I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it make me think _____.

14. I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it make me feel _____.
15. I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it lead me to do things such as _____.
16. I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it make me think _____.
17. I ultimately decide that a brand is I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it make me feel _____.
18. I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it lead me to do things such as _____.

Through these two kinds of research instruments, this study elicited the responses of the brand communication manager and consumer participants. The said responses were subjected to coding and thematic analyses to draw insights on how brand authenticity is co-constructed from the communicative interaction of both sides. From the said insights, a model was be created to encompass this study's findings.

Data Gathering Procedure

Utilizing a dual perspective approach, there are two processes in gathering the data for this research. A separate process was used for the in-depth interviews with the brand communication manager participants and a different process for the sentence completion method among the consumer participants. However, regardless of the difference in procedure, both processes obtained informed consent prior to drawing their responses.

For the in-depth interviews, the invitation/cover letters were sent to the target brand communication manager participants to obtain informed consent. Then, the appointment date for each interview was set. On the respective appointed schedule, each in-depth interview was conducted either in person or online via Google Meet, depending on the preference of the participants. The interview was primarily audio-recorded and secondarily video-recorded, as backup, so that the responses can be transcribed and reviewed more accurately. During the interviews, the researcher consciously exerted efforts to maintain reflexivity by critically examining and taking note of his assumptions while setting aside potential biases as he interacted with the participants.

On the other hand, the first step in implementing the sentence completion method was uploading the cover letter containing the instructions, the information necessary to ensure informed consent, and the sentence stems in Google Forms. Then, the researcher sent the Google Form link via social media messaging apps to invite consumers to participate. After the selection of 74 participants had been reached, the responses were extracted from the Google Sheet file that was automatically created by Google Forms.

Although the brand-consumer interactions were not directly observed in this study's data gathering procedure, since the brand communication managers' interview responses and the consumers' sentence completion responses were separately gathered, both perspectives were eventually integrated in the data analysis process.

Data Analysis Methods

After data gathering, both the in-depth interviews and the sentence completion responses separately underwent thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of shared meaning into themes within the obtained data sets. This data analysis method helped the researcher to understand the participants' views, opinions, knowledge, experiences, and values in relation to brand authenticity (McLeod, 2024c). Once the responses for each data set were retrieved in textual format, the data analysis process underwent six steps (Rosairo, 2023). In the first step, the researcher familiarized himself with the data obtained by reading and re-reading the sentence completion responses. Familiarization helped in initially identifying potential themes to be used in assigning codes. Coding was the second step where ideas and discussion areas in the data were assigned codes for easy and quick reference. In the third step, themes were identified by collating the results of the coding process wherein the discussion areas represented by the codes were tied together into meaningful groups called themes based on the patterns in the data. The fourth step entailed reviewing the themes to check how well they supported the coded data extracts. After reviewing the themes, the fifth step was about labeling and defining the themes more precisely. Lastly, the sixth step involved creating and compiling a write-up of the themes, the underlying concepts and findings extracted from the data, and other realities emerging from the analysis.

The individual thematic analyses derived from each of the 7 interview participants were then subjected to an integrative cross-case thematic analysis to establish the overarching themes among them. Having two separate sets of themes coming from two different perspectives of the Generation Z, the consumers and the

brand communication managers, the task then was to interpret and analyze the multiple realities based on the findings from both sides. To perform this, the researcher further processed the thematic analysis findings from both the in-depth interviews with the brand communication managers and the sentence completion method with the consumers. The thematic findings coming from both participant sources were compared and contrasted to examine points of alignment and points of divergence (Hecker and Kalpokas, 2025). The findings were then jointly analyzed to formulate a brand authenticity theory with several component models that show how brand authenticity is co-constructed through the communicative interaction between brands and consumers.

Throughout the interpretation of data and thematic analysis, the researcher carefully maintained reflexivity by critically examining and being mindful of his own assumptions about branding in general and about brand authenticity and Gen Z in particular. He also practiced transparency in analysis by clearly linking actual response quotes to their generated interpretations and themes.

In formulating a brand authenticity theory, the researcher conceptualized and visualized the relationships among the themes generated. Conceptual maps and diagrams were ideated based on the analyzed relationships of the themes. From there, the researcher performed theoretical integration by bringing together the analyzed insights, relationships, models, and diagrams into an integrated theory.

In theorizing about the brand authenticity co-construction phenomenon, giving due consideration to the goals of theory formulation is of utmost importance. According to Asemah, et al. (2022), the goals of a theory are: (i) description; (ii) explanation; (iii) prediction and control; and (iv) reform. Description, the foundation of the theory, is a process using symbols to represent the phenomenon by identifying its features and

variations. Explanation is an effort to clarify how and why the phenomenon works. Prediction is about projecting what will happen to a phenomenon when exposed to certain conditions or stimuli while control influences the conditions and stimuli to govern what a phenomenon actually does. Reform is about triggering change in actual organizations or in society. Aligned to these goals of theory formulation, the indicators of a good theory can be based on how potent the theory is in achieving these goals. Hence, the degree of potential of a theory to describe the phenomenon is Descriptive Power. Its ability to clarify how the phenomenon works is Explanatory Power. Its potential for predicting future occurrences of the phenomenon is Anticipatory Power. The theory's potential for triggering reforms in the discipline or field of practice where it belongs to is Transformative Power. The theory's capacity to break down phenomena into its constituent parts and explain underlying mechanisms is Analytic Power (Weshbe, et al., 2023). The theory developed by this study was evaluated based on these indicators of a good theory.

Research Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher observed Lincoln and Guba's criteria (Alexander, 2019) in the conduct of this research. The said trustworthiness criteria comprised of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibilitiy is about the confidence in the truthfulness of the data and its interpretations while dependability is the stability of data over time and over conditions. Confirmability ensures that conclusions are grounded in the data while transferability is the applicability of findings to other settings or groups.

In terms of credibility, the researcher carefully derived codes and themes from direct quotations of the participants' responses. The study had a rich base of response quotations since the researcher had prolonged engagement with the participants especially during the in-depth interviews. The dependability of the study was addressed by maintaining a clear record of the actual data gathered through the audio recording, video recording, and transcript of the brand-side interviews and the self-encoded, cloud-stored consumer-side sentence completion responses. Confirmability was established and maintained by triangulating the data since they come from two different sources, as well as practicing reflexivity or delimiting subjectivity in the conduct of the study. Transferability was provided for by including extensive contextual descriptions of the the Gen Z participants' characteristics, allowing readers to discern the relevance of the findings to other generational cohorts.

On top of these criteria, the study further ensured that ethical safeguards were in place by selecting only the participants who were 18 and above in age, obtaining informed consent from them, and keeping their identities confidential.

Chapter V
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The brand communication managers' perspective was explored using in-depth interviews while the consumers' perspective was probed into via sentence completion method. The findings from the in-depth interviews are first presented and analyzed using a separate thematic analysis on the responses of each of the 7 interview participants. After presenting the individual thematic analyses, an integrative cross-case thematic analysis of the 7 participants follows. For the consumer side, a thematic analysis on the responses of the 74 participants is also presented herein. Lastly, the researcher compared and contrasted the thematic findings from both participant sources to determine points of alignment and points of divergence (Hecker and Kalpokas, 2025). A theory on brand authenticity, with its component models, was also formulated based on the findings.

Thematic Analyses of the In-Depth Interviews (Brand Communication Managers)

The interview participants were composed of Gen Z individuals who have been involved in various brand communication functions on the brand side for at least 1 year. For privacy reasons, their names have been withheld from the public but may be revealed to authorized personnel from the University of the Philippines Open University, the institution under which this research was conducted. The interview participants have represented or performed brand communication functions for a number of brands including: Century Tuna, Jether Palomo (celebrity brand), L'Oreal, National University Las Piñas, Coca-Cola, Gardenia, EJ Obiena (celebrity athlete brand), Alyssa Valdez (celebrity athlete brand), Pia Wurtzbach (celebrity brand),

Angelique Manto (celebrity online influencer brand), Julie Eigenmann (celebrity online influencer brand), Milo (Nestle), Summit Natural Drinking Water (Asia Brewery), TAC Tours & Travel Corporation, Profil Holidays, Vitamilk (Asia Brewery), CDO Katsu/Tonkatsu (CDO Foodsphere), CDO Chicken Nuggets (CDO Foodsphere), Carlo Rossi, Barefoot, Arbor Mist, Carnivor, Pik-Nik, Mezcal, San Miguel Foods (Purefoods, Magnolia, Magnolia Timplados), San Miguel Mart, Sunny Side Up Pet Cream, IN2IT, and Instant.

Interview Participant 1

The brands represented by Interview Participant 1 are Century Tuna and the celebrity brand Jether Palomo. These brands are interrelated since Jether Palomo is a celebrity brand who has joined and won some local and international pageants, worked as a male model, and became the brand ambassador of Century Tuna after winning the Century Tuna Superbod title.

Based on this participant's responses to the interview questions designed per discussion area, the following themes and descriptions in Table 2 were generated and supported with actual quotes from the interview:

Table 2

Thematic Analysis Table for Interview Participant 1

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Brand elements	identity expression, symbolic self-expression, emotional symbolism, personal growth	Authenticity through symbolic self-expression	Symbols serve as communicative tools that express personal growth, emotional states, and identity transitions, which consumers	"And that's why I keep changing it every single time, because everyone's hearts change, everyone's feelings change,

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
			interpret as authentic since they reflect real experiences.	and so that's why I use the heart emoji."
	fitness identity, lived values, embodiment, symbolic representation	Embodied authenticity	As the Century Tuna Superbod and brand ambassador, his physique, fitness journey, and public appearance symbolically attest that he truly lives out the values associated with Century Tuna.	"I am essentially a symbol of fitness in the Philippines… they see that Jether put in the hard work and dedication to get that."
	symbol adoption, follower participation, community engagement	Shared symbolic participation	When followers adopt and reproduce the symbols he uses, authenticity is reinforced.	"And each time I make a post, a lot of my fans comment the exact emojis that I use"
	rawness, unscripted communication, natural behavior, spontaneity	Authenticity through spontaneity	Consumers perceive authenticity when brand-related symbols emerge spontaneously instead of being staged.	"And so it (referring to a spontaneous iconic moment) showed genuine authenticity for Marian Rivera as her brand, my brand as Jether Palomo, and then Century Tuna holding both of us now as ambassadors because it was raw, it was real, and it was authentic to everyone
Marketing mix strategies	congruence, alignment, lived experience, credibility,	Authenticity through lived alignment	Authenticity involves the alignment between what the brand promotes and how its representatives actually live.	"…if we project a certain image of health and we aren't at a healthy point, can they really believe to trust us?"
	participation, engagement, community-building	Participatory brand experiences	When consumers actively participate instead of merely consuming, marketing mix strategies become authentic.	"At the end of the day, what we wanted to do was just build community. And because of that community, people felt more connected with the brand."
	realism, attainability, inclusivity, accessibility	Accessibility and attainability	When brand initiatives appear achievable rather than exclusive,	"…this is what the standard of fitness should be, not something that is

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
			consumers respond positively.	unrealistic for people."
	exclusion, privilege concerns, fairness	Fairness concerns	Strategies can pose authenticity challenges when consumers perceive them as skewed towards privileged participants.	"…aren't professional athletes the only ones that are going to be the winners?"
Consumer responses	feedback, comments, consumer evaluation	Overt co-evaluation	Consumers openly express their authenticity judgments through comments, messages, and engagement behaviors.	"…they're very vocal when it comes to comments online or sometimes even in person. You'd be surprised where they comment…"
	recognition, brand recall, validation	Recognition as validation	Physical encounters serve as evidence of consumers' internalization of authentic brand moments.	"You're the guy from Century Tuna, right?"
	relatability, realism, attainable success	Authenticity as attainability	Consumers evaluate brand authenticity based on whether achievements appear realistic and relatable.	"…people see that, wow, that's realistically attainable. That's something that can be achieved. And that's how I've been able to build that authenticity with the brand and with the people because it's showcasing that you can achieve this as well…"
	trust monitoring, consistency, behavior comparison	Authenticity as consistency	Followers monitor actions and compare them with prior expectations and values.	"And so it became a point of, like, it is a bit of a hit on me on, like, okay, this is my personal brand. Like, I built it to where they know me for a certain shape that I retain. But then I changed my shape, and it kind hurt their trust in me."
Brand adaptation	listening, consumer feedback, responsiveness	Listening as authenticity task	Century Tuna actively considers and incorporates consumer feedback into its brand campaigns and in the selection of brand ambassadors.	"…for Century Tuna, I definitely know that they listen to the fans, the Gen Z people, because they're one of the largest consumers for

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				Century Tuna…they do listen to them."
	selective responsiveness, identity preservation, authenticity maintenance	Selective responsiveness	Unlike Century Tuna, Jether Palomo (the celebrity brand) selectively responds to feedback to avoid losing his sense of self.	"…because if I listened to everything that they said, I don't know if I would be myself anymore. And that would be inauthentic to my brand and to the fans.
	growing, evolving, self-development	Growth-oriented authenticity	Authenticity is not necessarily remaining unchanged, but evolving while remaining true to one's values.	"What you can always expect from me is me pursuing the chase of becoming better for myself. And they trust that no matter what direction that may look. And so that's how I've been able to keep growing and building trust and authenticity with my fans because it's true to who I am. I'm always growing. I'm always changing."
Co-construction of authenticity	participation, relationship-building, shared ownership	Authenticity as relational	Authenticity is not imposed by the brand, but emerges through ongoing exchanges between the brand and consumers.	"The relationship is that, wow, I love the brand because you're able to work well with us. You listen to us. And it seems like we're not just consumers, but rather we're a part of the company. And I think that's what helps build authenticity amongst Gen Z people."
	community, belonging, connection	Human connection	Meaningful social connections strengthen authenticity.	"And because of that community, people felt more connected with the brand."
	consumer influence, negotiation, mutual shaping	Mutual influence	Consumers help redefine authenticity through their responses and preferences.	"And so they're constantly shifting their strategies based on what's

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				popular with the Gen Z…"
Sensemaking of authenticity	identity alignment, congruence, consistency	Authenticity as congruence	Authenticity exists when communication reflects who or what the brand really is.	"…whenever I am going to post something on my story, it has to reign true to who I am."
	honesty, transparency, vulnerability	Authenticity as honesty	Admitting imperfections or limitations increases authenticity perceptions.	"…it really showed that I'm not a perfect person…And so because of that, it showed, one, that I'm true to myself, that I'm not going to just pretend…"
	natural actions, genuineness, non-performative behavior	Authenticity as non-performativity	Consumers value behavior that appears natural over strategically manufactured actions.	"And every single time I'm surprised at people's reactions because it just comes from who I am. It isn't me trying to be someone that's performative."
Critical incidents	spontaneity, unexpected resonance, virality	The unexpectedly viral Marian Rivera moment	A spontaneous request for English translation turned into a defining authenticity event for the celebrity brands Jether Palomo and Marian Rivera, as well as for Century Tuna.	". I didn't expect that to go viral."
	trust challenge, transparency, recovery	Physical transformation	Weight gain of the celebrity brand created doubts among his followers but later reinforced authenticity through openness and improvement.	"…some people could see it as like the weight gain as something good or something bad…with my physical change, they saw the growth. So whether that be the people that were questioning that he's getting out of shape and people were considering me that I was getting in better shape, that there's growth no matter what, that it didn't stick to the same place, that who I

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				am is constantly ever changing.
Learning about authenticity	genuine engagement, resonance, virality	Authenticity generates resonance	Authenticity often produces better visibility and audience connection than planned communication.	"…don't try to go viral. It just happens naturally. And what that changed in me was that the more true to who I am, the more moments go viral.
Advice for brands	trust, adaptability, relationship-building	Trust, fluidity, relationship	Authenticity comes from listening, adapting, and building meaningful relationships with the consumers and followers rather than impression management.	"I think it comes down to three things, which is trust, fluidity, and also relationship… And that helps any type of celebrity brand or business corporate brand."

In the area of brand elements, Interview Participant 1 asserted that his use of the heart emojis served as a symbolic self-expression or communicative tool for his celebrity brand, through which he expressed his personal growth, emotional states, and identity transitions as he continually modified the emojis. This means that as he evolved as a person, not just as a celebrity, his physical body, emotional make-up, and personal identity also evolved in pursuit of his aspirations and were shaped by his environment. His identity actually transitioned from a regular guy to a symbol of fitness after winning the Century Tuna Superbod title despite his physique being built just right instead of flaunting a super-bulked muscle-filled body. His identity further transitioned into a role model, not just of physical fitness but also of intelligence and congeniality as he continued joining and winning international male pageants. The evolving heart emojis that he used can be considered as a form of semiotic communication (Craig, 1999) through which he channeled his self-expression of his personal growth and transformation based on his authentic real-life experiences as a human being. This

use of strong symbols in the form of the evolving heart emjois enhanced his personal brand identity cohesion, recognition, and recall (Aaker, 2010) as well as his authenticity as a celebrity brand since his identity transitions were based on his real life transformation, not just a celebrity façade. He embodied authenticity by putting in the hard work and dedication to achieve his state of fitness and be rightfully considered as a symbol of fitness in the Philippines. In other words, his life truly manifested the lived values of his celebrity brand and his endorsed brand, Century Tuna. As he lived out those values, his online and offline followers believed and engaged with him through shared symbolic participation by adopting the very same symbols and emojis that he used. His private and public life displayed raw and natural behaviors characterized by unscripted spontaneity that turned his supposedly embarrassing moments into iconic, memorable, and authentic viral scenes that touched the hearts of his followers.

As for marketing mix strategies, Interview Participant 1 considered lived alignment very important in relation to brand authenticity. Lived alignment, for him, is the congruence between what the endorsed brand promotes and how its endorsers actually live. Because of this, as the brand's endorser, he exerted much effort to strengthen and maintain his actual state of health and fitness, aligning with Century Tuna's advocacy for health and fitness. Aside from this, lived alignment for Century Tuna as a brand can also be observed through its core-and-cause alignment wherein its core business of providing healthy food shows congruence with its corporate social responsibility and advocacy on health and fitness. This congruence is supported by Mazutis and Slawinski (2015) who claimed that the alignment of a brand's CSR activities with the company or brand's core mission, vision, and values is one of the 2 core dimensions of CSR that impact authenticity. The efforts of both the celebrity

endorser and the endorsed brand resonated with consumers who also value health and fitness, leading to self-congruence (Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn, 2017) or lifestyle congruence (Manthiou, et al., 2018). Marketing mix strategies, according to Interview Participant 1, become more authentic when consumers engage with a brand and participate in its activities in a community-like atmosphere, making them more connected with the brand. Relating this to past studies, it can be said that gaining authentic engagements among consumer communities (Leigh, Peters, and Shelton, 2006) require providing and supporting meaningful consumer experiences (Beverland, Farrelly, and Quester, 2010). Enhancing consumer engagement with a brand's marketing mix strategies necessitates maximizing accessibility while minimizing fairness concerns, as implied by Interview Participant 1. Incidentally, accessibility, as proposed by Sansome, Conduit, and Wilkie (2024), is one of the key characteristics of brand transparency, which in turn is a signal of authenticity.

In terms of consumer responses, Interview Participant 1 considered recognition of his celebrity brand and the endorsed brand as a form of consumer validation and internalization of authentic brand moments. Beyond brand recognition, consumers also overtly co-evaluate him as a celebrity brand and his endorsed brand through feedback and comments where they openly express their authenticity judgments both online and in person. Cross-referencing this with the study of Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink (2013), consumer evaluations of the authenticity of brand claims are influenced by the type of brand claim and its alignment with the consumers' values and expectations. When celebrities serve as a role model for consumers to emulate, the celebrity's brand authenticity is evaluated by consumers based on how realistic and relatable the said celebrity's achievements are. The success of Interview Participant 1 in terms of fitness goals appeared as quite realistic and achievable in the

eyes of his followers and Century Tuna's consumers as they monitored his actions and compared them with prior expectations and values. However, when he, at some point, became inconsistent in his physical appearance as a result of slacking a bit on his fitness habits, his followers noticed.

In the area of brand adaptation, Interview Participant 1, as a celebrity brand, bounced back from his temporary fitness slump and renewed the pursuit of his fitness goals, thereby recovering from the slight dip in his followers' trust. His endorsed brand, Century Tuna, on the other hand, also actively listens and incorporates consumer feedback into its brand campaigns and brand ambassador selection. To avoid losing his sense of self and consequently becoming inauthentic, Interview Participant 1 said that he selectively listens to feedback and makes adjustments only when they support his personal growth goals, making his celebrity brand authentically growth-oriented. The brand adaptation practice of this celebrity brand and his endorsed brand is related to the claim of Veremchuk and Grigoriev (2024) that brand management requires constant market monitoring of consumer needs and appropriately adapting brand strategies to changes in the market.

Interview Participant 1 believes that brand authenticity is co-constructed as it emerges through ongoing exchanges between brands and consumers, making it relational. He also believes that meaningful social connections strengthen authenticity and mutual influence is exerted between brands and consumers. This belief is parallel to the Communication as Constitutive of Brands or CCB perspective (Hansen, 2022).

In discussing the sensemaking of authenticity, Interview Participant 1 related brand authenticity to congruence, honesty, and non-performativity. When brand communications reflect who or what the brand really is, there is congruence (Fritz,

Schoenmueller, and Bruhn, 2017). When a brand becomes vulnerable as it admits imperfections (Frontify, 2025), honesty and authenticity are perceived (Eblen, et al., 2024). When actions appear natural rather than strategically staged (MacCannell, 1973), consumers see non-performativity.

Interview Participant 1 also discussed some critical incidents that he has experienced, observed, and learned from. His unexpectedly viral moment with Marian Rivera during the Century Superbod competition made him realize that virality cannot be enacted or forced, but rather being spontaneous and authentic generates resonance and genuine engagement. He also learned from his weight gain experience that openness, transparency (Frontify, 2025), and self-improvement reinforces authenticity. Deriving from his experiential learning about brand authenticity, his advice to both celebrity and corporate business brands is all about trust, fluidity, and relationship since authenticity comes from listening, adapting, and building meaningful relationships with consumers rather than impression management.

Summarizing the most repeated themes across the numerous questions in the interview with the first participant, the researcher highlights the succeeding findings. Based on the responses of Interview Participant 1, authenticity is mostly about congruence, symbolic performance, relational co-construction, continuous adaptation, and human connection. The core theme Authenticity as Congruence, as discussed by the interview participant, is about aligning personal identity, brand values, and communication. Emojis, gestures, physique, and viral moments serve as symbols through which authenticity is interpreted, making Authenticity as Symbolic Performance. The interview participant also supports the idea of Authenticity as Co-Construction, by acknowledging that authenticity emerges through ongoing interaction between the brand and consumers. Going further, as pointed out by the interview

participant, brands remain authentic by evolving while remaining true to its core values instead of staying fixed, thereby placing Authenticity as Continuous Adaptation. The first interview participant considers trust, community, participation and emotional resonance as central to authenticity judgments, implying Authenticity as Human Connection. Focusing on the most emphasized core theme of Interview Participant 1, brand authenticity is about self-congruence.

Interview Participant 2

The second interview participant has handled the social media communication, particularly TikTok, of the brand L'Oreal for the Philippine market. Together with her team, she has implemented brand campaigns, monitored consumer feedback, and tweaked their strategies based on consumer responses. Based on the interview, Table 3 presents the themes and their supporting quotes derived from her responses:

Table 3

Thematic Analysis Table for Interview Participant 2

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Brand authenticity in everyday communication	Influencer credibility, trusted endorsement, social proof	Authenticity through social proof	Consumers perceive authenticity through trusted public figures and influencers who use and endorse the brand.	"…once that specific influencer tells them…they think it's already authentic."
	brand heritage, inter-generational trust, brand longevity	Authenticity through heritage	Long-standing brand presence across generations contributes to intergenerational legitimacy and authenticity perceptions.	"…even their parents or grandparents have most likely got the brand or purchased the brand."

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Brand elements	packaging quality, premium look, visual credibility	Packaging as a communicator of authenticity	Packaging quality connotes product legitimacy and value, just like gold logos and metal casings symbolize quality and trustworthiness.	“So, when we hopped on with the gold logo and then the metal, the heavy metal casing, that's where the Gen Zs really said, even if it's budget friendly, it still looks expensive.”
	emotional relevance, empowerment, self-worth, slogan messaging	Slogan as identity anchor	The slogan “You’re worth it” communicates empowerment and self-worth while reinforcing authenticity though emotional relevance.	“…the brand is supposed to show that you're worth it. That's the main tagline that we have, You’re Worth It.”
	Slogan integration, branding consistency, campaign continuity	Brand elements as community symbols	The slogan gets embedded into the brand’s packaging, products, events, and community programs.	"We instilled that campaign into some of our products and our packaging."
	skepticism, greenwashing, scrutiny of brand claims	Risks of authenticity claims	Skepticism and backlash were triggered when consumers scrutinized historical inconsistencies, revealing the practice of greenwashing.	"…when we mentioned in one of our campaigns that we're eco-friendly, that was a bad campaign. Because apparently, the Gen Zs know what greenwashing is. They know if we're really not animal testing and all that. I think that was the most negative campaign we had when we mentioned that our products are cruelty-free and eco-friendly."
Conceptualization of brand elements	generational insight, peer understanding, perspective alignment	Gen Z-led sensemaking	The team relies on its own Gen Z members to anticipate and understand Gen Z consumer reactions.	“So, majority of my team are also Gen Zs.”
	multiple perspectives, diversity, inclusive understanding	Diversity of perspectives	Team diversity is viewed as a resource to identify multiple consumer viewpoints and understand Gen Z	“We have men with us. So, we're a mixture of gays, men, and then women as well.

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
			authenticity perceptions.	So, all points of view, even men, we get. Especially Gen Z men as well."
Brand elements supporting authenticity	product demonstration, product performance, proof of claims	Authenticity through demonstrated performance	Consumers trust products when performance is observed in unscripted real situations.	"But, apparently, her makeup wasn't removed when she got poured on with water."
Brand elements challenging authenticity	claim contradiction, inconsistency, credibility risk	Authenticity threatened by inconsistency	Product claims become questionable when consumer observations reveal discrepancies or contradict brand messaging.	"We were saying…it's transfer-proof…and we did not see on our TikTok video that the lipstick transferred, in the video, which kind of backfired on our end."
Marketing mix and authenticity	openness, transparency, price justification	Transparency as authenticity practice	Consumers accept pricing decisions when brands explain them clearly and openly.	"It's just that it's already on sale… we reiterate that you can only use it for six months, that's why it's cheap…it's always being transparent with the Gen Zs."
	consumer orientation, responsiveness, relevance	Responsiveness to consumer needs	Products and campaigns are designed based on the evolving consumer preferences and concerns, including seasonal adaptation.	"…it's always looking on to what they need and what catches their eye…This summer, we created a campaign for non-transfer, non-melting. So it's always something that they need. We check on reviews, we check on videos on other brands, of course.
	environmental adaption, localization, contextual relevance	Local relevance	Product development is based on local environmental conditions, user experiences, and climate-based adaptation.	"The formulation of Asia is different. They need something that's good for humidity. So we also help give them the idea that in the Philippines, they need something like this because it's humid now."

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Marketing mix supporting authenticity	improvement, functionality, problem-solving	Product improvement	Packaging improvements increased trust since they provided better functionality and solved actual consumer problems.	"…they tweaked it to a thicker, more impact-proof casing."
Marketing mix challenging authenticity	lack of information, communication gaps, uncertainty	Information gaps	Product modifications generated doubt when consumers were not informed about the changes.	"But it kind of gave us a different backlash because they weren't aware. There was no online campaign release or there was no information online…"
	resistance, affordability concerns, price sensitivity	Pricing tensions	Consumers questioned authenticity when familiar products suddenly became expensive.	"But then for them, it's like, oh, why did it get expensive? And apparently, reformulating it wasn't something they wanted. So, they did not like tweaking the product and then tweaking the price as well.
Interpretation of consumer responses	comment monitoring, feedback tracking, social listening	Continuous monitoring	Authenticity perceptions are tracked by systematically monitoring consumers' comments and reviews.	"We deeply monitor the comments… we really try our best to keep an eye on all of the comments and see if there's any negative comments…"
	consumer outreach, direct engagement, dialogue	Dialogue-based understanding	When comments are ambiguous, the team directly reaches out to the consumers.	"It's our standard now that if there's a comment that we don't know the answer to and it's really concerning, we go ahead an extra mile to message the customer and see what's on."
	data interpretation, pattern recognition, analytics	Data-driven sensemaking	The team groups and analyzes the consumer reactions to identify emerging authenticity concerns.	"…we break it down."
Consumer expression of authenticity	participation, online expression, feedback culture	Active feedback culture	Gen Z consumers actively communicate feedback, whether	"Gen Zs like to post a lot. I observed that even with different brands

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
			approval, concerns, or questions.	
	scrutiny, verification, investigative behavior	Investigative consumption	Consumers research about brands and verify product claims before accepting brand messages.	"…would research first…investigate and see if their skin type is suitable for that specific product."
Brand response to feedback	incentives, tactical response, adaptation	Strategic adaptation	Pricing concerns trigger tactical adjustments instead of directly reducing the price.	"So what we do is, we normally give them more vouchers if it's really impacting them that the new product is too expensive."
	clarification, transparency, educative communication	Communication correction	Confusion about the packaging and authenticity is addressed by providing educational content.	"…upload more videos informing them on what happened and then showing them that the packaging is more sturdy now. So, we have drop tests on live and videos on live comparing old packaging…so, it's just really the information. They just really needed information."
Co-construction of authenticity	Adaptation, negotiation, evolving meaning	Authenticity as negotiation	Authenticity emerges through ongoing interaction instead of unilateral brand control.	"I feel like it's the third one (continuous adaptation)"
	participation, user-generated content, co-construction	Consumer participation	Consumers co-construct authenticity through content creation.	"…they get to make a video and sell the product on their own ways…we had one video before, he went hiking to Pulag with a matte resistance (product)."
	consumer endorsement, community influence, social validation	Community validation	Authenticity grows when many community members talk about the products and use them.	"…there's a lot of people using the product…and how they would make the videos because there's so much people doing it in a creative way."
Learning about authenticity	participation, community engagement,	Community involvement as authenticity	Beyond advertising, authenticity involves active participation in	"So when we started having, we started signing up with Pia

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	social involvement		meaningful social communities.	(Wurtzbach), we started being more community involved, we have events related to women. That's the time where we realized na ah, we have to be more community involved pala to become authentic for the Gen Z consumers. Kasi Gen Zs care, they care a lot…Yeah, it's really community involvement."
	imperfection, insincerity perception, realism	Imperfect communication	Gen Z consumers distrust communication that seem overly perfect.	"If it's too perfect, the Gen Zs intend to react that it's too perfect…"
	representation, inclusion, diversity	Authenticity through inclusion	Connecting with women and LGBTQ+ communities strengthens authenticity.	"But if it's something related, if it's already involving the women community, the LGBT community, the Gen Zs intend to think that it's authentic because it's connecting to the community."
Advice to brands	participation, community engagement, relationship-building	Community equals authenticity	Authenticity emerges through community life participation.	"Yes, it's really community is equal to authenticity."
	consumer voice, listening, feedback utilization	Listening to the consumer voice as authenticity practice	Brands should actively listen to consumers for detailed feedback.	"I think it's very good to listen to your consumers, especially the Gen Zs. Because Gen Zs give very detailed advice."

Generally speaking about brand authenticity, Interview Participant 2 alluded that consumers perceive authenticity when there is social proof through trusted public

figures and influencers who use and endorse the brand. Aside from influencers, consumers also trust intergenerational legitimacy when a brand has thrived and gained the loyalty of their parents and grandparents over time. Fritz, Schoenmueller, and Bruhn (2017) referred to this as brand heritage.

In terms of brand elements, Interview Participant 2 considered packaging as a communicator of authenticity, although possible backlash can happen when sustainability claims about a brand's packaging get discovered by consumers as simply greenwashing, unbacked by actual eco-friendly packaging materials. To make things worse, false claims such as being animal cruelty-free also pose authenticity risks for the brand. On the positive side, Interview Participant 2 considered emotionally-relevant brand slogans as identity anchors that uphold brand consistency in products, packaging, campaigns, and continuing community programs. In conceptualizing brand elements, her team relied on its diverse composition to understand multiple consumer viewpoints although majority of them were Gen Z since a significant portion of their target market was Gen Z. In her experience, consumers trust brands when product performance is observed in unscripted (Blanchbennett, Lees, and Moeladi, 2022) real situations while authenticity is threatened when consumer experiences contradict brand messaging.

As far as marketing mix strategies are concerned, Interview Participant 2 asserted that consumers accept pricing decisions when explained clearly and openly, just like when added value, brand reputation, and superior quality justify premium pricing (Kapferer, 2008). Based on the experience of Interview Participant 2, when products and campaigns are adapted to evolving consumer preferences, concerns, and changing seasons, the brand becomes responsive to consumer needs which is critical in brand management (Veremchuk and Grigoriev, 2024), and consequently

improves brand authenticity perceptions. Likewise, developing products and improving packaging based on local environmental situations, user experiences, and climates lead to local relevance, better product functionality, and effective consumer problem-solving, thereby contributing to authenticity perceptions. However, poorly communicated and inadequately justified product and pricing changes create uncertainty and tension among consumers.

In interpreting consumer responses, especially those belonging to Generation Z, the team of Interview Participant 2 continuously monitors consumer feedback through social listening, seeks out dialogue-based understanding by reaching out to consumers whose comments are ambiguous, and undertakes data-driven sensemaking by analyzing actual consumer reactions to identify emerging authenticity concerns. Interview Participant 2 observed that consumers research about brands and verify product claims before accepting brand messages. When they find a brand as authentic, they actively express their perceptions of authenticity in the form of feedback, approval, or simply engagement. These actions by consumers can be considered as a form of feedback culture.

In turn, the brand responds to consumer feedback through adaptation, as shared by Interview Participant 2, such as in the case when her team made tactical adjustments by offering discount vouchers in response to consumers' concerns about pricing changes. Similarly, her team also released clarificatory videos online to address consumer confusion about packaging re-design.

As Interview Participant 2 has observed that consumers express authenticity perceptions through feedback and brands respond through strategies and tactics, she realized that brand authenticity is negotiated and co-constructed as consumers

participate by engaging with the brand's content and creating user-generated content. She also expressed that brand authenticity is co-constructed through community and social validation as more consumers engage and use the brand. Her realization is supported by Khoirina, Handirana, and Usman (2025) who claimed that seeking third-party validation helps address consumer skepticism. She also learned from experience that community involvement and inclusivity enhances authenticity perceptions about a brand although brand communication that seems overly perfect tend to trigger distrust among Gen Z consumers.

Derived from her experiences and learning, she expressed her advice to brands in 2 main points. She recommended for brands to always actively listen to consumer feedback. She also asserted that community involvement contributes to better brand authenticity perceptions. Her emphasis on community involvement is shared by Beverland (2009) who claimed that one of the 7 habits for building and maintaining brand authenticity is being one with the community by contributing to it and fostering strong community relations.

The strongest and most repeated core theme from Interview Participant 2 is about Authenticity as Community Involvement. She cited her brand's involvement in women's events, community programs, consumer participation, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and the "Hindi Ka Sayang" campaign, among others. She even emphasized that "Community is equal to authenticity." Interview Participant 2 also highlighted the core theme Authenticity as Transparency and Information Sharing when she related that L'Oreal maintains authenticity by explaining product claims, packaging changes, and price changes, and by clarifying misunderstandings. She attested that "Information is very important to them," as she referred to the consumers. She also shared her view on Authenticity as Social Validation by manifesting that authenticity is heavily

influenced by influencers, brand ambassadors, reviews, user-generated content, and affiliate content creators. Her words "…once that specific influencer tells them…they think it's already authentic" reflect this core theme. The second interview participant also supports the core theme Authenticity as Continuous Consumer Negotiation since she recognized that authenticity is not imposed by the brand, but rather consumers react, the brand monitors those reactions, the brand adapts, and consumers react again. Hence, she agreed that brand authenticity is continuously adapted back and forth through the interaction between the brand and the consumers. Encapsulating these, Interview Participant 2 sees brand authenticity as community involvement and transparency.

Interview Participant 3

The third interview participant handles the office that plans and implements the corporate social responsibility or CSR programs of the brand National University or NU Las Piñas, as well as its communication to beneficiaries and other stakeholders. CSR is also a form of brand communication that connects the brand to various stakeholders, not just consumers. Officially, the name of the office being handled by Interview Participant 3 is the Community Extension Office but still under the brand NU Las Piñas. Below is Table 4 indicating the themes extracted from the interview:

Table 4

Thematic Analysis Table for Interview Participant 3

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Brand authenticity in everyday communication	communicating brand values, values in actions, internalization of values	Authenticity as fidelity to institutional values	Authenticity is perceived as being faithful to the brand's core values; for NU, these are integrity, patriotism, compassion, resilience, and service.	"The management kept on telling us that we have to stick with our core, the values of patriotism, integrity, and so on…There are five values that NU Philippines is instilling in its stakeholders, most importantly the internal stakeholders, the employees, the students, the faculty members, the administration."
	brand purpose, social relevance, social mission	Authenticity as a social mission	NU's purpose is to help Filipinos gain access to quality education.	"Their point is that the university is built for the Filipinos, and its core is to be compassionate to those who are in need… it's the way of the university or the SM group to help those in need, especially in the education sector."
Brand elements	symbolic brand name, brand meaning, brand identity	Brand name as symbolic identity	The brand name National University communicates inclusivity, accessibility, and service to the nation.	"This is the university of the country. For the country, by the country. So, that's how they envision it."
	tagline's meaning, integrative function of tagline, brand coherence	Tagline as value communication	The tagline supports NU's mission and identity.	"NU Philippines tagline… Founded for Filipinos, Built for the nation."
	simplicity of branding, ease of understanding, centrality of main brand	Simplicity as authenticity	CSR program titles are intentionally straightforward to maintain transparency and avoid confusion.	"As is. Blood Donation, Book Donation. Because I personally want it to be understandable. Not just understandable. I

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				don't want to judge. But I want it to be simple to a point where a layman can understand it. So, basically, there's no brand in this specific program. It's the NU brand that you're carrying."
	brand symbolism, communication of brand purpose, consistency of brand elements	Brand coherence	Brand elements symbolize and communicate the institution's commitment to accessible education.	"NU Philippines tagline… Founded for Filipinos, Built for the nation." "So, all of the things that came later to them acquiring, everything changed. Even the logo, even the tagline. I understand taglines are also part of brand elements, right? So, even those things are changed because of that context. That they want NU to be for the poor. They want NU to be for those in need."
Marketing mix strategies	quality of people, continuous learning, proof of excellence	People as authenticity communicators	Faculty competence, professional development, and ongoing training communicate quality and commitment to excellence.	"When it comes to people…they want the best of the best." "The training is continuous and people can see that."
	the need for needs assessment, the risk of assumptions, relevant CSR programs,	Process as authenticity	CSR programs are designed based on what the community actually needs, not just assumptions.	"But if there's a need for a Community Needs Assessment, we go there prior to the activity. We do CNAs, we assess, we coordinate with people who are in charge of those heads of communities or public schools."
	need-based CSR,	Service relevance	CSR activities must address genuine	"…all efforts will be wasted, all

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	stakeholder concerns, social relevance		needs of stakeholders.	resources will be wasted, time, pinakamahalaga, will be wasted because if hindi makakasagot sa isang pangangailangan, masasayang po lahat ng efforts, kung hindi."
	delivering CSR, communicating CSR, social resonance	Promotion as authenticity amplifier	Communicating CSR activities demonstrate organizational commitment.	"…after each event, I'll go to the marketing office and tell them to post it on FB."
Marketing mix supporting authenticity	transparency, visual proof, living witnesses	Visible action	When stakeholders can directly observe CSR activities, authenticity increases.	"…that it is perceived as authentic because they saw it themselves. Because what we did on campus, we did not block the doors nor the windows. They really saw it."
	strategic partnerships, mutual benefit, enhanced credibility	Credible partnerships as third-party legitimacy	Authenticity perceptions are strengthened through partnerships with respected institutions.	"And they saw that we have partnered with a credible, a reliable organization, which is the Philippine Red Cross."
	community-oriented CSR, social responsiveness, socially relevant actions	Community responsiveness towards real social issues	When CSR programs respond to actual community concerns, authenticity increases.	"Almanza Elementary School asked, Can you train the faculty?"
Marketing mix challenging authenticity	no hidden agenda, sincerity to help, avoiding excessive promotion	Risk of over-promotion	Excessive promotion may possibly undermine authenticity.	"…the way I see it, community extension activities, if successfully done, and no agenda is behind it…the way I see it, it's authentic."
	over-reliance on AI, diminishing human touch, loss of identity,	AI and individuality concerns	Excessive use of AI may reduce authenticity by decreasing personal voice.	"I personally think AI limits individuality."
Consumer expression of authenticity	stakeholder feedback, online expression, feedback culture	Verbal feedback culture	Gen Z stakeholders openly express reactions and opinions.	"Gen Zs are verbal, opinionated even… There's an online group of NU Las

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				Piñas online community... They express their feelings and thoughts there.”
	institutionalized feedback mechanisms, feedback monitoring, stakeholder feedback	Formal feedback channels	Students communicate perceptions through evaluations and surveys.	“…we have online teachers evaluation. So they evaluate the faculty. They're also included in the stakeholder satisfaction survey.”
	online community, open discourse, online culture	Digital community discourse	Consumers express their views and opinions through online communities and discussion groups.	“There's an online group of NU Las Piñas online community… They express their feelings and thoughts there.”
Interpretation of consumer responses	feedback as basis for improvement, timely response to feedback, adjustment of actions based on feedback	Responsiveness to feedback	Feedback is viewed as an opportunity for improvement.	“All the comments, especially qualitative ones, they take it seriously.”
	stakeholders’ concerns about AI, absence of institutional policy on AI use, need for a local policy on AI use	Corrective adaptation	Organizational changes can be triggered by stakeholder concerns.	“I personally know that this addresses the issue of the usage of AI of the stakeholders. That's why a manual, a policy like was drafted for NU Las Piñas because NU Philippines doesn't have a policy yet.”
Brand adaptation	utilizing AI, maintaining educational integrity, finding balance	Balancing innovation and authenticity	NU embraces technological change while maintaining educational integrity.	“They're different from other schools that shy away from AI because they're embracing it but to a certain extent, of course.”
	listening to stakeholder inputs, modifying organizational actions, complying with the university manual	Stakeholder-informed decisions	Stakeholder inputs can influence organizational actions as long as they are aligned with the institutional values and policies.	“Kasi nandun pa rin, it's the constitution of the university, the manual and the handbook. So dapat walang tinatamaan dun. If there is no problem with that, we are open to comments,

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				suggestions, recommendations."
Co-construction of authenticity	institutional actions, stakeholders' response, ongoing interaction	Authenticity as negotiation	Authenticity emerges from the ongoing interaction between the institution and its stakeholders.	"Because it's a two-way street."
	actions, feedback and response, shared meaning	Authenticity as shared meaning	Authenticity emerges through reciprocal feedback and response.	"…it enables a higher level of authenticity, I think that's better."
	negotiation, adaptation, remaining faithful to the university manual	Negotiated adaptation	The institution adapts but remains guided by the handbook and values.	"…we try to integrate what they need, what they want, what they feel they need, what they feel they want in the things that we do na hindi nakakaapak ng values, hindi nakakaapak ng lines ng manual and the handbook."
Human-centered authenticity	personal interaction, face-to-face conversation, genuineness	Authenticity through personal effort	When representatives of the organization personally engage stakeholders, authenticity is enhanced.	"Because especially with partners, the human touch is still better… a face-to-face conversation is better than a voice call or leaving a message on social media platforms."
	physical visitation, human touch, sincerity	Authenticity through sincerity	Stakeholders appreciate the effort and sincerity when staff physically visit communities.	"…because you can feel the sincerity, you can feel the genuineness of a person when they do that especially for community extension activities."
	consistent interaction, appreciation of efforts, long-term relationship	Authenticity through relationship-building	Long-term relationships strengthen perceptions of authenticity.	"Thank you very much for coming, we truly appreciate it, talagang pumunta pa kayo."
Critical incidents	actual CSR activity, transparency, genuineness	Blood donation drive	Stakeholders viewed the CSR activity as authentic since they have directly witnessed it.	"…that it is perceived as authentic because they saw it themselves. Because what we did on campus, we did not block the

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				doors nor the windows. They really saw it."
	small efforts, strong appreciation, unexpected response	Food packs for jeepney drivers	A small-scale CSR activity generated stronger appreciation than expected.	…"the response was unexpected."
	understanding the Gen Z culture, communicating with Gen Z, meme messaging	Gen Z meme controversy	The university learned the importance of understanding the culture and communication styles of the Gen Z.	…" embrace the tone, the voice, the culture of Gen Z."
Learning about authenticity	Gen Z language, Gen Z humor, Gen Z communication preferences	Adaptation to Gen Z culture	Authenticity entails understanding the language, humor, and communication preferences of the Gen Z.	"Personally, what it taught me is to be, is to adapt to them. To their voice."
	flexibility in messaging, language adaptation, evolving communication style	Authenticity requires evolution	Brands must evolve and keep up with changing communication practices.	"Don't stick to the usual mode of communication. Because for me, communication is changing. It adapts. It's evolving."
Advice to brands	learning Gen Z communication through trends, researching about Gen Z preferences	Follow trends and research	Awareness of emerging consumer trends is important for authentic communication.	"Two, sir. Trends and research."
	flexibility, non-traditionalism, communication adaptation	Avoid rigid traditionalism in communication	Brands should be willing to change the way they communicate.	"Don't stick to what is the traditional. Don't stick with what is usual for the company. If there is a need for you to change your ways so that our message can be spread across."

Being the person in charge of corporate social responsibility or CSR for his organization and brand, Interview Participant 3 views brand authenticity as a social mission while being true to his institution's values. His view is aligned with the perspective of Mazutis and Slawinski (2015) who claimed that the alignment of a

brand's CSR activities with the company or brand's core mission, vision, and values is one of the 2 core dimensions of CSR that impact authenticity.

His view of brand elements placed brand names as symbolic identity as he cited the example that his brand stands for inclusivity, accessibility, and service to the nation. He also considered tagline as value communication that supports his brand's mission and identity. He also emphasized brand coherence through the proper use of brand elements. In naming his organization's CSR programs, he emphasized his belief that simplicity is authenticity by making his brand's CSR program titles generic and easily understandable, thereby allowing his organization's brand to take the limelight.

In terms of marketing mix and CSR strategies, Interview Participant 3 viewed people as authenticity communicators since their competence, development, and ongoing training reflect quality and commitment to excellence. He also considered the process of determining and assessing community needs, prior to designing CSR activities, as a means to ensure that CSR programs are relevant in addressing genuine stakeholder needs. Mazutis and Slawinski (2015) called this as social connectedness, referring to the extent to which the CSR efforts are embedded in a broader social context while addressing certain societal needs. Aside from these, Interview Participant 3 shared that promoting a brand's CSR activities serves as an authenticity multiplier that communicates a brand's commitment to its advocacy. However, excessive promotion or manifesting self-serving agenda undermines authenticity. Of course, visible and directly observable CSR actions produce living witnesses and thereby enhance CSR authenticity, especially when the organization is quite responsive towards real social issues. Authenticity is further enhanced when a brand partners with credible and legitimate organizations for its CSR programs. Amidst all of

these though, over-reliance on artificial intelligence or AI diminishes human touch and leads to loss of identity.

Interview Participant 3 recognized that stakeholders, especially Gen Z, openly express their reactions and opinions. This is why his organization implemented formal feedback channels in the form of periodic evaluations and surveys aside from its digital community discourse channels. Since his organization views feedback as opportunities for improvement, all comments are taken seriously with the valid stakeholder concerns being subjected to corrective adaptation. His organization balances innovation and authenticity as it adapts stakeholder inputs that are aligned with the institution's values and policies.

Being a CSR person, Interview Participant 3 highlighted his belief that authenticity is a two-way street that undergoes negotiation through the ongoing interaction between the institution and its stakeholders. Additionally, he also relayed his view of authenticity as negotiated adaptation within the limits of the institution's handbook and values, thereby making authenticity as a shared meaning that is co-constructed and emerges through reciprocal feedback and response.

In terms of human-centered authenticity, Interview Participant 3 stated the importance of personal interaction, sincerity, and relationship-building. Based on his experience handling CSR programs, he considers face-to-face conversations more authentic and sincere compared to voice calls or messages sent through social media platforms. He also alluded that human touch helps in building long-term relationships, which in turn strengthens authenticity. Sincerity, for Napoli, et al. (2014) is one of the 3 important dimensions of brand authenticity.

Critical incidents such as their blood donation drive, food packs for jeepney drivers, and the Gen Z meme controversy made Interview Participant 3 understand a few things about brand authenticity. He observed that stakeholders viewed the blood donation CSR activity as authentic because it was carried out transparently and they have directly witnessed it. He noticed that even small efforts such as giving food packs to jeepney drivers, when sincerely done with a human touch, are greatly appreciated. He was also able to grasp the importance of understanding the culture and communication styles of stakeholders, whether they belong to Gen Z or otherwise.

Adaptation and evolution are two important concepts related to authenticity that Interview Participant 3 learned from his experience in handling CSR activities. He reiterated that it is very important to understand the Gen Z culture as many of their stakeholders belong to that generation. He also realized that authenticity requires evolution as brands need to keep up with changing brand communication practices.

Based on his realizations about authenticity, his advice to brands on how to become adaptive is two-fold. First is to update by understanding trends and conducting research. Second is to avoid rigid traditionalism in brand communication and be willing to change.

Deriving the core themes from the numerous themes found in the third interview, the interview participant perceives Authenticity as Value-Based Service wherein the institution's actions should always align with its core values and remain faithful to its mission. Additionally, its CSR activities should always serve genuine community needs. In his words, he said, "We should stick with our core," with visibly strong conviction. He also views Authenticity as Human-Centered Engagement through personal interaction by physically showing up to build face-to-face

relationships benefit from that stakeholders would see the genuine effort because “The human touch is still better,” as he said with utmost sincerity. He also sees Authenticity as Visible and Relevant Action since stakeholders trust actions that they can directly observe, participate in, and benefit from. “They saw it themselves,” as Interview Participant 3 verbalized it. The interview participant also emphasized that, “It’s a two-way street,” while pointing out that the institution listens, receives feedback, adapts, and responds to stakeholders while remaining anchored to its core values, hence, positioning Authenticity as Negotiated Responsiveness. The third interview participant also believes in Authenticity as Cultural Adaptation. “Adapt to them. Their voice,” as he stressed the importance of understanding the Gen Z culture, using contemporary communication styles, and adapting to trends without abandoning values. In the end, Interview Participant 3 considers brand authenticity as value-driven service and human engagement.

Interview Participant 4

The fourth interview participant has worked for agencies that provide advertising, promotions, and brand communication services for various brands including Coca-Cola and Gardenia, some Nestle chocolate brands, Dieting Mom, and Karcher. Most of her basis for answering the interview questions came from her stint with Coca-Cola and Gardenia brands. The information extracted from the interview including the themes and supporting quotes are presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5

Thematic Analysis Table for Interview Participant 4

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Brand authenticity in everyday communication	truth in advertising, brand promise fulfillment, what you see is what you get	Authenticity as consistency	When advertisements, promotional messages, discounts and other offers match what consumers actually receive, authenticity is perceived.	"We make sense of brand authenticity in such a way that what we communicate across our ads or our platforms are consistent with what we offer. So, the discounts, the callouts, and then the banners or the graphics should be consistent with what the consumers can see and purchase."
	failed promises, reliability concerns, consumer doubts	Authenticity as reliability	When communicated promises are not fulfilled, consumers doubt the authenticity of a brand.	"…what was communicated through the platform, hindi nasunod so nagkaroon sila ng doubts about sa authenticity…"
Brand elements	visual recall, familiarity of brand elements, brand identity embodiment	Brand elements as authenticity signals	Familiarity of logos and symbols serves as indicators that a brand is genuine and trustworthy.	"For Gen Zs like me, I think we're very visual people. So, when we see logos that are familiar or symbols that are consistent, we already associate them somehow with authenticity because we rely on these brand elements because they embody the identity of the brand."
	long-term exposure, visual familiarity, visual detail consistency	Visual consistency	Authenticity perceptions are strengthened by consistent visual elements over time.	"So, those elements need to be consistent. And then, when regularly we see them, that's the sign or signal that

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				the brand is authentic."
	brand color recognition, brand association, brand identity	Color as brand identity	Colors associated with a brand help communicate identity and aid in brand recognition.	"So, when you automatically see these colors or visual elements, you'll think, ah, this is for Coca-Cola or for Gardenia."
	interrelated campaigns, thematic slogans, brand message continuity	Slogan continuity	Authenticity and brand identity are reinforced by using related slogans across campaigns.	"…when the slogans are so different from the previous slogans used, it's like it's so far from the brand."
Brand elements supporting authenticity	familiar brand elements, recognizable visual identity, trust in familiar objects	Familiar brand identity	Authenticity is reinforced by highly recognizable visual identity elements.	"Their logo is familiar to the Gen Z with that. I think that's what shows authenticity."
	time-derived legitimacy, brand track record, experience-based trust	Brand heritage	Long-term brand presence leads to perceptions of legitimacy and trustworthiness.	"Gen Z considers Gardenia as a pioneer brand…"
	first-hand observation, transparency, no hidden secrets	Transparency of production	Authenticity perceptions increase when consumers see how a product is made.	"Yes, because I feel that when kids are exposed to that (factory tour), it's instilled in their minds. Like, oh, this is how Gardenia bread is made. So, the brand becomes more authentic…"
Brand elements challenging authenticity	damaged packaging, possible product contamination, quality issues	Packaging quality issues	Damaged packaging poses concerns for consumers about quality and authenticity.	"Because sometimes, the cans or bottles get damaged."
	fear of counterfeit products, skepticism about change, changes without prior notice	Packaging redesign confusion	Visual changes create doubts about the genuineness of products.	"Before, the word Sprite was small and there were a few other elements. Now, the updated logo is much bigger on the bottle… So, we were asked if the products were authentic."

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Interpretation of consumer reactions	reactions and comments, feedback and complaints, product reviews	Social listening	Consumer comments and reviews are critical sources of authenticity insights.	"Usually, the reactions we get are through comments and then feedback… Also, the reviews of the products after they purchase the products."
	livestream interactions, real-time monitoring, immediate feedback	Engagement monitoring	Real-time engagement provides immediate feedback.	"There's also a livestream of our brands. So, we observe what they're saying through the comments and then how they engage through the livestream."
	complaints as areas for improvement, repeated complaints as unresolved issues, change driven by complaints	Feedback-driven adjustment	Repeated complaints lead to recommendations for change	"Usually, our team collects comments. When we see a comment that is repeated many times, we focus on what we can suggest to the brand."
Critical brand element incident	fear of counterfeit products, skepticism about change, changes without prior notice	Packaging redesign confusion	Consumers interpreted a packaging change as a possible issue about the authenticity of the product.	"The packaging of Sprite was different on the website, but they received the old packaging."
	customer recovery, customer service, dialogue	Authenticity restoration	Trust was restored through explanation and clarification.	"…, our customer service team answered their questions and explained that it was just a revamped logo. We assured them that the products were authentic."
Marketing mix and authenticity	quality, consistency, authenticity	Product quality as indicator	Packaging helps in communicating quality, consistency, and authenticity.	"For example, in the product elements of packaging, they suggest product quality, consistency, pricing, fairness, and distribution methods like in our online and

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				offline. They suggest convenience and accessibility. I think they're all essential parts of brand authenticity."
	reasonable pricing, fair value, price justification	Price fairness	Reasonable pricing contributes to authenticity perceptions.	"… pricing fairness… I think they're all essential parts of brand authenticity."
	role of distribution channels, legitimacy and credibility, accessibility and convenience	Distribution credibility	Distribution channels communicate legitimacy and provide convenience.	"… distribution methods like in our online and offline. They suggest convenience and accessibility."
	attractive promotions, delivery of offers, brand promise fulfillment	Promotional integrity	Authenticity depends on delivering campaign and promotional promises.	"I think it's more on consistency in terms of what the brand should offer, what the promotion itself is, and what the consumers should get."
Marketing mix supporting authenticity	promotional pricing, price sensitivity, value for money	Attractive pricing	Reduced prices during campaigns reinforce authenticity perceptions.	"They said that it's cheaper in the livestream compared to the supermarket."
	listening to feedback, refining promotion strategies, consumer response monitoring	Responsive promotions	Promotions are continually improved based on consumer feedback.	"So, every time we have a campaign, we always have an analysis of what we do."
Marketing mix challenging authenticity	promotion implementation failure, doubts about authenticity, customer recovery	Promotional execution failure	Failure to fulfill promised rewards raised authenticity concerns.	"And then, what happened is, in a specific platform, we weren't able to set up properly the freebie. So, there were consumers who weren't able to get a free item. So, what we did with that is, we tracked all the orders that complained because a lot of

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				them complained. And then, we sent each of them the missing item that they didn't receive."
	consumer skepticism, legitimacy of distribution channels, distribution's contribution to authenticity	Distribution identity confusion	Consumers doubted the authenticity when the online store name did not match the Coca-Cola brand.	"So, for our TikTok, its name is different. So, if I can specifically state, it's not Coca-Cola official store but it was a Drinks Corner. So, a lot of people were questioning if our products are authentic because it's not under the Coca-Cola name… the name was different. So, that's where the questions about authenticity arose at that time."
Consumer expression of authenticity	livestream campaigns, instant feedback, consumer engagement	Real-time feedback	Consumers communicate authenticity perceptions instantly during livestream campaigns.	"Usually, it's engagement on the livestream because that's where we get the real-time feedback."
	operational concerns, expressions of dissatisfaction, seeking consumer justice	Complaint behavior	Authenticity concerns are usually expressed through complaints instead of abstract evaluations.	"Mostly, the comments we receive are from complaints."
	post-purchase evaluation, recommending the brand to others, forewarning others about the brand	Review culture	Product reviews are forms of authenticity judgments.	"Also, the reviews of the products after they purchase the products."
Brand response to feedback	listening to the customer, messaging review, campaign refinement	Consumer-centered adaptation	Feedback directly influences subsequent brand messaging and campaigns.	"We really take the feedback from the consumers… We need to adjust our communication strategies."
	clarifying promotions mechanics, change in	Communication correction	Consumer confusion requires immediate	"So, we have to change the mechanics or communications

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	communications, sense of urgency,		communication adjustments.	of our stores immediately. So, usually, that's what we do. We need to adjust our communication strategies."
	errors in operations, immediate correction, avoid losing trust	Operational correction	Errors are rectified quickly to maintain trust.	"So, we had to adjust the QR code…"
Co-construction of authenticity	brand actions, consumer feedback, brand adjustments	Consumer influence	Consumer reactions directly influence subsequent brand actions.	"...the consumers communicate through feedback. So, the feedback that we receive from the Gen Z consumers is the reason why we adjust our messaging or behavior so that our strategies become authentic."
	continuous interaction, back-and-forth exchanges, ongoing negotiation	Authenticity as interaction	Authenticity emerges through the continuous back-and-forth exchanges between brands and consumers.	"So, it becomes a cycle of what the consumers will be saying about the brand and then what we will be adjusting."
	ongoing engagement, continuous negotiation, brand-consumer relationship	Relationship-centered authenticity	Authenticity is perceived through brand-consumer engagement rather than merely through brand actions.	"…I can feel the authenticity of the brand through the way they interact with the consumers rather than what they just do."
Leaning about authenticity	congruence in communication, consistency in actions, brand integrity	Alignment matters	Messages must consistently align with actions.	"I realized that what we communicate should always align with the brand's actions."
	importance of feedback, learning from feedback, consumers as a source of organizational learning	Listening matters	Consumer feedback is a critical source of learning authenticity.	"It's important to listen to the feedback, whether it be positive or negative. It's important in terms of authenticity."
Advice to brands	role of consumer feedback, taking feedback	Take feedback seriously	Authenticity relies on genuine	"My advice is more on the importance of

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	seriously, genuine responsiveness to feedback		responsiveness to consumers.	consumer feedback. It should really be taken seriously."
	brand planning, responding to feedback, treatment of consumers	Authenticity through treatment of consumers	Authenticity depends on how consumers are treated, not just on how brand actions are planned.	"We should always consider how the brand responds to feedback and criticism and how they treat consumers. It's not just about what was planned, but how we genuinely treat the consumers. That's what's important so that the brand can be seen as authentic."

Brand authenticity, as seen by Interview Participant 4, is largely about consistency and reliability. She claimed that authenticity is perceived when advertising and promotional messages, discounts, and other offers match what consumers actually receive. When brands fail to deliver what they promised, consumers consider them unreliable and doubt the authenticity of the said brands. This claim is supported by Bruhn, et al. (2012) who revealed in their literature review that reliability is one of four indicators of brand authenticity.

For brand elements, Interview Participant 4 considered them as authenticity signals since familiarity of logos and brand symbols serves as indicators that a brand is genuine and trustworthy. Beyond familiarity, she emphasized the role of visual consistency, the use of brand colors, and slogan continuity in strengthening brand identity, brand recognition, and brand authenticity perceptions, such as in the case of

Coca-Cola. Furthermore, highly recognizable visual identity elements reinforce authenticity while a long-standing brand heritage leads to legitimacy and trustworthiness perceptions. Consumers also perceive authenticity when they are able to observe how a product is made, just like in the Gardenia factory. On the negative side, Interview Participant 4 cited packaging quality issues such as damaged bottles pose product quality and brand authenticity concerns while packaging redesign confusion such as visual changes in product labels create doubts about the genuineness of products. This was the case when Sprite updated its label posted on its website while some products with the old label design were sold to consumers. Trust was restored when the customer service team clarified and explained the label changes.

In terms of marketing mix, according to Interview Participant 4, product and packaging communicate quality, consistency, and authenticity while price fairness contributes to authenticity perceptions. Aside from these, the credibility of distribution channels communicate legitimacy while providing convenience. Moreover, promotional integrity and responsiveness, through the fulfillment of campaign promises and the continual improvement of promotions based on consumer feedback, enhance authenticity perceptions. Incidentally, Nunes, et al. (2021) affirm integrity and legitimacy as among the 6 components that collectively define consumers' authenticity perceptions. On the other hand, authenticity perceptions decline when the brand fails to fulfill the promised promotional rewards and when consumers doubt the legitimacy of distribution outlets.

Consumers express authenticity perceptions in different ways, as described by Interview Participant 4. Real-time feedback happens during livestream campaigns of a brand while authenticity concerns are usually expressed as specific complaints

instead of general feedback evaluations. Post-purchase reviews are also now a part of the review culture where consumers conduct and even post online their reviews of products they have purchased and used, influencing the authenticity judgments of other consumers.

In interpreting consumer reactions, Interview Participant 4 argued the importance of social listening and engagement since consumer comments and reviews are critical sources of authenticity insights, especially real-time engagements which provide immediate feedback. Negative comments and feedback, when received repeatedly, lead to recommendations for strategy or tactical adjustments. Brands respond to consumer reviews and feedback by adjusting their subsequent brand messaging and campaigns, as reflected in the actions taken by Interview Participant 4 for the brands that she handled. Consumer confusion requires communication correction or adjustments while operational errors should be rectified quickly to maintain consumer trust.

Because of these experiences and observations in the interaction between her brands and their consumers, Interview Participant 4 now believes in relationship-centered authenticity where authenticity is perceived through brand-consumer engagement in the form of continuous interaction where consumer reactions directly influence subsequent brand actions, thereby rendering brand authenticity as a co-constructed meaning. Amidst all of these, she learned that alignment between actions and messages, as well as listening to consumer feedback greatly matter. Hence, her advice to brands is to take consumer feedback seriously as authenticity depends on genuine responsiveness and how consumers are treated, not just on how brand actions are planned.

Summarizing the themes extracted from the interview with the fourth participant into core themes, it can be said that the interview participant focused and emphasized on: Authenticity as Communication-Action Consistency, Authenticity as Familiarity and Visual Continuity, Authenticity as Consumer Responsiveness, Authenticity as Interactive Negotiation, and Authenticity as Trustworthy Execution. She believes communication-action consistency contributes to authenticity when advertisements match reality, promotions are delivered as promised, and consumers receive what they expect. She asserted that familiarity and continuity of brand elements reinforce authenticity by making logos, brand colors, packaging, and slogans visually consistent and recognizable. In terms of consumer responsiveness, authenticity is manifested by the brand through collecting feedback, monitoring comments, adjusting communications and revising campaigns accordingly. Hence, this paves the way for the idea that authenticity is not enacted by brands as authenticity emerges from interactive negotiation, particularly through brand communication, consumer feedback, brand adjustment, and further consumer response. On the operational side of authenticity, based on the interview participant's experience, authenticity can be challenged by operational failures such as missing freebies, incorrect QR codes, damaged packaging, confusing store names, and packaging inconsistencies, making authenticity not just symbolic but also operational requiring trustworthy execution. For her, brand authenticity is about consistency and responsiveness.

Interview Participant 5

The perspective of the fifth interview participant comes from a person who has performed brand communication functions for several celebrity brands and product

brands, as well as tourism-related service brands. Among the celebrity brands that she handled were celebrity athletes EJ Obiena and Alyssa Valdez, celebrity beauty queen Pia Wutrzbach, and celebrity online influencer brands Angelique Manto and Julie Eigenmann. For the product brands, there were Milo and Summit Natural Drinking Water. The tourism-related brands were TAC Tours & Travel and Profil Holidays. Her point of view provided another angle within the brand side of this study. In Table 6 below are the themes and supporting quotes along with their descriptions as extracted from the interview:

Table 6

Thematic Analysis Table for Interview Participant 5

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Brand authenticity in everyday communication	consumer life journey, consumer experiences, life-long brand relationships,	Authenticity as long-term relevance	When consumers relate the brand with their own life journey and experiences, authenticity emerges.	“So that's how the people, us, Gen Z can relate to it because I've always known Milo since when I was a kid. And then now I still use Milo.”
	brand presence, brand familiarity, consumer life stages	Authenticity as familiarity	Continuous brand presence through a person’s life stages makes a brand authentic.	“So ever since we were kids, we've always been using Summit.”
Brand elements	brand values, endorser’s personal values, alignment of values	Celebrity-brand congruence	Brand endorsers must naturally embody and manifest the values of the brand they represent.	“…they have to always correlate with the talent or with the person that they're going to promote it with because why would you promote something that doesn't relate to your values or who you are as a person?”
	product category, celebrity image, endorser credibility	Authenticity through symbolic fit	Authenticity perceptions increase when the celebrity	“For example, for Pia Wurtzbach, everyone knows her as Miss

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
			endorser's public image matches the brand's product category.	Universe 2015. So when you think of Miss Universe, you think beauty, pageant, all of that. So she endorsed L'Oreal which is also a beauty product, cosmetics. So of course, it matches with her identity as a beauty queen…"
	athlete success stories, endorser's lived values, brand message	Authenticity through aspirational narratives	Brand messages are reinforced by the endorser's related achievements and lived values	"I think it's authentic because a lot of people look up to EJ, especially given his history and then how he made his way to the Olympics… I look up to him and see his dedication and hard work as something that correlates with Milo as the brand…"
	growth and transformation, storytelling, emotional connections,	Emotional storytelling	Personal development stories create strong emotional connections.	"…from when they were kids up until they grow up, they've been with Milo…"
Brand elements supporting authenticity	athlete endorser's achievements, brand values, brand-endorser personality match	Athlete endorsements	Successful athlete endorsers strengthen authenticity because their achievements embody the brand's values.	"…Milo promotes their product through EJ is in a sporty way…"
	success journeys, personal development narratives, relatability	Relatable success journeys	Narratives showing progression from childhood to adulthood resonate with consumers	"…I saw it on social media that a lot of people shared it, and were saying that it was a great video."
Brand elements challenging authenticity	celebrity brand image, celebrity brand positioning, competing celebrity identities,	Public comparison culture	When celebrities enter spaces strongly associated with another celebrity, consumers may challenge their authenticity.	"For example, for Fashion Week, everyone knows Heart Evangelista as the main fashion icon of the Philippines. And then suddenly you see other Filipinos entering these Fashion Weeks like

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				Ann Curtis, Pia Wurtzbach. But then people, or maybe Gen Z, have this negative aspect when they see other fashion icons post it, they would bash them in the sense that why are you stealing Heart Evangelista's title as a fashion icon? So that's not exactly what the brand or the talent would expect. Instead, you'd think that people would be supportive."
Marketing mix and authenticity	interactive promotions, instant feedback, sharing in social media	Social media as authenticity space	Immediate interaction, validation, and feedback are made possible through social media	"…a lot of Gen Zs are on social media… and the reason why it's also a good place for promotion is because Gen Zs have this tendency to react and comment and share on what they like, on the smallest things that they relate to, they just share it, they just like it, they have that."
	online influencers, social media following, influencer popularity	Influencer selection	Choosing the right social media influencer is critical to authenticity perceptions.	"So I think having it on social media is the main platform for promoting a brand and with that, they have to pick up talent who also has a high following."
	brand actions, consistency with brand mission, alignment with organizational core values,	Value consistency	Authenticity requires remaining faithful to the core values of the brand and the organization.	"But let's say as the travel agency that I'm working with, our mission and value is to always provide the best experience, always have the best service regardless what happens and all of that. So as our way, we always

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				make sure to always stick to that."
Marketing mix supporting consistency	athlete evolution stories, brand history, alignment of endorser-brand narratives	Story-driven campaigns	Campaigns that connect brand history with the endorser's personal growth reinforce authenticity.	"…Hidilyn Diaz then was in that video, where it kinda like, from when they were kids up until they grow up, they've been with Milo… that positively impacted a lot of people, kasi they can all relate to it in that sense."
	relatable communication, consumer engagement, sharing and commenting on social media	Emotional resonance	Consumers are more engaged when communication reflects their own experiences.	"…it affected them nicely or positively… one, they're going to keep sharing it on social media, and two, they will comment. They have this thing, I like to believe Gen Z likes to give their comments, if it's nice, if it's worth it, if it's relatable."
Consumer expression of authenticity	organic amplification, sharing brand content, commenting	Sharing behavior	Positive authenticity perceptions are expressed through engagement, sharing, and commenting.	"…it affected them nicely or positively… one, they're going to keep sharing it on social media, and two, they will comment."
	reacting, commenting, discussion	Opinion culture	Gen Z consumers actively express brand authenticity perceptions online.	"…Gen Z likes to give their comments… They like to share their opinion on social media."
	public scrutiny, negative feedback, expressing opinions	Criticism and comparison	Consumers openly compare brands, endorsers, and campaigns.	"No one really anticipates a negative feedback. So if it's positive, it's good for the brand, they got what they wanted. And on the negative side, I guess it's more on people's opinion and how they see the person also."
	social listening, engagement	Monitoring engagement	Engagement levels, shares,	"…I saw it on social media that a lot of

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Interpretation of consumer responses	levels, sharing and commenting		and comments are interpreted as authenticity indicators.	people shared it, and were saying that it was a great video."
	consumer reactions, relatability of brand content, consumers' lived experiences.	Relatability assessment	Consumer reactions indicate whether brand content resonates with consumers' lived experiences.	"They have this thing… Gen Z likes to give their comments, if it's nice, if it's worth it, if it's relatable."
Co-construction of authenticity	brand-consumer interaction, interactive communication, ongoing negotiation	Authenticity as joint construction	Authenticity emerges through the interaction between brands presenting themselves and consumers interpreting them.	"I believe that it comes with the consumers and the brand themselves with how they present themselves."
	meaning-making by audiences, consumer acceptance, validation of authenticity	Consumer validation	The ultimate decision whether authenticity claims are accepted lies with the consumers.	"So that's how the people, us, Gen Z can relate to it."
Critical incident	creative storytelling, unexpected positive resonance, viral effect	Milo athlete evolution campaign	Milo's growing up campaign generated stronger engagement than expected.	"… a lot of people shared it."
	unanticipated authenticity challenges, uncontrollable incidents, celebrity comparisons	Fashion Week celebrity comparisons	Public comparisons among celebrities affected perceptions beyond the control of the celebrity or the brands they endorse.	"For example, for Fashion Week, everyone knows Heart Evangelista as the main fashion icon of the Philippines. And then suddenly you see other Filipinos entering these Fashion Weeks like Ann Curtis, Pia Wurtzbach. But then people, or maybe Gen Z, have this negative aspect when they see other fashion icons post it, they would bash them in the sense that why are you stealing Heart Evangelista's title as a fashion icon?"
Learning about authenticity	understanding Gen Z interests, following trends, consumer insights	Authenticity requires relevance	Brand communications must connect with what Gen Z	"Gen Zs have this tendency to react and comment and share on what they

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
			currently values and discusses.	like, on the smallest things that they relate to, they just share it, they just like it, they have that."
	brand content visibility, consumer self-recognition, relevance	Authenticity requires identification	When consumers see themselves reflected in the brand stories, they respond.	"That one, I know there was one video of Milo that positively impacted a lot of people, kasi they can all relate to it…"
Advice to brands	aligned values, endorser living out the brand's values, brand-endorser fit	Choose aligned endorsers	The brand's values should be embodied and manifested in the endorser's life.	"…I believe that they have to always correlate with the talent or with the person that they're going to promote it with because why would you promote something that doesn't relate to your values or who you are as a person?"
	mission-driven communication, value-aligned decisions, behavior based on the brand's principles	Stay value-consistent	Brands should remain faithful to their declared values.	"So as our way, we always make sure to always stick to that. Any conflict that comes to it, we stick to that."

In general, the personal perspective of Interview Participant 5 treats brand authenticity in terms of long-term relevance. For instance, she related that she had been consuming Milo since she was a kid and throughout her life journey. In line with this, familiarity with the brand also makes her see the brand as authentic, as in the case of her exposure to Summit Natural Drinking Water.

In the area of brand elements, Interview Participant 5 deems celebrity-brand congruence and their symbolic fit as enhancers of authenticity perceptions, in which the public image of celebrity brand endorsers should not only match the product

category of the brand but also they themselves must embody and manifest the brand's values. This belief of Interview Participant 5, who happens to be a former talent manager of celebrity athletes, affirms a similar stand of Interview Participant 1 who is a celebrity brand himself. Furthermore, Interview Participant 5 implied that brand messages are reinforced by the celebrity endorser's achievements and lived values through aspirational narratives. She cited the examples of famous successful athletes EJ Obiena, Alyssa Valdez, and Hidilyn Diaz endorsing Milo and Summit Natural Drinking Water. The logical explanation behind these can be found in McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989), as cited by Jain and Roy (2016), wherein cultural and social meanings associated with a cultural entity, such as a celebrity endorser, are passed on to a brand and eventually to the consumer as those meanings are internalized through repeated product usage. Brand messages are further strengthened when emotional storytelling approach is used in conveying the personal development stories and relatable success journeys of successful athlete endorsers, thereby resonating with the consumers and fostering strong emotional connections with them. On the negative side, celebrity brands face authenticity challenges when they enter spaces strongly associated with another celebrity because of the tendency of the public to make comparisons. This occurrence is similar to the difficulty that a brand faces when trying to occupy a positioning or a distinct identity in the consumer's mind where another brand has already successfully laid claim to.

In terms of marketing mix strategies, Interview Participant 5 considers social media as an authenticity space since immediate interaction, validation, and feedback are made possible through this communication platform. It is important to choose the right social media influencer as this can strongly influence authenticity perceptions. Implementing story-driven campaigns that resonate with consumers emotionally

reinforce consistency and authenticity perceptions. Aside from these, Interview Participant 5 highlighted the importance of remaining faithful to the core values of the brand and the organization while citing her own travel and tour package agency as an example wherein she ensures that, no matter what happens, the guest is provided with the best experience as promised by the organization's mission and values.

When consumers perceive authenticity, according to Interview Participant 5, they tend to share them online through engagement, sharing, commenting, and giving their opinions, which fosters an opinion culture. The downside is that negative opinions and criticisms are also made public, giving rise to the need for brands to monitor online engagements. In social listening, brands should assess the relatability of their content aside from monitoring consumer engagement.

Throughout her experience in directly managing celebrity athlete brands and their endorsed brands indirectly, as well as in managing her own travel agency, Interview Participant 5 claimed that she learned that brand authenticity requires relevance wherein consumers can identify and connect with the brand. Because of this, her advice to brands focuses on choosing endorsers who embody and manifest the brand's values in their lives and on ensuring that brands remain faithful to their declared values.

The core themes from the fifth interview are the following: Authenticity as Celebrity-Brand Alignment, Authenticity as Relatability, Authenticity as Storytelling, Authenticity as Consumer Validation, and Authenticity as Value Congruence. With regards to celebrity-brand alignment, authenticity emerges when the endorser's identity fits the brand, the consumers perceive a natural relationship with the brand's spokesperson, and the values of the endorser reinforce the brand's values. In line with

relatability, authenticity grows when consumers see themselves in the brand narrative such as in childhood memories, growing up stories, athlete development, and everyday experiences. In terms of storytelling, authenticity perceptions are enhanced when continuing narratives show growth, development, and connect personal and brand histories. As far as consumer validation is concerned, authenticity is not solely determined by the brand but affirmed by consumer sharing, commenting, engagement, and other forms of organic participation. Value congruence impacts authenticity perceptions when brands, endorsers, products, and services consistently stay aligned with the brand's core values. In other words, Interview Participant 5 emphasizes brand authenticity as celebrity-brand alignment and relatable storytelling.

Interview Participant 6

The participant in the sixth interview has worked in brand management handling Vitamilk for Asia Brewery, CDO Katsu/Tonkatsu, and CDO Chicken Nuggets for CDO Foodsphere. Although she has a bachelor's degree in marketing, she practically learned the ropes of brand management while working for these 2 companies. The insights, themes and supporting quotes from the interview with her are presented in Table 7 below:

Table 7

Thematic Analysis Table for Interview Participant 6

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Brand authenticity in	real life experiences, everyday	Authenticity as relevance	When brands connect with real Gen Z	"…brand authenticity actually builds on

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
everyday communication	struggles, connecting with Gen Z		experiences and challenges, authenticity emerges.	consistency and also your relatability and relevance on the everyday experiences of the Gen Zs.”
	delivering brand promises, consistency, repeated behavior	Authenticity as consistency	Brands must consistently deliver what they convey in their communications.	“…brand authenticity actually builds on consistency…”
	addressing consumer needs, solving consumer problems, consumer need-based brand promise	Authenticity as problem-solving	Authentic brands solve genuine consumer needs and problems.	“…we communicate the authenticity because it captures the problem, the main struggles of the Gen Zs in particular… we deliver the authenticity in a way of communicating or delivering the promise of delivering the product, the promise of being satisfying, more convenient, and really resonates with the Gen Zs that are looking for practicality but also the convenience of recreating the dish at home.”
Brand elements	communicative brand elements, brand identity, brand purpose	Brand elements as meaning systems	Brand elements communicate the brand identity and purpose.	“…brand elements is really part of the way we communicate our brand. It's basically the foundations of everything for the brand.”
	visual cues, meanings of colors, semiotic brand communication	Color symbolism	Visual elements communicate the brand’s values.	“…we use the color red because red actually connotes the fun, the energy which is also aligned with the promise or the purpose of the brand.”

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	brand semantics, functional communication, brand promise embedded in the brand name	Brand name as meaning carrier	Brand names can be used to communicate benefits and purpose.	"Vita because it vitalizes the mind and body of the consumers."
	language adaptation, coined terms as brand elements, Pagudtom campaign	Localized cultural language	When brands speak the consumers' language, authenticity is enhanced.	"…we use the coined term Pagudtom for us to also resonate with the Filipino market."
	consumer insights, data-driven branding, research-based decisions	Research-based branding	Consumer understanding, not mere assumptions, should be the basis of designing brand elements.	"We did a lot of research, the FGDs, the quant… and we see that there is no soy milk brand or even an RTD milk brand that is highlighting on that messaging first… and then with the help of our creatives as well, we come up with that term, the Pagudtom."
Brand elements supporting authenticity	visual honesty, accurate representation, packaging communication	Packaging truthfulness	Packaging visuals should accurately depict and represent the product.	", the visuals that you use with your packaging… should also stay true… It should be aligned very close to what the consumer is expecting from the appearance on how they see it on shelves up to the time that they will try it on their own."
	unique brand traits, distinctiveness of brands, relevant positioning	Authentic positioning	Distinctive but relevant positioning enhances authenticity.	"…authenticity also starts with what is unique to your brand."
Brand elements challenging authenticity	consumer assumptions, no misleading communication, lack of clarification	Misaligned consumer assumptions	Consumer assumptions and interpretations can lead to authenticity challenges even without misleading communication.	"So, we actually experienced a report on the consumer side that they tried original Vitamilk because they thought that it is good for lactose intolerance. But

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				they experienced diarrhea because it contains 1% of cow's milk, basically. So, with that, there's a question already on authenticity because we know that Vitamilk is a soy milk. And although it's not part of our comms (that) it's good for lactose intolerance. But that's the general perception already."
	consumer expectations, ambiguous claims, need for clarification	Perception-reality gaps	Authenticity becomes vulnerable when consumer expectations are different from product realities.	"…there's a question already on authenticity because we know that Vitamilk is a soy milk. And although it's not part of our comms (that) it's good for lactose intolerance. But that's the general perception already. So, what we did to address that is basically we apologized… we explained really the product composition of Vitamilk. And also, moving forward, we added that in our FAQs.
Marketing mix and authenticity	product quality, brand promise, delivering promised quality	Product authenticity	Product quality is critical to brand authenticity.	"So to really carry on the promise of authenticity, we need also the support of our team, of the R&D team to really ensure that the product will be of quality, that it delivers on the promise that it's made of premium meat cuts."

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	convenience, practicality, resonating with consumers	Lifestyle fit	Products should fit the consumer's lifestyles and routines.	"And then, for my new brand, basically, which is the Katsu and also the Nuggets, we deliver the authenticity in a way of communicating or delivering the promise of delivering the product, the promise of being satisfying, more convenient, and really resonates with the Gen Zs that are looking for practicality but also the convenience of recreating the dish at home."
	accessibility, practicality, competitiveness	Competitive pricing	Pricing should support accessibility and practicality while remaining competitive.	"And also we stay true for CDO on the value of really communicating the convenience, the practicality, so that we also ensure that in terms of pricing, we are very much competitive versus our competitors."
	aspirational communication, emotional appeal, situational relevance	Promotion through relevance	Brand communications should reflect current realities.	"…we actually changed our communication strategy or promotion or our messaging to be more of like aspirational. So from functional, we shifted to emotional on how Vitamilk can actually support you in reaching your goals because it helps you to fill your day…"
Marketing mix supporting authenticity	context-based campaigns, appropriate	Timeliness	Campaigns gain authenticity when aligned with	"So we launched this project Survive and it's

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	timing, relevance to consumers		current consumer situations and context.	actually very timely. So I think authenticity also roots on being very timely. You need to have the proper timing whenever you launch your campaign. So it should be very timely for Gen Z. So during that time, we launched the campaign a day before the lockdown. So yeah, so very relevant to the Gen Zs as well."
	emotional appeal, context-based relevance, resonating with consumers	Emotional resonance	Emotional communication increases brand and campaign relevance in times of crises such as during the pandemic.	"…we actually struggled a lot with our sales during the pandemic. Because our main channel, which is convenience store, no one is out, everyone is home… we shifted to emotional on how Vitamilk can actually support you in reaching your goals.
	cultural adaptation, riding trends, staying relevant	Trend responsiveness	Authenticity perceptions about a brand increases when it responds appropriately to emerging trends.	"…last 2022 actually, because there's this - the kabataan, the Gen Zs, they're really into the Kakampink…And then in that 7-Eleven store, we promoted the strawberry (flavor). And it actually sell a lot because we adapted a trend."
Marketing mix challenging authenticity	consumer assumptions, general product perceptions, need for clarification	Product misconception	Inaccurate consumer assumptions led to perceptions of inauthenticity.	"…they thought that it is good for lactose intolerance. But they experienced diarrhea because

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				it contains 1% of cow's milk… although it's not part of our comms (that) it's good for lactose intolerance. But that's the general perception already."
	Halal concerns, misunderstood claims, clarification communication	Certification misunderstanding	Misunderstood claims raise questions on a brand's authenticity.	"…there's this issue before that CDO is Halal certified, but it's actually not. So the team actually released a statement to address that concern. And then we also made sure that it is not being or part of the claims on our packaging."
Consumer expression of authenticity	Consumer feedback, digital reviews, online feedback culture	Online reviews	Gen Z consumers actively express feedback online.	"I guess for Gen Z, since they are the techie, the techie market, so they're really very expressive online. So whenever they are not happy with a particular product, so they would post their reviews online. Or if they are happy with the brand, they would actually do a lot of organic content for us. So I think that's their way of showing or how they respond on the authenticity of the brand."
	consumer feedback expression, organic endorsement, "word-of-mouse"	User-generated content	Consumers express positive authenticity perceptions through organic user-generated content.	"…if they are happy with the brand, they would actually do a lot of organic content for us."
Interpretation of consumer responses	monitoring reactions, online	Social listening	The team monitors consumer	"We do also the social scans… to check whether the

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	feedback, social media scans		responses systematically.	message that resonates is about the brand. And then also the impact or the engagement on how really the consumers or the target audiences respond to the campaign."
	evaluating campaigns, tracking consumer response, measuring engagement	Post-campaign analysis	Campaign performance and audience reactions are reflections of brand authenticity.	"…we actually do a post-campaign analysis… on how really the consumers or the target audiences respond to the campaign."
	celebrity outshining the brand, celebrity reinforcing the message, communication effectiveness	Message vs. celebrity evaluation	Brand teams assess whether consumers focus on the message or the celebrity endorser.	"…to check whether the message that resonates is about the brand or does it resonate to the celebrity more because that is something that we don't want to happen. Because there are instances that if you have a new campaign and then there's a big celebrity, the focus on the message shifts towards the celebrity more than the brand itself."
Brand response to feedback	clarification, disclosure, transparency	Communication transparency	Transparency can restore trust when authenticity is questioned.	"We apologized, we explained really the product composition of Vitamilk. And also, moving forward, we added that in our FAQs."
	addressing product concerns of consumers, product improvements, adapting products	Product adaptation	Consumer feedback triggers product improvements.	"…if they mention that they're not happy with the size of our product… it's too small for them or

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	based on consumer preferences			the packaging is too dark… we do a lot of adjustments to really address the feedback of consumers."
	organized communication processes, frequently asked questions of consumers, preventing recurring consumer concerns,	Proactive communication	Organized communication processes can be used to address consumer concerns.	"And also, moving forward, we added that in our FAQs."
Co-construction of authenticity	adjustment, adaptation, ongoing responsiveness	Authenticity as continuous adaptation	Authenticity emerges through constant adjustment and adaptation rather than fixed planning.	"…we need to continuously adapt…"
	influence of Gen Z consumers, brand strategies, reshaping brand communication,	Consumer influence	Gen Z consumers shape brand communication strategies.	"Actually, Gen Z consumers influence us on how we will reshape mainly our communication over time."
	Gen Z tonality, Gen Z terminologies, different connotations of words for Gen Zs	Language adaptation	Authenticity depends on how a brand communicates in ways consumers recognize and appreciate.	"…we need to continuously adapt on the changing Gen Zs' language. Even their tonality is also important because the way the brand or the tonality of the brand also affects how the Gen Zs perceive you as authentic or not."
Critical incident	transparency response, customer recovery, prevention of recurrence	Vitamilk lactose intolerance misunderstanding	Consumer assumptions created an authenticity crisis that got resolved through explanation, disclosure, and transparency.	"We apologized, we explained really the product composition of Vitamilk. And also, moving forward, we added that in our FAQs."
	timely campaign, situation-relevant message,	Pandemic "Project Survive" campaign	A timely campaign unexpectedly	"And then we launched the campaign, the

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	unexpected authenticity gain,		enhanced authenticity perceptions during the pandemic lockdown.	Survive campaign during that time. So very positive comments from the consumers."
	trend adaptation, avoiding explicit political positioning, calculated risk	Kakampink adjacent strawberry promotion	The campaign successfully leveraged a cultural trend while avoiding explicit political identification.	"And then in that 7-Eleven store, we promoted the strawberry (flavor). And it actually sell a lot because we adapted a trend… We don't explicitly communicate the support with the tandem, the Kakampink tandem. We just really promoted the brand, the color of the brand, the flavor of the brand."
Learning about authenticity	evolving consumer culture, evolving the brand, staying relevant	Authenticity requires adaptation	Brands must continuously evolve to adapt to changing consumer realities.	"You need to really adapt on their language, on what they're looking for, what's their experiences now, what's their struggles, and even the way they interact with other brands."
	direct communication, transparent brand messaging, straightforward discourse	Authenticity requires being straightforward	Gen Zs expect more direct and transparent brand communication.	"We need to be more straightforward since Gen Zs are more straightforward now."
	standing out, differentiation, distinctiveness	Authenticity requires distinctiveness	Authenticity is associated with memorability and differentiation.	"Because with a lot of options in the market now, you really need to stand out. So being authentic is also being able to stand out both physically and also mentally to your consumers."
Advice to brands	deliberate listening, genuine responsiveness, consumer-	Listen and respond genuinely	Authenticity emerges through attentive responsiveness	"…you really need to listen, respond genuinely to the consumers…"

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	centered communication planning, tweaking, flexibility	Balancing planning and flexibility	towards consumers. Planning is important for brands but remaining flexible and open to adjustment is also necessary.	"It is not planned. Because there are instances that you really need to do a lot of tweaking with your strategies… to really adapt to the trend or to what the consumer is looking for

Interview Participant 6 generally considers relatability and relevance to everyday life, consistency between communication and action, and the ability to solve genuine consumer needs and problems as enhancers of brand authenticity perceptions. Aligned with her claim about relevance to everyday life is part of the findings of Tran and Keng (2018) saying that realism is about perceived genuineness and everyday relevance.

For Interview Participant 6, brand elements serve as meaning systems by communicating brand identity and purpose wherein visual elements such as colors symbolize certain values and meanings, as in Vitamilk's usage of the color red that connotes fun and energy. She also considers brand names as carriers of meanings that convey the brand's benefits and purpose, such as "Vita" for vitalizing the mind and body, also in the case of Vitamilk. These brand elements support authenticity perceptions. In addition, Vitamilk's coining and capitalizing on the word "Pagudtom" in its campaigns resonated with the Filipino market by localizing an imported brand to fit into the culture of the Philippine market. These brand elements, as cited by Interview Participant 6, were not selected at random or on the whim but rather based on

consumer insights derived from market research. She also emphasized that distinctive but relevant positioning enhances authenticity and that packaging visuals or product labels should accurately depict and represent the product. Misaligned consumer assumptions and perception-reality gaps can pose challenges to brand authenticity, such as when some lactose-intolerant consumers assumed and expected that Vitamilk, being a soy drink, did not contain cow's milk. However, since the original variant of Vitamilk actually contained 1% cow's milk, although the brand never claimed being lactose-free in their brand communications, the said lactose-intolerant consumers experienced diarrhea. This incident triggered authenticity concerns, prompting the brand to apologize and explain the product composition, and consequently added the product composition information to its online FAQs. A similar incident took place when consumers misunderstood that CDO was Halal certified, when in fact it was not. As a response the brand released a statement to clarify the issue and made sure that no such claims were included in the brand's packaging or brand communications.

In terms of marketing mix strategies, Interview Participant 6 mostly talked about the CDO breaded products and the Vitamilk brand. Critical to brand authenticity is product quality, with her highlighting the fact that her CDO products were made from premium meat cuts. She further claimed that CDO Katsu and CDO Nuggets fit the lifestyle of consumers looking for practicality and convenience when recreating the said dish at home. The competitive pricing of the CDO brand supports its accessibility and practicality claims. She also related Vitamilk's shift from functional to aspirational and emotional brand messaging and campaigns, making the brand's promotions more relevant to consumers by proposing that Vitamilk supports them in reaching their goals because the product helps them to fill their day. Timeliness of campaigns also helps

make the brand more relevant as illustrated by the launching of the project Survive a day before the COVID-19 lockdown. The project Survive emotionally resonated with the consumers and enabled the Vitamilk brand to encourage home consumption and address its sales struggle during the pandemic. According to Sansome, Conduit, and Wilkie (2024), timeliness is among the key characteristics of brand transparency which is a sign of brand authenticity. Related to timeliness is trend responsiveness, where Vitamilk was able to capitalize on a particular election campaign event in 2022 by tactically highlighting and stocking up on its pink-colored strawberry flavored variant in the 7-Eleven branch nearest to where the pink-identified political party was holding a big public event, without taking sides politically.

In the area of consumers expressing their authenticity perceptions about a brand, Interview Participant 6 cited online reviews and user-generated content as important avenues of outgoing consumer communication. She explained that consumers, especially those belonging to Gen Z, post their reviews online when they are unhappy about a brand. They also create organic content for the brand when responding to brands they consider authentic.

Brands seek and interpret consumer feedback, as discussed by Interview Participant 6, through social listening, post-campaign analysis, and checking whether consumers focused on the brand message or the celebrity endorser. In responding to those consumer feedback, it is important to use transparent and proactive communication when brand authenticity is questioned. When appropriate, consumer feedback prompts brands to initiate product adaptation or improvements.

In her experience while working in the field of brand management, Interview Participant 6 realized that brands need to continuously adapt to changing consumer

realities and not rely on a single fixed unchangeable plan. In adapting, brand communication strategies are actually influenced by consumers. She also learned that authenticity requires brands to be more direct, transparent, and straightforward in brand communication. Brands also need to be distinct and memorable. Because of these, she advises brands to listen and respond genuinely to consumers, implying the need to balance planning and flexibility.

The core themes that can be derived from the many themes embodied in the sixth interview are the following: Authenticity as Relevance to Everyday Life, Authenticity as Transparency, Authenticity as Continuous Adaptation, Authenticity as Timeliness, and Authenticity as Research-Based Understanding. Being relevant to everyday life means the brand understands consumer struggles, addresses real-life needs, and fits into daily routines, subsequently enhancing authenticity perceptions. Transparency in the form of clarifications and FAQs helps avoid and resolve misunderstanding such as in the case of Vitamilk's lactose intolerance issue and CDO's Halal certification issue, thereby restoring trust and perceptions of authenticity. Because brand authenticity is not fixed, it requires continuous adaptation by listening to consumer feedback, monitoring trends, adapting the language used in brand communication, and making appropriate campaign adjustments. Timeliness is linked to authenticity because the timing of brand communications affects relevance through leveraging on social and cultural contexts. Research-based understanding of consumers, through focus group discussions, quantitative studies, consumer insight analysis, and white space analysis, among others, enables brand communication strategies to be more responsive to the consumers, thereby contributing to perceptions of authenticity. Overall, Interview Participant 6 views brand authenticity as relevance, transparency, timeliness, and continuous adaptation.

Interview Participant 7

The seventh interview participant is a brand manager who has worked on numerous brands in various companies. From Celavive Skincare and HKT Essentials to 16 brands of Primeline Products Philippines belonging to beauty, lifestyle, home, and beverage categories, she has gained a lot of experience in brand communications before handling more popular brands from San Miguel Foods such as Purefoods, Magnolia, Magnolia Timplados, and San Miguel Mart. Aside from San Miguel's brands she also handled the brand Sunny Side Up under a business where she is a part-owner. For Emperador Distilleries, the brands under her care are Carlo Rossi, Barefoot, Arbor Mist, Carnivor, Pik-Nik, and Mezcal. The themes and supporting quotes derived from the interview are presented in Table 8 below:

Table 8

Thematic Analysis Table for Interview Participant 7

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Brand authenticity in everyday communication	consistent storytelling, consumers' interest in stories, narrative continuity	Authenticity as consistent storytelling	Authenticity emerges when brands communicate a coherent story across touchpoints.	"For example, for my team, we view brand elements as an extension of our storytelling rather than curated design assets."
	familiarity, brand identification, immediate brand recognition,	Authenticity as recognizability	Authenticity is perceived when consumers can immediately recognize the brand.	"As in unang tingin pa lang, even if they don't look at the handle, they know it's Sunny Side Up."
	familiarity, consumer experience,	Authenticity as lived experience	Authenticity develops through repeated	"…even my niece, na Gen Z, told me, Oh, Tita, di

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	everyday consumer use		interactions with the brands or products.	ba you're handling this… We love the bottle. We actually use it in the condo as a water bottle."
Brand elements	semiotic brand communication, symbolic brand elements, brand narratives	Brand elements as storytelling tools	Brand names, logos, colors, mascots, and packaging are used to communicate stories and the brand's personality.	"For example, for my team, we view brand elements as an extension of our storytelling rather than curated design assets. Because every element that we use, for example, for Sunny Side Up, the logo is handwritten because we want to make it fun. Then the elements, like for Sunshine kasi Sunny Side, and then we include animals since it's a pet cream."
	story behind the name, personal narrative, founder-inspired brand name	Brand name as personal narrative	Brand names may reflect a genuine personal story.	"And this is based on her childhood. She likes to draw eggs. So that's why we made it sunny side up, because she wanted to relate it to that."
	mascot-enhanced brand personality, emotional appeal of mascots, memorability of mascots	Mascot symbolism	Mascots provide an emotionally engaging and memorable identity for brands.	"We even have a mascot. His name is Eggsy. It's an egg that they always remember when we do executions. Even in Korea, Eggsy is quite popular actually there."
	symbolism of packaging product-packaging match, product identity,	Packaging as symbolic communication	Packaging forms part of the brand's symbolic meaning.	"…Arbor Mist, the bottle, that specific element, the packaging, the color, brand colors… it's a muted purple, then the bottle is frosted. It really

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				looks elegant, especially with the look of the wine inside."
	colors, visual elements, consistency	Visual identity consistency	Consistency of visual elements strengthens perceptions of authenticity.	"It's the color, it's the element, and also the look. As in unang tingin pa lang, even if they don't look at the handle, they know it's Sunny Side Up."
Brand elements supporting authenticity	frosted bottle, elegant design, unique packaging,	Distinctive packaging	Unique packaging enhances brand recognition, brand recall, and emotional attachment.	"We love the bottle."
	mascot, emotional connection, brand recall	Memorable mascots	Mascots enhance consumers' emotional connection with the brand.	"… Eggsy. It's an egg that they always remember when we do executions."
	brand element consistency across various types of execution, immediate recognition, recognition across platforms	Consistency of brand elements	Consistent brand elements help consumers identify the brand immediately.	"As in unang tingin pa lang, even if they don't look at the handle, they know it's Sunny Side Up."
Brand elements challenging authenticity	loss of symbolic meaning, consumers' resistance to change, consumer skepticism	Packaging redesign	Consumers questioned authenticity when the brand changed the iconic packaging.	"Why did they change it? We love the bottle."
	excessive change, loss of elegance, deterioration of aesthetics	Identity dilution	Significant and highly noticeable visual changes may weaken perceptions of authenticity.	"we change the bottle… if the reception is bad, it's a bad execution overall."
Marketing mix and authenticity	product quality, reliability, consistency	Product quality as authenticity foundation	Authenticity requires products to perform reliably and consistently.	"For product, basically, for the product, quality basically communicates reliability. So if your product has quality, definitely it's going to be a reliable product."
	assessment of benefits vs. cost,	Value communication	Consumers assess	"The pricing, I tell them that, oh, this

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	perceived value, communicating value		authenticity through perceived value or the ratio between benefits and costs.	cream, for example, for Sunny Side Up, oh, this cream for 33 grams, this lasts for 3 to 4 months, and then you can get it for 849, this will last you up to 4 months, and then you can use it overall. And then I highlight all of the product quality, so at least it covers the price. Usually, because they want to see how valuable the product is."
	trustworthy distribution system, anti-counterfeit measures, consumer trust and confidence	Distribution trustworthiness	Trustworthy distribution systems contribute to authenticity perceptions.	"…we're setting up our website to maintain the distribution and not have counterfeits."
	consumer participation, interactive engagement, consumer experience,	Experiential promotion	Authenticity grows through consumer participation and interactive experience.	"…the booths or executions that I do are very interactive… I'm starting to create a community group or like an engaged community management chat where when we promote Filipino food and wine pairing, they can easily message our Facebook page and ask, oh, what's good with this wine? What's good with this wine? And then you can post and you can share it."
Marketing mix supporting authenticity	claim confirmation through consumer experience, saying what you mean and meaning what you	Product-promotion integration	Authenticity is enhanced when product quality is communicated and product quality claims are confirmed by	"It's the product and how you communicate it that really, I would say, gives the strongest…that gives the

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	say, walk the talk and talk the walk		actual product experience.	strongest communication to Gen Z."
	consumer groups, online community, sustained interaction	Community-building	Sustained interaction between brands and consumers strengthens authenticity.	"…a community group or like an engaged community management chat where when we promote Filipino food and wine pairing, they can easily message our Facebook page and ask, oh, what's good with this wine? What's good with this wine? And then you can post and you can share it."
Consumer expression of authenticity	consumer posting and sharing, consumer-driven publicity, user-generated promotion	Positive engagement	Consumers enhance authenticity through engagement and recommendation.	"…you can post and you can share it."
Consumer expression of inauthenticity	consumer vigilance, brand accountability, call-out culture	Criticism and public accountability	Gen Z openly critiques brands they perceive as inauthentic using sarcasm and public call-outs.	"… for inauthentic content, usually, Gen Z, they usually communicate through criticism. Sometimes, it's sarcasm. And then, public call outs…"
	stalking brands, checking brand claims, verification behavior	Skepticism	Consumers actively evaluate the veracity of brand claims.	"… Gen Z nowadays, they're very keen to authenticity. Even myself, whenever I would scroll on socials and stalk different brands, I would really check if they're very authentic when it comes to their messaging."
Interpretation of consumer responses	tracking conversations, monitoring multiple brands, checking public perceptions	Social listening	Online consumer discussions are treated as key indicators of brand authenticity.	"So, what I would usually do is I would check the comment section. I would read it. Sometimes, sobrang lalim ko na if there's like

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				12,000 comments, I would stay there for like 15 minutes scrolling and checking what they're talking about.”
	observing other brands, consumer insights from social media discourse, benchmarking	Benchmark learning	Authenticity insights can be drawn from observing competitors and other brands.	“So, it really sets that perspective on my end, and this is not just my, the brands that I'm handling. I stalk a lot of brands that are very well known, and ang target market niya are usually Gen Zs.
Brand response feedback	voice of the consumer, adaptability, strategic adjustment,	Feedback-driven adaptation	Consumer reactions can be a good basis for future decisions.	“What we do is, we analyze the feedbacks. And then, what we can do to change that. If it's a negative perception, we usually discuss, what can we do? What can we test? What can we do to change their perception? Do we do something like a digital post? Do we make another campaign to change their perspective?”
	flexibility, preserving brand identity, adaptive stability	Balancing consistency and change	Brands must be flexible enough to evolve without losing its identity.	“It's usually the process of balancing out the brand consistency and adaptability.”
Co-construction of authenticity	consumer interpretation of brand actions, negotiated authenticity, co-construction of meaning	Authenticity as negotiated meaning	Authenticity is determined through consumer meaning-making rather than managerial intention or brand actions alone.	“But overall, from my belief is, authenticity ultimately depends on how your consumers would really interpret your brand, and how it's going to, how they're going to validate it over time.”

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
	repeated interaction, not totally controlled by the brand, ongoing negotiation	Authenticity as ongoing interaction	Brand authenticity evolves through repeated interaction and negotiation.	"Well, I would say authenticity of a brand is continuously, like I said, continuously negotiated siya. And the adaptability of it always on the line. Because like I said, yung authenticity, you have to maintain brand consistency, because they really want to make sure na hindi ka lang gaya-gaya ng brand… that's where it continuously negotiated, and then adapted… and all of those cannot be controlled by the brand. Because at the end of the day, you don't know what's gonna, you don't know how your market is gonna perceive it."
	consumer participation, brand-consumer interaction, influencing and shaping brand authenticity	Participatory authenticity	Consumers actively influence and shape brand authenticity.	"So I think with Gen Z consumers, they are highly, highly, highly participatory. They're very engaged, and also vocal. So authenticity for me, as a brand manager, it becomes like, it's like a social process. On my end, I have to always make sure that it's being shaped through the interactions that I

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
				have with my audience. And at the same time, they, I want to make sure that they, that my brand, and the audience that I'm targeting really have a good relationship. It's like having fans of the brand. So it's really, it's really making sure that they're well engaged, and you're still going to be relevant overall."
Critical incident	Arbor Mist packaging redesign, emotional consumer reaction, threat to authenticity perception	Unexpected authenticity challenge	Packaging modification reduced emotional attachment and weakened authenticity perceptions.	"Why did they change it? We love the bottle… the market noticed it… And if the reception is bad, it's a bad execution overall."
	Sunny Side Up visual identity growth, emotional appeal, brand recognition	Unexpected authenticity reinforcement	Consistent storytelling increased recognition and emotional attachment.	"… even if they don't look at the handle, they know it's Sunny Side Up."
Learning about authenticity	designing the marketing mix, cultural relevance, positive consumer response	Authenticity requires cultural relevance	Culturally relevant marketing mix strategies contribute to authenticity perceptions.	"… I design it to get the attention that they need in terms of cultural relevance."
	distinctiveness, recognizability, standing out	Authenticity requires distinctiveness	Brands must project and maintain a recognizable identity.	"Because nowadays, there are so many competitors in the market. And you really have to do something that makes you stand out… You really need something to really stand out."
	flexibility, adaptation, continuous evolution	Authenticity requires flexibility	Authentic brands evolve continuously.	"It's how the brand responds, and at the same time, how the brand evolves in the long run."

Discussion Areas	Codes	Themes	Descriptions	Supporting Quotes
Advice to brands	stable identity, maintaining distinction, brand consistency	Maintain consistency	Brands should preserve distinct and recognizable elements while adapting in order to maintain brand identity.	“Because like I said, yung authenticity, you have to maintain brand consistency… to make sure na hindi ka lang gaya-gaya ng brand.”
	consumer responsiveness, adaptability, staying relevant,	Stay Adaptable	Brands must continue to evolve as consumer expectations change.	“So there's that thin line. And then at the same time, you want to make it relatable and adaptable to them.”

For the brand manager Interview Participant 7, brand authenticity emerges when a brand communicates a coherent story across touchpoints, making the brand immediately recognizable. Repeated interactions with the brand produce lived experiences that contribute further to brand authenticity.

Brand elements such as brand names, logos, colors, mascots, and packaging, for Interview Participant 7, serve as storytelling tools that communicate the brand’s personality. Brand names can reflect a genuine personal story, like in the case of Sunny Side Up where one of the founders liked to draw eggs when she was still a child. Sunny Side Up’s mascot Eggsy provides an emotionally engaging and memorable brand identity. The consistency of the brand elements of Sunny Side Up helps consumers identify the brand immediately and strengthens perceptions of authenticity. The packaging of Arbor Mist forms part of the brand’s symbolic meaning where its muted purple frosted bottle provides an elegant look, especially with the wine inside. Its distinctive packaging enhances brand recognition, recall, and emotional

attachment. However, when the iconic bottle was redesigned, consumers questioned its authenticity as significant visual changes may weaken brand authenticity perceptions.

In terms of marketing mix strategies, product quality, for Interview Participant 7, serves as a foundation of authenticity since quality communicates reliability, while reliability is an indicator of brand authenticity (Bruhn, et al., 2012). Consumers also assess authenticity using their perceived value of the brand, which is the ratio between its benefits and costs. Authenticity perceptions tend to increase when the brand's distribution systems are trustworthy. Authenticity also grows through consumer participation in experiential promotions. Effectively communicated product quality claims, when confirmed by actual consumer experiences, tend to enhance authenticity perceptions. Sustained brand-consumer interactions within an online community setting strengthens authenticity. For example, when consumers engage with the Facebook page of the Carlo Rossi brand that promotes Filipino food and wine pairing, they can easily ask, post, and share which food goes well with which wine and vice versa.

Consumer-driven publicity such as consumer posting and sharing and user-generated promotion was interpreted by Interview Participant 7 as positive engagement that enhances brand authenticity. On the other hand, criticism, sarcasm, and public call outs are indicators of inauthenticity perceptions. Skepticism also pushes consumers to actively evaluate the accuracy of brand claims, indicating doubts unless convinced otherwise.

Social listening by checking and reading online consumer discussions in the comment section of the brand's social media platforms is also being practiced by

Interview Participant 7 to keep track and interpret consumer feedback and responses. Aside from that, she also checks and reads the online consumer discussions of other brands, both competitors and non-competitors, to draw insights through benchmark learning. Based on the feedback and insights, she and her team ask themselves what can be done to improve, especially in the case of negative perceptions. In making changes, they try to balance consistency and adaptability by being flexible enough to evolve without losing the brand's identity.

Interview Participant 7 underwent a change in perspective, from her marketing degree knowledge about rigid brand planning and brand strategy execution to establish authenticity through managerial intent and brand actions alone. Her paradigm shift went towards to seeing brand authenticity as a negotiated meaning through repeated interaction and negotiation where consumer participation actively influences and shapes brand authenticity. She learned, through experience, that brand authenticity requires cultural relevance, distinctiveness, and flexibility. These realizations made her apply to her brands and recommend others to become adaptable while maintaining consistency.

Looking at the seventh interview as a whole, the interview participant's focus went around the following core themes: Authenticity as Storytelling, Authenticity as Recognizability, Authenticity as Symbolic Attachment, Authenticity as Consumer Interpretation, and Authenticity as Continuous Negotiation. For her, using brand elements such as logos, mascots, packaging, colors, and visual identity as storytelling tools help influence authenticity perceptions. Related to the use of brand elements and other differentiating characteristics, Interview Participant 7 claims that authenticity emerges from being easily recognizable, such as when consumers can instantly identify a brand regardless of the platform. In her experience, when consumers

develop emotional attachment to symbolic brand elements, brand authenticity is enhanced, such as the cases of the Arbor Mist frost bottle, Eggsy the mascot, and the consistent use of brand colors and other brand aesthetics. She acknowledged that brand authenticity is subject to consumer interpretation since, according to her, authenticity is not possessed by brands but ultimately depends on how consumers interpret the brand. The consumers' interpretation of the brand, for Interview Participant 7, is not a one-time occurrence but rather a continuous negotiation cycling through brand communication, consumer interpretation, feedback, adaptation, and consumer reinterpretation over and over.

Cross-Case Thematic Analysis of the 7 In-Depth Interviews

After conducting a separate thematic analysis, generating themes, and clustering those themes into core themes for each of the 7 in-depth interviews, the researcher performed a cross-case analysis to further synthesize the 34 core themes into 11 integrated themes based on the perspective of the brand communication managers. Presented in Table 9 below are the original core themes coming from the separate thematic analyses and the resulting integrated themes:

Table 9

Integrated Themes from the Interviews

Original Core Themes (and Interview Participant #)	Integrated Themes
Authenticity as Transparency (IP6) Authenticity as Transparency and Information Sharing (IP2) Authenticity as Congruence (IP1 & IP5)	Authenticity as Transparency

Original Core Themes (and Interview Participant #)	Integrated Themes
Authenticity as Action-Communication Consistency (IP4)	Authenticity as Alignment and Consistency
Authenticity as Value Congruence (IP5)	
Authenticity as Trustworthy Execution (IP4)	
Authenticity as Celebrity-Brand Alignment (IP5)	
Authenticity as Symbolic Performance (IP1)	Authenticity as Symbolic Identity
Authenticity as Familiarity and Visual Continuity (IP4)	
Authenticity as Recognizability (IP7)	
Authenticity as Symbolic Attachment (IP7)	
Authenticity as Storytelling (IP5 & IP7)	Authenticity as Storytelling
Authenticity as Visible and Relevant Action (IP3)	Authenticity as Demonstrated Value in Action
Authenticity as Value-Based Service (IP3)	
Authenticity as Cultural Adaptation (IP3)	Authenticity as Cultural and Contextual Relevance
Authenticity as Timeliness (IP6)	
Authenticity as Human Connection (IP1)	Authenticity as Human Connection and Relatability
Authenticity as Human-Centered Engagement (IP3)	
Authenticity as Relatability (IP5)	
Authenticity as Relevance to Everyday Life (IP6)	
Authenticity as Research-Based Understanding (IP6)	Authenticity as Consumer Understanding
Authenticity as Continuous Adaptation (IP1 & IP6)	Authenticity as Adaptive Responsiveness
Authenticity as Negotiated Responsiveness (IP3)	
Authenticity as Consumer Responsiveness (IP4)	
Authenticity as Community Involvement (IP2)	Authenticity as Community and Social Validation
Authenticity as Social Validation (IP2)	
Authenticity as Consumer Validation (IP5)	
Authenticity as Relational Co-Construction (IP1)	Authenticity as Co-Constructed Meaning
Authenticity as Continuous Consumer Negotiation (IP2)	
Authenticity as Interactive Negotiation (IP4)	
Authenticity as Consumer Interpretation (IP7)	
Authenticity as Continuous Negotiation (IP7)	

To illustrate which among the integrated themes were emphasized and focused on by which interview participant, the visual representation in Table 10 below highlights their areas of most concern:

Table 10

Cross-Case Checklist of the Integrated Themes from the Interviews

Integrated Themes	Interview Participant 1	Interview Participant 2	Interview Participant 3	Interview Participant 4	Interview Participant 5	Interview Participant 6	Interview Participant 7
Authenticity as Transparency		☺				☺	
Authenticity as Alignment and Consistency	☺			☺	☺		
Authenticity as Symbolic Identity	☺			☺			☺
Authenticity as Storytelling					☺		☺
Authenticity as Demonstrated Value in Action			☺				
Authenticity as Cultural and Contextual Relevance			☺			☺	
Authenticity as Human Connection and Relatability	☺		☺		☺	☺	
Authenticity as Consumer Understanding						☺	
Authenticity as Adaptive Responsiveness	☺		☺	☺		☺	
Authenticity as Community and Social Validation		☺			☺		
Authenticity as Co-Constructed Meaning	☺	☺		☺			☺

Linking together the resulting integrated themes derived from the core themes of each interview participant, it can be said that a brand's transparency and sharing of relevant information influence consumer trust, thereby increasing authenticity perceptions. Consumers perceive a higher level of authenticity among brands whose endorsers' personality and character, the brands' values and identity, and their brand

communications are aligned and manifested clearly – making authenticity serve like a moral barometer or ethical imperative that compels brands to carefully watch its lived values vis-à-vis its stated ones. Such clear alignment helps establish a positive brand identity through the cohesive symbolic performance and visual continuity of the brand elements, leading to better consumer familiarity, ease of recognition, and symbolic attachment with the particular brand. Implementing these communicative brand elements helps tell the brand's story to the consumers, which may catch their interest and contribute to their perceptions of authenticity about the brand. Although symbolisms and storytelling may enhance authenticity perceptions, promises without action are inadequate. Hence, a brand's values should be demonstrated in action and service to the stakeholders to further grow brand authenticity in the consumers' minds. Timely brand actions and communications that are culturally and contextually relevant are better perceived as authentic by consumers because relevant brand messages, especially those that relate to everyday life, tend to connect better with people, making the brand more relatable. In order to become relevant and remain relevant, a brand should understand its consumers by monitoring trends and conducting consumer and market research. When brand communication managers understand their consumers, they can better address their consumers' needs and preferences, as well as adapt their succeeding communicative actions based on the consumers' feedback about the brand's previous messages and actions. In other words, being able to continuously adapt to consumers' responses and feedback keeps a brand on its toes, alert and responsive towards consumers' changing authenticity perceptions. When a brand is successful in continuously negotiating its brand authenticity with consumers through communicative interaction, individual, social, and community validation can be seen through online and offline consumer reactions, comments, sharing, and engagement.

Therefore, brand authenticity is not simply a planned attribute nor a single-occasion opinion interpreted by consumers from a brand's communicative actions, but rather a continuously co-constructed meaning emerging from the back-and-forth messages, actions, and negotiations between the brand and its consumers. Hence, the co-construction of brand authenticity is both a dialogic and a dialectic process. It is dialogic because the process exposes the differences between the brand's perspective and the consumer's experience. On the other hand, it is also dialectic since it tries to reconcile perception gaps by striking a balance between the brand's consistency and adaptiveness to prevailing consumer and social contexts through communicative interaction and negotiation.

Thematic Analysis of the Sentence Completion Responses (Consumers)

The consumer side was composed of 74 sentence completion method participants who completed 18 given sentence stems via Google Forms. The sentence stems were grouped based on the kind of data they were designed to obtain. The first and second groups of sentence stems solicited responses on how consumers interpret brand authenticity and inauthenticity respectively. The third and fourth groups of sentence stems probed into how consumers respond to brands that they interpret as authentic and inauthentic respectively. Lastly, the fifth and sixth groups of sentence stems explored how consumers co-determine or ultimately decide on the authenticity and inauthenticity of brands respectively.

Table 11 below shows the titles and descriptions of the themes generated from the consumer participants' responses to the following sentence stems:

A - A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when it is _____.

B - A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as _____.

C - A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as _____.

The actual quotes for the Example Responses column can be seen in the Appendix H of this research where the letter component of the example response identifiers refers to the sentence stem while the numeric part of the identifiers indicates the participant/response number. Since the actual responses were short and insightful enough, they were already able to serve as the codes in the coding process prior to identifying the themes.

Table 11

Themes on How Consumers Interpret Brand Authenticity

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Honesty, Transparency, and Integrity	Consumers perceive authenticity among brands that are truthful, transparent, genuine, ethical, and aligned with their values, promises, and actions.	A2, A3, A4, A9, A11, A13, A17, A22, A24, A28, A29, A44, A61, A67, A73, A74, B4, B15, B16, B18, B20, B24, B25, B28, B35, B36, B38, B41, B43, B45, B49, B50, B51, B58, B59, B62, B63, B67, B68, B69, B70, B74, C2, C3, C5, C8, C11, C12, C13, C16, C17, C21, C23, C24, C25, C26, C27, C28, C38, C41, C45, C50, C52, C55, C62, C63, C70, C74,
Consistency and Congruence	Consumers see authenticity among brands that consistently deliver what they promise and align their communications, actions, products, and values.	A2, A3, A4, A17, A23, A27, A28, A29, A30, A43, A52, A63, A74, B6, B11, B38, B64, B70, C11, C15, C18, C23, C28, C33, C36, C38, C41, C65, C69, C70, C74
Distinctive Identity, Purpose, and Values	Consumers find authenticity among brands that possess a unique identity, clear purpose, stable values, and relevant differentiation from competitors.	A32, A33, A37, A41, A58, A60, A,67, B7, B32, B42, B46, B67, B72, C1, C7, C9, C19, C21, C23, C63, C65, C67, C69, C73
Social Responsibility and	Consumers discern authenticity among brands that demonstrate ethical conduct and concern for	A10, A22, A28, B22, B26, B43, C2, C3, C22, C24, C26, C28, C41, C45, C46, C47, C52, C55, C65, C74

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Stakeholder Orientation	employees, communities, society, and the environment, beyond profit motives.	
Product and Service Quality	Consumers evaluate brand authenticity through material quality, durability, functionality, performance, and value delivery.	A1, A5, A12, A19, A42, A47, A52, A57, A63, A65, A66, A68, A69, C1, C2, C33
Customer-Centeredness and Human Connection	Consumers sense authenticity among brands that genuinely care about customers, understand their needs, build relationships, and communicate like a human being.	A6, A8, A20, A28, A38, A39, A40, A43, A64, B2, B3, B8, B16, B21, B27, B29, B33, B37, B40, B44, B68, B71, C4, C6, C17, C20, C22, C28, C31, C37, C40, C47, C56, C57, C58, C61, C62, C64, C66, C70, C74
Credibility, Reputation, and Social Validation	Consumers infer brand authenticity based on trustworthiness, recommendations, popularity, expert endorsements, evidence, and established reputation.	A7, A15, A16, A25, A35, A36, A49, A55, A56, A61, A63, A71, B17, B49, B51, B57, B61, C14, C22, C30, C50, C51, C56, C59

Analyzing the sentence completion responses from the consumer participants of the study, one of the ways by which brand authenticity is interpreted by consumers is through the level of honesty, transparency, and integrity manifested by the brand. Consumers seek these traits in a brand to know the truth about the brand they are buying or the content that they are engaging with. Consumers do not want to be deceived by pretentious brands. They want to be able to trust the brands that they engage with to reduce purchase risks and avoid wasting hard-earned money. They also want to be sure that the brand will take responsibility when mistakes happen. They want brands with integrity to avoid unethical companies that exploit society or the environment. When brands are honest and transparent, consumers feel respected and they become confident that the brand will continue to act fairly even in difficult situations.

Consumers interpret brand authenticity also through the consistency and congruence of brands. When a brand delivers on its stated values, claims, and

promises, consumers find consistency between the brand's words and actions. This is an important brand consideration appreciated by consumers because it makes the brand reliable and easy to trust. Congruence, on the other hand, means remaining true to its brand identity and thereby making it easier for consumers to identify and understand what the brand really stands for. In other words, when the brand elements and its actions uphold the identity and values it represents and advocates, consumers find congruence in that brand. Consumers find a brand more congruent when its values and identity are aligned with the consumers' own personal values, personality, and aspirations.

Simply manifesting a brand's identity through its communications and actions is not the end of the story. Consumers' brand authenticity perceptions favor brands that show a distinctive brand identity as well as purpose and values that resonate with them. Even when a brand's identity, purpose, and values are sound and positive, consumers may not necessarily associate the brand with higher authenticity levels, especially if other brands' identity, purpose, and values appear identical. In other words, when a brand's identity, purpose, and values seem to ride the bandwagon of typical brands, the brand may lose novelty and consumers may just treat it as mediocre or run of the mill. Hence, the distinctiveness or uniqueness of brand identity, purpose, and values are as important as consistency and congruence for the brand to be regarded by consumers as authentic.

When consumers find out that a particular brand goes out of its way to support a relevant social issue or advocacy that resonates with them, they find the brand more authentic, Aside from caring for their own welfare as users of the products and services being offered by a brand, many consumers also care about the rights and welfare of other stakeholders involved in a brand's business. They believe that brands should be

socially responsible and not just pursue the goal of satisfying their customers. Brands should also look after their other stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, distribution channels, communities, society, the environment, the government, and even their competitors. In the eyes of consumers, brands should treat everyone fairly beyond profit motives - from reasonable price-quality offers and sincere customer service, to equitable wages for employees, to fair deals with suppliers and distributors, to just treatment of communities, society, and the environment, to honest tax and regulation compliance with the government, and even to fair competitive strategies agarinst competing brands. In fact, although corporate social responsibility or CSR programs may appear to be something that society should grateful for towards the brands or companies that implement them, a shift in perspective would show that CSR is just a way for brands and companies to give back to society for the material and human resources they extract from both society and the environment. Because of this, consumers perceive the brands that exercise fairness and social responsibility towards their stakeholders as more authentic.

As users of the product and service offering of a brand, consumers are vigilant about the quality of those products and services they avail of. They interpret the authenticity of a brand based on its quality. Quality covers the product's type of component materials, durability, functionality, performance and the brand's overall ability to create and deliver value. Component materials that appear high-grade contribute to the genuineness of a product. The product's durability increases the brand's reliability over time. Functionality addresses the purpose or intended use for the product. Product performance helps meet consumer expectations. Value creation and delivery provide the benefits that consumers expect and even beyond what they

expect. Collectively, when these dimensions of quality are effectively addressed by a brand, consumers' brand authenticity perceptions are enhanced.

Brand authenticity is also interpreted by consumers through the customer-centeredness and human connection of brands. Consumers desire sincerely customer-oriented brands. Authentic customer-orientedness means genuinely caring about customers and understanding their needs. When a brand understands customer needs, communication becomes personal and the connection more human. Consumers are not treated as statistics or transactions. More personal communication builds long-term relationships. These customer-centered behaviors manifest when a brand ensures that every brand strategy, tactic, communication, and action truly benefits the customers, not just self-serving motives. When these customer-centered behaviors accumulate, the brand is able to establish human connection with its consumers, thus contributing to brand authenticity perceptions.

On top of their own authenticity interpretations, consumers also consider the perceptions of other consumers by checking on the credibility, reputation, and social validation of a brand. Consumers consider a brand as credible when it is deemed trustworthy by many consumers. Popularity and evidence of a brand's desirable characteristics help establish the brand's reputation. Recommendations from other consumers, endorsements from experts, and a well-established reputation serve as social validation towards the authenticity of a brand.

The next table, Table 12, shows the titles and descriptions of the themes generated from the consumer participants' responses to the following sentence stems:

D - A brand feels LESS authentic to me when it is _____.

E - A brand feels LESS authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as _____.

F - A brand feels LESS authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as _____.

Similar to the previous table, the actual quotes for the Example Responses column can be seen in the Appendix H of this research where the letter component of the example response identifiers refers to the sentence stem while the numeric part of the identifiers indicates the participant/response number.

Table 12

Themes on How Consumers Interpret Brand Inauthenticity

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Dishonesty, Deception, Manipulation	Brands are perceived as less authentic by consumers when they are fake, misleading, deceptive, exaggerated, dishonest, manipulative, or unethical.	D2, D3, D4, D5, D7, D8, D13, D15, D16, D17, D20, D21, D22, D24, D35, D38, D41, D44, D51, D59, D60, D61, D63, D66, D70, D72, E2, E4, E5, E7, E10, E13, E15, E16, E17, E18, E21, E24, E25, E27, E28, E30, E31, E33, E37, E38, E41, E45, E49, E52, E53, E54, E62, E63, E65, E67, E69, E70, F2, F3, F12, F13, F16, F17, F21, F24, F26, F28, F37, F38, F40, F41, F45, F46, F49, F51, F63, F70, F74
Inconsistency and Lack of Congruence	Consumers consider brands as less authentic when they fail to match their promises, values, communications, and actions.	D2, D3, D6, D10, D17, D23, D27, D28, D30, D31, D32, D33, D37, D38, D42, D43, D45, D52, D54, D59, D63, D65, D67, D69, E6, E8, E10, E12, E28, E42, E68, E70, F6, F15, F16, F18, F20, F23, F27, F28, F35, F38, F51, F52, F58, F62, F69, F70, F73
Trying Too Hard and Being Profit-Driven Rather Than Customer-Driven	Consumers find brands as less authentic when they appear to be trying too hard and motivated primarily by sales, profit, self-interest, publicity, or commercial gain rather than customer welfare.	D24, D28, D29, D37, D40, D41, D43, D53, D57, D64, D69, D74, E4, E19, E26, E35, E38, E39, E44, E47, E48, E57, E62, E65, F2, F4, F8, F14, F17, F19, F25, F30, F33, F39, F48, F52, F57, F60, F61, F63, F65, F67, F68, F70, F71, F74
Performative, Opportunistic, and	Consumers perceive inauthenticity among brands that are seen as opportunistic, performative,	D11, D20, D23, D27, D28, D29, D36, D39, D51, D52, D54, D58, D61, D62, D71, D73, D74, E3, E4, E9, E11,

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Trend-Chasing Behavior	superficial, trend-hopping, and engaging in cause-washing.	E14, E15, E18, E20, E23, E26, E50, E53, E55, E59, F9, F11, F18, F19, F27, F35, F51, F52, F56, F59, F62, F66
Poor Quality and Failure to Deliver Value	Consumers view brands as less authentic when their products, services, or strategies are perceived as low quality, ineffective, weak, or unable to meet expectations.	D5, D12, D19, D30, D31, D34, D35, D45, D46, D47, D53, D57, D68, D69, E7, F1, F10, F29, F31, F32, F34, F36, F42, F43, F44, F47, F53, F54. F72
Lack of Genuine Identity and Human Connection	Brands are considered by consumers as less authentic when there is no clear brand identity or brand message and when brand communications appear scripted, artificial, AI-generated, copycat, generic, impersonal, or disconnected from consumers.	D26, D39, D48, D50, D54,D56, D60, D63, D72, D74, E3, E5, E22, E29, E32, E34, E39, E40, E43, E44, E46, E47, E51, E52, E56, E58, E60, E61, E63, E64, E65, E66, E72, E73, E74, F7, F23, F44, F48, F50, F56, F60, F64, F65, F72
Lack of Credibility, Trust, Social Legitimacy	Brands that lack reputation, evidence, endorsements, consumer trust, credibility, or social responsibility are perceived by consumers as less authentic.	D14, D15, D16, D18, D20, D25, D28, D35, D49, D55, D65, D70, D71, E45, E71, E72, F22, F45, F55, F65

In viewing inauthenticity, consumers consider dishonesty, deception, and manipulation as red flags of inauthenticity in a brand. Whether in the form of half-truths or whole lies, consumers find this practice distasteful. Consumers hate being deceived as they do not want to be scammed or waste their money on misrepresented brand offerings. Many consumers also hate the thought that they are being manipulated because it insults their intelligence. Dishonesty, deception, and manipulation may range from acts of omission, such as hiding the truth, to acts of commission such as misrepresentation through actual lies and manipulation by distorting or exaggerating the truth. Despite varying levels of intensity, all these add to consumers' negative brand authenticity perceptions.

Likewise, inconsistency and incongruence reduce authenticity, especially when a brand fails to fulfill its promises, align with its values, and match its communications

with actions. Inconsistencies are observed when there are gaps between actual consumer experiences and a brand's promises. Gaps can happen in the different stages of the communicative interaction between brands and consumers. First, there can be gap between what the brand intends to promise and what is actually communicated to the consumers. Second, a gap can occur when what is communicated by the brand is not what gets understood by the consumers. Third, a gap can also surface between consumers' understanding of the brand's promise and what was actually delivered. Another gap can arise between what was actually delivered and how the consumers perceive what was actually delivered. Any of these gaps can lower brand authenticity perceptions. Hence, brands should ensure that these gaps are addressed if not eliminated through proactive and responsive actions and communications. In terms of incongruence or the lack of alignment between the brand's identity, purpose, and values vis-à-vis consumers' perceptions and preferences, gaps can also occur. These gaps also negatively influence consumers' brand authenticity interpretations but may be addressed through consistent and adaptive brand communications and actions.

Inauthenticity signals are also perceived by consumers when a brand is trying too hard to become authentic or relatable and, in the process, its real priority for profit motives over genuine concern for customers gets revealed. Whether the brand is actually trying too hard because of greed or only appears to be trying too hard because of lack of strategic brand communication skills or competence, brand inauthenticity signals will still be triggered. Neither the brand's self-serving motives nor its incompetence is desirable from the consumers' perspective and thus, may diminish their authenticity perceptions about the brand.

Opposite of trying too hard is trying too little. When a brand tries too little, in terms of its brand communicative actions, to a point that the efforts only add up to being performative for the sake of appearances only, those efforts may also backfire towards inauthenticity. Likewise, when a brand manifests opportunistic behavior such as chasing trends that do not align with its identity and values, consumers can discern the incongruence. When a brand engages in cause-washing activities like greenwashing and consumers eventually find out, it leaves a bad taste of inauthenticity in the consumers' mouths. These behaviors create the impression of hypocrisy as the brand's actions seem to be driven more by appearances and not by genuine commitment. Skepticism enters the consumers' minds when the brand's support for trends or social causes appears insincere, temporary, and primarily intended for brand image enhancement. Inauthenticity perceptions increase as this self-serving behavior manifested by the brand accumulates.

Related to what was discussed in the previous table where good quality serves as authenticity enhancer, poor quality of products and services, as well as ineffective and weak strategies diminish brand authenticity in the minds of consumers. This is because poor quality leads to failure in meeting expectations and delivering value to consumers, thereby not fulfilling its brand promise. As products, services, and strategies continue to fail expectations, consumer confidence in the brand declines.

The lack of a genuine and distinctive brand identity sends inauthenticity signals to consumers. Consumers often try to understand what a brand stands for by analyzing its brand messaging and actions, whether consciously or otherwise. The lack of brand identity distinctiveness and the lack of clarity in its messaging also confuse consumers. When consumers get confused, they either judge the brand negatively outright or they try to figure the brand out, posing the risk of accidental or

unintended brand positioning and brand image in the minds of consumers. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence nowadays, brand communications that appear artificial, impersonal, or disconnected from consumers make it difficult for consumers to feel the sincerity and relatability of the brand.

Consumers usualy hesitate to trust brands that lack credibility. Lack of credibility can come from lack of social validation or lack of social legitimacy. When a brand is not yet popular, it needs to build its credibility through endorsements and other brand communicative actions that indicate its trustworthiness. When the brand is no longer popular because it has already been forgotten by the consumers, it may need to revitalize its credibility by enhancing its brand recognition and recall through repetitive brand communicative actions. When a brand has lost its popularity due to negative consumer experiences, it needs to repair its credibility through transparency and visible ethical behavior. Whether a brand lacks or loses its credibility, authenticity perceptions tend to decline.

Presented in Table 13 are the titles and descriptions of the themes generated from the consumer participants' responses to the following sentence stems:

G – When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I usually think _____.

H – When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I usually feel _____.

I – When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as _____.

Patterned after the previous tables, the actual quotes for the Example Responses column can be seen in the Appendix H of this research where the letter component of

the example response identifiers refers to the sentence stem while the numeric part of the identifiers indicates the participant/response number.

Table 13

Themes on How Consumers Respond to Authentic Brands

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Information Seeking and Brand Engagement	Consumers develop curiosity, research the brand, follow its communications and activities, compare alternatives, and engage with its content or community.	G5, G7, G12, G17, G20, G30, G39, G43, G44, G45, G55, G72, H26, H42, H43, H51, H71, H72, I1, I4, I7, I10, I19, I22, I26, I28, I30, I35, I42, I43, I45, I49, I50, I51, I52, I55, I56, I60, I61, I62, I65, I66, I69, I70, I71, I72
Trust, Confidence, and Credibility	Consumers develop trust and confidence, appreciate the reliability and security, and believe in the claims of brands they perceive as authentic.	G2, G4, G6, G8, G9, G13, G17, G22, G24, G28, G33, G36, G37, G38, G56, G59, G61, G70, G73, G74, H2, H3, H4, H12, H15, H16, H23, H24, H27, H28, H30, H32, H35, H36, H37, H38, H44, H45, H49, H52, H58, H63, H67, H73, H74, I6, I56
Perceived Quality and Value	Consumers believe that authentic brands provide superior quality, durability, effectiveness, safety, and value for money.	G5, G7, G12, G14, G16, G18, G26, G27, G28, G29, G32, G34, G35, G41, G42, G45, G48, G49, G51, G56, G57, G58, G59, G60, G63, G66, G68, G69, G70, H1, H6, H9, H25, H45, H49, H53, H56, H59, H61, H70, I1
Customer Care and Relationship Orientation	Consumers perceive that authentic brands genuinely care about their customers and build meaningful relationships with them.	G3, G11, G23, G20, G33, G40, G64, G67, H27, H28, H30, H33, H40, H64
Emotional Connection and Positive Effect	Consumers feel positive emotions such as comfort, satisfaction, pride, excitement, inspiration, admiration, and emotional attachment towards authentic brands.	H2, H3, H4, H8, H10, H13, H14, H17, H19, H20, H22, H28, H29, H30, H33, H37, H38, H39, H40, H41, H45, H46, H47, H48, H49, H50, H54, H56, H60, H63, H65, H66, H68, H69, H73, H74, I2, I27, I28, I38, I52
Brand Prestige and Status Perceptions	Consumers look at authentic brands as premium, prestigious, established, luxurious, iconic, or worth investing in.	G15, G16, G18, G27, G31, 57, 58, 60, G66, G70, H18, H48, H57, H62
Purchase and Repurchase Intentions	Consumers are willing to buy, repurchase, subscribe, or invest in brands that they perceive as authentic.	G10, G15, G17, G19, G20, G25, G29, G35, G36, G47, G54, G62, G63, H5, H6, H7, H51, H52, H56, H59, H61, H63, H65, H68, I3, I4, I5, I6, I7, I9, I10, I11, I12 , I13, I15, I16, I17, I18, I21, I22, I23, I24, I27, I28, I31, I33, I35, I17, I38, I39, I40, I41, I42, I44, I45, I46, I47, I48, I51, I52, I53, I54, I56, I59, I63, I65, I67, I74

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Loyalty, Advocacy, and Brand Support	Brands perceived as authentic encourage loyalty, recommendation, advocacy, positive word-of-mouth, and long-term support among consumers.	G17, G20, H11, H24, H27, H28, H42, H65, H68, I2, I3, I4, I8, I11, I13, I16, I17, I20, I22, I23, I25, I27, I28, I29, I32, I33, I36, I37, I38, I39, I40, I45, I52, I53, I56, I58, I59, I61, I63, I64, I65, I67, I68, I70, I73, I74

When consumers sense authenticity in a brand, they become curious about it. Curiosity makes them seek more information about the brand. They explore information sources. First, they try to recall their own past experiences with the brand or its content, if any. Then, they check external sources published by the brand itself such as the brand's website, social media platforms, and other online and offline brand communications. Consumers also gather information from other consumers they personally know such as friends and relatives. To be thorough about it, consumers also read, watch, and listen to product reviews and comments of social media influencers, vloggers, peer consumers, and other people who have experienced the brand in one way or another. Many consumers also communicate directly with the brand or engage with the brand's content and activities to find information that would help them make a decision how to go forward with the brand.

Armed with information from various sources, consumers try to figure out whether a brand is credible and worthy of their trust. They try to decide whether the brand is reliable based on their own experiences and of other consumers. Favorable evaluations of the brand's reliability lead to feeling secured. This feeling of security with the brand convinces the consumers to believe in the brand's claims, developing confidence. As consumer confidence grows, they feel reassured that the brand will

consistently deliver on its promises, reinforcing their authenticity perceptions about the brand.

From the discussion of one of the previous tables, consumers perceive authenticity in a brand based on its quality and the value it creates and delivers for the consumer. The other way around is also true. Consumers perceive and expect superior quality in brands that they regard as authentic. Superior quality means the product is effective for the purpose it was created. It also means that the product is durable and will last repeated uses. When product performance remains consistent during these repeated uses, the product is dependable. Safety for the product users is another dimension of superior quality. Of course, providing value for the consumers' money is also covered by superior quality.

Just like consumers seeing authenticity where there there is quality and vice versa, consumers also see authenticity when brands genuinely care about consumers and vice versa. Consumers also perceive and expect genuine customer concern from brands they consider as authentic. Genuine and sincere customer care builds meaningful relationships between a brand and its consumers. The brand's customer-oriented actions attest to the brand's sincere concern for the consumers' needs and well-being. Consistent efforts like these on the part of the brand reinforce the impression that the brand prioritizes its customers beyond profit motives, further enhancing brand authenticity perceptions.

A meaningful brand-consumer relationship establishes emotional connection and enhances positive emotions. Consumers feel comfortable with the brand. They feel satisfaction not just in using the product but also in engaging with the brand's content and activities. They feel proud and excited being associated with the brand.

They draw inspiration and foster admiration for the brand. These favorable emotions are cultivated by the positive experiences they accumulate while engaging with the brand. The consumers' positive feelings further strengthen their connection and favorable evaluations of the brand including authenticity perceptions.

Some consumers see authenticity when a brand is prestigious, premium, luxurious, established, iconic, or worth investing in. The value and status that these consumers associate with authentic brands is reflected in these perceptions. Such qualities reaffirm the impression that a brand has already earned recognition and distinction in the eyes of the consumers over time. As a result, consumers see brands that are worthy of long-term confidence and investment as authentic.

The willingness of consumers to buy a product is higher for brands they believe are authentic. When consumers perceive higher authenticity in a brand, they become more confident and willing to buy its products. They think that authentic brands can better address their need and wants as consumers. As they experience satisfaction with the purchase and interaction with the brand, they tend to repurchase the next time around. For long-term or continuing services, consumers are also more willing to subscribe or invest in brands that they find authentic. Authenticity perceptions are important for consumers when choosing a brand over other alternatives. The more authentic they perceive a brand is, the more likely they would choose that brand.

Accumulated positive experiences, when using and engaging with an authentic brand, motivate consumers to become loyal. Loyal customers stay with a brand despite cheaper alternatives. Loyal customers also stick with a brand even when sometimes, the brand commits mistakes but takes responsibility to admit and rectify them. Such loyalty drives consumers to advocate for the brand by recommending it to

peers, friends, and relatives. They also spread positive word-of-mouth about the brand. Through these responses, loyal customers express their support for brands they believe are authentic.

The table below, Table 14, contains the titles and descriptions of the themes generated from the consumer participants' responses to the following sentence stems:

J – When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I usually think _____.

K – When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I usually feel _____.

L – When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as _____.

Just like in the previous tables, the actual quotes for the Example Responses column can be seen in the Appendix H of this research where the letter component of the example response identifiers refers to the sentence stem while the numeric part of the identifiers indicates the participant/response number.

Table 14

Themes on How Consumers Respond to Inauthentic Brands

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Information Verification and Risk Reduction	Consumers search for reviews, conduct research, verify claims, compare alternatives, and reduce purchase risk when they detect inauthenticity in a brand.	J5, J28, J44, J45, J50, J52, J54, J57, J62, J63, J69, K15, L4, L16, L19, L51, L61, L62, L63, L65, L70, L72, L73
Distrust, Skepticism, and Suspicion	Consumers question the credibility, honesty, claims, intentions, and reliability of brands they perceive as less authentic.	J2, J4, J6, J16, J17, J24, J28, J35, J36, J37, J38, J39, J40, J40, J41, J46, J48, J61, J63, J64, J65, J70, J71, J73, J74, K2, K4, K6,K7,K8, K9, K15, K16, K17, K21, K23, K24, K27, K33, K37, K38, K40, K41, K44, K47, K52, K54, K56, K58, K61, K63, K65, K68, K70, K74, L2, L19, L26, L36, L69

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Perceptions of Poor Quality and Low Value	Consumers associate low quality, poor performance, lack of durability, and poor value for money with less authentic brands.	J1, J6, J7, J9, J12, J13, J14, J15, J18, J21, J22, J25, J27, J30, J32, J33, J34, J42, J45, J47, J49, J51, J53, J56, J57, J60, J65, J68, J69, J74, K1, K12, K22, K25, K32, K35, K45, K50, K53, K56, K57, K59, L1, L5,
Perceived Profit-Driven Deceptive Motives	Consumers believe that less authentic brands prioritize profit, image, or manipulation over customer welfare.	J3, J8, J11, J20, J23, J28, J33, J35, J52, J59, J67, K21, K47, K73
Disappointment, Frustration, and Negative Effect	Consumers feel disappointment, annoyance, frustration, dissatisfaction, and emotional detachment when it comes to less authentic brands.	J58, K2, K3, K13, K17, K20, K24, K26, K28, K33, K35, K36, K40, K42, K45, K50, K62, K66, K67, K69, K70, K71, K74, L45, L64,
Disengagement and Indifference	When dealing with less authentic brands, consumers lose interest, become detached, ignore the brand, or feel emotionally disconnected.	J55, J66, J72, K10, K19, K20, K26, K29, K31, K32, K39, K43, K46, K50, K55, K57, K60, K61, K64, K65, K67, K70, K72, L7, L8, L15, L20, L21, L26, L28, L29, L31, L35, L43, L47, L48, L50, L52, L54, L55, L56, L57, L60, L64, L65, L66, L71, L74
Avoidance and Brand Rejection	Consumers avoid purchasing less authentic brands, stop supporting them, actively reject them, or switch to other brands.	J5, J10, J19, J26, J29, K5, K31, K51, K56, K64, L2, L3, L5, L6, L9, L10, L11, L12, L13, L16, L17, L23, L24, L25, L27, L28, L33, L37, L38, L40, L41, L42, L45, L46, L49, L52, L56, L59, L65, L67, L68, L70, L73, L74
Negative Word-of-Mouth and Competitive Switching	Consumers warn others about less authentic brands, leave negative feedback about them, de-influence peers, and move towards competing brands.	L22, L23, L24, L26, L27, L28, L30, L32, L33, L34, L35, L37, L38, L42, L46, L49, L52, L56, L58, L63, L65, L68, L70, L73, L74

Similar to responding to authentic brands, consumers also seek and verify brand information when they encounter brands they suspect as inauthentic. However, they seek clarification not just because of curiosity but also because of their cognitive dissonance caused by doubts and uncertainty about the brand's promises. They check on the veracity and accuracy of the brand's communications and claims. This is the consumers' way of mitigating or avoiding the risks in engaging with brands they perceive as less authentic.

When consumers sense inauthenticity in a brand, they tend to distrust it. Impressions of inauthenticity lead consumers to become skeptical and suspicious about the brand's communicative actions. As they doubt the brand, they become less willing to accept its messages without verification. Sometimes, even with verification, they still remain reluctant to believe the brand's statements. Consumers become more critical of every action made by the brand. Reversing this kind of situation may not be impossible but may prove to be quite difficult, especially when compounded by further negative experiences with the brand.

Brands that consumers regard as less authentic are presumed by consumers to have poor quality, which leads to poor performance. These brands are not expected by consumers to be durable. Thus, consumers do not believe that they would get their money's worth if they patronize this kind of brands. They also predict that such brands will not be able to deliver on their promises if ever consumers decide to try them out. Disappointing product or service experiences would even add to consumers' negative evaluations of the brand. As these impressions persist among consumers, the perception of inauthenticity would likely worsen.

Consumers also believe that less authentic brands are more profit-driven, prioritizing profit and image over customer welfare. Such perceived priorities about less authentic brands lead consumers to question whether the brand truly acts in the consumers' best interest. Confirmation of such suspicions would occur when actual brand behavior points towards giving more importance to commercial and self-serving goals rather than addressing consumers' needs and concerns. Being labeled by consumers as greedy and selfish makes it difficult for brands to bounce back and change such impressions. Brands that manifest selfish motives through their actions would further be perceived as inauthentic.

Negative experiences, whether coming from a brand's dishonesty, poor quality products, failed promises, or lack of genuine customer concern, cause disappointment among consumers. At the very least they may feel dissatisfied. Repeated instances frustrate or even annoy consumers. As these feelings intensify, consumers become less emotionally connected with the brand. They also become less responsive to its communications and activities.

Emotional disconnection from less authentic brands makes consumers lose interest, disengage, become indifferent, and ignore them. These responses also reflect a declining psychological connection with the brand. With decreasing engagement, consumers pay less attention to the brand's communications and actions. They become disinterested in what the brand says and does. Worst case is, consumers become indifferent and would not even care what happens to the brand.

When indifference turns into rejection and avoidance, consumers totally withdraw support from the brand. They stop supporting the inauthentic brand by ceasing most, if not all, engagements with it. They even seek alternative brands that might better satisfy their expectations. In other words, escalated inauthenticity perceptions lead to avoidance and rejection. Recovering from this scenario appears to be extremely difficult for the brand.

Further deterioration of the previous scenario may motivate consumers to warn other consumers by leaving negative feedback in the brand's website, social media platforms or other online sites. Consumers may also spread disapproving word-of-mouth about the brand by creating negative content and posting it in their own accounts or in online communities. Posting complaints and negative comments is also another way by which consumers warn their peers. Spreading negative word-of-mouth

may also be done through offline or traditional media. With regards to product purchase and usage, these disgruntled consumers usually switch to more authentic brands for good.

Table 15 below contains the titles and descriptions of the themes generated from the consumer participants' responses to the following sentence stems:

M - I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it make me think _____.

N - I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it make me feel _____.

O - I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it lead me to do things such as _____.

Same as in the previous tables, the actual quotes for the Example Responses column can be seen in the Appendix H of this research where the letter component of the example response identifiers refers to the sentence stem while the numeric part of the identifiers indicates the participant/response number.

Table 15

Themes on How Consumers Co-Determine Brand Authenticity

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Information Seeking and Brand Exploration	Consumers become more curious about authentic brands and seek to learn more about the particular brand, its origins, products, campaigns, and future offerings.	M56, M62, M72, N54, N56, O7, O14, O19, O39, O56, O62, O70,
Honesty and Transparency	Consumers regard brands as authentic when interactions communicate sincerity, openness, truthfulness, and transparency without deception or hidden motives.	M2, M3, M4, M6, M24, M27, M38, M52, M56, M58, M60, M63, M64, M65, M68, M69, N7, N16, N28, N60, N68
Consistency Between Words and Actions	Consumers judge a brand as authentic when its actions consistently match its message, promises, claims, values,	M2, M3, M4, M6, M10, M16, M20, M23, M27, M28, M30, M33, M37, M38, M40,

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
	brand identity, and public image, thereby aligning consumer experiences with consumer expectations.	M43, M52, M58, M67, M69, M70, M74, N11, N27, N28, N52, O11, O28, O52
Shared Values and Purpose	Authenticity emerges and is felt by consumers when they find alignment between their own values and the brand's principles, mission, purpose, or social contribution.	M18, M22, M23, M40, M42, M60, M61, M72, N18, N19, N22, N39, N72, O18, O27, O72
Reliability and Trustworthiness	Consumers view authentic brands as dependable, credible, and worthy of trust while positive interactions strengthen confidence in the brand and encourage future reliance.	M2, M3, M4, M6, M7, M8, M12, M15, M16, M20, M23, M24, M28, M30, M33, M37, M38, M40, M43, M45, M52, M55, M56, M58, M63, M64, M65, M67, M68, M69, M70, M74, N11, N7, N12, N15, N16, N21, N23, N27, N28, N30, N38, N45, N52. N53, N60, N63, N64, N68, O3, O4, O11, O12, O16, O17, O18, O20, O21, O22, O23, O24, O28, O29, O30, O31, O33, O36, O37, O38, N40, O43, O44, O45, O47, O49, O51, O52, O54, O55, O58, O59, O63, O67, O68, 73, 74
Reputation, Prestige, and Status	Some consumers find authenticity among brands that manifest prestige, luxury, exclusivity, established reputation, or premium positioning.	M1, M9, M10, M35, M48, N9, N18, N59, N62, O58
Comfort, Safety, and Security	Authentic brands reduce uncertainty and risk, thereby making consumers feel safe, secure, reassured, comfortable, and confident in their purchase decisions.	M12, M15, M24, M55, M59, M63, N1, N11, N14, N18, N20, N21, N22, N23, N26, N27, N28, N34, N35, N38. N40, N47, N55, N57, N58, N61, N64, N65. N69, O16, O30, O56
Feeling Valued, Respected, and Appreciated	Consumers experience a sense of recognition and dignity with authentic brands, making them feel respected as people rather than mere customers.	M13, M17, M18, M39, M43, M63, M73, N2, N3, N4, N6, N9, N17, N18, N24, N28, N33, N37, N41, N44, N45, N46, N63, N65, N67, N73, N74
Customer-Centeredness	Consumers discern authenticity when the brand genuinely prioritizes customer welfare, satisfaction, respect, and fair treatment over merely pursuing transactions.	M2, M4, M11, M13, M17, M18, M20, M22, M23, M28, M39, M42, M43, M63, M64, M67, M70, M73, N2, N3, N4, N6, N9, N11, N17, N18, N24, N28, N37, N39, N40, N41, N44, N45, N46, N65, N67, N72, N73, N74, O2, O17, O27, O28, O30, O32, O40. O45, O52, O56
Human Connection and Relationship	Consumers regard brands as authentic when interactions feel personal, human, caring, and relational rather than purely commercial since they feel heard, understood, and connected.	M2, M4, M13, M17, M18, N23, M28, M39, M43, M46, M64, M67, M70, M73, N2, N3, N4, N6, N9, N17, N18, N24, N28, N33, N37, N38, N41, N42, N44, N45, N46, N52, N60, N63, N64, N65, N67, N72, N73, N74, O2, O18, O27, O28, O30, O39, O43, O50, O56, O61, O72
Emotional Connection and Identification	Consumers emotionally connect with authentic brands since they see those brands as personally meaningful, relatable, and reflective of their own identity.	M18, M22, M29, M42, M43, M44, M46, N50, M51, M56, M61, M63, M64, M70, M71, M72, M73, N2, N3, N4, N6, N18, N19, N22, N24, N28, N29, N37, N41, N44, N45, N46, N56, N60, N61, N63, N64, N65, N67, N72, N73, N74, O18, O52, O60, O72
Active Engagement and Participation	Consumers are motivated by authentic brands to engage beyond purchasing	M56, M62, N56, N61, N73, O2, O4, O6, O8, O22, O27, O28, O29, O30, O39,

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
	through interaction, following brand content, participating in events, and providing feedback.	O40, O42, O43, O45, O50, O52, O56, O61, O62, O65, O70, O71, O72
Quality and Value Delivery	Brand authenticity is validated through product quality, durability, usefulness, performance, and perceived value for money, hence making the consumers feel that the brand delivers tangible benefits.	M1, M5, M14, M20, M21, M56,M27, M30, M32, M34, M35, M36, M45, M49, M54, M55, M57, M65, N5, N13, N15, N25, N27, N32, N43, N49, N53, N57, N69. O1, O45, O53,
Satisfaction and Positive Experience	Authenticity is reinforced through satisfying experiences that meet or exceed consumer expectations, making consumers feeling contented and fulfilled.	M25, M28, M63, M73, N5, N8, N13, N25, N33, N42, N43, N47, N49, N50, N55, N57, N58, N69, O2, O20
Future Purchase Intention	Satisfied consumers of an authentic brand are motivated to consider future purchases, expand purchases within the brand portfolio, and anticipate future intentions.	M15, M25, M31, M53, M66, N27, N29. N31, N32, N36, N51, N64, N66, N70, N71, O1, O2, O3, O4, O10, O11, O12, 015, O17, O18, O20, O21, O22, O23, O24, O26, O28, O29, O30, O31, O33, O35, O36, O37, O38, O40, O44, O45, O47, O49, O51, O52, O54, O55, O58, O59, O60, O63, O66, O67, O68, O69, O70, O73, O74
Advocacy and Recommendation	Satisfied consumers of an authentic brand become willing ambassadors and advocates who recommend the brand, share positive experiences, and encourage others to engage with it.	M51, N61, O4, O13, O16, O18, O22, O23, O24, O25, O28, O30, O32, O33, O34, O35, O36, O37, O38, O40, O41, O45, O46, O47, O48, O49, O52, O53, O60, O63, O64, O65, O68, O74
Brand Loyalty and Continued Support	Consumers choose authentic brands repeatedly over alternatives since authenticity fosters long-term commitment, repeat patronage, and enduring support for the brand.	M15, M25, M31, M51, M53, M66, N27, N29. N31, N32, N36, N51, N61, N64, N66, N70, N71, O1, O2, O3, O4, O10, O11, O12, O13, 015, O16, O17, O18, O20, O21, O22, O23, O24, O25, O26, O28, O29, O30, O31, O32, O33, O34, O35, O36, O37, O38, O40, O41, O44, O45, O47, O48, O49, O51, O52, O53, O54, O55, O58, O59, O60, O63, O64, O65, O66, O67, O68, O69, O70, O73, O74

After the consumers have interpreted and responded to a brand's authenticity signals and the brand has also responded with further communicative actions, the consumers now continuously reassess and co-determine the brand's authenticity based on their communicative interactions. In continuously reassessing and co-determining the brand's authenticity, consumers search for more information about the brand. They explore deeper into the brand's intentions, communications, and activities

while seeking confirmation of their initial perceptions and interpretations. As the brand responds adaptively to the consumers' responses towards the initial brand signals, the consumers also reinterpret the adaptively modified brand communicative actions. These continuous and on-going adaptions and responses co-determine the brand's authenticity.

As the brand exercises honesty and sincerity in continuing to adapt their communicative actions based on the consumers' potentially changing responses, consumers reinterpret these actions as positive experiences. Consumers appreciate the openness and transparency of the brand as it makes adaptive adjustments to its communicative actions without hidden or deceptive motives. These ongoing adaptive brand actions and consumer reinterpretations continuously co-determine the authenticity of the brand.

Aside from considering honesty and transparency in their reinterpretations, consumers also evaluate the brand's consistency in its words and actions. They check the alignment of its adapted messages, claims, promises, brand identity, and public image. Consumers compare their expectations with actual experiences. When they continually find consistency between what they expect the brand to adapt and what they actually observe, they accept the brand as authentic.

Consumers also consider the alignment of their own values with the brand's principles, mission, purpose, and social contribution in continuously co-determining its authenticity. This ongoing alignment makes the consumers feel that the brand genuinely upholds beliefs and priorities similar to their own. The more congruent the brand's values are with the consumers' for the long term, the more likely they will regard the brand as authentic.

Continuous reassessment of the authenticity of a brand entails consumers checking whether the brand remains trustworthy and credible in its brand actions and communications. Consumers evaluate the brand's long-term dependability and reliability by reinterpreting their ongoing interactions with the brand. With positive reassessments, the consumers become more confident in the brand. These favorable reassessments renew their trust and willingness to continue depending on the brand in the future.

The reputation, prestige, and status of a brand remains to be a consideration in the ongoing co-determination of brand authenticity, as some consumers give continuing importance to the brand's level of luxury and exclusivity. These qualities reinforce the impression that the brand possesses distinction and enduring value. For this kind of consumers, such characteristics strengthen the image that the brand is genuine and credible.

Engaging with an authentic brand over time makes consumers continuously feel safe, secure, and reassured. Feeling confident about the brand enables them to believe that risk and uncertainty are reduced in their purchase decisions. This diminished uncertainty makes consumers more comfortable with relying on the brand to meet their needs and expectations over time instead of seeking other alternatives. The persistence of these emotions allows consumers to somehow let their guard down when engaging with the said brand since they strongly feel that the brand is authentic.

Constantly being valued, respected, and appreciated as people instead of mere transactions or revenue sources contribute positively to consumers' continuous reinterpretation of a brand's authenticity. With this kind of treatment from a brand, consumers feel a sense of dignity and recognition. When a brand consistently values,

respects, and appreciates consumers across every touchpoint, consumers' human needs are addressed, not just their functional needs for the brand's products. This kind of experience motivates consumers to continuously regard the brand as authentic.

The consumers' feelings of being valued and respected by the brand during their interactions can be traced to the brand's customer-centeredness as the brand genuinely prioritizes customer welfare, satisfaction, respect, and fair treatment over merely pursuing transactions. When a brand continually prioritizes consumers over commercial gain, consumers interpret and reinterpret such behavior as enhancers of brand authenticity.

Human-like connection and long-term relationships with consumers are constantly being cultivated as brands continue to observe customer-centeredness in their communications and actions. Genuine care for the consumers makes them feel that the connection is personal and relational rather than purely commercial. Consumers experience being heard and understood. This kind of meaningful relationship motivates consumers to continuously consider the brand as authentic.

The human connection fostered by a brand by treating customers with genuine care and respect cultivates consumers' emotional attachment. Consumers see the relationship as personally meaningful, relatable, and reflective of their own identity. They view the brand's persona as compatible with their own character and personality. Because of this, they identify strongly with the brand, increasing the brand's relevance in their lives. Hence, the brand continues to resonate with the consumers towards favorable authenticity reassessments.

The consumers' emotional connection with a brand motivates them not just to purchase but to also engage with it by following its content, participating in its events

and providing feedback. In other words, consumers become more willing to maintain a long-term relationship with the brand beyond individual transactions. Positive consumer experiences during this long-term relationship will likely convince consumers to continually assess the brand as authentic.

Aside from relational needs, consumers also continuously co-determine and validate brand authenticity in terms of how the brand addresses their functional needs through product quality, durability, usefulness, performance, and perceived value for money. After the initial assessment of these attributes, consumers continue to be watchful of improvements or deterioration in these dimensions of quality as they continuously engage with the brand. Positive continuing assessments greatly contribute to favorable reinterpretations and co-determination of the brand's authenticity.

Satisfaction and positive experiences that meet consumer expectations also greatly contribute to consumers' co-determination of a brand's authenticity. These positive experiences help prove to the consumers that the brand delivers on its promises. Consumers' brand authenticity reassessments continue to grow stronger as satisfying experiences accumulate over time.

When consumers continue to be satisfied, they are motivated to repurchase and expand their purchases within the brand's portfolio, which may likely lead again to satisfaction and further validation of the brand's authenticity. Positive experiences increase consumers' willingness to continue engaging with the brand in the long term. Consumers also tend to purchase additional offerings from the brand as satisfaction is reinforced through continued interactions.

Highly satisfied consumers become willing ambassadors and advocate for the brand as they recommend the brand, share their positive experiences, and encourage others to engage with it. These behaviors reflect consumers' confidence in the brand as evidenced by their willingness to express favorable evaluations to others. As more positive experiences are gained by the consumers, they become more willing to sustain their advocacy and support for the brand over time.

Consumers choose authentic brands repeatedly over other alternatives because authenticity fosters long-term commitment, repeat patronage, and enduring support for the brand. As the consumers continue to be satisfied in their recurring interactions with the brand, they become more loyal and more willing to use and push the brand that they continuously co-determine as authentic.

In Table 16 below, the first 2 columns contain the titles and descriptions of the themes generated from the consumer participants' responses to the following sentence stems:

P - I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it make me think _____.

Q - I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it make me feel _____.

R - I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it lead me to do things such as _____.

Just like in the previous tables, the actual quotes for the Example Responses column can be seen in the Appendix H of this research where the letter component of the example response identifiers refers to the sentence stem while the numeric part of the identifiers indicates the participant/response number.

Table 16

Themes on How Consumers Co-Determine Brand Inauthenticity

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
Increased Scrutiny and Verification	When consumers perceive inauthenticity in a brand, they become more cautious by seeking reviews, checking credibility, and questioning claims before engaging further.	P50, R18, R21, R30, R62, R68
Perceived Dishonesty and Deception	Consumers judge brands as less authentic when interactions indicate dishonesty, misleading claims, fake positioning, exaggeration, or hidden motives.	P2, P3, P4, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13, P16, P17, P23, P24, P27, P28, P33, P37, P40, P46, P51, P52, P63, P69, Q10, Q15, Q17, Q18, Q20, Q21, Q28, Q30, Q40, Q41, Q45, Q69, Q73, Q74, R53,
Inconsistency Between Claims and Reality	Consumers detect inauthenticity in a brand when experiences contradict promises, marketing messages, or stated values.	P4, P11, P16, P17, P23, P27, P28, P35, P38, P40, P51, P52, P63, P68, P69, P70, Q15, Q22, Q27, Q45, Q52
Profit-Driven Rather than Customer-Oriented	Consumers associate inauthenticity with brands that prioritize sales, image, or profit over customer welfare and genuine value creation.	P6, P17, P18, P20, P21, P28, P36, P45, P56, P58, P65, P67, P69, P70, P73, P74, Q16, Q23, Q30, Q70,
Distrust and Suspicion	Less authentic brands trigger consumers to develop skepticism, doubts, and uncertainty regarding brand intentions and credibility.	P7, P11, P14, P15, P31, P38, P55, P61, P63, P64, Q2, Q6, Q7, Q12, Q23, Q27, Q33, Q38, Q40, Q44, Q52, Q62, Q68, Q69, Q70, Q74, R14, R28, R46, R52, R68
Feeling Misled, Manipulated, or Scammed	Consumers feel deceived, exploited, tricked, or manipulated when brands appear insincere or fail to meet expectations, leading to inauthenticity judgments.	P3, P8, P40, Q10, Q18, Q20, Q21, Q28, Q30, Q40, Q41, Q45, Q58, Q65, Q69, Q73, Q74, R30,
Feeling Ignored, Disrespected, or Undervalued	Consumers feel that less authentic brands neglect customer needs, fail to listen, or treat customers merely as transactions.	P18, Q14, Q17, Q18, Q26, Q37, Q43, Q46, Q64, Q67,
Emotional Disconnection and Indifference	With less authentic brands, consumers feel weak emotional bonds, apathy, disengagement, and lack of interest.	P26, Q23, Q24, Q28, Q39, Q50, Q56, Q60, Q69, Q71, Q72, R22, R37, R38, R39, R56, R64
Ignoring or Disengaging from the Brand	Consumers respond to less authentic brands by ignoring their advertisements, unfollowing them, disengaging, or ceasing interaction with them.	P66, Q50, Q56, Q60, Q66, R2, R7, R9, R20, R22, R26, R29, R37, R39, R40, R50, R55, R56, R57, R60, R66, R72
Avoidance and Purchase Withdrawal	Consumers avoid purchasing, discontinue use, and withdraw support for less authentic brands.	P25, P47, P49, P61, R2, R4, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R15, R16, R17, R20, R22, R23, R24, R25, R28, R37, R40, R41, R42, R45, R48, R49, R50, R56, R58, R59, R60, R67, R69, R74
Poor Quality and Lack of Value	Inauthenticity judgments emerge from perceptions of poor quality, unreliability, low durability, or wasted money.	P1, P5, P9, P12, P19, P29, P30, P34, P35, P41, P43, P45, P53, P54, P57, P64, P71, P72, Q1, Q9, Q22,

Themes	Descriptions	Example Responses
		Q34, Q48, Q49, Q53, Q57, Q59, R1, R25,
Disappointment and Dissatisfaction	Negative authenticity judgments come with consumers' disappointment, frustration, regret, and dissatisfaction.	Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q11, Q22, Q24, Q25, Q28, Q34, Q35, Q40, Q45, Q54, Q55, Q61, Q63, Q65, Q70, Q71, Q73, Q74, R25,
Switching to Competitors or Alternatives	Consumers seek more trustworthy alternatives when authenticity gets questioned.	R3, R5, R11, R16, R18, R28, R38, R40, R43, R52, R54, R67, R70, R73, R74
Negative Word-of-Mouth and Warning Others	Consumers tend to share negative experiences, leave critical reviews, or caution others against less authentic brands.	R3, R4, R6, R8, R16, R17, R18, R23, R27, R28, R33, R34, R35, R36, R37, R47, R61, R63, R65, R70
Loss of Loyalty and Relationship Termination	Consumers reduce engagement, end brand relationships, and terminate support for less authentic brands.	P25, P47, P49, P61, Q23, Q24, Q28, Q39, Q50, Q56, Q60, Q69, Q71, Q72, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R15, R16, R17, R18, R20, R22, R23, R24, R25, R27, R28, R33, R34, R35, R36, R37, R38, R39, R40, R41, R42, R43, R45, R47, R48, R49, R50, R52, R54, R56, R58, R59, R60, R61, R63, R64, R65, R67, R69, R70, R73, R74

Similar to the discussion for the previous table, consumers continuously reassess and co-determine the brand's authenticity, or the lack of it, even after the consumers have initially interpreted and responded to a brand's authenticity signals and the brand has also responded with further communicative actions. Consumers tend to scrutinize a brand further when they reinterpret it as less authentic, They exercise caution by seeking reviews and checking the brand's credibility. They question its claims before engaging further. These efforts are risk-reduction measures for consumers to reduce the uncertainty of decision-making.

In these reassessments, consumers judge unfavorably the interactions that indicate dishonesty, misleading claims, and exaggeration. They become wary of fake positioning, hidden motives, and deception. Interactions tainted with these red flags strongly urge consumers to reinterpet the brand as inauthentic.

Continuing inconsistency between the brand's claims and reality, such as when actual experiences contradict promises, marketing messages, or stated values, point the consumers towards co-determining the brand as less authentic. Such inconsistencies reveal that the brand is either presenting a false façade or incapable of fulfilling its promises. Persistently inconsistent brands will likely be reinterpreted by consumers as inauthentic.

Furthermore, consumers associate prioritization of sales, image, and profit over customer welfare and genuine value creation with inauthenticity. When a brand continues to manifest these motives through its actions and decisions despite consumer feedback pertaining to such, the brand is not likely customer-centered. Thus, consumers will likely continue to see them as inauthentic.

This impression leads to more distrust and suspicion. Consumers tend to become skeptical and doubtful about the brand's intentions, diminishing its credibility. Skepticism subjects every brand message and action to careful verification by the consumers. In other words, these reactions make consumers more hesitant to trust the brand and believe in its claims. Additional negative experiences will likely confirm the brand as inauthentic in the minds of the consumers.

Unaddressed skepticism makes consumers feel misled or deceived at the slightest sign of questionable brand intent. Suspicions of exploitation, or manipulation may surface whenever a brand appears insincere or fails to meet consumers' expectations. Negative perceptions and experiences like these reinforce the consumers' reassessment of brand inauthenticity.

Aside from the feeling of being misled or deceived, consumers may also feel disrespected when the brand continues to treat them as transactions instead of

people. Consumers feel undervalued when the brand continually de-prioritizes them. They also feel neglected when the brand persistently ignores or fails to listen to them. These feelings trigger doubts whether the brand truly cares and values its customers. Repeated experiences like these will likely push consumers to judge the brand as inauthentic.

Lingering negative emotions, like those mentioned above, weaken the bond between a brand and its consumers. As this happens, consumer interest in the brand declines, paving the way for apathy and indifference to set in. The weakening of consumers' emotional attachment and their loss of interest pose potential negative consequences for the brand. In a case like this, brand authenticity reassessments will likely spiral downwards.

Beyond these consequences, consumer disengagement may follow, manifesting through the consumers' ignoring and unfollowing of the brand's content, advertisements, and activities. Consumers may hesitate to further interact with the brand. These behaviors confirm the consumers' reduced willingness to engage with the brand and its communications. As disengagement continues, there will be less opportunities for the brand to recover from the consumers' growing inauthenticity reinterpretations.

Avoidance and purchase withdrawal become observable as consumers continue to judge the brand as less authentic. These behaviors manifest the consumers' unwillingness to continue investing in brands they no longer perceive as authentic. As inauthenticity perceptions persist, consumers will likely transfer their support and patronage to alternative brands.

Aside from failing to address relational needs, a brand's poor quality, unreliability, and low durability will also likely persist on failing to address the consumers' functional needs, leading to continued inauthenticity judgments. These quality-related perceptions reinforce the consumers' beliefs that the brand is unable to deliver what it promised, worsening brand inauthenticity perceptions.

These negative authenticity judgments come with disappointment, frustration, regret, and dissatisfaction. Such emotional responses reflect consumers' negative experiences and evaluations of the brand. Like a vicious cycle, these negative emotions emanating from accumulated unfavorable experiences will again lead to worse inauthenticity judgments.

As dissatisfaction grows and brand authenticity gets questioned further, consumers seek more trustworthy alternatives and will likely switch to competitors. This response shows the consumers' desire to reduce uncertainty and find better brands. Consumers become more willing to consider and avail of other alternatives as confidence in the first brand declines.

Spreading unfavorable word-of-mouth serves as the avenue of disgruntled consumers to vent out their frustrations. Triggered by prolonged dissatisfaction, these consumers share their negative experiences and leave critical reviews about the brand. The possible intentions for doing these may range from wanting to warn and prevent other consumers from experiencing similar disappointments to getting back at the brands that caused them much grief and exasperation. The spread of such negative word-of-mouth, especially if it becomes viral, can be very detrimental to the authenticity judgments of other consumers about the brand.

Ultimately, continued inauthenticity judgments by consumers about a brand lead to loss of loyalty and relationship termination. Engagements are reduced, if not totally avoided. Relationships with the inauthentic brand are terminated. Support for the said brand is withdrawn. Consumers eventually become unwilling to interact with that brand.

Integrated Findings from the Sentence Completion Responses

Table 17 below summarizes and integrates the findings from the 74 consumers' responses to the 18 given sentence stems. First of all, a brand is interpreted by consumers as highly authentic when its communicative brand actions consistently demonstrate honesty, transparency, genuineness, customer-centeredness, priority for value-driven motives, high quality, and consistency among its values, communications, strategies, and actual behavior. On the other hand, a brand is interpreted as less authentic when it is seen as misleading, exaggerated, overly profit-driven, manipulative, having poor quality, and inconsistent in its claims, communications, strategies, and actual behavior. When consumers encounter a highly authentic brand, they perceive it as trustworthy, reliable, credible, true to its promises, and worth supporting. Upon encountering a less authentic brand, they cognitively process it as fake, suspicious, opportunistic, and not worth trusting. Emotionally, consumers feel confidence, comfort, security, satisfaction, respect, being valued as a person, and connection when exposed to authentic brands. These feelings serve as emotional reassurance to the consumers. Contrarily, they feel skeptical, disappointed, frustrated, distrustful, regretful, and indifferent when it comes to less authentic brands. Towards highly authentic brands, consumers manifest behavioral responses such as

engagement, purchase, repurchase, recommendation, advocacy, and loyalty while they disengage, avoid, cease to support, switch to other brands, reject future brand communications, and spread negative word-of-mouth about less authentic brands. After back-and-forth communicative interactions between a brand and its consumers, brand authenticity is verified when consumer experiences consistently confirm the brand's promises, values, and quality while inauthenticity is reinforced by experiences that reveal gaps between claims and reality. Authentic brand experience leads to trust, satisfaction, loyalty, and continued support while inauthentic brand experience leads to the deterioration and termination of the brand-consumer relationship as well as the rejection of the brand.

Table 17

Integrated Findings from the Sentence Completion Responses

Higher Order Dimensions	Authentic Brand Experience	Less Authentic Brand Experience
Brand Signals	Honest, transparent, genuine, customer-centered, value-driven, high quality, consistent	Misleading, exaggerated, overly profit-driven, manipulative, poor quality, inconsistent
Consumer Cognitive Perceptions	Trustworthy, reliable, credible, true to its promises, worth supporting	Fake, suspicious, opportunistic, not worth trusting
Consumer Emotions	Confidence, comfort, security, satisfaction, respect, being valued, connection	Skepticism, disappointment, frustration, distrust, regret, indifference
Consumer Behavioral Responses	Engagement, purchase, repurchase, recommendation, advocacy, loyalty	Disengagement, avoidance, ceasing to support, brand switching, warning others, negative word-of-mouth
Authenticity Verification	Experiences consistently confirm promises, values, and quality	Experiences reveal gaps between claims and reality; between words and actions
Relationship Outcome	Long-term trust and relationship building	Relationship deterioration/termination and brand rejection

Integrated Findings: Points of Convergence and Points of Divergence

In analyzing the integrated themes from the brand-side interviews and the integrated themes from the consumer-side sentence completion responses, 3 major points of convergence and 4 major points of divergence were identified.

The first strong point of convergence is the consistency between communication and experience. The themes derived from the interview, particularly transparency, alignment, consistency, and demonstrated value in action correspond directly with the consumer expectations of honesty, credibility, reliability, and fulfillment of promises. The consumers' theme of authenticity verification is particularly important as it indicates that brand claims are being evaluated against actual experiences. The second major point of convergence is authenticity as a relational phenomenon. The brand-side's themes of human connection, relatability, consumer understanding, community involvement, and co-constructed meaning align with the consumer-side's themes of feeling valued, respected, satisfied, and connected. Trust, engagement, and loyalty result from positive relationships while negative experiences are associated with disengagement, switching, and rejection. The third notable point of convergence is authenticity as an ongoing process of verification and negotiation. The interview themes, adaptive responsiveness and continuous negotiation, correspond with the consumer process of verifying whether brand promises match reality. This convergence supports the notion that brand authenticity may be strengthened, questioned, or revised as consumers encounter new brand actions and experiences.

In terms of divergence, the first one is the difference in emphasis between communicative practices and consumer evaluations. The brand-side interviews emphasized what brands communicate and do, such as transparency, storytelling,

symbolic performance, cultural adaptation, research, and responsiveness. The consumer findings focused on how brand signals are evaluated, whether genuine or misleading, trustworthy or suspicious, satisfying or disappointing. Although these are not exactly contradictions, they show a difference in analytical emphasis between the 2 data sets, addressing different parts of the same phenomenon. The second divergence area is the contrast between brand identity and expression and experienced authenticity. The brand-side emphasized on how authenticity is expressed through visual continuity, celebrity alignment, stories, symbols, and recognizable identity while the consumer-side dwelled more on whether brand signals and experiences are credible, consistent, and worthy of trust. This implies that practices deemed important by the brand-side may not necessarily form part of the consumers' criteria on authenticity. The third divergence aspect is about organizational responsiveness and consumer consequences. The brand communication manager participants cited practices like research, adaptation, cultural relevance, and responsiveness, whereas the consumer participants described the resulting feelings, evaluations, and behaviors. This divergence suggests that managerial intentions about a brand's responsive actions may not necessarily produce the intended consumer interpretation. The fourth divergence points out that the interview findings explicitly identified relational co-construction, interactive negotiation, and continuous negotiation while the consumer fidnings organized authenticity into signals, perceptions, emotions, behaviors, verification, and relatyionship outcomes. The brand-side pointed out how brand authenticity may be communicated and negotiated while the consumer-side provided an account of what consumers perceive and experience. These points of divergence do not necessarily mean that the brand-side perspective and the consumer perspective directly contradict each other. The 2 sides

emphasize 2 different angles of the same phenomenon, metaphorically describing the 2 sides of the same coin.

Integrated Higher-Order Themes

Combining the integrated themes separately derived from the interviews and the sentence completion responses, the researcher drew 7 integrated higher-order themes. These 7 integrated higher-order themes, as described in Table 18, represent the major findings from the brand communication manager participants and the consumer participants.

Table 18

Integrated Higher-Order Themes

Integrated Higher-Order Theme	Description
Transparency and Credibility of Brand Communication	Authenticity begins with communication perceived as honest, transparent, genuine, and credible
Consistency Between Brand Identity, Promises , and Actions	Authenticity is supported when brand identity, values, messages, products, services, and actual conduct align
Symbolic and Narrative Construction of Brand Meaning	Authenticity is communicated through recognizable symbols, visual continuity, storytelling, and meaningful associations
Demonstrated Value and Consumer-Centered Relevance	Authenticity becomes tangible through value-driven action, quality service, cultural relevance, consumer understanding, and human connection
Consumer Interpretation and Experiential Verification	Consumers interpret brand signals and assess authenticity through their perceptions, emotions, and actual experiences
Adaptive Responsiveness and Interactive Negotiation	Authenticity evolves as brands listen, respond, adapt, and negotiate meaning through ongoing interactions with consumers
Social Validation and Relationship	Authenticity is reinforced or challenged through community feedback, consumer advocacy, trust, loyalty disengagement, and brand rejection

Chapter VI
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study was conducted to explore brand authenticity from the communication perspective, with the intention of explaining and theorizing about the business and marketing phenomenon of brand authenticity under the lens of constructivism. The study answered the general research question: “How is brand authenticity co-constructed through the communicative interaction between brands and consumers?” by answering the following specific research questions:

1. How do brand communication managers conceptualize and enact their brands’ communicative actions in engaging consumers?
2. How does brand authenticity become meaningful through brands’ communicative actions?
3. How do consumers interpret brand authenticity in relation to brands’ communicative actions?
4. How do consumers respond to brands based on their interpretations of brand authenticity?
5. How is brand authenticity co-determined through the integration of brands’ and consumers’ perspectives in their ongoing communicative interaction?

In answering these research questions, the study aimed to achieve the general objective of developing a grounded theoretical understanding of how communicative interaction between brands and consumers co-construct brand authenticity, as well as the following specific objectives:

1. To examine how brand communication managers conceptualize and enact their brands' communicative actions in engaging consumers
2. To explore how brand authenticity emerges and becomes meaningful through brands' communicative actions
3. To investigate how consumers interpret brand authenticity in relation to brands' communicative actions
4. To analyze how consumers respond to brands based on their interpretations of brand authenticity
5. To theorize how brand authenticity is co-determined through the integration of brands' and consumers' perspectives in their ongoing communicative interaction.

In the end, a theory was formulated based on the interview responses from the brand communication managers, representing the brand side, and the sentence completion responses from the consumers, representing the consumer side. In the context of this study, the brand communication managers referred to the interview participants who have served in brand communication functions for at least 1 year regardless of position, title, rank, and nature of employment. The resulting theory formulated in this study is composed of several component models explaining the multi-dimensional phenomenon of brand authenticity.

Conclusions

In concluding this research, the researcher addressed both the main research question and the main objective, as well as the specific research questions and their corresponding specific objectives. The conclusions of this study also led to the formulation of a brand authenticity theory with several component models.

Conclusion 1

The brand communication manager participants shared that they conceptualize brand communicative actions, such as brand elements and marketing mix strategies, as a continuous process of aligning brand identity, values, promises, and behaviors with the expectations and lived realities of consumers. Hence, brand communications are not simply a transmission of promotional messages. As they have described, brand communication managers view brand communicative actions as encompassing all interactions, symbols, experiences, and organizational behaviors through which a brand expresses who it is and what it stands for.

After conceptualizing brand communicative actions, brand communication managers explained that they enact them through several interconnected practices. They strive to maintain consistency between brand messages and actual organizational actions. They try to communicate transparently about brand intentions and decisions. They also deliver coherent narratives through storytelling. Cultivating distinctive symbolic identities and fostering human-centered relationships with consumers are also part of enacting their brands' communicative actions. Furthermore, they also engage in continuous listening, consumer research, cultural monitoring, and adaptive responsiveness for their brands to remain relatable and relevant to the changing consumer expectations and social contexts. Thus, brand communication managers should recognize that authenticity cannot be unilaterally declared and controlled by brands. On the contrary, brand authenticity must be continuously validated through consumer interaction, engagement, and demonstrated value.

Therefore, brand communication managers perceive that brand communicative actions are not just strategic communication outputs but also relational and interactive practices wherein brand authenticity is enacted and negotiated.

Conclusion 2

According to the brand communication manager participants, brand authenticity becomes meaningful when communicative actions consistently convey and reinforce a clear alignment among what a brand claims, what it values, and what it actually does. Communication alone does not generate authenticity. Brand authenticity emerges when communication is supported by observable actions and experiences that validate brand claims.

Based on the interviews with the brand communication managers, the authenticity of a brand gains meaning through multiple communicative mechanisms. Consistency between messages and behavior supports perceptions of integrity and trustworthiness. Honesty and sincerity are perceived by consumers through a brand's transparency. A brand's identity and purpose is effectively expressed through the narratives provided by storytelling. Symbolic identity enables consumers to recognize and relate to a brand's distinctive characteristics. Opportunities for consumers to experience brands as relatable socially embedded actors are created through human-centered engagement and community involvement. A brand's responsiveness to consumer needs and their cultural contexts, while remaining aligned to the brand's core values, helps brand authenticity to become meaningful.

Therefore, the brand communication manager participants perceive that brand authenticity emerges not as a fixed brand attribute but as a communicatively

generated meaning that is continuously reinforced through consistent communicative actions, interactions, and experiences.

Conclusion 3

Based on the consumer participants' responses, they interpret brand authenticity by evaluating whether or not a brand's communicative actions demonstrate honesty, consistency, transparency, customer-centeredness, and genuine customer-oriented intentions. They do not simply accept brand authenticity claims at face value. Instead, they actively assess whether or not a brand's actions fulfill its communicated values and promises.

The findings from the sentence completion responses showed that consumers initially interpret a brand's communicative actions as authenticity signals. They look for and examine cues such as transparency, quality, customer treatment, consistency across platforms, responsiveness, social responsibility, and alignment between stated values and observable practices. These signals allow consumers to form cognitive interpretations of a brand's credibility, trustworthiness, reliability, and sincerity, which increase authenticity perceptions. They also watch out for cues that depict the brand as inconsistent, deceptive, manipulative, exaggerated, and overly profit-driven. These negative cues reduce perceptions of authenticity.

Furthermore, the findings from the consumers' responses showed that they also interpret brand authenticity through emotional experiences. Brands are perceived as authentic when they evoke feelings of confidence, comfort, security, respect, and connection. On the other hand, brands are perceived as inauthentic or less authentic when they generate feelings of skepticism, disappointment, distrust, and frustration.

Hence, consumers believe that brand authenticity should be verified through direct and indirect experiences.

Therefore, as the consumer particpants have signified, brand authenticity is interpreted as an ongoing evaluation of the congruence between communication and reality rather than a static brand characteristic.

Conclusion 4

The consumer participants reported that they respond to brands based on the authenticity judgments they develop through their interactions and experiences with the said brands. On the positive side, consumers tend to develop positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses towards a brand whose communicative actions are perceived to be authentic. On the negative side, consumers will likely develop negative cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses towards a brand whose communicative actions are perceived to be inauthentic or less authentic.

Positive authenticity interpretations lead to trust, satisfaction, emotional attachment, and confidence in the brand. These interpretations frequently translate into supportive behaviors like purchasing, repurchasing, recommending the brand to others, advocating for the brand, engaging with the brand's content, and maintaining brand loyalty. Consumers expressed belief that authentic brands are worthy of support because they consistently deliver on their promises and act in accordance with their stated values.

Negative authenticity interpretations lead to distrust, skepticism, disappointment, and frustration. These interpretations often translate into avoidance,

disengagement, switching to alternative brands, negative word-of-mouth, rejection of future brand communications, and termination of brand-consumer relationship.

Therefore, the findings from the consumer participants showed that consumers' responses towards brands are highly dependent on their experiences that confirm or disconfirm their authenticity expectations.

Conclusion 5

The combined findings from the responses of the brand communication managers and the consumers showed that brand authenticity is co-constructed through an ongoing communicative process wherein brands enact and continuously adapt communicative actions that directly or indirectly convey authenticity claims and consumers continuously interpret, evaluate, validate, negotiate, and respond to those claims. Hence, neither brands nor consumers can unilaterally define and control brand authenticity. Brand authenticity emerges through the ongoing interaction between brand's communicative practices and the consumers' meaning-making process.

As discussed by the brand communication manager participants, brands participate in this process by articulating values, constructing narratives, expressing identities, demonstrating actions, and responding to consumer feedback. The consumer participants indicated that they participate by interpreting brand authenticity signals, comparing brand claims with lived experiences, sharing evaluations within social networks, and collectively validating or challenging brand meanings. The venues where brand authenticity is negotiated include community discussions, social interactions, consumer advocacy, criticisms, and feedback mechanisms.

Since this process is dynamic rather than static, as described by the research participants, brands continuously adapt their communicative actions based on consumer expectations and cultural changes. Simultaneously, consumers continuously revise their interpretations based on new experiences and information updates coming from the brands' adaptation of their communicative actions. These repeated cycles of signaling, interpretation, verification, feedback, and adaptation enable both parties to collaboratively establish the criteria by which brand authenticity is recognized and maintained.

Therefore, both the brand-side and the consumer-side participants' perspectives view brand authenticity as a communicatively co-constructed phenomenon that emerges through the continuous negotiation of meaning between brands and consumers. This implies that brand authenticity is not dictated or confined within the brand nor dictated or confined within consumer perceptions, but rather emergent within the evolving brand-consumer relationship created through ongoing communicative interactions.

General Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, brand authenticity emerges through a continuous communicatively co-constructing process wherein brands enact authenticity signals through consistent, transparent, value-congruent, and consumer-oriented communicative actions and consumers actively interpret, verify, and negotiate those authenticity claims through cognitive judgments, emotional experiences, and behavioral responses. These ongoing cycles of communication, interaction, validation, and adaptation allow brands and consumers to co-determine

what counts as authentic. This joint determination of brand authenticity shapes the development or deterioration of long-term brand-consumer relationships. Hence, this study goes beyond the traditional practice of commercial marketing or even relationship marketing. The findings of this inquiry stretches marketing to further address the phenomenon of brand authenticity, particularly its being co-constructed and emergent through ongoing brand-consumer communicative interaction.

In identifying what counts as authentic for the brand communication managers and consumers, 2 higher-order themes surfaced from the numerous codes, themes, and integrated themes that came from the brand side and consumer side responses in this study. The 2 higher-order themes that this research found are consistency and adaptiveness. Consistency encompasses the brand's continuous alignment of its identity, values, promises, claims, communications, product and service quality, and all other actions and behaviors of the brand and the organization that owns the brand. Adaptiveness covers continuous consumer feedback monitoring, social listening, responsiveness towards consumer needs, customer-centeredness, maintaining relatability and social relevance, and continuous interaction between the brand and its consumers. Both the brand side and consumer side participants of this study agree, through their qualitative responses, that these 2 higher-order themes constitute brand authenticity.

Therefore, this study revealed that brand authenticity is co-constructed through the ongoing communicative interaction between brands and consumers. Brands conceptualize and enact communicative actions, and in the process, send brand signals to the consumers. In turn, the consumers interpret those brand signals and form cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. These consumer responses are then interpreted by the brands, prompting them to maintain or adjust their subsequent

strategies and communicative actions, which again serve as updated brand signals for the consumers to interpret and respond to. This continuous cycle, where brand authenticity is co-constructed, goes on and on and can be described as an ongoing brand-consumer relationship.

Relating this co-constructed brand authenticity phenomenon to the concept of emergence in the field of complexity sciences, it can be said that the study's findings support a social-emergence interpretation of brand authenticity for the following reasons. First, instead of being dictated as a fixed attribute by one party, the brand authenticity phenomenon comes from the interaction and negotiation of 2 agents - the brands and the consumers (Holland, 1998). Since the interactions occur spontaneously in a self-organized manner, there is no centralized planning or leadership between the agents involved (Kauffman, 1993). These spontaneous self-organized interactions give rise to new and coherent patterns of communication and behavior (Goldstein, 1999). Reinforcing or positive feedback amplifies change, encouraging brands to repeat and maintain brand communicative actions that elicit those favorable consumer reactions while balancing or negative feedback resists change, influencing brands to adjust their strategies and behavior (Meadows, 2008). As brands decide whether to maintain or revise their communicative actions, they try to balance their brand consistency and adaptiveness. Amidst this entire ongoing process of communication, interaction, and negotiation between brands and consumers, brand authenticity emerges. Hence, brand authenticity is both co-constructed and socially emergent.

Theorizing About Brand Authenticity

In fulfilling the general objective of the study of formulating a theory on brand authenticity based on the research findings, the researcher used the codes, themes, core/advanced themes, and integrated themes generated from the interview responses of the brand communication managers and the sentence completion responses of the consumers. In the process, the researcher integrated the perspective of the brand communication managers and the perspective of the consumers, which were separately collected through interviews and sentence completion method respectively, although the actual brand-consumer interactions were not directly observed. Several models were conceptualized and linked together to form a cohesive theory. Presented herein are the main theory and its component models.

The BASE Theory

The theory derived from the findings of this study is called the BASE Theory or the Brand Authenticity Social Emergence Theory. This serves as the core theoretical mechanism to which all the other component models are anchored. Through the brand-side and consumer-side responses, the study has established that brand authenticity is co-constructed through the communicative interaction between brands and consumers. This characteristic of being co-constructed also supports the notion of the brand authenticity phenomenon being socially emergent. Applying the concept of emergence from the field of complexity sciences, it can be inferred that brand authenticity emerges from the interactions among the agents (Holland, 1998) through reinforcing or positive feedback, which amplifies change, and balancing or negative feedback, which resists change (Meadows, 2008). These interactions occur in a spontaneous self-organized manner without centralized planning or leadership

governing the said interactions (Kauffman, 1993), thereby giving rise to novel and coherent structures and properties during the self-organization process (Goldstein, 1999).

The BASE Theory unifies the models derived from the research findings. Illustrated in Figure 2 are the BASE Theory and its component models, namely the BARON Model or Brand Authenticity as Recurring Ongoing Negotiation Model, the BART or Brand Action-Response Typology, the Balancing ACT Model or Balancing Adaptiveness and Consistency Together Model, the CASE Model or Consistency-Adaptiveness Scenario Eventualities Model, the BASS Model or Brand Authenticity Sweet Spot Model, and the BANC Model or Brand Authenticity Notion Continuum Model.

Figure 2.

The BASE Theory



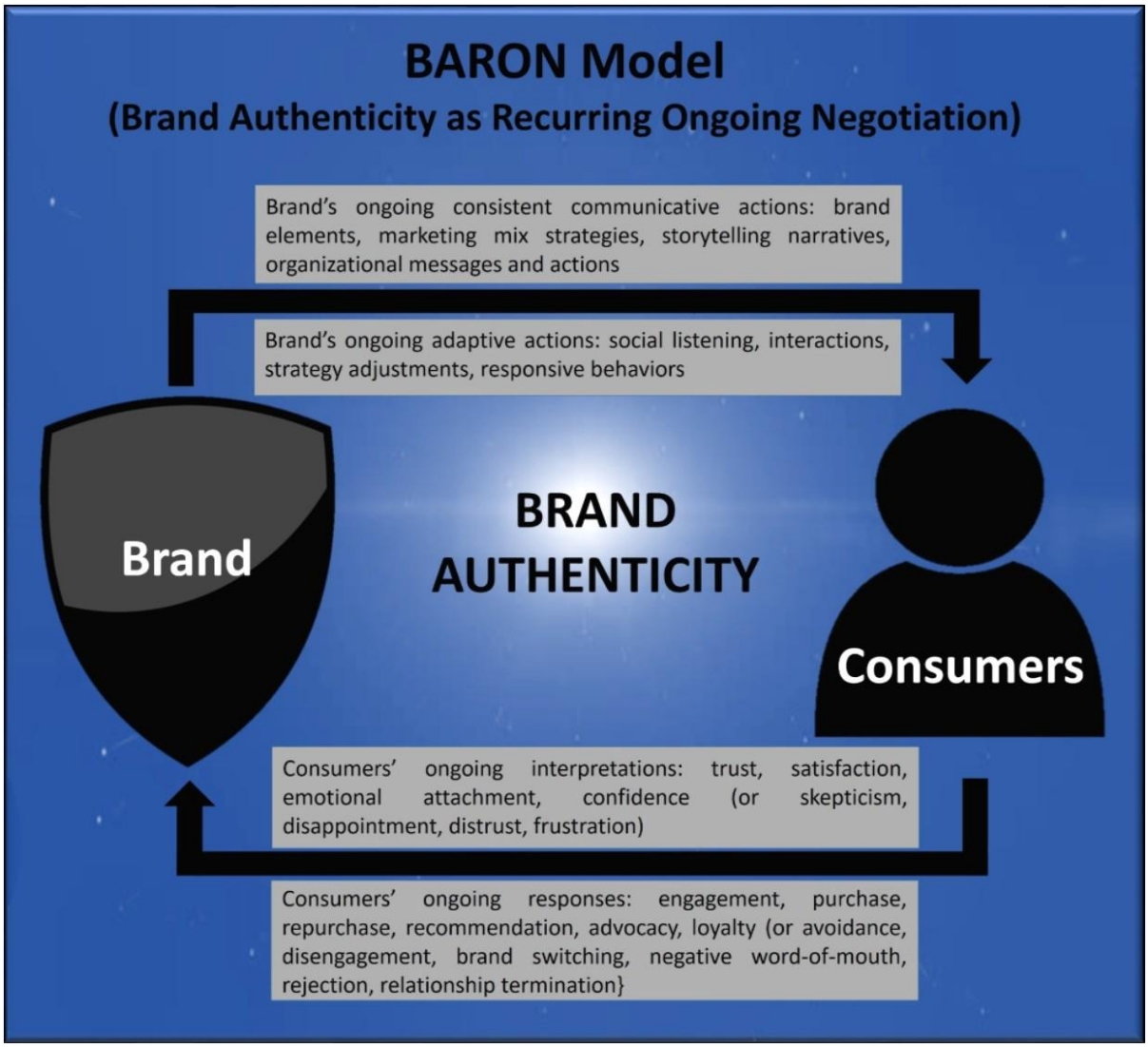
The central figure of this integrated diagram represents the phenomenon of Brand Authenticity while its surrounding diagrams depict the different dimensions being highlighted in the theory. Each of the 6 surrounding diagrams are connected by arrows to the central figure, Brand Authenticity. This means that each of them contributes to explain a part of the Brand Authenticity phenomenon.

The BARON Model

The BARON Model or Brand Authenticity as Recurring Ongoing Negotiation Model explains the process wherein brand authenticity emerges. The process starts with the brand communication managers conceptualizing and enacting the brand's communicative actions, which include the brand elements, marketing mix strategies, organizational messages and actions, and other forms brand communications. Traditionally, these brand actions were treated like market stimuli which, when appropriately designed and implemented, will automatically establish brand authenticity as a fixed attribute of the brand. However, the findings of this study showed that the meaning-making process of brand authenticity does not stop there. When consumers are exposed to the brand's communicative actions, they interpret and respond to those stimuli either positively or negatively. The BARON Model enumerates the consumer interpretations and responses most reflected in the study findings. The consumers' responses serve to negotiate the next actions of the brand. As the brand observes the consumers' interpretations and responses through feedback monitoring, social listening, and interaction with the consumers, the brand's communicative actions are then adapted to the prevailing social context through strategy adjustments and responsive behaviors. These new communicative actions are, again, interpreted, responded to, and negotiated by the consumers. This cycle of communicative actions, interpretations, responses, and negotiations continues to recur and evolve into what constitutes brand authenticity. Hence, brand authenticity emerges through the recurring ongoing negotiation between the brand and its consumers as depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3

The Baron Model



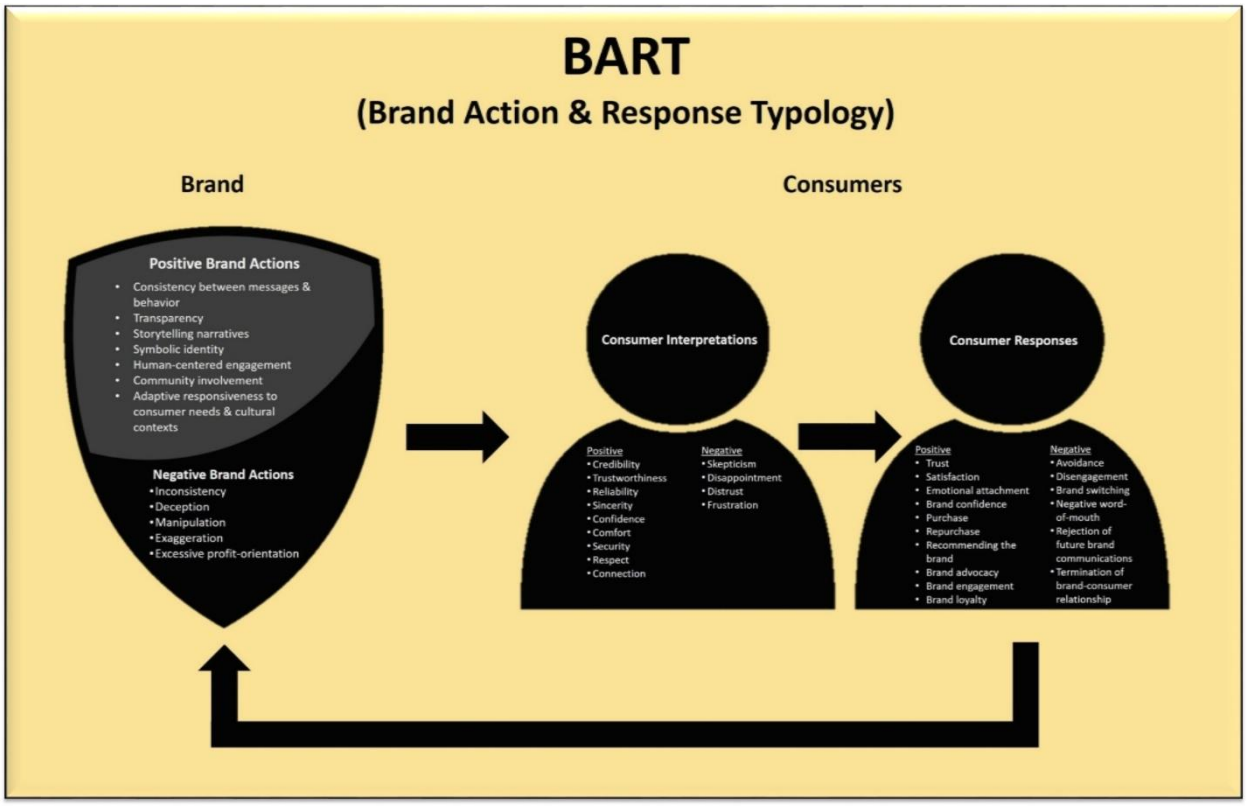
The BART

The Brand Action-Response Typology organizes the brand's ongoing communicative actions, the consumers' ongoing interpretations of those brand actions, and the consumers' ongoing responses to them while segregating the positive

from the negative. The brand communicative actions, consumer interpretations, and consumer responses included in the BART were all derived from the interview and sentence completion responses collected in this study. The positive brand communicative actions are: consistency between messages and behavior, transparency, storytelling narratives, symbolic identity, human-centered engagement, community involvement, and adaptive responsiveness to consumer needs and cultural contexts. The negative brand communicative actions are: inconsistency, deception, manipulation, exaggeration, and excessive profit-orientation. On the side of the consumer, the positive consumer interpretations are: credibility, trustworthiness, reliability, sincerity, confidence, comfort, security, respect, and connection. The negative consumer interpretations are: skepticism, disappointment, distrust, and frustration. For the consumer responses, the positive list includes: trust, satisfaction, emotional attachment, brand confidence, purchase, repurchase, recommending the brand, brand advocacy, brand engagement, and brand loyalty. The negative list of consumer responses is composed of: avoidance, disengagement, brand switching, negative word-of-mouth, rejection of future brand communications, and termination of brand-consumer relationship. This typology, as presented in Figure 4 below, may not exhaust all possibilities in terms of brand communicative actions, consumer interpretations, and consumer responses in relation to brand authenticity but it paints a vivid picture of how brand communication managers conceptualize, enact, and adapt the brand side and how consumers think, feel, and act on brand authenticity from the consumer side.

Figure 4

The BART



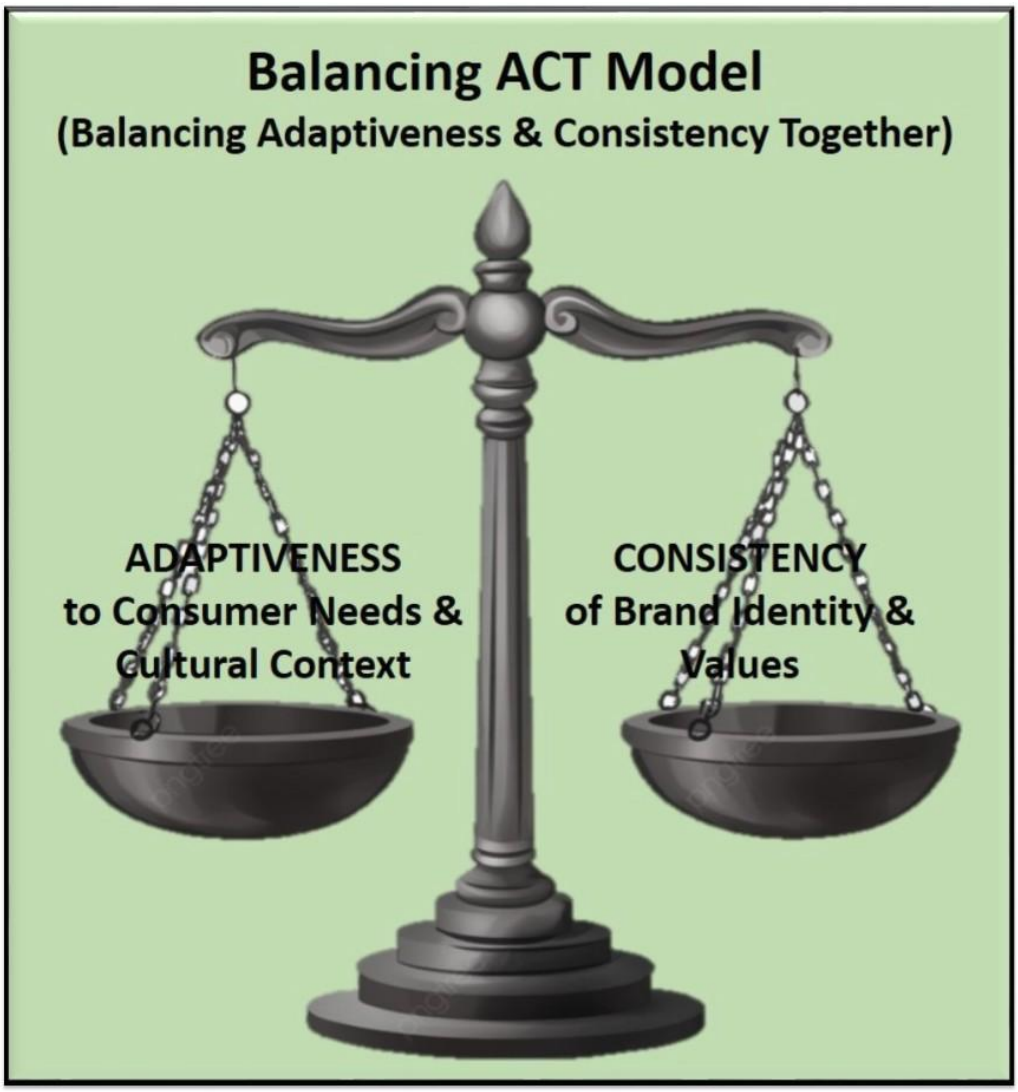
The Balancing ACT Model

The Balancing ACT Model or Balancing Adaptiveness and Consistency Together Model emphasizes the 2 very important higher-order themes that were derived from both the brand side and the consumer side of this study. Brand communication managers and consumers alike have cited that consistency, which is about being true to one's values and promises; and adaptiveness, which is about listening and responding to consumer feedback and social contexts; are both crucial in the ongoing brand-consumer negotiation on the authenticity of a brand. However, consistency and adaptiveness can be inversely related to each other. When a brand becomes overly consistent to its values and identity, flexibility decreases and the brand

becomes quite rigid. When a brand becomes very adaptive to trends and prevailing social contexts, consistency suffers. Hence, striving for both consistency and adaptiveness literally becomes a balancing act where the challenge for the brand lies in determining how consistent it should be while remaining adaptive and how adaptive it should be without becoming inconsistent. Figure 5 below metaphorically illustrates the Balancing ACT Model.

Figure 5

The Balancing ACT Model

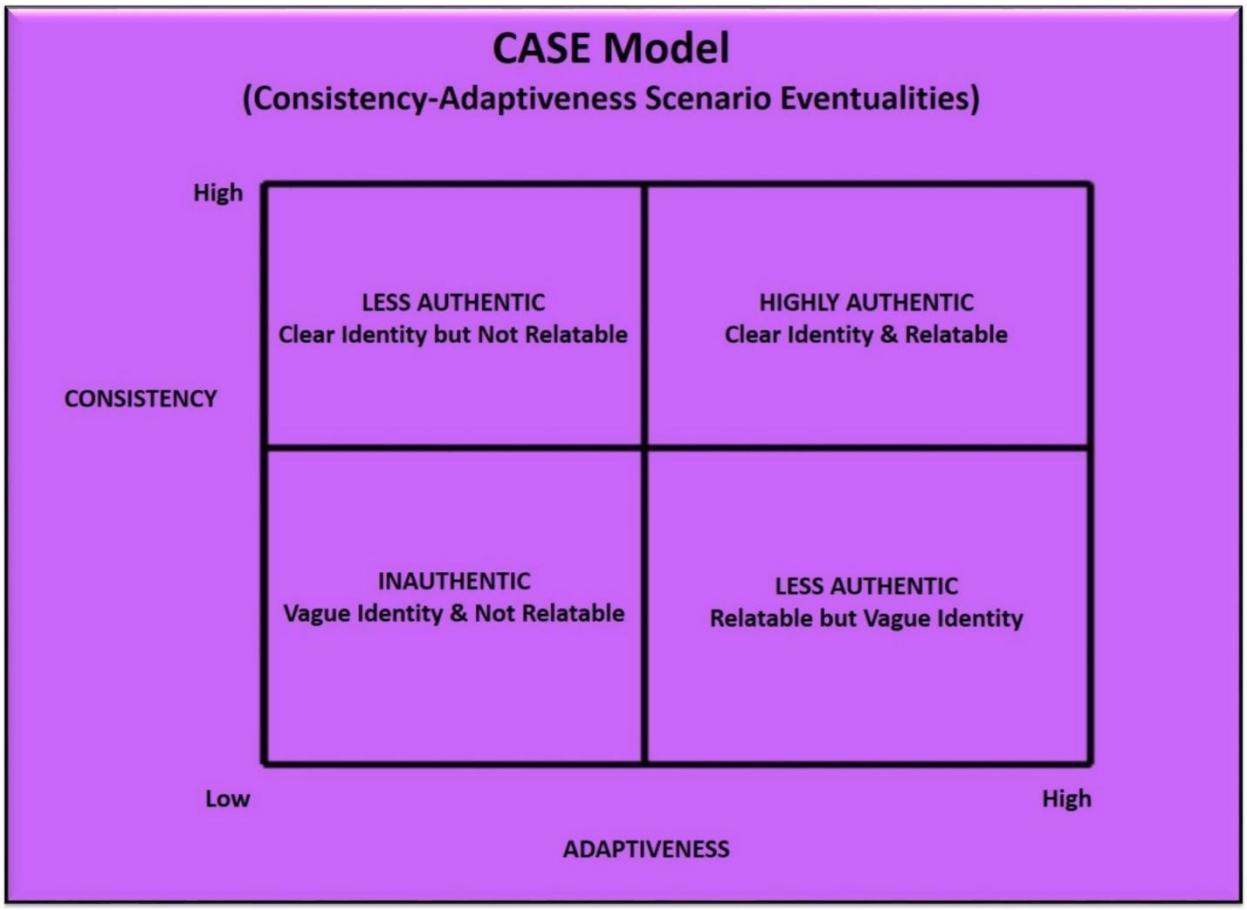


The CASE Model

The CASE Model or Consistency-Adaptiveness Scenario Eventualities Model presents possible scenarios based on the different combinations of varying levels of consistency and adaptiveness of a brand. The 4 quadrants in the diagram represent 4 different scenarios. In the lower left quadrant, where both consistency and adaptiveness are low, the brand is interpreted as inauthentic. This is due to the brand's vague identity caused by its low consistency, as well as the brand's being unrelatable due to its low adaptiveness. In the upper left quadrant, where consistency is high but adaptiveness is low, the brand is interpreted as less authentic. Although consistency gives the brand a clear identity, its low adaptiveness makes it unrelatable. In the lower right quadrant where consistency is low but adaptiveness is high, the brand is also interpreted as less authentic. Despite being relatable due to its high adaptiveness, its identity is vague because of the brand's inconsistency. The ideal scenario is in the upper right quadrant where both consistency and adaptiveness are high, making the brand highly authentic as it is both clear in identity and relatable. The CASE Model depicted in Figure 6 complements the Balancing ACT Model by showing the positive and negative implications of balancing and failing to balance consistency and adaptiveness.

Figure 6

The CASE Model



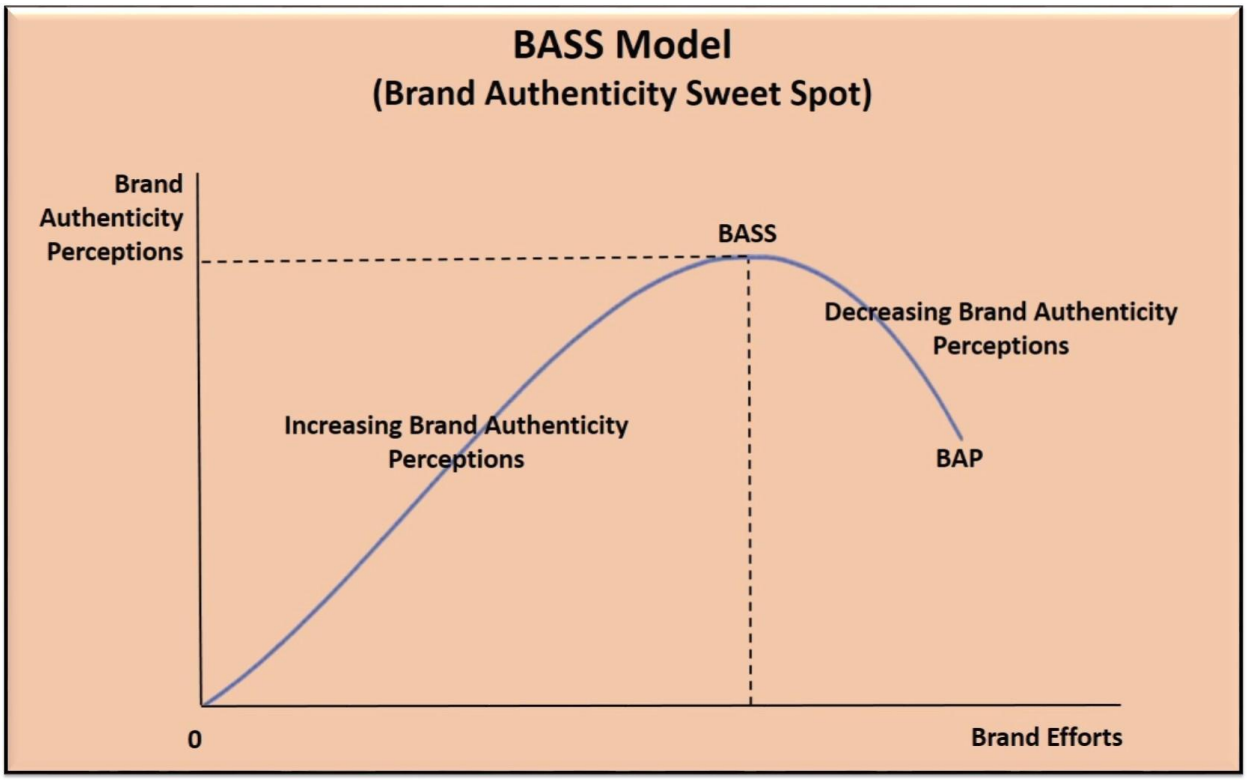
The BASS Model

The BASS Model or Brand Authenticity Sweet Spot Model shows a sub-phenomenon within the brand authenticity phenomenon. Based on the findings in the interviews and sentence completion responses of this study, when brands are, or appear to be, trying too hard to become authentic by chasing trends not aligned with its identity, being performative, or being opportunistic, consumers tend to interpret inauthenticity instead of appreciating the brand's communicative efforts. The underlying principle of this sub-phenomenon is parallel with the Law of Diminishing

Returns in the field of economics where continued increases in one kind of input alone increases the total output of a firm at a diminishing rate and eventually even diminishes the total output of the firm altogether (Costales, et al., 2000). In the model, the graph of Brand Authenticity Perceptions or BAP initially indicates an increasing trend brought about by the brand efforts early on, but declines as the brand efforts get perceived as trying too hard due to the above-cited reasons. The declining part of the graph is also the phase where the brand's efforts may already be suspected by consumers as staged authenticity or engineered spontaneity. The BASS Model poses both a warning and a challenge to brands to be careful not to try too hard to become authentic to the point of being performative, trend-chasing, opportunistic, or engaging in staged authenticity or engineered spontaneity since these tactics may seem to work in the short-term but often backfire in the long run. As implied in Figure 7 below, the key is not to try too hard but to find the "sweet spot" where brand efforts are both consistent with the brand's identity and adaptive to the social context.

Figure 7

The BASS Model



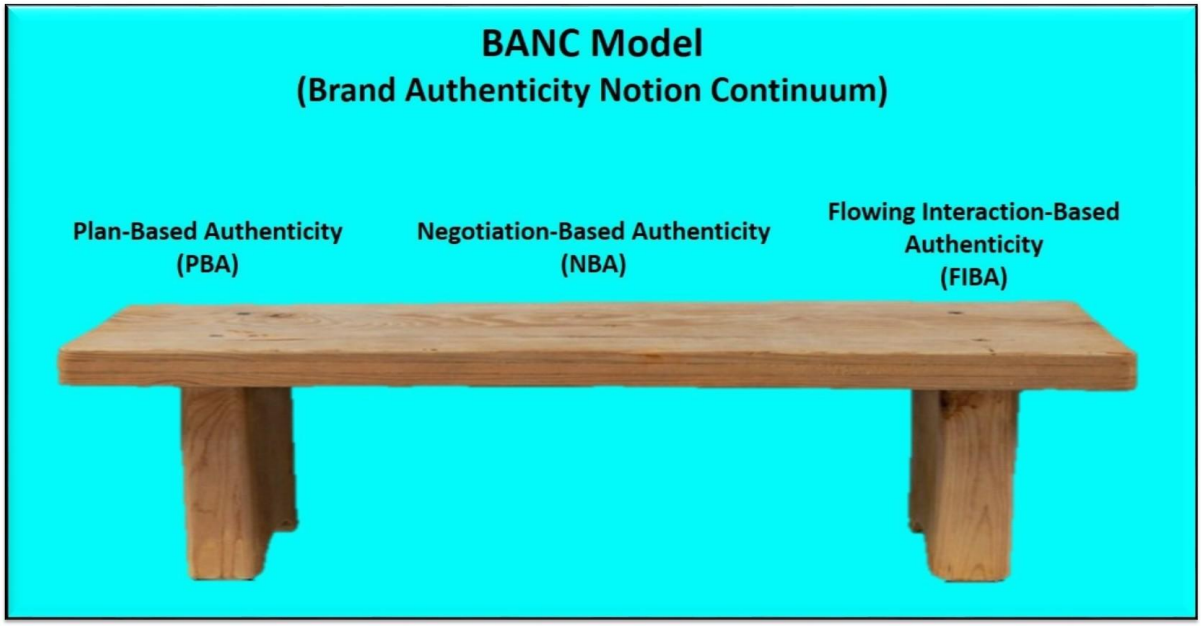
The BANC Model

The BANC Model or Brand Authenticity Notion Continuum shows 3 stages in the brand authenticity perspective continuum. The first stage is the traditional perspective on brand authenticity that simply views brand authenticity as planned and enacted. This perspective is labeled in the model as Plan-Based Authenticity or PBA. Some participants of the study appear to embrace the second stage in the continuum labeled as the Negotiation-Based Authenticity or NBA where authenticity is based not on the brand's communicative actions alone but on the interpretations of consumers about those actions. Most of the participants in the study agree that brand authenticity is continuously negotiated through communicative interactions between the brand and

its consumers. This perspective is shown in the third stage of the continuum and labeled as Flowing Interaction-Based Authenticity or FIBA. Figure 8, the diagram of the BANC Model, illustrates the brand authenticity continuum using a long bench because “banc” in French literally means a long bench. The long bench gives brands and consumers the options of sitting at the left side where brand authenticity is seen as a planned attribute, in the middle where brand authenticity is viewed as based on the consumers’ interpretations of the brand’s communicative actions, or at the right side where brand authenticity is considered emerging through the continuously flowing interaction between brands and consumers. The third perspective is the one that is aligned to the findings of this research.

Figure 8

The BANC Model



To identify the relationships of the BASE Theory and its component models, the following list identifies the role of each aspect:

- The BASE Theory is the core theory to which all the other component models are anchored.
- The BARON Model supports the BASE Theory by illustrating the recurring communicative interaction between brands and consumers.
- The BART supplements the BASE Theory by presenting a typology that organizes the brand's ongoing communicative actions, the consumers' ongoing interpretations of those brand actions, and the consumers' ongoing responses to them while segregating the positive from the negative.
- The Balancing ACT Model expounds on the BASE Theory by depicting the trade-off between a brand's adaptiveness and consistency where an increase in one entails the risk of a decrease in the other, thereby emphasizing the importance of striking a balance between them.
- The CASE Model extrapolates the Balancing ACT Model by identifying 4 possible scenarios that may happen based on the relative magnitude of consistency and adaptiveness.
- The BASS Model also supports the BASE Theory by predicting what happens to brand authenticity perceptions when brand efforts fall below, attain, and exceed the optimal level, coined as the Brand Authenticity Sweet Spot.
- The BANC Model places in a continuum the main concept of the BASE Theory which treats brand authenticity as a continuously flowing interaction vis-à-vis other notions, particularly planned authenticity and interpretation or single negotiation authenticity.

The BASE Theory: Provisional Theoretical Functions and Areas for Future Validation

The BASE Theory and its component models were formulated to provisionally serve certain functions, subject to future validation. These functions were derived from the 5 previously identified indicators of a good theory, namely descriptive power, explanatory power (Nkwam-Uwaoma 2020), analytic power (Weshbe, Shackelford, and Al-Shawaf, 2023), anticipatory power, and transformative power (Nkwam-Uwaoma 2020). Derived from these indicators of a good theory, the intended functions of the BASE Theory and its component models are the following: to describe, to explain, to analyze, to anticipate, and to transform.

Table 19 below summarizes the provisional functions of each aspect of the proposed theory by presenting what the BASE Theory and its component models intend to describe, explain, analyze, anticipate, and transform. However, since these provisional functions of the proposed theory's various aspects were not tested in this study, the researcher welcomes future validation tests to be performed on the proposed BASE Theory and its component models.

Table 19

Provisional Theoretical Functions and Areas for Future Validation of the BASE Theory and Its Component Models

Theory/ Model	To Describe…	To Explain…	To Analyze…	To Anticipate…	To Transform…
BASE Theory	the brand authenticity phenomenon as a whole	the co-construction of brand authenticity meanings through brand-consumer communicative interaction	brand-consumer communicative interactions that give rise to brand authenticity perceptions	possible brand authenticity negotiations between brands and consumers	the mindset of brand practitioners and consumers towards treating brand authenticity as being

Theory/ Model	To Describe…	To Explain…	To Analyze…	To Anticipate…	To Transform…
			and negotiations		continuously negotiated
BARON Model	the recurring process of brand authenticity negotiation	the recurring communicative interaction between brands and consumers	the continuous back-and-forth brand actions, consumers' interpretations, consumers' responses, revised brand actions and so on and so forth	Possible consumers' interpretations and responses towards brand actions	the mindset of brand practitioners and consumers towards treating brand authenticity as being continuously negotiated
BART	the classifications of a brand's ongoing communicative actions, the consumers' ongoing interpretations of those brand actions, and the consumers' ongoing responses to them	the positive and negative brand actions, consumers' interpretation of those actions, and consumers' responses to them	which brand actions may lead to which consumer interpretations and responses	consumers' interpretations and responses towards certain brand actions	the mindset of brand practitioners towards being conscious that positive and negative brand actions are interpreted and responded to by consumers in positive and negative ways respectively
Balancing ACT Model	the trade-off between a brand's adaptiveness and consistency	the importance of balancing brand adaptiveness and brand consistency in the context of brand authenticity	the benefits and risks of prioritizing adaptiveness over consistency and vice versa	the possible effects of prioritizing adaptiveness over consistency and vice versa	the mindset of brand practitioners and consumers towards striking a balance between adaptiveness and consistency
CASE Model	the 4 possible scenarios that may happen depending on the relative levels of brand consistency and brand adaptiveness	the consequences of different combinations of high and low brand adaptiveness and brand consistency	the implications of brand consistency and brand adaptiveness combinations on brand authenticity and inauthenticity perceptions	the negotiated authenticity of a brand based on the ratio between brand consistency and brand adaptiveness levels	the mindset of brand practitioners and consumers towards striking a balance between consistency and adaptiveness
BASS Model	the graphical behavior of brand authenticity perceptions based on the amount and kind of brand efforts	that too little or too much brand efforts do not maximize brand authenticity perceptions, thereby	the optimal level of brand efforts that would maximize barnd authenticity perceptions	brand authenticity perceptions based on the level of brand efforts	the mindset of brand practitioners towards finding the Brand Authenticity Sweet Spot instead of merely

Theory/ Model	To Describe…	To Explain…	To Analyze…	To Anticipate…	To Transform…
		necessitating to find the Brand Authenticity Sweet Spot			increasing brand efforts
BANC Model	the 3 notions about how brand authenticity comes to be	the progression of the 3 brand authenticity notions	the differences among the 3 brand authenticity notions	brand practitioners' and consumers' behavior depending on which among the 3 brand authenticity notions they subscribe to	the mindset of brand practitioners and consumers towards treating brand authenticity like a continuously flowing interaction between brands and consumers

Recommendations

There are 2 sets of recommendations that this study sets forth. The first set is about the practical application of the findings of this study. Prospects for future research comprise the second set of recommendations.

To realize the practical application benefits identified in the Significance of the Study section of this research, the researcher recommends that people involved in brand management or any function related to brand communications should consider using the BASE or Brand Authenticity as Social Emergence perspective, where brand authenticity is not treated as a fixed brand attribute but rather a co-constructed interpretation emerging through the continuous communicative interaction between brands and consumers, as a reflective framework. By doing this, they will be able to examine the balance of their brands' consistency and adaptiveness to consumers' interpretations, responses, and feedback. On the side of consumers, the researcher also recommends for them to adopt the BASE or Brand Authenticity as Social

Emergence perspective in relation to brand authenticity. By doing so, they will realize that they are not powerless in brand-consumer negotiation situations, Instead, they will be empowered to influence brands to become consistent and adaptive to their needs and social contexts. Ideally, when this happens, both the brand and the consumers will ultimately benefit by maximizing brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction and welfare.

For future research, this study recommends that qualitative studies similar to this one be conducted among other generational cohorts to compare the perspectives among the different generations. Qualitative studies that directly studies the actual brand-consumer interactions over time, such as digital interaction, crisis communication, consumer feedback cycles, and matched brand-consumer cases, would also greatly broaden the understanding about brand authenticity. Empirical quantitative studies are also suggested to test the proposed BASE Theory and its component models for validation purposes.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Transcript of In-Depth Interview 1

Date of Interview: May 14, 2026

Time of Interview: 10:00AM

Duration of Interview: 1 hour and 19 minutes

Place of Interview: BGC, Taguig City

Name of Participant: NAME WITHHELD

Brands Handled/Worked for: Century Tuna and Jether Palomo (celebrity brand)

Interviewer:

Hi, good morning. Hello. (Name withheld), good morning.

Good morning. Well, basically, I invited you for this interview for a research study for my dissertation. It's called Brand Authenticity, the Co-Construction of Meaning through the Communicative Interaction between Brands and Generation Z Consumers.

So, we're looking here at both sides from the point of view of the Gen Z consumers and the Gen Z brand communicators, or in the study, we call it brand communication managers. Although, not necessarily they are a brand manager or in title or in terms of rank or position, but as long as they have performed functions in relation to brand communications and other interactive brand activities towards their Gen Z consumers. So, that's the study that you're participating in and I understand that you are a brand ambassador of Century Tuna and you yourself are a brand of your being a celebrity.

Can you tell us more about how you became a brand ambassador of Century Tuna and a little bit of background of your being a celebrity?

Participant:

Yeah, so initially the celebrity aspect started back in California when I used to do shows back then. Eventually, I moved to going to the Philippines and then from then, I was able to gain some following on there where it was able to make sure that my career in the Philippines ended up improving. Everything all good there?

I guess it's all good. That everything's all good there. And then afterwards, I competed for the title of Century Tuna Superbod.

Essentially, there are over tens of thousands of hundreds of thousands of applicants and then it was cut down all the way to 100 people, cut down to 16 people, cut down to the top 8, and then eventually out of everybody I ended up winning the title of

Century Tuna Superbod. And with that comes the responsibility of becoming their ambassador and so that's how I became, I guess, a celebrity and an ambassador for Century Tuna.

Interviewer:

Briefly, when you already won, when you're already the brand ambassador of Century Tuna, what are the things that you did for Century Tuna in relation to communicating with the consumers?

Participant:

I know there's a lot of billboards that I had for Century Tuna. There's this viral moment that I had with Marian Rivera where I asked her, could I get a question in English, please, because she asked it in Tagalog and it went very viral and we ended up doing a few campaigns where she got onto other billboards, I got onto mine and it was just this viral moment because the billboards were very near each other. And the Gen Z community and I guess a lot of communities had taken notice of that and since then I've been doing appearances throughout the Philippines, I flew out to Davao for judging there.

I still do runs, the Century Tuna runs now, running clubs that kind of entices communities whether it be older gen but it tends to seem that it's mostly my gen that participates in it that I've done ever since winning.

Interviewer:

Let me move on to your celebrity brand. When you're already a celebrity here in the Philippines or when you were doing your celebrity activities, basically, you have your brand, right? It's your name.

Basically, it's your real name, it's the one that you're using. But in terms of being a celebrity, what were those activities that you did? I understand you joined several pageants and other stuff.

Can you give us a little bit of background regarding that? And in relation also to communicating with your followers who happen to be Gen Z and probably some other generations.

Participant:

So essentially how it kind of starts is I've been able to grow a large amount of following whether it's through the competitions that I do or the viral videos that I produce or viral moments of me online. It kind of encapsulates small sections of who I am, especially when it's like viral clips. They're around like 10 to 15 seconds long or a bit longer sometimes depending on the video.

But what ends up happening is that the fans, the followers, or anyone online can kind of see those videos and get a grasp of who I am. Whether it be me walking on stage, I've been able to represent brands such as Bench or Avon in their campaigns. Other brands also have came into play, but essentially what ends up happening is that my fans, my followers, or the people online trust who I am, mostly because the brands that I endorse or brands that I use or I actually promote.

And I've been able to build a strong connection with my fans since then. Just establishing that anything that I push out are things that are credible.

Interviewer:

Okay, so now let me go to some of the main questions. From your perspective in both Century Tuna and as a celebrity brand yourself, how do you make sense of brand authenticity in the context of your everyday communication practices serving Century Tuna and serving as your celebrity in terms of communicating with Gen Z consumers? So how do you make sense or how do you perceive or do you consciously think about brand authenticity when you're doing those stuff?

Participant:

A hundred percent. I think whenever I am going to post something on my story, it has to reign true to who I am. And what that means is that if this is who I actually am, am I going to post this on my story?

Whether it be posting about something that I like, whether it be food, a certain brand, I have to make sure that I align with it. And so that's always on the top of my mind because my fans understand that when I'm promoting something that it's backed by the trust of me. And there's a lot of trust that my fans have for me, whether it be the things I talk about or even things I want to start pushing out onto my stories.

It comes with who I am and the brands that I want to push out.

Interviewer:

Okay, so basically you're saying your brand and who you are are aligned. Yes. Now, let me go into more specifics.

Can you recall a situation where in your brand's communicative actions, both Century and your celebrity brand, were interpreted by Gen Z consumers either as authentic or inauthentic either way? Can you come up with a real situation in the past that you encountered where they said, oh, that particular action of the brand that you're representing contributes to them becoming authentic or not? And then what happened during that situation and how did you and perhaps your team interpret the consumer's response, the Gen Z consumer's response to that particular situation?

How did you interpret the way they reacted to it?

Participant:

I think what instantly hits in my head was the Marian Rivera moment. Not many competitions have happened where people say that, like a contestant at the time will actually ask back a question to the judge, just so that they can understand. That moment was super real.

That's why Century Tuna and that whole moment went viral because it really showed that I'm not a perfect person and I don't, at the time, couldn't really understand that much Tagalog. And so because of that, it showed, one, that I'm true to myself, that I'm not going to just pretend like I understood what she said. It was staying true to who I am, which was someone that was new to the Philippines and was trying to learn.

And that was for my personal brand. As for Century Tuna, it still showed that as Marian as an ambassador, she's still authentic to herself as she's also one of the ambassadors. That she can be authentic speaking Tagalog and she can also go into her personal brand, which is just having a witty response to what I had asked her.

And that grew amongst the Gen Z fans because every time I would step out at the time, and sometimes even now, people would ask, like, you're the guy from Century Tuna, right? With Marian Rivera. And I'm like, yes, that's me.

And then they're like, wow, I love that moment. It's so iconic. And it stands true to the test of time because even to this day, I'm still recognized for it.

And so it showed genuine authenticity for Marian Rivera as her brand, my brand as Jether Palomo, and then Century Tuna holding both of us now as ambassadors because it was raw, it was real, and it was authentic to everyone. Okay.

Interviewer:

Sorry, I'm not that very familiar with that particular iconic and viral situation. So sorry, probably it got past me. So I know you said it went viral, but probably I wasn't able to catch it.

Could you relate to us a little bit how it happened?

Participant:

Yeah. So it was during the final question and answer of the top eight. I think I was one of the first ones to go up on stage, or if not the second one to go on stage.

And we had to pick a question out of a bowl. And there's a bunch of names. There was Aga Muhlach, Richard Gomez, Pia Wurtzbach, Marian Rivera, and I think a few other judges.

And their names are all scattered in a bowl. We as contestants get to pick one paper slip from the bowl, and that'll be the judge that we ask the question. Lo and behold, I choose Marian Rivera.

And at the time, I don't understand Tagalog that well. I picked her not knowing that she is mostly known for speaking Tagalog on the internet, on TV, and her English proficiency is good, but she's mostly known for being Tagalog. And so I pick her.

She asks a question. I get stunned on stage because I'm like, I have no idea what she's saying. And so I instantly say, could I get that in English, please?

And then crowd goes dead silent. I'm like, okay, I think I'm going to lose now in my head. And then Marian Rivera goes on to saying, okay, or something like along the lines of, okay, I'll give it to you in English.

And then she translates it in English. The crowd goes wild. And then I have to answer.

And then I give my answer. I get a crowd reaction that was very good. And it was that whole moment because it was part of her character or who she is, showing that she's Filipino, she's Tagalog.

And it's so strong with their brand that it's synonymous. And so it was super iconic because I, as a guy that only speaks English, asked the person that is known for Tagalog in English. And then we have that good clash of our personalities.

And then that's what happened for the viral moment.

Interviewer:

That's quite an amazing story. Okay. But let me just clarify, you're a dual citizen.

Participant:

Yes, I'm a US and Filipino citizen.

Interviewer:

Moving on. Let's now talk about brand elements being used as communicative forms.

Now, I'm sure you're familiar with brand names, logos, symbols, characters, packaging, or slogans and the like. These are brand elements that are usually used by brands in business. So I'm sure Century Tuna has those.

You've encountered them. But as a celebrity, basically when we say, well, your brand name is your name. It's the one that you're using.

And probably if you use symbols, I don't know, or certain kinds of image that you're trying to project or some other icons that you identify with yourself, the way you sign your name when signing collaterals or stuff that fans or followers are asking you to sign. These are all considered as brand elements in the context of what we're going to talk about. Now, my question is, how do these brand elements, both in your Century Tuna and celebrity brand, how do these brand elements serve as or their function as communicative forms?

Can you describe how these brand elements serve as communicative forms in communicating with Gen Z in such a way that they would interpret the brand as either authentic or inauthentic? Of course, the goal is to become authentic.

Participant:

Yeah. So every time I've competed, I've competed a total of one, two, three, actually now four currently. So every time I compete, which is four times now, I actually, my fans like when I compete.

And when I do, I actually the way I communicate to my Gen Z fans is that there's a certain emoji or like emoticon that I use. And each time I compete, it's a different emoji. But every single time, it's still a heart emoji.

So for the first time, I remember I used a normal red heart for my first competition. For Century Tuna, I used a, I believe I used a tuna fish and a darker red heart for that. And for the third competition, I used a red heart that is on fire.

I know that kind of sounds weird. And then lastly, which is currently I am using a white heart. And each time I make a post, a lot of my fans comment the exact emojis that I use, which kind of shows support towards me and shows that, hey, guys, this is a new journey.

This is a new chapter of me. This is who I am. Who I was before is different.

That's why I wanted to have a change of emoji. And each time that I do that, they tend to support by commenting that emoji and in some kind of way and shape or form. I feel like they understand that, oh, they're really part of the journey because like, hey, I can show support in this specific way and this specific type of way of communication, which is an emoji.

And that helps them align with my brand where, hey, guys, we're in this fight together. And it isn't just me that's competing. It's us as a team.

Interviewer:

What about when you represented Century Tuna and you yourself are one of the brand elements of Century Tuna being the brand ambassador. So how do you see the brand elements and yourself as a brand element also in terms of performing that communicative function in interacting with the Gen Z consumers in such a way that it would probably influence the way they perceive Century Tuna, whether as an authentic or an inauthentic brand?

Participant:

I think what comes apart of it is like I at the end of the day of being an ambassador of Century Tuna and like being my own brand that the way I appear, meaning the way I talk, the way I walk, the way I look matters. People are wondering like, hmm, Jether's in really good shape. How has he been able to do that?

Century Tuna is known as a very fitness oriented brand. They promote a lot of like protein rich and things like that. And so what we ended up becoming was that each time I do an appearance or even me as just my normal self appearing physically in shape almost every single time is how I've been able to ensure that, hey, I've been an ambassador for Century Tuna for over two years now.

And I still stick with them and they still stick with me because we align with each other. But also that I am essentially a symbol of fitness in the Philippines. And when people see how I am, whenever I do like a photo shoot that requires me to be, let's say, shirtless, that they see that Jether put in the hard work and dedication to get that.

He also supports Century Tuna in a way that a lot of the fitness that I have been able to promote through the run clubs or through my workouts, I always mention Century Tuna because they align with my branding. They align with how I've been able to hit my goals before. And sometimes now I sometimes eat a can once in a while.

And it kind of aligns all in itself because of the way I project myself.

Interviewer:

By the way, what year was the time that you were the Superbod winner of Century Tuna? And what was your reign? I don't know if you call it the reign as a brand ambassador.

Participant:

It started in 2024, spanned to 2025, and now it's 2026. And I'm still the current ambassador. I believe I am the youngest, the tallest, and I will reign the longest winner ever for Century Tuna.

Interviewer:

Okay, good. Congratulations. Now, in terms of your celebrity brand, specifically you mentioned about your icons, the heart icons that were changing depending on the different events that you appeared on or competitions, as well as your other brand elements.

I don't know if you have other brand elements that you also capitalized on. You can also mention them. But how do you conceptualize these brand elements?

Of course, your name is given. It's your real name. But of course, how did you also decide that you'll use your real name instead of a pseudonym, as well as your other brand elements?

Specifically, I'm a bit curious about the hearts, the evolving hearts, the changing hearts. How did you conceptualize them? How did you decide that, okay, I will use the heart and these other brand elements?

And what made you decide to change them every time if there's a story behind it? And do you think it has, as part of your broader communication efforts with your fans, with your followers, especially the Gen Zs, how do you think it influences the Gen Zs' perception of brand authenticity on your product?

Participant:

To cover some ground there, I am known for the hearts every time I compete. But also, I'm known for certain physical gestures that I do. During Century Tuna, the number one gesture that I did was, in Korea, it's very popular to do the finger heart.

It looks like this, where it's like your index finger and thumb together, and it essentially is like the shape of a heart, your hand. And so, I always did that on stage, and every time, the crowd would be wowed by it. For whatever reason, I think it just worked with the way I looked.

And so, it became a part of my brand. Even until now, I tend to do it pretty often, because it's always a nod or a tribute back to when I used it often. Another one was the hearts that you mentioned.

The reason why I kept changing the hearts is that, in our everyday lives, our hearts can change. Whether that be the way we feel, and sometimes, each time I compete, I have a different feeling each time I compete. Whether it's a heart that is on fire, which is the third competition that I joined, and now it's currently a white heart that kind of shows like, alright, this is a brand new renewal of my heart, a renewal of me.

And so, that's why each time I compete, it tends to change. The first time I competed, it was like a light pink-ish heart, and then during Century Tuna, it was a deep red heart, because I felt, with Century Tuna, my heart was really ready to compete. It was really strong.

And then the first one, which was like a light pink, it was my first time, so I was kind of nervous, because it couldn't be fully red, it couldn't be fully there, but it was still there. And that's why I keep changing it every single time, because everyone's hearts change, everyone's feelings change, and so that's why I use the heart emoji.

Interviewer:

Can you name the different competitions that you were mentioning?

Participant:

So, including the international ones, so it would go to Mr. Grand Philippines, I won the title of Mr. Tourism World Philippines, then I compete in the Mr. Tourism World International, I placed first runner up there. Next is Century Tuna Superbod, I placed as the winner there. The next year, I compete in a competition called Mr. Filipinas Worldwide. I grabbed the title of Mr. Global Philippines, the top title. I then compete internationally to Mr. Global. I placed top 10 there.

Now, I'm currently competing at Mr. World Philippines. Currently, I'm a candidate and I hope to be the next Mr. World Philippines, and then if I get that, I would become Mr. World and see how I would place there. We've never won in that competition before, that's why I hope to be the first ever Mr. World from the Philippines. So, I think a total of seven or eight competitions.

Interviewer:

Based on your experience, which of those brand elements that you mentioned, and even the brand elements that Century Tuna has, which do you think among those brand elements tend to support or tend to influence positively the Gen Z consumers in terms of perceiving the brand as authentic? And which brand elements somehow did you find that posed a bit of a challenge in terms of influencing the Gen Z consumers to think that the brand is authentic? So, both sides, which has the positive effect and which has probably the negative effect based on your experience?

Participant:

I think both of the questions or both of the things can be answered in one, where it's my life, right? I'm an ambassador for Century Tuna, but at the end of the day, I'm also still a student. I'm an ambassador.

I'm a model. I'm still a son. Sometimes I'm someone's boyfriend, but sometimes that changes in and out.

Sometimes I'm someone's friend. Sometimes I'm in a business meeting. Sometimes I'm a business owner.

And long story short, it all summarizes down to balance, right? I can be authentic, like, hey guys, sometimes I'm insanely overworked and overstressed out and people recognize that either in person or online. And sometimes it's that where I can influence Gen Z people to be like, hey, I'm able to achieve this while balancing so much other things.

I know that I'm not a special person. You're able to also do the same things. And to some form, people are very inspired by that.

Every single time I compete, people are wondering, like, hey, Jeff, you're balancing so much. How are you able to do it? It comes from a form of a lot of discipline that I have to have, but also a lot of sacrifice with that.

It comes to the other counterpoint, which is sometimes is it too much? Am I pressuring people online to try to attain the things that I am at? There have been interactions, especially recently, that in the current competition that I'm in, people come up to me and be like, wow, you're like one of the best to ever do it.

And I say to them, yeah, man, I appreciate that. But it comes with a lot of stress. And they are inspired, but they're also scared because sometimes they don't know themselves if they can handle it because not everyone in this kind of position can be able to handle the amount of workload.

And so it becomes a toss-up of is this hustle culture where you're burning yourself out or is it inspiring to try to attain a lot of the things you want in life? So it's kind of like a two-in-one where the work ethic that I have as an ambassador and as my own brand, can it be too much for Gen Z or can it be just the right amount? And it's a toss-up between the two.

Interviewer:

Okay, so let me just clarify. So it works both ways. It can either elicit a reaction from the consumers that, oh, this guy's doing too much.

It's unrealistic on the inauthentic side. Or on the authentic side, this guy's human. He's doing a lot, but I could also see his struggles.

Is that what you're trying to say? It's like a double-edged sword.

Participant:

Exactly.

Interviewer:

Okay, interesting.

How do you and perhaps your team observe, interpret, and make sense of the Gen Zs reactions to these brand elements? You just mentioned that some Gen Zs react this way, some Gen Zs react in a different way. How do you observe them?

How do you interpret them? How do you make sense of their reactions to the brand elements, both in your celebrity brand and in Century 2 now? When I say by consumers, the Gen Zs reactions, it's not just limited to their physical reactions or offline reactions.

It could also refer to the way they react in terms of online, through social media or other digital means.

Participant:

I would say the reaction that they have, nine times out of ten, especially if it's in person, are very supportive, whether that be my personal brand or Century 2 now. Some of the reactions, how they perceive it is, like I said, the double-edged sword. They sometimes are like, wow, that's insane or wow, that's inspiring.

The way I handle it as the Century 2 now side is that I know I'm an ambassador of it. I promote what's realistic in my life and what's realistic for me. I always project that to the fans of Century Tuna.

Like, hey, I am not this guy that's a 24-7 athlete like the previous winners before me. I'm someone that is still studying, still trying to balance everything. They see that and they see that in a good light where, wow, this guy at a young age has been able to achieve this and they can attain it too to a certain level.

That's what they try to grasp from it, either online and for my personal brand, the things that they say are actually quite similar because the way I stand with Century 2 now is we're directly aligned with each other. We're promoting something that's realistic, something that is attainable through just discipline.

And so fans get excited for that because, wow, I can achieve what he has also, whether that be physically or just being able to have that mental determination of the discipline that is being built throughout the process.

Interviewer:

But in the process, how do you know if they're thinking the Gen Z, if they're thinking whether, oh, this brand's authentic or, oh, this brand's not authentic or something? How do you know based on their actions? How do you know which is which?

Participants:

I remember at the time of winning Century Tuna, there was a lot of support for the look that I had. I am the youngest winner, the tallest winner. But at the time, even now, I'm still the least muscular winner, meaning the guys that previously had won are insanely muscular.

And I promoted something that was realistic, something that was naturally attainable for the communities that saw Century Tuna. My body went, kind of weird to say, my body went viral because they saw it as this is what the standard of fitness should be, not something that is unrealistic for people. I'm someone that when you look at me in big clothing, you may not think I work out, but once I am on stage and I'm in my performance clothing, which is just shirtless and stuff and wearing some shorts, that people see that, wow, that's realistically attainable.

That's something that can be achieved. And that's how I've been able to build that authenticity with the brand and with the people because it's showcasing that you can achieve this as well and just within a couple months or depending on where you're at.

Interviewer:

How do you interpret their reactions? For example, can you cite certain reactions that would tell you that, ah, this Gen Z person is thinking that the brand is authentic or a different kind of reaction would indicate that he has doubts about authenticity. So what kind of reactions or how do you interpret their reactions?

What kind of reactions probably make you think that, hey, this is a confirmation that the brand is being authentic or perhaps this is a bit of a something to think about because it appears that the Gen Zs reaction is authentic.

Participant:

Two reasons. I remember, I guess like for the Century Tuna standpoint, there was a point where after the final Century Tuna sales had jumped up, I think I'm allowed to say this, around 157% since that moment, since I won. And I think it truly built like authenticity with like the Q&A moment, but also like the way I looked because it wasn't like a matter of like me faking my answer or me having a bad reaction to how she said it or even Marian Rivera having a bad reaction.

It was, this was all authentic. So there's that section. And for like the physical section, my body went viral because it was something that people could relate to.

Like he's not insanely muscular, but he's not insanely thin. And it ended up just co-aligning with authenticity and it showed through the brand where sales went through the roof. And then for my own personal brand, it went really well because it's aligned with who I am in terms of like how I saw their reactions in the modeling and pageant world.

A lot of people had given comments where, wow, like you were able to set like such an iconic moment and create this like level of, wow, something that they also wanted to achieve. And those models and pageant people also were inspired by that. So it was just a reaction from both ends, from Century Tuna and in my brand itself.

Interviewer:

Okay. Now, can you describe a specific time or specific incident or situation wherein a brand element that you used or your brand that you're representing that it used unexpectedly, unexpectedly affected the perceptions, the brand authenticity perceptions of the Gen Zs? You were not expecting this would be their reaction or this would be their perception.

So was there an incident or situation wherein one of the brand elements of the brand that you're representing has somehow brought about unexpected reactions or unexpected perceptions from the Gen Z in relation to brand authenticity?

Participant:

Yeah, it always goes back to the Marianne Rivera thing for Century Tuna. I didn't expect that to go viral. My family from California were telling me their co-workers were talking to them about that moment.

And they're also part of Gen Z where I didn't expect it to reach outside of the Philippines. So it was super surprising to me. And for my own personal brand, I owe in my own personal brand in any competition I've had, I'm known for question and answer.

And so every time I go on stage for question and answer, there's always like a viral moment or an iconic thing that happens. And every single time I'm surprised at people's reactions because it just comes from who I am. It isn't me trying to be someone that's performative.

I think especially nowadays, Gen Zs tend to be performative where they are acting like they want to do this thing, but internally they don't really want to. And so I think that builds authenticity for myself and for Century Tuna.

Interviewer:

So basically you're saying being spontaneous, being who you are, basically, you are not expecting that the reactions of the audience would be or the followers or the audience would be like that.

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Now let's go to marketing mix strategies.

Okay. For marketing mix, basically these are product strategies, pricing, place of distribution, promotions, and for service businesses, it's people, strategies, people, process, and physical environment. Well, for Century Tuna brand, of course, the product would be the food that they're selling, Century Tuna.

The price, the price that they charge, the place or distribution where they distribute it, where it can be bought by the consumers, the promotions, how do they promote it? And basically you're part of the brand communications of Century Tuna being the brand ambassador. Less of the people, process, and physical environment because they're more of a tangible good rather than a service business.

In terms of your celebrity brand, the product would be yourself as a celebrity. Price would probably, I don't know, the talent fee that's being paid to you. For the consumers, probably the entrance fee that they pay for a particular show to watch you or perhaps the time that they spend online or offline trying to follow you and catch you on stage or on camera.

The time that they spend there, that would be the price that they're paying. In terms of place or distribution, it would be the shows or the events that you appear in. And in terms of promotions, it's how you're being promoted as a celebrity, how you're being, how your brand is being promoted or projected or communicated as a celebrity.

Of course, people, probably the way you interact with them, the way you deal with them, and even if you have your support staff. Process basically relates with how you also interact with them. In business, we call it customer service.

And for the physical environment, probably the way you look, the way you dress, the stuff that you carry in public that they see. Physical things, physical environment. Now, having said those, my question is, in your experience, both for Century Tuna and for your celebrity brand, in your experience, how do these marketing mix strategies become part of the brand's ongoing communication through which the Gen Zs would interpret it as either being authentic or inauthentic?

Participant:

I see. I think it comes down to just who I am as an ambassador. This is both through the Century Tuna avenue and my own brand avenue where it's a collective experience

of, the Century Tuna products of itself are tangible goods where it's being sold online. And the thing for me is the product is myself, where it comes to the point of, okay, how is Jether projecting himself when it comes to meeting people, or if it's the way I look.

Ultimately, it boils down to how we interact with all of them. And the way we've done it is just being authentic. It's being spontaneous.

It's being true to who we are rather than being, I'd say, performative amongst the Gen Z fans and consumers. Because I think especially nowadays, people can smell if a brand's inauthentic and in the ways that, are they truly standing for what they say? Whether that be for me, for example, if I say, hey guys, I'll be showing up to this event.

I'd love for you guys to come and see me. And they come, but I don't end up showing up. That would hurt my authenticity as a brand in itself.

And let's say for Century Tuna, if they hold an event saying, hey guys, please show up for Century Tuna and me, or just Century Tuna, and they don't show up and people are showing up for it, it'll hurt the brand. And so in turn, it's a matter of being, there's this term that I'd like, or that I'd want to use. It's like, you earn trust by the drop and you can lose it by the bucket.

And essentially, it's, do we follow through with their word? Do we follow through with our brand sayings, our brand values, and our brand in and of itself? Because if we project a certain image of health and we aren't at a healthy point, can they really believe to trust us?

And that works for both Century Tuna, for their products, their placements, and everything. And then mine as a personal brand in itself.

Interviewer:

Okay. Now, for both Century Tuna and your celebrity brand, how do you, or how do you, or how do they, or the people in charge there for Century Tuna, conceptualize? How does the team conceptualize and implement the marketing mix strategies as part of the broader brand communication strategy of the brand?

Participant:

Actually, it's funny.

Each time we have a meeting for Century Tuna for, let's say, right now, we're going to launch the second, or the 10th anniversary of Century Tuna Superbots. I'm the, I'm considered as the ninth winner. Now we are in hopes to look for a 10th winner.

And they have a meeting with us, with the winners, with me, my co-winner and the two runner-ups. And in those meetings, they ask us, hey guys, as winners, what would you like to see in terms of marketing for the next batch? And I give them my two cents where it's like, hey guys, I think this aspect would actually hit Gen Z more rather than Gen Z more instead of the way they wanted to do it.

For example, one of the things that I gave was, hey guys, I feel like there should be an online challenge. Lo and behold, Century Tuna now has an online challenge. They're partnered up with Strava.

Strava is a running app where you can log how many kilometers you run. And the challenge is to run 40K over the course of, I think two months now, almost three. And I think at the time I'm allowed to say this, the number one person, male or female, or actually one from each gender, the number one ranked person will instantly get a spot in the top 18 or top, sorry, not top 18, top 16 in Century Tuna.

And they're able to become a contestant for Century Tuna. And that became very popular because, wow, that means one of us can attain a spot in the top 16 and potentially become a winner. And so that drives the incentives of one, active participation throughout a lot of the Gen Z community.

Two, it entices them to have a goal to work for. And three, it builds a level of authenticity because most times people think, well, I'm just an average guy. How can I really get in?

Oh, well, now you have an opportunity. And honestly, everyone has an opportunity to get in, even if you are considered, quote unquote, a normal person. Yeah.

Interviewer:

Why did you suggest that online challenge? Or what made you think that it's a good thing to, it's a good strategy to adopt for Century Tuna?

Participant:

One, because we've never done it before. When I pitched it to Century Tuna, they were, they're surprised. They know that I have, I tend to be a very creative person.

And so I instantly thought, let me spice things up because I am the youngest winner ever. And I instantly thought, the processes before were a bit too on the more mature side or older side of things. And I wanted to bring a fresh perspective of people nowadays, especially Gen Z, love to be challenged in some kind of way.

There are things that are super popular right now, like running clubs. That's a huge thing around the world. And so I thought, hmm, why not just do the same thing for Century Tuna?

And then I pitched it. And yeah, now we're here with Century Tuna and Strava.

Interview:

That was quite an example of something, a marketing mix strategy that tends to support the shared understanding of authenticity between the brand and the Gen Z consumers. But on the other hand, what marketing mix strategies do you think would tend to raise questions or become a challenge in terms of eliciting favorable reactions from Gen Z consumers in terms of brand authenticity? Because what the story gave

was somehow, okay, the online challenge made the brand become more authentic in the eyes of, as part of the reactions of the audience, the Gen Z consumers.

But on the other side, the opposite side, can you cite one or a few marketing mix strategies that somehow pose as a challenge in terms of having that brand authenticity in the minds of the consumers?

Participant:

Yeah, I think it works as a double-edged sword again, where we want a lot of people to participate. And there's been so many people that are excited to become a part of that running club and log in a bunch of kilometers. But the response back was, so aren't professional athletes the only ones that are going to be the winners?

And so that elicited a point of, well, you're opening it to the public, amazing, but you're going to have the top athletes of the Philippines or people that have the most time to log in the most amount of kilometers win. Isn't that kind of unfair to the, quote unquote, let's say, average people that are not athletes? That enticed a negative response because you're opening it to the public, it's great, but you know who's going to win at the end of the day.

And to us, that raised the question of, is that really fair? To be honest, on our end, we realized that, okay, that could be the case, but those professional athletes, they still have to compete for their own sport. But some people that are average, let's say, they're just a guy that, for me, at the time of winning, I think I was 21 or 22 years old, I had a lot of time to dedicate to try to win the competition.

And so that can entice that those athletes need to train a specific way, not necessarily they can have the most amount of time or kilometers logged in, but someone that's average, putting consistent amount of work and consistent amount of kilometers can still actually beat them. That's where it kind of felt like the response of Century Tuna to me, and sometimes some of the people that were seeing the challenge that top athletes are going to win, this is kind of still unfair, but it still brings about the point that it's still anyone's game. There's professional athletes everywhere around the world.

There's models that love to exercise and run, but you can still put in the kilometers and still beat them. At the end of the day, it is a challenge. We're not necessarily trying to challenge one to go against each other, but challenge yourself to see how fit you can get and how Century Tuna can support this kind of challenge.

Interviewer:

So you're saying during the planning stage, it was a debate between will it work in terms of eliciting brand authenticity reactions or in terms of the consumers, Gen Z consumers, believing that Century is authentic or you said it's a double and short. It could also work that the other side that, oh, it may contribute to the inauthenticity of the Century brand. But at the end of the day, what was the result?

Did it contribute to the brand authenticity or to the brand inauthenticity of Century Tuna from the perspective of the consumers, as far as you know?

Participant:

It went to a more positive authenticity rate. And the reason why is because of this. We've built communities, these running clubs, and now more and more people are coming together and just running together.

And that built a level of human connection. At the end of the day, what we wanted to do was just build community. And because of that community, people felt more connected with the brand.

There is feeling towards this brand. Let's say, for example, this bottle right here is Century Tuna. And I am just participating.

In my batch and before, we just see Century Tuna. Oh, it's cool. But sometimes they can develop feelings like, wow, I really like this candidate or I really align with them.

But now I'm actually able to join this running club and be a part of the community, people that are also wanting to challenge themselves. And so it built that level of authenticity where I feel connection to this and I'm able to be around community that want to better themselves. And so that's how we felt that it increased in terms of authenticity.

Interviewer:

My next question is basically, well, those are the reactions that the Gen Z consumers have manifested. But your team, how did you observe them? How did you interpret them?

How did you make sense of them at the onset? Did you already see, oh, it has a positive influence on the perceptions of authenticity on the side of the Gen Z? Or were you doubtful at first and in the long run, that's when you realized, okay, it works?

Or how's the process of sensemaking when you were observing their reactions towards that particular marketing mix or that particular promotion that you did?

Participant:

They're very supportive. The teams that I surround myself with, I always make sure they aren't like, I guess the term would be called the yes men. I don't want to hear yes if they know I'm wrong.

So they always give me the feedback of like, hey, Jether, that's actually a terrible idea. You should not do that. When I pitched it in Century Tuna, they were very supportive of it because they knew that it did bring a level of human connection, authenticity, but also builds the brand and community itself.

And for my own personal one, it also built the same thing where it's to who I am. They know I love generating a lot of ideas and that idea just aligned with me and who I am because I've built a running club and have been a part of many brands for Century Tuna and other brands and my personal brand itself. So it just kind of comes to me on the spot where, wait, I have a great idea.

And it just hits my head out of nowhere. That's kind of like the thought process of how I've been able to build, I guess, conceptualize the ideas. Okay.

Interviewer:

I know that's probably an answer. The story that you said about the online challenge, pitching that online challenge for Century Tuna. I know that's a story that somehow elicited unexpected perceptions from the side of the agency.

So that's one example already that answers the next question. But aside from that, is there probably another incident or situation wherein whether Century Tuna or your celebrity brand wherein one particular marketing mix decision, whether product, price, place, promotions that we discussed, one particular marketing mix decision came up with unexpected reactions coming from the Gen Z? Okay.

Participant:

Yeah. This is for my personal brand. So I'm someone that is constantly, like, I guess, critiqued by media, even critiqued by my fans. I remember at a time that I was competing, and I actually gained quite a significant amount of weight.

And it became a point where they realized, like, hey, Jether, like, is everything okay? And I was like, yeah, why? This is from, like, many fans, just like either comments or direct messages.

Is everything okay? I'm like, yeah. I posted on my story, like, I'm currently gaining weight purposely.

And they elicited the reaction of, like, is everything okay? Because you're known as the guy that's always in shape, that's always, like, in, like, ready mode to compete. And it kind of elicited a negative reaction because they thought I was being lazy or something was going on in my personal life where I may not have been able to be disciplined as much.

And it was my strategy to actually gain weight because I wanted to purposely gain weight. But it became a point of their questioning, like, is everything okay? Because they know me as a guy that's always in shape.

And so it became a point of, like, it is a bit of a hit on me on, like, okay, this is my personal brand. Like, I built it to where they know me for a certain shape that I retain. But then I changed my shape, and it kind hurt their trust in me.

But I think in the end, it was worth it because from that hit, I was able to come back stronger. And yeah, I guess that's how I guess the negative reaction was elicited on my end.

Interviewer:

How did you come back stronger?

Participant:

The way it came back stronger was I got back and came in even better shape. It's just that I needed, like, a little bit of weight gain. And then I came back now.

It's actually the current one. I gained a lot of weight, and then I came back stronger now. And people like the current shape that I'm in now because I'm a lot more muscular than before.

Interviewer:

Now, in terms of the consumer's responses, as well as the brand's response, it's like, you know, an interaction. In terms of them responding to each other, how do Gen Z consumers, based on your observation, how do Gen Z consumers typically express or communicate their perceptions of authenticity or inauthenticity when responding to a brand's particular actions?

Participant:

I would say they're very vocal when it comes to comments online or sometimes even in person. You'd be surprised where they comment, hey, we love this new you, this new look that you have. Or sometimes Gen Z, again, they could either be fans or non-fans.

They could sometimes even be haters. Or they would comment, yo, Jether, he fell off. Or Jether is looking out of shape now, blah, blah, blah.

And they're very vocal throughout the comment section. I have yet to receive hate in person. It's mostly been positive.

And so that's how they kind of respond to that. Because I always project like, hey, guys, this is the journey that I'm on of getting in shape. And then while getting in shape, it's that I actually gained weight.

But they thought getting in shape was becoming even more muscular. But it takes a process. So some of them see it as like, he said he was going to get in shape, but he's actually gaining weight.

What's happening? So there's some, I guess, distrust and authenticity that they see. But then some of them see it as, oh, he's gaining weight.

That is authentic to who he is because he said he wanted to. So it works in like a split pattern where some people could see it as like the weight gain as something good or something bad. But it's still, for me, staying true to myself in the middle because it's what I wanted for myself.

And that's how they vocalize that.

Interviewer:

So that's how your followers, Gen Z followers express their perceptions towards your things, changes in your brand actions. On the side of Century Tuna, based on your

observation, how do their Gen Z consumers express their reactions towards the brand actions of Century Tuna in relation to brand authenticity?

Participant:

Yeah. So Century Tuna often hires celebrity ambassadors. Outside of me, there are a multitude of ambassadors.

One of the, I think the most famous one we've ever had, his name is Park Seo Joon. He's this Korean idol that is an actor, an ambassador of a lot of companies. And when we hired him to become a part of our quote-unquote Century Tuna family, we invited him in the Philippines.

We hosted a gigantic event at Araneta Coliseum. And the turnout was absolutely wild. It was a full stadium of fans that he enticed because he has 50 million followers.

So his brand is very strong. And it shows that Century Tuna listens to the fans because they've always wanted a celebrity from outside of the Philippines to endorse the brand. And so Gen Z speaks out on, Hey guys, we would love to see a non-Filipino celebrity ambassador.

And so Century Tuna listens, we provide them one, and then it builds more trust and more hype with the brand because wow, you got one of the top celebrities in the world to be a part of Century Tuna. And that builds trust with the fans of Gen Z.

Interviewer:

Okay, well based on the two stories you said, first the reactions of your Gen Z followers towards your celebrity brand, and the reactions of Gen Z consumers towards what Century Tuna did. What reactions on the other side from the brand? What actions or adjustments or in the first place, how did they interpret those reactions from the Gen Zs?

And then based on what they interpreted, how did they react or respond again on their end? Meaning to say, did they make adjustments or changes in the brand or in the brand actions, in the brand strategies for both Century Tuna and your celebrity brand?

Participant:

For Century Tuna, I guess a little change that they made was, there's a can of Century Tuna with Park Seo Joon, the Korean idol's face. And so in terms of product, that's how they changed it because fans have always wanted a can with him on it. And then that's what Century Tuna changed in terms of products because now his face is on the cans.

And I think it still is to this day in stores. And fans love that even more. So that's on the Century Tuna side.

And then for my personal side, with my physical change, they saw the growth. So whether that be the people that were questioning that he's getting out of shape and people were considering me that I was getting in better shape, that there's growth no

matter what, that it didn't stick to the same place, that who I am is constantly ever changing. Like I mentioned, the heart emojis, our hearts always change.

And because of that, I also always change. I'm never always the same Jether that they always see, that there's growth and that people can trust that I'm constantly growing as a person. And so that also built some level of trust and authenticity towards my celebrity brand.

Interviewer:

So would you say both Century Tuna and your celebrity brand are changing in response to the responses of the Gen Z followers and consumers?

Participant:

At least for Century Tuna, I definitely know that they listen to the fans, the Gen Z people, because they're one of the largest consumers for Century Tuna. At least like a good portion of consumption. And so it's important for them as a brand to listen to them as they are all entity, they aren't a singular person.

And so at least for me, what I can say for them is that they do listen to them. For my personal one, I will be honest, I only listen to a few select people in my life on terms of what to do. But if it's not them, it's usually my own voice that tells me, hey, Jether, I think we should head down this direction.

And I usually head down it, regardless of the reaction of my fans or followers, because if I listened to everything that they said, I don't know if I would be myself anymore. And that would be inauthentic to my brand and to the fans. Okay.

Interviewer:

In general, how would you describe the ongoing communicative interaction between your two brands, Century and your celebrity brand? How would you describe the ongoing communicative interaction between the brand and the Gen Z consumers in terms of shaping what counts as authentic?

Participant:

I think for Century Tuna, they build authenticity towards listening to what the fans want. If they kept on just ignoring them, I feel like their brand wouldn't be as strong because it just feels like another brand that's just there to make money. But at the end of the day, all businesses are there to make money, but they still want to be able to build human connection and relation by listening.

Like, hey, you guys wanted a non-Filipino celebrity ambassador to come in. We heard you, we listened, we'll provide it. And that builds trust with them.

And then for my personal brand, I think they've been, or at least I know that they've been able to trust me more because I'm pushing towards what I want in life. And I think

one of the first ever messages I made on my broadcast channel was that the broadcast channel is essentially all the fans that they can see the messages. It's like a private message, but me and literally all my fans where they see, wow.

One of the first messages was that I'm constantly growing as a person. I'm constantly changing. What you can always expect from me is me pursuing the chase of becoming better for myself.

And they trust that no matter what direction that may look. And so that's how I've been able to keep growing and building trust and authenticity with my fans because it's true to who I am. I'm always growing.

I'm always changing. And that's all they can ever expect from me.

Interviewer:

What platform are you using for your broadcast channel?

Participant:

That one I use on Instagram mainly, but I project it on all social media platforms, whether that be Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Threads, and YouTube. And yeah, and X. It's formally called Twitter.

Interviewer:

Okay. In what ways do the Gen Zs influence or even reshape how the brand understands and enacts authenticity, both for Century and your celebrity brand? In the long run, in the long run, over time?

Participant:

I think for Century Tuna, they will constantly keep hiring new ambassadors or grab an old ambassador from before because the hype around them is very high. And so they constantly look towards that, like the list of the Gen Z fans. For example, Ann Curtis is one of the people that are an ambassador for Century Tuna.

For a while now, she's been out of the mix, but now recently it's publicly known that she is one of the new faces, despite being a Century Tuna ambassador from a long time ago, because the popularity amongst Ann Curtis is very high at the moment. And so they hired her again to become one of the quote unquote new ambassadors again. And so they're constantly shifting their strategies based on what's popular with the Gen Z at the moment.

That's for Century Tuna. And for my end, it's just a matter of like the question for my personal life of what's next after I finish a competition. People like the journey that I'm on.

They see that I've been able to develop over time. Like before in California, I was doing shows and some modeling. And then I moved on to gym content.

And then I transitioned out of all of that to the Philippines where I started doing pageants and competitions. And slowly but surely, they've seen me grow out of who I used to be and who I want to become. And slowly but surely, it builds authenticity that I'm true to my brand, that I'm forever learning and growing.

Interviewer:

Okay. Would you say that brand authenticity is something that the brand enacts, negotiates, or something that they continuously adapt through the interaction with the consumers?

Participant:

I definitely say for me, and I think for Century Tuna also, I can speak on both. So for Century Tuna and me, it boils down to one answer is that we tend to adapt. For Century Tuna, they adapt to the voices of Gen Z, like what's popular right now.

So they enact on it, whether it be trends, celebrity figures, or ambassadors. They pop that up and run towards that because that's what helps push the brand farther. And then for me, I adapt, but not through adapting through the voice of Gen Z fans that I have, but rather the adaption of who I want to become.

There's this thing that I say to myself, who do I want to be in 10 years, and what are the actions that I'm taking currently to achieve that? And that's the type of adaption that I need to entice in my own life to make sure that I reach that point. And so it's continuous adaption for Century Tuna, for listening to the fans, and then continuous adaption for me to adjust what I need to achieve, what I want to become in the future.

Interviewer:

How do you determine what you want to become? Is it based on a particular set of values, principles?

Or what's the basis for deciding this is what I want to become, and therefore this is what I will do with my celebrity brand?

Participant:

The best example I could give was I asked myself this question when I was 13 years old. I'm currently 24 years old, but I asked myself when I was 13, who do I want to become in 10 years? At the time of me being 13, I was playing video games.

I think I was in middle school, and I was very, very, very, very out of shape. And I asked myself, wow, who do I want to be when I'm 23? I said I wanted to hopefully be in college or finishing up college.

I wanted to become some type of inspirational figure and not just a celebrity or influencer, because sometimes this concept of being a celebrity or influencer can have the negative connotation, because sometimes they project things that aren't beneficial

for the world or themselves. And so I said, hmm, I want to become a model, but not just any type of runway model, which I still am, but a role model for a lot of people. And so I started making change when I was from 13 all the way to 23.

I started to get in shape, learn how to be on camera, learn how to project on when I'm walking, when I'm talking, or kind of figuring out the values that I align with and what I don't align with, whether that be the things that I wear. It ended up becoming a collection of experiences that I ended up building a bunch of values to realize who I wanted to become and work on that.

Interviewer:

Okay. I have a curious question that I'd like to inject before we move on to the concluding questions or the final questions. Correct me if I'm wrong.

If I remember correctly, Marian Rivera used to be an endorser of your competitor, San Marino, correct?

Participant:

That I am unsure about, but let's run with this.

Interviewer:

Now, what do you think would be the, or what do you think for the consumers, or maybe how you have observed or you have probably thought about it, the reactions of the consumers in terms of brand authenticity for Century? Because Marian came from San Marino and moved to Century, if that's correct, if I remember correctly. What do you think would be the impact on the brand authenticity in the eyes of the consumers for both brands, for both San Marino and for both Century?

Participant:

Two things there.

I want to brush on the fact that it can also, to some extent, I also feel the same way where it's like, okay, I used to be someone that was known for all the shows that I've done previously in my life, but then I transitioned out of it. Meaning like, well, how come you're changing? Doesn't that mean you're not who you used to be or a part of that brand?

Because for the shows that I was doing, I was a part of a certain brand, but I ended up exiting and changing to something else, which was gym content. Wouldn't that entice distrust or inauthenticity to who I am? But it kind of more so invoked the fact that I am adapting.

Like I said, Century Tune is adapting and I was adapting. I don't know Marian Rivera, her initial thoughts on that switch because I only knew about Marian Rivera when I did

the competition. So I think for her, I can only relate on the fact that if I'm changing brands, for example, Bench and Avon, they're two brands here in the Philippines.

I've endorsed both. Does that build a level of authenticity? To a certain extent, yes and no, because I was with Avon before, but switched out to Bench.

It doesn't mean that I don't necessarily like Avon. It just means that I've moved on to Bench in good faith. And maybe Marian Rivera, the same thing for San Marino and Century Tuna.

We leave out of good faith. We transition to something because we want to adapt and maybe we align with this company's values a lot more. It doesn't mean that the values that we had with, let's say, Avon or San Marino were negative, but we just realized that, wow, there is another brand that we align with better.

And so we want to move on there. And as for the Gen Zs to interpret that, they could see it as maybe being disloyal or inauthentic because we used to stick with them. But I think Gen Zs now realize that people are constantly adapting and changing and it's a matter of who you move towards in a better direction.

And for both me, I've been able to move in a good direction and I believe in Marian Rivera's career with Century Tuna and San Marino that she moved on to things that were more aligned with who they are as a person.

Interviewer:

Now, looking back, what have the Gen Z consumers or followers for both your brands, what have they taught you, your brands, both brands, about authenticity through your brands' interactions with them that you did not anticipate? What realizations did you have that you didn't anticipate before that the Gen Zs have made you realize something about brand authenticity for Century and for your celebrity brand?

Participant:

I think for Century Tuna, what that viral moment happened, when that viral moment happened, Century Tuna has never had that type of interaction or that level of virality before. And so because of that, they realized, wow, Gen Z communities love that moment. How can we create more successful campaigns that are very viral with Gen Z?

So it was now them understanding, hmm, this guy, Jether and Marian Rivera, both current ambassadors, did something that was so viral that it became super popular with Gen Z. Let's continue to listen to the Gen Z people because they are one of our largest consumers. So that's how they've been able to adapt.

And they didn't realize that until after that moment. And then for my personal brand, it was that I go viral for a lot of things. And it's kind of crazy to realize that.

And I don't try to go viral. It just happens naturally. And what that changed in me was that the more true to who I am, the more moments go viral.

And that helped me realize to trust the actions that I do and not second guess it within reason.

Interviewer:

Now if you were advising another brand, whether another business brand or another celebrity brand, if you're advising another brand targeting Gen Zs, what would you say about how brand authenticity emerges through communication and interaction and practice rather than planning it as this is what I will do because this is what will make my brand authentic. So what will you advise them in relation to brand authenticity emerging from the interactions rather than having it planned as a fixed attribute?

Participant:

I think it comes down to three things, which is trust, fluidity, and also relationship. So for fluidity, it's that people can set in stone something like, I want this to work. I'm going to go with this.

But they don't realize that maybe that's not the most popular thing that's going on right now. Maybe you need to adapt. That's why I use the word fluidity there.

For trust, it's that we're constantly ever changing and ever growing. We'd love to gain your feedback. And in turn, you build the relationship.

The relationship is that, wow, I love the brand because you're able to work well with us. You listen to us. And it seems like we're not just consumers, but rather we're a part of the company.

And I think that's what helps build authenticity amongst Gen Z people. And ultimately, that builds the brand's trust. And also, it helps them adapt in terms of fluidity or adaptation because they listen, they build connection, and they build the trust.

And that helps any type of celebrity brand or business corporate brand.

Interviewer:

Okay. And with that, thank you very much, (name withheld), for participating in this research. The things that you shared will definitely help enrich the findings of this research.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

Participant:

Guys, follow me on Instagram at Jether Palomo on every social platform.

APPENDIX B

Transcript of In-Depth Interview 2

Date of Interview: May 14, 2026

Time of Interview: 2:00PM

Duration of Interview: 1 hour and 4 minutes

Place of Interview: BGC, Taguig City

Name of Participant: (NAME WITHHELD)

Brands Handled/Worked for: L'Oreal

Interviewer:

Good afternoon, (name withheld). Thank you for allowing me to interview you for this research, and I know you can contribute insights into this research. So, before we start with the main questions, maybe you could give a brief background about the brands, or the brand or brands that you handle or used to handle.

Participant:

Okay, so, so far I'm actually a social media marketing manager, but at the same time, I'm also a content manager for L'Oréal Paris.

So I handle mostly their TikTok accounts, not their Facebook accounts, that's a different department, but mainly on their TikTok accounts. So I conceptualize every quarter, their plans for the next seasons, for example, if summer comes up, we create events, especially for the brand, especially as well if there's double digit brand promos, those type of things, or little events with in regards with women, we normally curate that every month, every month and every quarter.

Interviewer:

So you're basically handling those for the Philippine market?

Participant:

Yes, for the Philippine market.

Interviewer:

Okay. Let me go to the main questions. First, from your perspective, how do you see or how do you make sense of brand authenticity within the context of the brand that you handle, the everyday communication practices of the brand, when they

communicate with the Gen Z consumers, how do you make sense of the brand authenticity or do you see brand authenticity there in that communication process?

Participant:

Awesome. I feel like since the Gen Zs already know the brand, the brand has been there for almost a lot of years already, even their parents or grandparents have most likely got the brand or purchased the brand. So I feel like with the Gen Zs now, they're very practical, which I could see, they're really, really practical. So I feel like the best way to give an answer is, it's mostly how they see the brand.

For example, if there's an influencer that's probably not in their generation that they idolize, once that specific influencer tells them, because the Gen Zs, they're very, very They're very influential, they're easily influenced, but they're practical. So if there's a Gen Z that they follow that goes with our brand, they think it's already authentic. And I also feel like knowing that multiple generations have used the brand and they know about it as well, that's how they could think of it as authentic.

Interviewer:

Okay, well, can you recall a specific situation where the brand's communicative actions were interpreted by the Gen Z as either authentic or inauthentic? And in that situation, what happened? How did you and your, if you have a team, how did you and your team interpret the Gen Zs reactions? And how did you respond to the situation?

Participant:

That's actually really nice because before the pandemic, we used to be in the malls. We used to be inside Watson's, SM, we used to be inside. And then when pandemic hit, we decided to pull out.

Coming 2020 or 2021, we decided to target the e-commerce area. So we decided to get in TikTok, Shopee, and Lazada, but we focused on TikTok. What we did was get a influencer that's really known and we got, we were able to sign a deal with Tia Wurtzbach.

So from there on, once that we got her, of course, when you come to think of it, Miss Universe, right? So when Tia Wurtzbach came in, a lot of the consumers, especially the Gen Zs, came back saying that, oh, Tia Wurtzbach is holding the brand now, is an ambassador, so it's really authentic. So it's mostly how we get our influencers as well as reviews and affiliates that we have signed with us. That's where we see that when we have a new person on the brand, that's where the Gen Zs get more.

They get driven to purchase more with the brand. As well as if it's, for example, of course Miss Universe, once that we got Miss Universe with the brand, because we couldn't sell before, when we got Tia Wurtzbach, she pulled. So I feel like getting an authentic person as well for the brand helped a lot.

Interviewer:

How do you say that Pia Wurtzbach is an authentic person? So given that she's the Miss Universe, we wanted to sign a deal with her as an ambassador since she, of course, knowing her, the Filipinos are always following, of course, with people that win. And the story, her story, knowing that she actually gets into our brand saying, which is “You’re worth it”, and as well as women empowerment, knowing her experiences and all that, and as well as her followers, the Gen Zs, I feel like that's where she really pulled, knowing her story.

Interviewer:

Okay, so it's her, it's the story of Pia Wurtzbach, her background, aligning with the brand. In the perception of the Gen Zs.

Participant:

Yes, with the brand. Of L'Oreal that gives the authenticity. Yes, sir.

Interviewer:

Okay, let's move on to brand elements. How do the brand elements such as brand names, logos, symbols, characters, packaging slogans and the like of L'Oreal, how do they function as communicative forms by which Gen Zs would perceive brand authenticity?

Participant:

So, this is super funny.

We have a really bad packaging before. I think in the generation of our grandparents, our packaging looked plasticky, it looked cheap because the logo wasn't even embedded. And then we twitched.

There used to be this lipstick, it's called Colorish. The packaging used to be plastic. It was just plastic with a L'Oreal logo that was color white.

Then we decided to repackage our Colorish and reformulate it. But then we really focused on repackaging it into something that looked expensive, something close to Dior or close to Chico Milano. So, we decided to go with a gold logo.

So, when we hopped on with the gold logo and then the metal, the heavy metal casing, that's where the Gen Zs really said, even if it's budget friendly, it still looks expensive. So, I feel like the brand packaging also pulled a really good amount of customers, and the Gen Zs especially. Because now, Gen Zs want to look rich as well.

So, even if the product is cheap, at least it looks expensive. That's something that the Gen Zs would like to purchase.

Interviewer:

Now, how do you or your team, if you have a team, how do you conceptualize and implement or enact these brand elements as part of your broader brand communication with the Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

So, majority of my team are also Gen Zs. So, they would normally tweak ideas. Now, I would purchase something that looks like this, like specifically, something that looks metal-y, something that has sparkle.

Normally, that's how we would tweak our ideas. It's somehow based on how we use our products. So, whenever we try to conceptualize an idea, we're technically six in the team.

I'm the one who normally approves the idea. But we conceptualize in a sense that we have small ideas and we make it into a big idea.

But the most important thing that our team does is we all get our experiences as a consumer and then that's how we try to see in the point of view of the Gen Z that this is what they are looking for. This is what we're looking for.

So, most likely, this is what they're looking for. Because we're a mixture. We have gay people in the team.

We have, of course, the other side of the team as well. We have men with us. So, we're a mixture of gays, men, and then women as well.

So, all points of view, even men, we get. Especially Gen Z men as well.

Interviewer:

So, as I hear from you, basically, your team are not just putting yourselves in the shoes of the Gen Z. You yourselves are really in the shoes of the Gen Z. Okay. So, based on your experience, which of the brand elements that you came out with tend to or supported the concept of authenticity in the minds of the Gen Z? And which brand elements that you have, if there are any, that tend to become challenges or become, you know, turned out to be something that contributed to the doubts of the Gen Z as to the authenticity of the brand?

Participant:

This is actually a really nice question. We had a campaign before that we were saying, we had a lipstick.

It's called Matte Resistance. We were saying that it's not, it's transfer-proof. Transfer-proof, kiss-proof, all the proof is in that lipstick.

But we had a campaign with one of, we had this huge campaign with the team wherein we popped up in a Pilates studio. So, of course, they're all sweating and all that. And

then we did not see on our TikTok video that the lipstick transferred, in the video, which kind of backfired on our end.

And then apparently, we had to bring out a statement that the makeup, the person who was wearing that makeup apparently has a gloss on top of it. So, how we dealt with this is we made more videos. We made more videos explaining that, oh, actually, if you put gloss on top of it, of course, it's going to transfer because you can remove the matte-ness of the lipstick with oil.

So, we had to explain it with the people who does our live videos as well, the people who do live sales. We had to reiterate to them that please explain to them that if they put gloss on top of it, it will really be removed. So, that's one of the bad experiences we had in terms of the campaign.

You can see it in the video. We didn't catch it because it was an event. It was an event that was being filmed.

Yeah, it was live. So, that's how we strategized. And as well as during the live, our live sellers are really good because they were doing live demos and it was really transfer-proof.

So, we intended to look for the most creative ways of showing them how matte it was and how transfer-proof it was with the glasses, transferring to the glasses, and all that. It's a clear glass. So, if they try to kiss it, it won't transfer.

So, that's how we tried to reiterate to them that it is still transfer-proof.

Interviewer:

And that characteristic is a unique differentiation of L'Oreal from other competitors?

Participant: Yes, yes.

Interviewer:

What about on the positive side? Which brand element contributed to the brand authenticity perceptions of the Gen Z?

Participant:

There was this one campaign we had. Here in BGC, we had a running campaign. So, it was when we released our setting spray.

So, in our setting spray, we had this activity wherein you'll get the foundation and everything and then do the run. Now, in our campaign, we had a really cute logo. It's a QR code where everyone will write a review and then it's a raffle.

But, I don't know how to connect that. It was creative in a sense that they get a free spray bottle and all that. Then, they make a video.

From there on, that video became our material because it's live. We're always live. So, whatever you can upload there, at least it's really transparent.

But, there's this one specific video. The girl applied foundation and all that. She got poured with water while running.

She was caught on film. We thought it was going to backfire on us. We were shocked.

We were doubting the product. We were the content team who were doubting. But, apparently, her makeup wasn't removed when she got poured on with water.

And, we caught it on camera. And, that helped pull a lot of the buyers. When we used the setting spray, it won't transfer.

It won't be removed even if we get wet. So, that was one of the negative things that happened but really had a positive impact.

Interviewer:

Who poured water on her? The person?

Participant:

She was at the finish line. So, it's really hot. So, a lot of the people intended the water guns because it's for them to be cooled down. So, there's really a stream of water.

Interviewer:

To cool them down?

Participant:

Yeah, to cool them down on the finish line. So, we thought it would be removed because we did not know that there's water included in the event.

Interviewer:

Okay. Now, of course, you come up with these brand elements. And then, the reactions of the J&Z consumers come.

As you observe them, how do you interpret and make sense of their reactions? How do you know that this one is a positive indicator in favor of being authentic or a negative indicator? How do you tell which is which or how do you interpret their reactions? Both their reactions in the physical world and in the digital world as well.

Participant:

I think during events, we would observe. But in online, it's easier to curate.

Because whenever we have a campaign, we would always check on the comments. We curate our own questions on ourselves. If someone asks about, is it non-transfer? Is there a positive feedback like, oh, I love the product during the comment sections.

During a live session for a live host, we monitor. We deeply monitor the comments, the feedbacks on the comments of the videos we make. And then, we try to see if they're happy or not.

So far, we haven't seen any negative comments. There's just, of course, customer service. Like, oh, my package is lost and all that.

So, we handle it well. But normally, when there's a campaign, we really try our best to keep an eye on all of the comments and see if there's any negative comments towards the product.

Interviewer:

Of course, the comments, if it's really expressed like praise or something, obviously, it's positive.

Or if it's like a complaint, obviously, it's negative. But if the comment is somehow, you know, you can't really tell. It's somehow appearing to be neutral or factual.

How do you know it contributes to their perception of authenticity for the brand or on the other side?

Participant:

What's really good with online now, you can see if they purchased the product. So, you would know if they really used it, if they really purchased it online. But of course, in person, it's hard to track.

But if online-wise, we would know if it's a fake account. Because we can see if they purchased with us, which is a good thing with online now. We would know if it's really a real comment or just a neutral comment.

Interviewer:

What if it's a real comment but it's just expressed in a not so clear way? It's not obvious that it's positive or negative. How do you make sense of that? With TikTok, we have to message them. It's a standard with us now.

Because we really care about our customers. It's our standard now that if there's a comment that we don't know the answer to and it's really concerning, we go ahead an extra mile to message the customer and see what's on. We investigate.

Because one comment can actually impact a whole brand line or a product.

Interviewer:

So, when in doubt, you reach out to them and try to find out whether it affects them positively or negatively?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer:

Okay. Can you describe... I don't know if you've already done it or maybe you have other situations.

Can you describe a time or situation when one of your brand elements or one of the brand elements that you came up with, your team came up with unexpectedly affected the Gen Zs perceptions of brand authenticity? Not as you expected but it turned out to be a different result or different perception that they came up with.

Participant:

I think when we mentioned in one of our campaigns that we're eco-friendly, that was a bad campaign. Because apparently, the Gen Zs know what greenwashing is.

They know if we're really not animal testing and all that. I think that was the most negative campaign we had when we mentioned that our products are cruelty-free and eco-friendly. When we mentioned that during the live sessions and when we mentioned that in some of our campaigns, we really got a backlash on it.

Because there's a lot of Gen Zs who really like poking into history, of course. Because the product technically, L'Oreal as a brand technically, wasn't really eco-friendly. Because we were still using plastics back then.

All of our packaging weren't reusable. Of course, the Gen Zs backlashed at us because they now care. If it's something related to greenwashing, they don't like it.

They don't like it. It negatively impacts them. If you claim that we're eco-friendly, we're not harmful to the environment, automatically, they don't like it. They don't like that idea.

Interviewer:

So how did you rectify the situation?

Participant:

It was hard. I think it took us almost a year.

It became from post to post to post. L'Oreal's not this and that. During their history, we had to reiterate to them.

That's why we tweaked our packaging. We tweaked everything into reusable because we wanted to help the environment. We wanted to be more eco-friendly even if we're not.

So that helped. But it took time. But it died down as well.

Because we released new products, everyone was still coming back.

Interviewer:

But you made adjustments?

Participant:

Yeah, we made adjustments, of course.

Interviewer:

Okay. On the side of marketing mix strategies, of course, you know, product price, place, promotions. People, process, physical environment may or may not apply that much because yours is a tangible product. In some cases, maybe for customer service, customer complaints, perhaps.

But in your experience, how does your marketing mix become part of the brand's ongoing communication with agencies? Especially in terms of, you know, trying to have the brand be perceived as authentic.

Participant:

I think we really adjust to their needs. Especially during campaigns, sometimes we always get questions related to price.

Because it's always the question with pricing. There are some elements that are okay. But with pricing, it's really hard.

Especially now with the global crisis. Shipping was hard. Shipping the products here was hard because we don't make it here.

We make it on different places like Paris. We get them from the US. So, of course, the prices had to go a little bit up.

And then a lot of our consumers are complaining, why is it high? So it's always the pricing that differs. So what we did, because we do in and out, our old products that are half a year old, we had to make a strategy wherein we had to put it on sale. Like sales, it's like a giveaway sale.

It's even 70% off. So with that, since Gen Zs are really practical, they like buying cheaper products from us. But they do not know, although we always mention to them, it's already half a year.

So that's the time that we really discount the products. So it's normally always a pricing problem. Because we have to adjust to, again, now the global crisis, we have to adjust our pricing of that target and help spread it with the Gen Zs. It's really pricing.

Interviewer

You touched on pricing being part of the communicative process of the brand. But you said that Gen Zs are practical, so it became attractive to them.

But on the other hand, what's their reaction in terms of, probably, did it affect their perception of quality, of authenticity, of course?

Participant:

I think because they're repeat users, so they would know that it's already half a year, that's why it's cheaper. But the quality is still there. But again, we also give them knowledge about makeup that it's only used in a year.

So makeup, normally, it's only used in one year. You can't use it the next year. So they have to use it within the next six months, perhaps.

It's like that. So it's still authentic. It's just that it's already on sale.

Because we always tell them, we reiterate that you can only use it for six months, that's why it's cheap.

Interviewer:

So it's about being transparent regarding that?

Participant

It's always being transparent with the Gen Zs.

Interviewer:

Now, how does your team conceptualize and implement your marketing strategies as part of your overall brand communication efforts with the Gen Zs?

Participant:

I think with us, it's always looking on to what they need and what catches their eye. For example, if it's a lipstick or a foundation, especially on a summer day. This summer, we created a campaign for non-transfer, non-melting.

So it's always something that they need. We check on reviews, we check on videos on other brands, of course, that they're looking for comments. We normally would give them a good recommendation, especially with our live hosts now.

What's really good with them is there's always people coming into the live asking for questions instead of going to the mall. But majority is we always tend to look for what they're looking for. So it's always during the summer, what are they looking for? They're looking for something, for a makeup that doesn't melt with the sun.

That's something that protects their skin. So we also help with, for example, if L'Oreal needs an idea. For example, they have Asia, they have Europe, they have U.S. Of course, Asia is different.

The formulation of Asia is different. They need something that's good for humidity. So we also help give them the idea that in the Philippines, they need something like this because it's humid now.

Then they would send over a new product that they released to us. So it's always what they need. That's how we adjust.

Interviewer:

Okay, now based on your experience, again, which of these marketing mix strategies or elements among the product, price, place, promotions, etc., and if you can be more specific, which particular strategies that you came up with in the past, which of them tend to support the concept of authenticity in the minds of the Gen Zs and which tend to raise doubts in terms of authenticity in the minds of the Gen Zs? I don't know if somehow your answer with the brand elements of similar question would somehow overlap with this, but maybe you have another story or situation that you can share.

Participant:

If it's very specific, we have one which is product. We had the powder called Freshwear.

The first release was 24 hours fresher than this, but I think it was the packaging that we had to change because it breaks easily. And then it took us almost a year, again, it took us a year to wait for a new packaging. So when we had the new packaging, I'm not all too sure what we did with this one because I wasn't with them yet when we had the powder.

But as far as I know, when we tried to market the powder, I was still fresh, I just joined the company. The old packaging that we had was thinner, it wasn't sturdy. Literally, when you put it on your bag, if you drop it, it will really break.

And in comparison to our new packaging, they tweaked it to a thicker, more impact-proof casing. So this one, if you drop it, it's gone. It's not gonna open, it's not gonna dodge.

So I feel like when we tweaked the product, when we tweaked the casing, that's how the consumers intend to think that it's authentic because the casing is different. But it kind of gave us a different backlash because they weren't aware. There was no online campaign release or there was no information online that there was a new packaging.

So what we did was on TikTok, we had to explain to them that this is the new packaging, this is the old packaging, just for you guys to be aware. And there's also a different term we have, infallible and infalliable. That's because the new packaging actually came from Paris.

The old packaging came from the U.S. So they're sick of two different words which affected their perception. They thought it was from China. That's what they were thinking.

Because of the spelling and the packaging. So we had to, of course, inform them online again that this is what we did, that's why it's authentic. That it's real.

Interviewer:

How did you do it? You said in order to inform them, you use TikTok. How did you do it in TikTok?

Participant:

It's just a video. We asked our ambassadors, or a lot of our ambassadors to make videos for us.

So we told them, Oh, so we have a problem now. It's the spelling. It's just the spelling of the packaging that already impacted us really bad.

So we had to inform them that you have to check the back and see where it was made from. So there's two differences. There's one that's made from the U.S. and one that's made from Paris.

Or made from France, rather. It's on the back. So we had our ambassadors make a message, Hey guys, we have a new packaging.

Multiple videos, actually. A lot of videos. We had to upload a lot of videos of them saying something different about the packaging as well as our live hosts during live.

There's a lot of questions and comments about why your packaging is different, why the spelling is different. So we were surprised, actually, that they would notice. So that's why we perceived that these Gen Zs really need to be checked.

Interviewer:

How long did it take for the brand to change the perception of the Gen Zs?

Participant:

I think it was quick because it was a video that was multiple videos. Probably more than 30-35 videos uploaded in 3 months or 4 months. So it took almost 3-4 months.

It was really long because we released the product without any information, no nothing. It was just new. There was no information that we're releasing a new packaging for the product but it still has the same contents.

We never released a statement. That's why when I came in, we decided with the team that we have to release a statement. Why is there nothing? So that's it.

Interviewer:

So basically, you tried to rectify an old packaging problem and then when you came up with the new, there was this spelling issue. Yeah, there was a spelling issue. You were trying to strengthen the authenticity and the quality in the minds of the Gen Zs.

But then after, although the quality of the packaging improved, but the other reaction was they doubted the authenticity of the new packaging because it had a different spelling. And then you had to, based on their reaction, you had to come up again with another response which you did in the campaign in TikTok using around 35 or so videos in order to, again, try to negotiate or change the minds of the market in terms of their perception of, from doubting the authenticity to believing that the brand and the new packaging is authentic. Now, how do you, of course, like in that process, there's that back and forth process where you did something, they reacted, and then you come up with something.

But, of course, before you react, before you come up with your own reaction to their reaction, how do you sense that there's something that's going on in the mind of the Gen Z target consumers? And how do you sense that there's something that they're thinking or they're perceiving? And then how do you interpret their perceptions or reactions to your actions, to the back and forth actions that you make?

Participant:

So, still related to the spelling problem, after we informed them that this is the new packaging and all that, it made sense to them in terms of, we had comments because we monitor the comments and the reviews on TikTok. We have data that we could break down and see if they're okay, they're not mad, they're not doubting us. So far, during the three to four month campaign, we had to monitor the comments and reactions as well as for physical store because we were purely TikTok.

With TikTok, we got to see on the comments that they're okay, they got to understand, that's why, they just really need the information. Information is very important to them, basically. So, for us to have a better data or a better reaction towards the reaction, we had to break down all of the comments.

We had one live that ran 24 hours, so we had live hosts that did our live for 24 hours. Actually, we had them live 24 hours for seven days, so it was 24-7 live. We had to monitor all of the comments, all of the reactions, all of their questions regarding the product, and so far, they just really needed information.

So, that's how we tweak now. Let's just upload more videos informing them on what happened and then showing them that the packaging is more sturdy now. So, we have drop tests on live and videos on live comparing old packaging, they'll drop.

So, it's just really the information. They just really needed information.

Interviewer:

Okay. Well, just like in the earlier question for the brand elements, for the marketing mix, can you cite a situation where in one of the marketing mix decisions of the brand unexpectedly affected the perceptions of the Gen Z consumers? So, you were not expecting that this would be their action, it turned out to be a different reaction.

Participant:

So, I feel like for this one, it was more of the pricing side of the marketing mix because L'Oreal decided to—we had the P349 lipstick before, and then out of nowhere, when we changed the packaging, it had to be tweaked to P600. So, now, what we had to tell the consumers was—which is true—it was reformulated to a better product, which is the Colorish, the new lipstick. That is an old lipstick that was passed down from generations, from their grandmothers, their parents.

Then to them, of course, they have the perception that it's still the same price when it's reformulated. It's just a better product, but then a different packaging. But it was really hard because we had to improve the packaging so that it looks premium.

But then for them, it's like, oh, why did it get expensive? So, that specific product wasn't repurchased because it got expensive. They're doubting that it's not the same anymore because we've reformulated it to a better version.

And apparently, reformulating it wasn't something they wanted. So, they did not like tweaking the product and then tweaking the price as well. So, they wanted the old one, not the new one.

Interviewer:

Classic?

Participant:

Yeah, they wanted the classic one. So, reaction towards that, we brought back the classic one, but it's just the packaging again. It's just really the packaging that they don't like.

Interviewer:

You retained the reformulated product? You brought back the packaging?

Participant:

And then, apparently, they like the old packaging more.

Interviewer:

What about their reaction to retaining the reformulated?

Participant:

No, they don't have a reaction. It's just really the packaging. Yeah, it's the packaging.

And the problem with the packaging and all that, we don't have control. The Philippine team for L'Oreal had no say to it because it was really the main L'Oreal that sent us the new Colorish. So, we can't make an old Colorish.

But what the Philippine market did, we partnered with the one in Thailand. So, they have the old packaging with the new formulation because it's different packaging per place. So, there's like Thailand, they maintain the old packaging but new product which we wanted to get. That's what we got for the Philippines.

Interviewer:

So, basically, you retained the reformulated product. You changed the packaging, reverted back to the old packaging. What about the price? What did you do with the price?

Participant:

The price was down to minus 100. The way we did it was through a voucher. But we did not tell them that this is still the original price.

It was more of they had a voucher with us, a 100 off when they follow. But the pricing went down to minus 100 for the new lipstick.

Interviewer:

So, you retained the price but then you gave discounts through vouchers. What's the reaction of the Gen Zs to that?

Participant:

It was more positive now because it's cheaper. They think that it's still the same product. So, apparently, it's just like the classic looking lipstick.

The one where you can open it and you can twist it. In comparison to the old one, you have to push it up.

Interviewer:

What do you think would be the Gen Zs' reaction if instead of coming up with a voucher, you simply reduce the price by 100? What do you think would be their reaction?

Participant:

They would think that it's still the standard price. If you tell the Gen Z that there's a discount, they're always going to go for it. But if it's something like the price went down, we can't say the price went down.

That's not a part of the campaign. We're not allowed to say that the price went down. It's more of we have a discount.

Interviewer:

Okay. So, in general, how do Gen Z consumers, based on your observation, typically express or communicate their perceptions of authenticity or inauthenticity in response to your brand's actions?

Participant:

Gen Zs like to post a lot. I observed that even with different brands, they like to post a lot. One inconvenience for us, we'll post it right away.

Or we will research about it and try to find ways on how to get what we bought for. For example, if I purchased a foundation that was apparently not suitable for my skin, I would research first if it was really suitable for my skin. And then if it was not and it was recommended to me, I would message the brand.

Normally, a lot of the Gen Zs message now. Sometimes they would post, but then when the data privacy, something like that, was released for social media, they don't like to post anymore. What they do now is message.

They would message, they would ask if, why is it like this? Then we would, of course, investigate and see if their skin type is suitable for that specific product. Sometimes, it could be our live host, they would recommend a specific product for someone who's oily but it's not suitable for oily skin.

Sometimes, we have to go through that. We have to check the whole live feed of who recommended who. It could impact.

We had one video before on the matte resistance of the lipstick, the transfer proof. That really affected the brand. That's just one simple video.

The Gen Z noticed that it's not transfer proof. Why are they saying it's transfer proof? Just that one video could impact.

That's why we're really careful.

Interviewer:

Every message you receive and every post that you see about your brand, you go through all those?

Participant:

Yeah, we have to. That's why we have a really good team. It's very tedious indeed, but it's just TikTok.

Interviewer:

How do you determine which ones you need to respond to directly? Which ones you simply, probably, I don't know, in the post probably just click the like button or what? Or probably, which ones if you do ignore some comments or messages, how do you determine which ones to respond to, to react to, or to simply ignore?

Participant:

Every month, my team and I would do a sit down. It's like we go through almost probably, we give ourselves like, 50 for you, 50 for me. We have a sit down where we go through all of the list of messages from the month only.

For the week on Friday, we check all of the messages from bottom to up. Some of the month, they check the comments. Some of the month, they check the interactions.

Because we're six, every two people check everything and then they would sort them out. After that, we have a meeting. With the presentation, of course, these are the comments.

When we break it down, the common comment, the common question is the common answer we have for them. That's how we curate it. But that's for TikTok only.

Interviewer:

So you try to cluster which comments are more or less similar. How do you decide on what would be your response and also which one to prioritize?

Participant:

We always prioritize the worst comment that makes sense, of course, because there are some comments or some messages that are super long and then suddenly related to J&T, related to shipping, which we can't handle. If it's product-related, especially with the powder breaking, I received it, it's already broken, I just used it for a day, it's already melted, those type of things. That's what we prioritize and see what happened.

We also ask where did you store it, was it inside the car for the whole day, and then were you under the sun? We have to go through that and explain to them, this is what

happened. If it's really an error that we made, we have a product, even if it's just one product that went through that was expired, those type of things, we really have to send this up to the other department.

We have to tell the product department that we released a product that was expired. The team has to tell the other team that you have to check the warehouse, maybe there's another expired product that was released. Because sometimes, even if we don't handle it, but even in terms of the warehouses, we have to ask them if this specific product was released, because there's a tag.

Before you release it, there's a tag, and then it's going to come to us, the data's going to go to us, that this was sent. So apparently, there's one box that was expired, so at least it was tracked.

Interviewer:

So based on the experience that you have, receiving all those comments or posts or messages from the Gen Zs, so for what kinds of adjustments or changes have you done with your team for the brand?

Participant:

Again, it's always the pricing. When we received a lot of messages in terms of the new products being a lot more expensive, those type of things, we tried to tweak it down. What we did though was, technically, it was a lot more expensive, but we gave them extra vouchers, but they had to follow, they had to like a video for them to claim the voucher.

In a specific video on TikTok, you can upload a voucher where they can claim it. So we would post in that video, for you to have 20% off or 30% off discount, you have to like this video and share it, then the vouchers pop up underneath the video. So what we do is, we normally give them more vouchers if it's really impacting them that the new product is too expensive.

If there's a lot of comments like that, we would choose a day. For example, we created a lipstick day. So lipstick day is every Wednesday, so they get 30% off every Wednesday for lipsticks, but that's only on a Wednesday.

And then we also have Worth It Friday, where they can purchase any product. If they purchase two, they get 3% off. If they purchase three, they get 5% off.

So we created little events that help with the pricing.

Interviewer:

So as I understand, the way you react to the pricing concerns of the Gen Zs is to more or less give discounts in different forms, like vouchers or special promotions on certain days. But doesn't that trigger a reaction on the part of the Gen Zs? Why are you making it difficult for us to avail of a lower cost or lower price?

Doesn't that affect the way they perceive the brand? It's like making it difficult for them.

Participant:

As a Gen Z consumer, I would go a long way to purchase a product that I use for a long time. So for example, of course I work for L'Oreal, but I have different brands that I really like. But I think for me, if it's really expensive, technically L'Oreal is considered a drugstore but luxe product.

They already have a perception of that. Because it's a drugstore, it's inside Watsons. That's the perception.

But it's considered a luxe product already. Technically close to Dior but underneath Dior.

Interviewer:

When you say luxe product, what does that mean?

Participant:

Luxury product, technically. Because of the price and the packaging and all that. And they're worldwide now.

But for me, I would go a long way, especially if I know that I've been using this product. I would go a long way. If it's cheaper, I would purchase it.

And if there's a voucher, I would go for it. If there's a strategy I need to do, I will still do it. But that's the Gen Zs.

Gen Zs are open to that. But I think for Millennials, it's very different. They want convenience.

Gen Zs really want the long way.

Interview:

In general, how would you describe the ongoing communicative interaction between your brand, L'Oreal, and Gen Z consumers in shaping what counts as authentic?

Participant:

I feel like it's always, we have a program with L'Oreal called Affiliate Program wherein they get to post a video and then they get to sell through their accounts. So we have an affiliate program wherein we, of course, check who can affiliate. So anyone that has 1,000 followers and below, or 1,000 followers and above, they get the chance to do an affiliation wherein they get to make a video and sell the product on their own ways.

So I think with the program that we have for them, it's somewhat helping with the brand authenticity because we have a lot of people making videos for us, selling for us as

well online, and as well as, at least, there's a lot of people using the product. That's in the Gen Z perspective. So it's mostly really the videos they make and how they would make the videos because there's so much people doing it in a creative way.

We had one video before, he went hiking to Pulag with a matte resistance. They go a long way just to help us sell the product as well. So that's the affiliate program we have for them.

Interviewer:

So it's basically, would you say that L'Oreal is not dictating the concept of authenticity to the Gen Zs, but rather it's more of, it emerges from their interaction between the two? Or participation of the Gen Zs as well?

Participant:

I feel like for authenticity for them, anything that doesn't claim that's eco-friendly or anything that doesn't claim, has a perfect advertisement. If it's too perfect, the Gen Zs intend to react that it's too perfect, too expensive, it's always too negative. But if it's something related, if it's already involving the women community, the LGBT community, the Gen Zs intend to think that it's authentic because it's connecting to the community.

So it's always like that for them.

Interviewer:

So connecting to the community makes it authentic?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

In what ways do the Gen Z consumers, on the other hand, influence the way your brand understands and enacts authenticity in the long term?

Participant:

I feel like we ask them, for example, what's your favorite product? What's your favorite campaign that L'Oreal did? We normally, it's funny and it's weird, but they would comment the most randomist comment about the product.

And then we would curate, so in a creative way, we could probably release this type of campaign for February. Or we could do an event in the mountains with the product. So anything related to their feedback to us, that's where we figure out the authenticity of the product.

Or the perception that we're authentic, that it's not fake. So it's always from the campaigns, the videos, and then how we communicate with them.

Interviewer:

Now, would you say that brand authenticity is something that the brand implements? Or is it something that is negotiated between the brand and the Gen Z consumers? Or is it something that is continuously adapted back and forth through the interaction between the brand and the Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

I feel like it's the third one because L'Oreal has been around for a long time. It's just that it kind of died down because during the pandemic, we were a purely physical store. So we had to adjust and create to an online store.

So from offline, we went purely online. I think it was hard as well for L'Oreal because we don't know what we're targeting. We don't know what the new generation wants after the pandemic.

So I feel like the way we communicate with them, the way that they already have a perception of the brand, that helps it for the Gen Z to make it more authentic. But it became a lot more authentic on their mind when we started making more videos and contents for them. At least, as well as getting more influencers with us.

I think having Pia was really the biggest achievement we got. Because when we had PIA, and then Pia did an ambassadorship for our product, that helped the Gen Z think that it's authentic because they have an influencer, which is Miss Universe, who supported the product.

Interviewer:

Why do you think the Gen Z perceived the brand to be more authentic when you got the influencers and Pia Wurtzbach?

Participant:

I feel like because the new generation or the Gen Z are more influential. Anyone that they idolize, if they sign up with a product, they would see it as a lot more authentic and a lot more premium in a sense for them. So it's a lot more like, oh, my idol uses this.

Filipinos, Filipino Gen Zs are very, very, they call this, ma-fan sila. They're really fan. They like being a fan of someone.

They like purchasing what their idols use. That's what I noticed. Kasi for me, of course, I'm also a fan of PIA.

I would normally watch her videos whenever she doesn't get ready with me. I would check what products she uses. Kasi she looks simple.

She looks simple, but she's pretty. So that's something that the Gen Zs are looking for.

Interviewer:

Okay, now looking back, what have the Gen Zs, Gen Z consumers taught you and your brand? What did you learn from them about brand authenticity through the interactions between your brands and them that you initially did not know? So something that, aha moment, you realized that, uy, ganoon pala, hindi pala ganoon, hindi pala ganito or something like that.

What was that realization or what realizations did you have as a brand, as one of the people handling the brand as well as for the brand itself? What realizations or learnings that you had and your brand had about authenticity through, that came out of the interactions with the Gen Zs that you initially did not anticipate?

Participant:

So when we started, yung pinaka experience na I had with them, hindi pa kami community involved when I came into L'Oreal. Like, we're purely online, we're so parang textbook-y. We're just taking pictures, we just have those simple posters with the makeup product on it, but we don't have people.

We don't have influencers, we don't have people who impact the community, especially women. Kasi the brand is supposed to show that you're worth it. That's the main tagline that we have, “You’re Worth It”.

So when we started having, we started signing up with Pia, we started being more community involved, we have events related to women. That's the time where we realized na ah, we have to be more community involved pala to become authentic for the Gen Z consumers. Kasi Gen Zs care, they care a lot.

So if you're a product that supports community involvement, even if you're a worldwide brand that's more towards that generative posters, yung mga ganun na post. Parang it's just a simple campaign, it's just a simple advertisement. Parang mukha kami corporate, parang ganun ang lumalabas.

Pero nung we tweaked, my team and I tweaked and then we tried to curate to a better na, oh be more community involved, be more community outside of the online world. That's the time we got to realize na ah, community involvement nga ang kailangan ng brand na to.

Interviewer:

So it's community involvement?

Participant:

Yeah, it's really community involvement.

Interviewer:

So you realized that's important in emerging, in order to emerge brand authenticity?

Now, you mentioned something about your tagline or slogan.

Participant:

You are Worth It.

Interviewer:

You are worth it. What can you say about that particular tagline that you use? What's the reaction of the Gen Z consumers towards that?

How did you implement it? How did they respond? How did you respond to their responses?

In such a way that, would you be able to say that that tagline contributed to the brand authenticity of L'Oreal?

Participant:

I think it did. Kasi we had this campaign, it was the first campaign we released when I started working with them. It's the Hindi Ka Sayang.

We had this campaign where we had multiple women, even the old generations say na. The negative comment in that video, it's like somewhat the Gen Zs are experiencing it. Ang taba-taba mo, ang pangit-pangit mo. Mga ganoon.

Pero when you purchase yung lipstick parang Hindi Ka Sayang, but you are worth it. That impacted the community. So I will feel more confident if I purchase with them because it brings to me the message that I'm worth it.

That's the campaign we had. That's the first campaign we had actually.

Interviewer:

When you launched that campaign, what was their reaction?

Participant:

Their reaction was really positive. Kasi they felt…there were long messages na. Oh, because of this campaign, I realized na ano pala ako, hindi pala ako sayang.

Kahit na may negative comments sakin, ano pala I feel better na. It impacted the community really good. Kasi apparently there's a lot of women having negative comments and backlashes towards them with their physical appearance or even the makeup they're using.

So it built more confidence for them. When we had the Hindi Ka Sayang, You're Worth It campaign, that was one of the most impactful campaigns we had.

Interviewer:

After you received those feedback from them towards the campaign of Hindi Ka Sayang, what then was your reaction? What's the reaction of the brand? What then did the brand do in response to those feedback?

Participant:

We had a pop-up event here in BGC. We had a little talk of makeup. Then we just had them come in.

We just had them come by and then have their own product test sila and other things like that. Then they can receive little testers. The Hindi Ka Sayang campaign was to bring more people.

We also had little talks with people, victims of rape, mga ganoon, to do a talk on their experiences, on how they overcome their depression, mga ganoon. As well as how to boost your confidence. We had little workshops, little talks on that pop-up.

We had people come in for that event.

Interviewer:

Basically, the brand reached out further in order to have more engagement, more interaction with the Gen Z consumers. After that, what then again was the result of the part of the other Gen Zs?

Participant:

The next step was that since we had the Hindi Kasayang campaign, we released, of course, yung mga product packages. But we, of course, did not title it Hindi Ka Sayang Packaging. It was more of You're Worth It packaging.

Parang, you're worth it, buy one, take two, mga ganoon. The type of products online. Then we also had a shade called Worth It.

Din na shades. So we instilled that campaign into some of our products and our packaging, as well as yung mga brand sets namin, yung mga product sets namin. For example, you're worth it shades of red, you're worth it shades of ano.

So that word na you're worth it really helped them remember na ah L'Oreal yan kasi you're worth it na.

Interviewer:

Now, let's say into the future, you as a brand specialist or something like that. If you were to advise another brand that's targeting Gen Z, maybe in a different business or whatever, but that brand is targeting Gen Z, what would you say to the people there about how brand authenticity emerges through the communication and interaction that you've seen happen in your brand? And would you say it's more of the communication and interaction, or would you say it's because we planned this, we were able to achieve this particular state of being authentic? So, which would you rather say?

Is it because of the interaction or is it because your planning was comprehensive and very careful?

Participant:

Honestly, because my team is all about Gen Z. We honestly lacked, before I see the recommendation for the new brand, we actually lacked preparation in most of the campaigns we had. But what was really nice is because, this is what I would want to recommend the new brands, is be more community-involved.

Because especially the Gen Zs now, they like going out, they like to be more involved now. Especially if it's like voluntary work or anything related to a brand that's making voluntary works. You really have to be very community-influenced or you have to be involved more in the community to have more impact to the consumers.

At least you see their reactions live, what's their thoughts on your product, what's everyone's general reaction. But with me and my team, we honestly weren't like super duper duper duper prepared. But we had of course the campaigns, it was related to PR, the events, that's very well planned.

But I feel like listening to your customers or listening to the Gen Zs, because it's very different from Millennials. Millennials, they don't really, they don't really comment. But with Gen Z, they really comment in detail.

So if you have a community event that's involving over a hundred consumers or you're popping up on some beauty events as well, I think it's very good to listen to your consumers, especially the Gen Zs. Because Gen Zs give very detailed advice. Or maybe I wanted, maybe if we had something like this, like we had a product that's more not too sticky, they would be really detailed on what their preferences is.

So for the new brand, that's really something I would like them to do, be more community-involved. Because there's not a lot of brands now that I see that are community-involved. I'm checking other brands as well at the moment, trying to observe if they're going to do the same thing.

None of them does it. But I think L'Oreal is one of the ones who really put themselves out there.

Interviewer:

So basically you're saying community involvement and listening to the Gen Zs through the interactions between the brand and the Gen Zs would give rise to the concept of or to the level of authenticity of a particular brand that you're handling.

Participant:

Yes, it's really community is equal to authenticity.

Interviewer:

Community equals authenticity. Okay, that's nice to hear. Anyway, so that's the end of the interview.

Thank you very much for participating. I'm sure your insights, your answers would go a long way in enriching the findings of this particular research. So thank you very much.

Participant:

Thank you for having me.

APPENDIX C

Transcript of In-Depth Interview 3

Date of Interview: May 15, 2026

Time of Interview: 4:30PM

Duration of Interview: 1 hour and 15 minutes

Place of Interview: SM Southmall, Las Piñas City

Name of Participant: NAME WITHHELD

Brands Handled/Worked for: National University (NU) Las Piñas Community Extension Office

Interviewer:
Okay, good afternoon, (name withheld).

Participant:
Good afternoon, sir.

Interviewer:
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research as a Gen Z on the brand side.

Participant:
Of course, any time for you.

Interviewer:
Before we start with the main questions, maybe you could just give a little bit of background on what you do and how to relate it into building or communicating the brand that you work for.

Of course, it's a bit different approach than the usual corporate business. But still, it has something to do with communicating the brand. In your organization's own way, it's quite different.

You may introduce your brand and what you do with it.

Participant:
I am the Community Extension Coordinator of NU Las Piñas. I am the person who's in charge of communicating with external stakeholders.

Actually, internal stakeholders as well. But most importantly, I talk to external stakeholders when it comes to corporate social responsibility activities or initiatives of NU Las Piñas. I am one of the coordinators across NU Philippines.

So, per campus, I have different coordinators. But this is the way of National University Philippines to extend its help to the city where NU Las Piñas is located. So, which is Las Piñas now.

So, we coordinate with different stakeholders like schools, LGUs, organizations. And I am one of them in accordance with the manual and the handbook. Also, with the help of other offices like Academe Industry Linkages and Placement Office.

And my office, Community Extension. We usually coordinate with external stakeholders. Sometimes, we also communicate with customers, students, should they have inquiries regarding the organization or the school.

Interviewer:

I see. So, the school, let me just clarify, is tertiary?

Participant:

Yes, tertiary.

Interviewer:

Do you have the basic education also?

Participant: For National University as a whole, they cater to basic education as well. But for NU Las Piñas, we cater to tertiary and secondary.

Interviewer:

Senior high?

Participant:

Senior high.

Interviewer:

Junior high?

Participant:

Junior high, no. But for offices like my office, Community Extension Office, we are all under the tertiary department. So, besides the fact that I am also a part of the pool of teachers, I also handle the office.

Interviewer:

So, that's how it is in our office here. So, let me just clarify. You're the Community Extension Coordinator for NU Las Piñas?

So, it's basically you're handling the CSR for NU Las Piñas?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

And each coordinator for each campus covers within your municipality or city? Or do you go beyond your…

Participant:

Yes, we go beyond. Sorry for cutting off, sir. We go beyond the lines of each city, perhaps, if that's the context.

We're not just per city. But because NU Las Piñas is a very new campus, I think the newest campus.

Interviewer:

One year?

Participant:

Yes, sir. One year. One year. The management, the upper management decides to focus our efforts to the city first because the concept of National University is it's important for them to fill up the gap in the city so that when it overflows, it can be expanded, extended to several cities.

But to answer your question, sir, yes, we do that. But for the meantime, majority, not all, majority of our activities are in the city. But we have already coordinated with other campuses in other regions.

For example, we have an activity in partnership with SM Philippines. We participated with Angels Walk for Autism. It's a walk for, excuse me, it's a walk intended for people with autism.

So it's not just in the city. We went to Pasay, Pasay, Parañaque. And several other campuses are doing that as well.

That's our directive. Maybe a good 75% of the activities must be in the city. Then the remainder must be outside the city.

Interviewer:

Okay. Let me proceed to the main question.

Participant:

Yes, sir.

Interviewer:

From your perspective as the extension or the person in charge of the CSR, how do you make sense or how do you perceive brand authenticity in the context of your brand's everyday communication specifically with your Gen-Z consumers or customers?

Participant:

Particular to the CSR?

Interviewer:

Not only the consumers, but probably because it's the CSR you're handling?

So you're the Gen-Z stakeholders.

Participant:

Actually, sir, you taught this to us. We have different levels of buyers.

Or categories. There's the initiator, there's the payer, or the user. Right, sir?

We have that. If we're going to think of it, it's not Gen Z who pays the tuition fees, but the Gen Zs are the direct consumers who are using the service. So perfect for me at some point, the Gen Zs, because our students are Gen Zs.

What was the question again, sir?

Interviewer:

How do you make sense of brand authenticity within the context by which your brand communicates with Gen-Z stakeholders? Not just the students, but even perhaps the beneficiaries of your...

Participant:

How do I make sense of it?

Interviewer:

How do you perceive?

Participant:

How do I perceive?

Interviewer:

What's your idea of brand authenticity within the context of your organization in terms of dealing with or communicating with Gen-Zs?

Participant:

The management kept on telling us that we have to stick with our core, the values of patriotism, integrity, and so on. I think I missed three. There are five values that NU Philippines is instilling in its stakeholders, most importantly the internal stakeholders, the employees, the students, the faculty members, the administration.

For them to instill these values because that's the identity of the university, to be compassionate to customers because the university is built... Their point is that the university is built for the Filipinos, and its core is to be compassionate to those who are in need. I think that's...

Not I think, but it's the way of the university or the SM group to help those in need, especially in the education sector. So, sticking to the core values of the university, integrity, patriotism, compassion, resilience, and... Oh no, I forgot the other one.

Interviewer:

Those are the core values of NU or the core values of SM Philippines?

Participant:

NU Philippines, sir.

Interviewer:

But as I perceive, correct me if I'm wrong, but when you talked about NU and SM, it seems that as you come up with the community extension, CSR activities of NU, it does not only communicate NU as a brand, not just NU the brand, but even SM the brand also.

Participant:

At some point, yes. Yes, because we all know that SM is owned by the Sy family, and NU Philippines is owned by... No, obtained, bought by the Sy family as well.

So now, of course, rest in peace, Henry Sy. His children are leading the group of companies. They have the same principles.

So somehow, yes, it's similar.

Interviewer:

It also affects the brand of SM.

Participant:

Yes, definitely.

Interviewer:

Can you cite a situation wherein your actions, the school's actions, both in their marketing as well as in your community extension or CSR projects, can you cite a situation wherein your brand's actions were interpreted by the Gen Z as either authentic or inauthentic? What happened in that situation, and how did the brand respond to the reaction of the Gen Zs?

Participant:

Citing a specific activity, perhaps, I organized, Sir Ron, an activity.

I think I have mentioned this to you already. I spearheaded the blood donation drive. Even if we're just, what, six months in operation, eight months, six to eight months in operation, I organized that already because it's easier because there are means for us to do it in partnership with Philippine Red Cross.

So what they did was, what we did was we invited Philippine Red Cross to the campus, and then they were the ones who initiated the activity. I would like to assume that the Gen Z perceived it as authentic because we're not the only ones there present because there are other people from a different organization who was there, and they saw it, Sir, that the Gen Z customers, in this context, the students, they saw themselves, other students being extracted, extracting blood from their...

Interviewer:

For donation.

Participant:

For donation. So we assume, I assume, that it is perceived as authentic because they saw it themselves. Because what we did on campus, we did not block the doors nor the windows.

They really saw it. And they saw that we have partnered with a credible, a reliable organization, which is the Philippine Red Cross. And the organization, the PRC or Philippine Red Cross is a very, as I mentioned, credible institution who donates or gives those blood to those in need.

So the way I see it is that perspective, that they saw it physically, that the PRC are there, the staff are there, so that's how I see it.

Interviewer:

I see. Okay, now... Excuse me. Let's move on to brand elements.

Of course, NU itself has a logo. I don't know if each program you have in your CSR, in your community extension, has a brand name of itself, a program name, which we can consider as a brand name for it or probably maybe it also has some symbols, icons, logos, or even slogans. So these are brand elements.

And in relation to brand elements, with NU in general, with CSR programs or community extension programs, to be more specific, how do these brand elements function as communicative forms, as forms of communication? How do they communicate, these brand elements? How do they communicate with that Gen Z?

Participant:

A few things that are coming up into my mind, sir. The first is the name itself, National University. I think one of the reasons why the Sy family bought NU is because of its name.

They want... I don't know if I can share this. But NU is the CSR of SM.

The way they see it, SM must consider NU as their CSR. So, with that said, the Sy family bought NU for their CSR to help the people in need. That's how they framed them. That's how they constructed NU.

So, all of the things that came later to them acquiring, everything changed. Even the logo, even the tagline. I understand taglines are also part of brand elements, right?

So, even those things are changed because of that context. That they want NU to be for the poor. They want NU to be for those in need.

Those who are incapable of paying high tuition fees. That's how they see it. But quality education.

Eventually, I think, personally, that's the path that NU Philippines is going. And I think Gen Zs are seeing this. It's like a national university.

This is the university of the country. For the country, by the country. So, that's how they envision it.

And that's how Gen Zs are seeing it.

Interviewer:

By the way, what's the tagline of NU?

Participant:

I should know this.

Created for Filipinos. I'll just search it, sir. Naku nakakahiya.

NU Philippines tagline. Okay. Founded for Filipinos, Built for the nation.

Interviewer:

So, I think it aligns with what you were saying.

Participant:

Yes. I don't know the verbatim.

Interviewer:

And also, incidentally, the programs of the community extension. Of course, you have titles like the blood donation. Do you have a title for it that you used or what?

Participant:

As is, sir. I personally have the freedom to do it. To change, to name it.

Interviewer:

So, what did you name it?

Participant:

As is. Blood Donation, Book Donation.

Because I personally want it to be understandable. Not just understandable. I don't want to judge.

But I want it to be simple to a point where a layman can understand it. So, basically, there's no brand in this specific program. It's the NU brand that you're carrying.

Participant:

And also, sir, just to share. One of our directors, one of our bosses there, mentioned that they want NU... I don't know, sir, if you're familiar with this.

NU Philippines wants... Wants their campuses to have their own unique offerings.

So, for NU Moa, they want it to be a pre-med school, university that offers pre-med courses. That's how it is. I don't know if other campuses are for what program.

But for NU Las Piñas, I think one of their visions for NU Las Piñas is for it to be a computer school. Something like that. That's the branding of NU Las Piñas.

Technically. That's how it is. I don't know if it will help the paper of yours, but that's how it is.

Interviewer:

Every information somehow. Because this is a qualitative study. So, we mentioned about these brand elements.

Let me also put into the picture the marketing mix elements. Product, enterprise, place, promotions. And since NU is a service, we include the people, process, and physical environment.

I'm sure you're very much familiar with that.

Participant:

Of course, sir.

Interviewer:

Because you're an RMP.

Participant:

My mentor is good.

Interviewer:

Because you're a registered marketing professional.

Participant:

No, sir. Because my mentor is good.

Interviewer:

Anyway. With those marketing mix elements as well, how do you see it as a form of communication also?

Do you see it as a form of communication also between the brand, the NU brand, and the Gen Zs? And how does it function as a communication tool for the product, the price, the place, etc.?

Participant:

Let's just shy away from the traditional, sir.

My good mentor said, 7Ps service marketing. Anyway. When it comes to the people, sir, Naku, baka magmayabang ako, but they want the best of the best.

From what I heard, they want to hire people who are experts in their field. Because, quoting. What is this, sir?

Confidential, right? Quoting the president of NU. He said, not all employees are for NU.

I thought of that, and I said, can't everyone be for NU? I said, why? And then, eventually, I came to realize, because people inside are working, not tirelessly, but they work their best for their customers, for their clients.

They're doing their best, not just because they have a doctorate, not just because they're cum laude, not just because they have a license. They're the best of the best. Even if the best of the best, even the best of us needs practice, or needs improvement.

That's what's inside of us. You need to continuously improve yourself. And I think that's perceived as good for Gen Zs, especially those who are coming in.

Because, I can speak on behalf of those people. If you're a customer, you want to make the most out of your payment. If they see that their faculty members, their employees, are the best at what they do, I'll go for that product.

I'll go for that service. Maybe that's one of the aspects, sir, that I really would like to highlight in this specific question. NU has a lot of professional development.

They urge you to do research, financially supported, emotionally supported. Even they deduct hours, or units of load per sem, for your research, if there's a need. NU has a lot of professional development.

That's how I, somehow, would like to answer this, the training is continuous, and people can see that. Kasi, pinagmamalaki ng NU Philippines lahat ng achievements nila.

Even the faculty members, even the employees, even the students. That's what I want to focus on.

Interviewer:

Since you mentioned that, I'd like to probe deeper into the professional development. Aside from encouraging the faculty to conduct research, what other professional development programs do they have?

Do they have training, seminars?

Participant:

Yes, sir. We have in-house, indoor, basta sa loob, internal trainings, workshops, seminars, conducted inside, spearheaded by the organization, lagi yun sir, per term.

Pedagogy training, workshop, trainings relative to the course that you're, not the course, or the programs or the subjects that you're teaching, we have inside. But what I really would like to highlight here, sir, to answer your question, are the seminars and workshops paid by the company for you to go out. I have experienced twice already, I wasn't allowed anymore for the school year because I already had two external participations in the trainings.

So for number one, I visited, to give you an idea, at the Sustainability Expo at SM Aura, that's number one. Number two, in addition to my job role, I'm also the LSTP coordinator. So, I attended the three-day seminar in Manila, expenses paid by, the seminar paid by the organization.

So, that's how supportive they are, especially the researchers. If your research is indexed by Scopus, Q4, they give you a big incentive. Aside from the article processing charges, or conference processing, they pay you a lot.

And it translates. I hope I answered your question, sir.

Interviewer:

Yeah, yeah, of course.

Okay, let me move on. Of course, since we're still talking about brand elements and marketing mix, how does NU, whether you yourself or the team, how does the team conceptualize and enact these strategies, whether brand elements or marketing mix strategies, as part of the communication efforts of the brand with the agencies? How do you conceptualize?

Participant:

Actually, sir, we do not just conceptualize, because, similar to what I have answered earlier, we have seminars. And one of the seminars is the Nationalian training, not training, Nationalian seminars. These Nationalian seminars are seminars that employees attend, faculty members, admin support personnel.

We attend these types of seminars because we do not, because NU has a subject of Nationalian course. It's like an institutional course relative to the success of NU and

the background of NU. Before faculty members teach that, we also get to be a part of those seminars.

We were taught of the success of NU, what is NU, the goals of NU. We are given information about these matters.

So, it's established already by NU Manila or NU Philippines and then we spread it out across campuses.

Interviewer:

Regarding your community extension programs, the things that you do there, the projects, how do you conceptualize what project to come up with and how do you put it into fruition or into implementation?

Participant:

Sure. Personal. I combine my personal judgment with the values of NU. Resilience, compassion, and SDGs. Three.

So, for me, before I do a community extension activity or spearhead a community extension activity, what I do is, I anchor it with the values, the core values. Does it match with the core values? Is it resilience? Is it compassion?

If yes, then I'll proceed. Is there an SDG that fits? If yes, then I'll proceed.

It's like a flowchart. I need to anchor NU's core values and at the same time, SDGs. Medyo critical si NU Philippines sa SDGs.

Not majority, but all activities that will be spearheaded by all NU campuses must be anchored with an SDG. At least three.

Interviewer:

That's required?

Participant:

Required. At least three SDGs.

Interviewer:

Three SDGs? Do you also consider the needs of your target beneficiaries or what as part of your conceptualization?

Participant:

That depends on whether or not the beneficiary needs a Community Needs Assessment.

If a beneficiary has established that the need is present, if they know what they can benefit from, they can proceed. But if there's a need for a Community Needs Assessment, we go there prior to the activity. We do CNAs, we assess, we coordinate with people who are in charge of those heads of communities or public schools.

Then from there, we can check what specific activity will be done. But for example, for blood donations, that's automatic.

Interviewer:

There will be people who will need it.

Participant:

Yes. For book donation as well. For school supplies.

I personally do not I think, I personally do not need to think if there will be benefits for the beneficiaries. Because I feel like that's constant.

Interviewer:

It's obvious.

Participant:

It's already present. But we have activities, sir. Let me just say this.

One of our college or department-driven activities, we're in a department, spearheads this. They have a Community Needs Assessment. Or they have a Community Needs Assessment because one of the schools Okay.

Almanza Elementary School asked, Can you train the faculty? Because the schools now are inclusive. So I want to be safe.

Children with special and inclusive needs are now included in the regular curriculum. And people, faculty, teachers in the school or the beneficiary na nakausap namin are not 100% versed or trained sa isang special and inclusive classroom. So yun yung ginawang Community Extension Activity or CSR. Ang mga speakers, inside lang din. Guidance counselors, psychometricians, to ensure na matuto yung faculty member ng beneficiary.

Interviewer:

I see. So that's one of the places wherein you still had to do a community needs analysis?

Participant:

Yes, sir.

Interviewer:

But based on what you said, whether the need is obvious or you have to probe into the need, it appears to me that the community extension programs of NU, you always see to it that it would be relevant to the needs, whether it's already obviously relevant in the first place, or you make sure if it's not obvious but you conduct your CNA in order to know that it will be relevant to the beneficiaries.

Participant:

Yes, sir. Kasi for me, as the coordinator of community extension, all efforts will be wasted, all resources will be wasted, time, pinakamahalaga, will be wasted because if hindi makakasagot sa isang pangangailangan, masasayang po lahat ng efforts, kung hindi.

Interviewer:

How do you think the Gen Z stakeholders, whether your students or people in the community, how do you think the Gen Zs view that, and you make sure that CSR or community extension programs are all relevant or should be relevant to them?

Participant:

What do they think?

Interviewer:

How do they feel? What's their reaction?

Participant

What's their reaction? One of these stakeholders, in particular the barangay, were ecstatic, glad, happy to know that NU is here. I don't know if it's because we paid the permit, but when NU opened, the president of NU Philippines was here, when NU Las Piñas opened here in South Mall, NU Philippines president was here, barangay captain was also here, in-invite.

President NU Philippines and barangay captain talked, saying that whatever you need, just ask. President NU asked, whatever you need, just ask. So the barangay was happy.

How do I know this? Because every time I go there, I feel like I'm the king of Brunei.

Interviewer:

Celebrity ka doon.

Participant:

Yes, sir. Hindi ako kilala pero pag nakita ID lace ko, or pag nalaman na NU Las Piñas ako, special treatment because they know we'll help them.

Because they know, when they need, they can just ask. And if there's a way for us to help, we'll help. That's the promise of the president.

We have to follow. We're anchoring on the core values there. So to answer your question, they're happy.

Interviewer:

Do you think the happiness or the joy that they feel, the barangay officials, do you think that's shared among the Gen Zs also? Do the Gen Zs also feel that way?

Participant:

How do I explain this?

Somehow, not somehow, yes, I also feel that. Because, by the way, Gen Zs. What I meant with barangay, sir, not just the barangay officials, but also the SK.

Interviewer:

Ah, the SK.

Participant:

Because we coordinate with both of them. Actually, sir, we already have a memorandum of agreement with all SKs in Las Piñas.

So if you want to focus on that so much, it's okay with me.

Interviewer:

What does the MOA generally say? That it's a mutual agreement.

When we need the help of SK, they will be, as much as they can, they will help. That's how it is. In your community extension program?

Not just community extension, sir. With internships, with... What we did, sir, was across the board.

Everything that's needed. I don't remember. It's like a partnership.

It's like a partnership, sir. With SK Federation of Las Piñas. So we have members from all...

Not members, we have all the barangay... We have all the SK chairmen of each of the barangays in Las Piñas City. Here, in partnership, in writing.

Interviewer

I see. Okay. Related to that also, maybe partially this was already answered, but just the same, you may have something else.

I don't know. Which of these, whether brand elements, marketing mix, or community extension programs, which of these... Or can you cite specific ones that tend to support or tend to enhance in the minds of the Gen Z, to enhance the brand authenticity of NU?

And which, if there are, which did you find out that this one is more or less on the negative side? Probably elicits a feeling of inauthenticity on the side of Gen Z. So either side, the positive and the negative, whether it enhances authenticity or inauthenticity feelings among the Gen Zs, which among those brand elements, or marketing mix, or community extension programs, or other actions of the school, of the brand, would either contribute to authenticity or inauthenticity.

Participant:

I want to highlight, sir, the promotion and... CSR, or Community Extension Activities. What I do, sir, personally, what I do, after each event, I'll go to the marketing office and tell them to post it on FB.

Pinapa-post ko, because what I want the public, all the stakeholders who have influence on NU Las Piñas, I want them to know that we do this. We are just, I think you will agree with me, sir, that as a new product, as much as possible, all the good things, show it. All the...All the things that you do, as much as possible, you share it with the public.

So for me, what I did, what I am doing is every after activity, every after the success of each activity, I talk to the marketing department and tell them, for your approval, this is for posting. So they upload all my community extension activities, and NSTP activities, because NSTP is pagtulong din.

So, that's what we do. So, I think it has a relationship, the promotion and the community extension activities.

Interviewer:

And you think that, well, how do you know that, because there are times when organizations publicize their CSR, and their promotions, but not all the time, Gen Zs perceive them as, you know, true or authentic.

I mean, not as in, I'm not saying that certain projects are fake or what, but, you know, the way they feel, because sometimes there are reactions for businesses. If the brand is overexposed, or, you know, it works, it's like a double-edged sword. Too much promotions, may result into inauthenticity, or too little may also...

How do you know, and how do you optimize? How do you know that these actions will help enhance the perception of brand authenticity among the public, especially the Gen-Zs?

Participant:

Maybe because, sir, the way I see it, community extension activities, if successfully done, and no agenda is behind it.

The way I see it, it's authentic. But the thing is, I'm speaking on behalf of the office. That's it.

Participant:

It's a difficult question, sir, because how can I assure or guarantee that these activities are perceived as authentic? Perhaps what I can answer, sir, or share with you, we have a stakeholder evaluation survey, or a stakeholder satisfaction survey, wherein all stakeholders were asked, or are asked, about their experience with an office. Because, sir, all offices are in that survey.

Perhaps, just to share with you, there's a positive response from that survey in the community extension office. Because there are different offices. There's a positive response, although it's a quantitative research.

So I can't say if it's perceived as authentic. But in this context, I would like to answer by saying that the positive responses of that quantitative research might be similar to the authenticity that they are perceiving NU Las Piñas has.

Interviewer:

Might be an indicator?

Participant:

Might be an indicator. Because in that survey, sir, wala yung authenticity.

Interviewer:

Who are the respondents of that survey?

Participant

All stakeholders, sir.

Parents, partners, LGU, Okay, let's go to the community extension. Quick to cite, the Philippine Red Cross, the Almanza Elementary School, a public school, the local government unit, which is the barangay. In this context, the barangay and the SK, the SK Federation, which is all the SK in the Philippines, or rather in Las Piñas, maybe in that context, those are the participants.

But other factors…because in other offices, I won't go there anymore because it's not important for the office yung other parts of the research.

Interviewer:

Okay. Can you cite a situation or an experience in the past or maybe present when one of your actions, whether it's a decision about a brand element, a marketing mix, or the community extension programs, can you cite an instance wherein an action unexpectedly affected the stakeholders, especially the Gen Z, their perception of authenticity about NU, about the office, which you were not expecting that kind of reaction from them, but it turned out that they had that kind of reaction, whether positive or negative?

Participant:

There was one community extension activity, sir, now this is a college or department-driven activity wherein, not in partnership, with the help of the students of a department, they, we organized an activity wherein we gave food packs to jeepney drivers because gasoline prices increased, right? So we thought of creating a very small community extension activity for them.

As much as possible, we do not give money. So what they did, what we did is that we decided to go with food packs. So we gave food packs sa tapat ng barangay mismo, sir, to the jeepney driver.

Interviewer:

As they pass by?

Participant:

As they pass by. That's one of the activities.

To answer your question, sir, there was an unexpected amount of response in the context of hearing appreciations from other campuses saying that, it's cute, it's

beautiful, it's nice that you thought of jeepney drivers that you created activities for jeepney drivers because it's not a one-day thing, it's like two days. But I participated in the latter part. So, the response was unexpected.

I knew that there would be responses, but I didn't know that other campuses would say that those responses to us, it's good, it's beautiful, it's cute, I don't know. Those are the adjectives that they said to describe the activity. So that's it, sir.

Interviewer:

How did your students, your own students, how did your own students react to that effort?

Participant:

How did they react to the reaction? Or how did they react to the efforts?

Interviewer:

How did they react to the project?

Interviewer:

Sir, the kids there, if they feel involved, they feel satisfied because in any response, these students, they feel happy when they are involved in activities of community extension.

Interviewer:

So they were part of those distributing the food?

Participant:

Sir, 75-80% of the time they are the ones who distribute. Isang beses lang ako nag-abot. Kasi I want them to experience it.

Interviewer:

Okay. This one in general, how do the Gen Zs, your students and other Gen Zs stakeholders, in your experience with NU, how do they express, typically express or communicate their perceptions of authenticity or inauthenticity about the brand?

Participant:

Gen Zs are verbal, opinionated even.

Interviewer:

Can you cite some specific ways how they communicate how they feel?

Participant:

In general, we have online teachers evaluation.

So they evaluate the faculty. They're also included in the stakeholder satisfaction survey. What else?

There's an online group of NU Las Piñas online community that I'm not a part of. They express their feelings and thoughts there. I'm not a part of that so I cannot really be.

Interviewer:

That's a Facebook group?

Participant:

Facebook group or page. I think it's a group.

I've been hearing stories of students expressing their thoughts there. But I don't know personally because I'm not involved or I'm not part of the community.

Interviewer:

How does the organization interpret or how do they react to those feedback that they get whether from the surveys or from the online groups or elsewhere?

Participant:

I don't know if my answer will be applicable to other NU campuses.

But for NU Las Piñas, they take it very seriously. All the comments, especially qualitative ones, they take it seriously.

Whatever comment it is, they especially if it's a negative one, they try to resolve it as early as they can. Yes.

Interviewer:

And then, does it trigger any kind of adjustments or changes in the way the school does things or some policies perhaps or rules or what?

Can you cite an example where there was a change in adjustments in probably the rules or strategies or efforts as a result of getting feedback from these stakeholders?

Participant:

Maybe, sir, improvement of the construction or creation.

We have, very recently, we were discussed about the AI usage of all stakeholders of NU Las Piñas. I personally know that this addresses the issue of the usage of AI of the stakeholders. That's why a manual, a policy like was drafted for NU Las Piñas because NU Philippines doesn't have a policy yet.

So, NU Las Piñas is trying to create its own but if the policy of NU Philippines will be done, that will be adopted. But if there's still something missing, the original will still be used, it's something like that. It's the answer to the issues of AI usage of employees and students.

Especially with research outputs, with assignments, with projects because as much as possible, here at NU Las Piñas, we embrace AI but to a certain extent. That's why we're making a policy.

Interviewer:

How do you think the use of AI affects the perception of authenticity for the school or NU Las Piñas?

Participant:

As I've mentioned earlier, sir, NU Las Piñas was initially created for it to be a computer school. So, AI is very relevant, very trendy, very I think majority of people in the Gen Zs I'm claiming it majority of us are familiar with this so if NU is embracing AI and not shying away from it, it might give a good perception to the customers that they're different though. They're different from other schools that shy away from AI because they're embracing it but to a certain extent, of course.

We do not copy and paste. That's a no-no. That's a big no-no.

But if embracing AI, we have partners of we have partners who cater to AI particularly in the Philippines, sir. That's how NU Las Piñas embraces AI. And I would like to assume that it brings a good connotation to its customers that Gen Zs that Gen Z customers that it really is a computer school.

It's as authentic as it can be in the context of staying true to its core that it's a computer school so it should be versed in AI. It should be knowledgeable in AI, not afraid of AI. Other schools are scared of AI.

Interviewer:

Can you cite a particular use of AI that would somehow influence the perception of people that are leaning towards inauthenticity of the school on the negative side? That's hard. I thought it was authenticity.

Interviewer:

Well, both sides.

Participant:

Yeah, right. Inauthenticity.

I don't know, sir. Because sometimes I get the point of other people saying that AI well, I personally think AI limits individuality. That's why I don't allow AI to be used in my class requirements.

Because of the loss of the sense of self in the paper that's just it, sir. Actually, that's a good thing. Nawawala yung individuality for AI, for me, sa mga gawa ng estudyante.

Perhaps that can be an avenue for inauthenticity… nawawala ako sa train of thought. Perhaps pwedeng isipin ng tao, ng customers, ng Gen Z customers na hindi ito original. Hindi na gawang NU yung outputs na yan kasi AI yan. Pwedeng ganun. .

Pwedeng computer-generated, AI-generated na yung outputs kasi they're embracing AI already. That's how I think.

Interviewer:

On the other side, what specific use of AI would enhance the authenticity perceptions about the school?

Participant:

We have one partner, sir. An AI platform that allows us to that allows us to enter or input the transcriptions of all the qualitative data that we have gathered (in the stakeholder evaluation). Then the AI will do the thematic analysis.

It's in the Philippines, sir. Diwa AI is the name of the company.

You just enter it, sir. Then Diwa AI will do the thematic analysis. You can still, of course, screen but it will look for similarities and then gather relevant data from all of those answers. Then Diwa AI will do it. I think that's a good thing.

Interviewer:

Okay. Going into other general questions. How would you describe the ongoing interaction between the school, your office, as well with the Gen Zs, whether the students or other Gen Z stakeholders, in that how would you describe as they as they interact, what counts as authentic, you know, in quotation marks?

As they interact as the school interacts with Gen Zs, have you observed or how would you describe them? How do the two, through their interaction, negotiate what counts as authentic and what counts as not?

Participant:

Naku, baka mamaya kakainin ko yung sinabi ko kanina. But I think the human factor must be present when interactions are needed. Because especially with partners, the human touch is still better. The human touch factor how… would I explain sir. For me personally, a face-to-face conversation is better than a voice call or leaving a message on social media platforms.

Because there's the human touch we are Filipinos we're very welcoming I think that's where authenticity comes in or might come in the human factor wherein you express what you want to say and tell it personally and that's what I do. I communicate with them personally if you need to e-mail go e-mail but if not, I would go there sir I would knock on their doors literally sir I would knock on the doors of the principal of Almanza Elementary School. Ma'am I am (name withheld) from NU Las, Piñas the Community Extension Coordinator and NSTP Coordinator. We would like to extend our help to you that's how it is because you can feel the sincerity, you can feel the genuineness of a person when they do that especially for community extension activities because I for one would like to do it the same way too and I would feel that the other person is sincere if they're making efforts.

Interviewer:
So you also, you also personally get in touch with the SK, each SK chairman perhaps or what?

Participant:
Not all the time not all the time but yes sir yes I have…

Interviewer:
But when there's the need to coordinate?

Participant:
Yes sir. I would go to barangay halls I would go to basketball courts to coordinate with their celebration of the youth week, Linggo ng Kabataan, Araw ng Kabataan I would go there to talk to them prior to that activity.

Interviewer:
And they appreciate it as being authentic on the part of the school?

Participant:
Yes sir. Thank you very much for coming, we truly appreciate it, talagang pumunta pa kayo. Again, this is non-verbatim hindi ito mismo yung sinabi nila but it runs along those lines na talagang nag-effort ang school ninyo to extend your help syempre hindi naman ako yung pumunta doon alone. I bring with me the name of the university. So that's how they see it talagang pumunta pa kayo kahit traffic, kahit Sabado, kahit Linggo.

Interviewer:
In what ways do you think or have you observed that Gen Zs influence, how the school understands and acts or implements its efforts towards being authentic? How do you, have you observed how, is there an influence or do Gen Zs influence have an influence

on the way the school understands or perceives and comes up with its efforts to become more authentic?

Participants:

Yes sir, kasi sila yung direct customers namin.

Interviewer:

In what ways is the school influenced to make efforts to become authentic?

Participant:

Again sir, staying true to the core, staying true to the values of NU, we communicate to them, we ask for their inputs and as much as possible, without stepping on some parts of the manual, of the handbook, looking at all of those things, we try to integrate what they need, what they want, what they feel they need, what they feel they want in the things that we do na hindi nakakaapak ng values, hindi nakakaapak ng lines ng manual and the handbook. Kasi nandun pa rin, it's the constitution of the university, the manual and the handbook.

So dapat walang tinatamaan dun. If there is no problem with that, we are open to comments, suggestions, recommendations.

Interviewer:

In the context of NU and its interaction with Gen Z stakeholders, would you say that brand authenticity is something that is enacted?

Or something that is… okay and… do this because I do this, the brand is authentic? Or is it something that's negotiated between the brand and the stakeholders or Gen Z?

Participant:

Sorry sir, pa-elaborate.

Interviewer:

Let me go through that again. Based on the context of NU Las Piñas and what you have mentioned, the answers you have given earlier, would you say that brand authenticity is like a fixed attribute that when an organization or NU Las Piñas does this, automatically okay we are authentic? Or the other side is, is it something that is negotiated?

Not really negotiated directly but indirectly negotiated through the interaction. For example, the organization comes up with an effort or a communication and then the

Gen Z stakeholders react and based on that reaction, the school will respond again and it will trigger another response from them and as they respond to each other's reactions, then it gives rise or that determines what level of authenticity or inauthenticity is being perceived in the process. So is it something that if you do this strategy, automatically you become authentic?

Or is it something that is negotiated, in quotation marks, through the interactions between the two parties - the brand and the consumers or stakeholders?

Participant:

To answer your question sir, I think both. But what bears the most weight would be the latter.

The university, NU Las Piñas is, again as I have mentioned, open to comments, suggestions, violent reactions even, recommendations from stakeholders, especially to its customers, from the smallest detail to the biggest detail that I can think of. For as long as it's negotiable, I think, and I know that we are open to that. Because if communication is per se, and it enables a higher level of authenticity, I think that's better.

Because it's a two-way street. Not only NU Las Piñas will benefit but also its customers. But at the same time, there are factors wherein I have to consider enacting something for it to be perceived as authentic.

Again, sir, to anchor on the manual or the handbook.

Interviewer:

Guided by the handbook?

Participant:

Because there will always be issues, there will always be challenges that we must not go back and forth.

There's no need for us to communicate further to be authentic. Because the handbook tells us that this is this, this is that. For example, as an educator, this is my problem, sir.

The maximum number of absences in NU is six. So, the students kept on telling me: sir, sige na isang absence lang ang sobra ko. Where do I go? Do I communicate with the students? Okay, fine, I'll allow it. Just give me an excuse letter and I'll go.

Because we are compassionate. That's one of the core values of NU - Compassion. But the handbook tells us...

Interviewer:

Otherwise.

Participant:

…otherwise. The maximum number of absences exists regardless of the reason, sir. There are no such thing as excuse absences. So, there's a juggle.

That's the issue, sir. But to answer your question, perhaps the latter. Mas maganda yung natalbog yung communication - Negotiation. I hope I answered your question, sir.

Interviewer:

Yes, yes, of course. There's no right or wrong answer here.

Participant:

Hindi, kasi baka ganito yung tanong mo sir, tapos gumanun ako.

Interviewer:

No. That's why we have follow-up questions. To clarify some things.

Going back. This is, we're now heading towards the last few questions.

Now, looking back. Is there something or what have the Gen Z stakeholders taught you and your brand about authenticity? Or are there realizations that you have encountered along the way, somehow triggered by, through the interaction with the Gen Z, ah ganoon pala yun, that you did not initially think or anticipate.

Realizations, aha moments. About brand authenticity or about the authenticity of your efforts, of your office, of NU Las Piñas. And NU by itself.

Participant:

Ano, sir. Embracing the culture of Gen Z. I don't know, sir, if you're familiar with the famous, they have terms, Gen Z terms, they have memes.

Personally, what it taught me is to be, is to adapt to them. To their voice.

Interviewer:

You're a Gen Z yourself, right?

Participant:

Sorry, speaking on behalf of NU. You have to adapt to them in the context of promotion-wise.

There's one issue, sir. Vice Ganda is famous for the movie Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy, Tomboy, Tomboy. Then gumawa yung isang department ng meme about Vice Ganda and Vice Ganda's character in that movie.

Naging talk of the town siya sa NU Las Piñas because, sir, there were a lot of noise, a lot of reactions.

Interviewer:

Online?

Participant:

Literal reactions, sir. Data Privacy Office entered the scene. Saying that we must be careful.

Because this is a character portrayed by a person. Which is owned by Star Cinema. That's their issue.

Personally, what I learned from that specific moment is to embrace the tone, the voice, the culture of Gen Z. Because if we retract that, then we'll have to release a new one to attract customers. Where will authenticity come in?

Where will the sincerity come in if we release memes like that, then at the end of the day, ibang memes na naman.

Because there are student-led organizations. They have posts that are being removed by the DPO or the Data Privacy Office because of such things.

To answer your question, perhaps what it taught the company and the organization is to embrace Gen Zs culture. Because they are the heart and soul of the university.

They are the students, they are the customers.

Interviewer:

I see. Now, if you were advising another brand, another organization, whose target customers are Gen Zs, what would you say about how brand authenticity emerges through communication and interaction in practice?

Or would you rather tell them it is planned, something that is planned? Or is it something that emerges through the communication? What would you advise to other organizations that are targeting Gen Zs customers with regards to brand authenticity?

Participant:

Don't stick to what is the traditional. Don't stick with what is usual for the company. If there is a need for you to change your ways so that our message can be spread across.

Because if we are limited to what we want to release. For example, sir, I don't know if you are familiar with Angkas motor taxi.

Their posts on social media, they post satire posts. Comedic posts even. Personally, the way I see it, sir, it's a company that must promote safety. Or is promoting safety.

But they post funny posts, comedic posts that are not related to safety per se.

Interview:

With their values?

Participant:

With their values. But it's clicking. It sparks conversations. Pumapatok. That leads me back to the question. Don't stick to the usual mode of communication.

Because for me, communication is changing. It adapts. It's evolving.

Nagbabago siya. So again, don't stick to just the traditional ones. Try to put yourself in the waters of the new generation. Baka mas pumatok. Especially if their customers are Gen Z.

Interviewer:

Let me just clarify. Your advice to other organizations or brands that are targeting Gen Z would be, do not stick to the traditional embrace change.

What would you tell them? What would you advise them? Where would they base the change?

What would be their basis of changing the way they communicate?

Participant:

Two, sir. Trends and research.

In social media here in the Philippines, I would like to assume that trends can easily be assessed. It can easily be checked. It's easy to see trends now, especially in Gen Z.

It's easy for them to see trends. What's funny? What sparked their interest?

It's easy for them to see. So try to look into trends or research.

Interviewer:

Research about what?

Participant:

Research about consumer behavior. Ano na ba ang gusto ng Gen Zs ngayon? Do they no longer want this type of measure? Dito na ba sila sa measure na ito? Or medium, for example. They do not go for the traditional radio, TV.

Because now they are more on gadgets like cellphones. I might be wrong. Let's look into research or they must look into research.

Maybe they are just on social media. Or they do not do print anymore.

Maybe they're no longer into brochures. Maybe they no longer have pamphlets. Maybe hindi na pumapatok ang direct marketing emails for younger Gen Zs. Baka for older Gen Zs siya. Mga ganoon siya, sir.

Interviewer:

I see. Okay, I think you have... Yes, of course.

I think you have shared a lot of insights. And thank you very much for participating, (name withheld).

Participant:

It's an honor.

Interviewer:

I know your answers would greatly enrich the findings of this study. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX D

Transcript of In-Depth Interview 4

Date of Interview: May 20, 2026

Time of Interview: 10:00AM

Duration of Interview: 47 minutes

Place of Interview: Online via Google Meet

Name of Participant: NAME WITHHELD

Brands Handled/Worked for Coca-Cola and Gardenia

Interviewer:
Okay, good morning (name withheld). Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research interview regarding brand authenticity. Can you give a little background first about the brands that you have experienced handling in terms of brand communication as well as also the role that you performed for those brands?

If there are a lot, maybe you can just name several of them. Go ahead.

Participant:

So, I worked for brands like Coca-Cola, Gardenia, and then a few Nestle chocolate brands, and then Dieting Mom, which is a dishwashing liquid brand also, and then Karcher, which is vacuum cleaners products for that brand. So, my role specifically is account executive for those brands, and then what I do is I interact with the brand side. So, those from the brands will tell us what they want to do in terms of advertising or what they want to put up in the banners or the discounts they want to implement on our online platforms.

Interviewer:

So, basically, it's really an ad agency that you're working for, and basically, the service of the ad agency is to perform some of the brand communication functions for the brands themselves. Am I correct?

Participant:

Yes, correct.

Interviewer:

Okay. Now, let me go to the main questions. From your perspective, how do you make sense or how do you perceive brand authenticity in the context of the brands that you handle in terms of their everyday communication practices, especially with Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

We make sense of brand authenticity in such a way that what we communicate across our ads or our platforms are consistent with what we offer. So, the discounts, the callouts, and then the banners or the graphics should be consistent with what the consumers can see and purchase.

Interviewer:

Okay. Consistency, basically. Can you somehow cite a situation, recall a situation, where in any of your brand's communicative actions were interpreted by the Gen Z audience, Gen Z consumers, as either authentic or inauthentic, as far as you can remember, in any situation?

And then, in that situation, what happened? How did you and your team respond or react to that situation?

Participant:

So, in my previous role in the e-commerce enabler, for Coca-Cola, we had this campaign that upon purchasing of Coke Original and Coke Zero, pack of 6 and pack of 12, the consumers will get a freebie, a customized bottle. So, if I may specifically state, it's the Share a Coke campaign, if you're familiar with it. So, that's where there’s a name on the bottle, that's free.

And then, what happened is, in a specific platform, we weren't able to set up properly the freebie. So, there were consumers who weren't able to get a free item. So, what we did with that is, we tracked all the orders that complained because a lot of them complained.

And then, we sent each of them the missing item that they didn't receive.

Interviewer:

So, do you think the consumers viewed the mistake as something that diminishes their perception of authenticity on the part of the brand?

Participant:

Siguro po na in the sense that what was communicated through the platform, hindi nasunod so nagkaroon sila ng doubts about sa authenticity na parang bakit mali yung nakalagay dito, di naman naming na-receive yung free item.

Interviewer:

But when you tried to remedy the situation by, as you said, sending the missing items, do you think the brand was able to recover in the perception of the consumers in terms of their perception of authenticity?

Participant:

I guess so. Since they were able to recover the item that they didn't receive. But I think that the situation should be looked at properly because it's hard to have misleading communication on the platform with the consumers.

Interviewer:

I see. So, basically, are you saying that if it could be avoided, the mistake like that, it would be better than remedying the situation? So, it would be better to do it right the first time?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Okay. Now, let's proceed to brand elements. As you know, brand elements include the brand names, the logos, the symbols, the characters, even the slogans, or even the unique packaging characteristics of a particular brand.

How do these brand elements function as communicative forms through which Gen Z perceives or interprets the brand authenticity of the brand that you're handling? In other words, how do these brand elements influence the Gen Zs perception of brand authenticity?

Participant:

So, for brand elements, they are mostly visual elements. For Gen Zs like me, I think we're very visual people. So, when we see logos that are familiar or symbols that are

consistent, we already associate them somehow with authenticity because we rely on these brand elements because they embody the identity of the brand.

So, those elements need to be consistent. And then, when regularly we see them, that's the sign or signal that the brand is authentic.

Interviewer:

On your part, whether your part as the e-commerce enabler or the part of the ad agency, or even the part of your client, how does your team, basically you're working like a team, right? So, how does your team conceptualize and enact or implement these brand elements as a main part of the brand's communication efforts with the Gen Z consumers? So, how do you conceptualize this and implement the brand elements?

Participant:

For the brand elements, we can't really touch the logos because they are on the brand's side. But what we can do usually is, in our ads or store visuals online, we usually use colors, words that are associated with the brand. So, when you automatically see these colors or visual elements, you'll think, ah, this is for Coca-Cola or for Gardenia.

Interviewer:

So, what are the colors for Coca-Cola and for Gardenia?

Participant:

Actually, sir, their both are red. And then for Gardenia, there's also yellow. Ah, yellow.

I mean, dark blue.

Interviewer:

What about campaign slogans? Have you observed how campaign slogans are conceptualized by your team?

Participant:

By our team, usually for the e-commerce platforms, we still use slogans. We just make it so that every campaign slogan is related. It's not like we mix them up.

It's like, what do you call this? It's like they are similar to each other. But they are still different.

But when you read our slogans, it's like there are similarities to our other slogans.

Interviewer:

Why do you design it that way? That they are interrelated or they match each other? Or people will get a feel that one slogan is pretty much connected to another?

Why do you design it that way? Why not different slogans altogether?

Participant:

I think it's because of the familiarity or the sounding of the brand's identity. The brand's identity becomes more associated with the slogan.

Interviewer:

Do you think that has an effect on the perception of brand authenticity on the part of the audience?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

How? You can put yourself in their shoes also. You're a Gen Z.

Participant:

For me, I recall the slogans when they are similar. Because sometimes, when the slogans are so different from the previous slogans used, it's like it's so far from the brand. That's how I perceive it.

Interviewer:

Okay. Based on your experience in those several brands that you've handled, can you cite a particular brand element perhaps that tend to support the understanding of authenticity? Or on the other side, that tend to pose as a challenge in terms of authenticity from the perception of the Gen Z consumers? In other words, can you probably relate here the particular brand element that either helped in getting the

positive perception or negative perception, on the other side, of the Gen Z consumers in terms of authenticity of the brand?

Participant:

For this one, the specific one that I can state is Coca-Cola. Their logo and symbol is very… Even if we can't see it, we can already imagine what it looks like.

Their logo is familiar to the Gen Z with that. I think that's what shows authenticity. And then, for the element that could raise questions or challenges, I think it's the packaging.

Because in my experience, there are a lot of people who complain in terms of packaging. Because sometimes, the cans or bottles get damaged. That's the side that shows that there's a problem.

Interviewer:

I see. Now, you of course encounter the reactions of the Gen Z consumers, right? How do you or your team interpret or make sense of their reactions to the brand elements that they're exposed to?

Whether in the physical realm or in cyberspace or in social media when they see the brand elements. So, how do you make sense or how do you interpret the reactions of the Gen Zs towards the brand elements?

Participant:

Usually, the reactions we get are through comments and then feedback. There's also a livestream of our brands. So, we observe what they're saying through the comments and then how they engage through the livestream.

Also, the reviews of the products after they purchase the products.

Interviewer:

So, what do you do about the comments? How do you perceive them and how do you react to them?

Participant:

Usually, our team collects comments. When we see a comment that is repeated many times, we focus on what we can suggest to the brand. Maybe next time, we can adjust these things in terms of packaging.

Because we receive a lot of complaints. So, that's what we do.

Interviewer:

What about the campaigns? Do you also make adjustments to the next campaign as influenced by some comments, perhaps?

Participant:

Yes, always.

Interviewer:

Can you probably cite an instance when a comment influenced your next campaign or your future campaign?

Participant:

Campaigns.

Interviewer:

Or even slogans? Are there comments that influenced what you do for the brand?

Participant:

Mostly, the comments we receive are from complaints. For example, I remember there was a campaign where there was a free item. It's like a card that when you scan the QR code, you'll get a free reward in an online game.

Then, there was a time when the QR code could not be scanned successfully. So, we had to adjust the QR code that was posted. I see.

Interviewer:

Can you describe a time when a particular brand element, or slogan, or what, unexpectedly affected the perceptions of the Gen Zs about brand authenticity? Meaning, you didn't expect their reaction to be like that. But it turned out that the consumers came up with a different reaction other than what you expected.

Participant:

I think this one is... I remember an instance where there was a reaction to our packaging of Sprite. There was a slight change in the packaging of the Sprite bottle.

Before, the word Sprite was small and there were a few other elements. Now, the updated logo is much bigger on the bottle. Then, we noticed that there was a difference.

So, we were asked if the products were authentic. The packaging of Sprite was different on the website, but they received the old packaging. That's the instance I remember.

Interviewer:

I see. So, how did you remedy the situation? Those who were doubting?

Participant:

Since they already received it, our customer service team answered their questions and explained that it was just a revamped logo. We assured them that the products were authentic. Since it was an official store, that was in Shopee.

Interviewer:

I see. Do you recall... Similar to the questions that we asked about brand elements, what about Gardenia?

Is there something that struck your memory about how brand elements of Gardenia are perceived by the Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

For Gardenia, there's not much. For me, Gen Z considers Gardenia as a pioneer brand of bread products. In my experience, we don't receive negative feedback from Gardenia.

Interviewer:

But in terms of positive, you said the Gen Z perceives Gardenia as a pioneer brand in terms of manufactured bread, right? Do you think that brand image of Gardenia in the minds of the Gen Z contributes to the perception of brand authenticity of the brand? From the point of view of Gen Z?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Why do you say so? As a Gen Z yourself, how does it contribute to your perception that Gardenia is authentic, having the brand image of being a pioneer brand?

Participant:

For me, I grew up with Gardenia. When I was working for them, I saw their factory that we went to. Also, what they communicate in the ads is more on family, so I think it gives us a sense of authenticity.

I see.

Interviewer:

I noticed you mentioned that you went to Gardenia's factory?

Participant:

Yes, the plant in Laguna, the commissary.

Interviewer:

I've also heard from other JMCs that it's like a usual destination for school field trips, right?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

So, does that have an effect on the perception of Gen Zs about the authenticity of Gardenia? The fact that they were exposed there because of the school field trips?

Participant:

Yes, because I feel that when kids are exposed to that, it's instilled in their minds. Like, oh, this is how Gardenia bread is made. So, the brand becomes more authentic in our perception.

Interviewer:

I see. Okay, let's now move on to a parallel set of questions. Previously, we talked about brand elements as communicative forms as part of the brand's communication.

Now, well, parallel to that is the marketing mix strategies as also part of the ongoing communication of the brand with the Gen Z consumers. Now, when we say marketing mix, I'm sure you're very much familiar as a marketing person yourself that this comprises of product price, place or distribution, promotions, also for tangible goods and for service businesses, you have the additional people, process, and physical environment strategies. Now, same question as in the brand.

Same question as in the brand. In your experience, how does the marketing mix of the brands that you've handled, how did the marketing mix perform their role as part of the ongoing communication with the Gen Zs in relation, of course, with brand authenticity?

Does the marketing mix have a role in communicating with the Gen Zs, especially when it comes to eliciting the perception of brand authenticity?

Participant:

Yes, I believe there is a role of the marketing mix. For example, in the product elements of packaging, they suggest product quality, consistency, pricing, fairness, and distribution methods like in our online and offline. They suggest convenience and accessibility.

I think they're all essential parts of brand authenticity.

Interviewer:

Well, including promotions.

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

How do the promotions communicate brand authenticity in terms of promotions?

Participant:

I think it's more on consistency in terms of what the brand should offer, what the promotion itself is, and what the consumers should get.

Interviewer:

I see. How does your team or maybe your team as an ad agency or the e-commerce platform or even the team of the brand itself, have you observed how does that entire team conceptualize and come up with the marketing mix strategies to be part of the communication tools of the brand with the Gen Zs?

How do you conceptualize?

Participant:

On our end, the original prices or the packaging is decided by the brand itself. We don't really decide on that. Mostly, our part is the discounts and the changes to our platforms.

We're in charge of the promotions and we're in charge of the warehousing and delivering food to the customers. That's how we handle the marketing mix of the brand.

Interviewer:

So somehow you have the influence on the price, on the handling of the products, but not the product design itself, right?

Participant:

Yes, sir.

Interviewer:

And then the distribution and the promotions?

Participant:

Yes, sir.

Interviewer:

Where do you base, for those that are within your control, where do you base your decisions or how do you conceptualize what you will do about the promotions, what you will do about the pricing or the distribution platform? How do you conceptualize those marketing elements, marketing mix elements that you have control over?

Participant:

For the price, every month, there is a guidebook that the brand gives us that we have to follow. So, every campaign, for example, 6-6, 12-12, it is already stated the price of each product in the store. So, that is what we follow every month that it is already set up there.

Usually, they are the ones who decide and then we follow.

Interviewer:

So, basically, it's the promotions that you have more or less a more control or more influence over in the promotions and decisions?

Participant:

Yes, sir.

Interviewer:

I see. And I think those are the ones that you discussed earlier, right?

Participant

Yes, sir.

In the previous questions also, we touched on that. Okay. How do you observe, this time, similar question, but pertaining to the marketing mix elements.

How do you observe the Gen Zs reactions towards the marketing mix elements or changes in the marketing mix elements of the brand? And how do you perceive their reactions?

Participant:

Usually, we have this. For example, we have a livestream. Every 6-6 or 12-12, we have a livestream that we do to sell Coca-Cola products.

So, after that, we have this analysis that we do. Which products are mostly being bought? Like the top SKUs and then the least bought.

And then, we also monitor the comments. Like what the Gen Zs are saying. If the prices of some other SKUs are still expensive.

And then, that's it. Yes, that's more or less what we do. So, every time we have a campaign, we always have an analysis of what we do.

Interviewer:

Their reactions? You always analyze their reactions?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Can you recall a time wherein one element of the marketing mix surprisingly came up with a different reaction from the Gen Z consumers regarding brand authenticity other than what you expected?

You didn't expect that their reaction would be like that towards a particular marketing mix element.

Participant:

Before, this one is regarding place or distribution. So, for our TikTok, its name is different. So, if I can specifically state, it's not Coca-Cola official store but it was a Drinks Corner.

So, a lot of people were questioning if our products are authentic because it's not under the Coca-Cola name. I'm not sure why they didn't want to be under Coca-Cola on TikTok before. But I know that now, the official name of the TikTok shop is Coca-Cola.

But before, the name was different. So, that's where the questions about authenticity arose at that time.

Interviewer:

Okay. So, eventually, the brand was changed to the official store of Coca-Cola?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

The following questions now are, more or less, in general although still related to the brands that you're handling.

How do Gen Z consumers typically express or communicate their perceptions of authenticity or inauthenticity in response to the brand's actions?

Participant:

Usually, what we get is comments and then feedback. Usually, it's engagement on the livestream because that's where we get the real-time feedback. So, that's where they communicate their perceptions in terms of our brand.

Interviewer:

Can you recall some of the memorable comments that you've encountered in the livestream?

Participant:

In the livestream, what do I recall? What I recall is positive. They said that it's cheaper in the livestream compared to the supermarket.

Those are the comments.

Interviewer:

Okay. How do you generally interpret the different comments that you get or feedback that you get from the Gen Zs? How do you interpret them?

What's your reaction to them usually?

Participant:

Whenever we would see comments, we really take them into consideration. So, whenever I tell them regarding the products, we suggest them to the brand and then we'll see what we can do for the next campaign. We really take the feedback from the consumers.

Interviewer:

Okay. Can you cite some of the kinds of adjustments or changes that were made about the brand in response to the feedback received from the Gen Z consumers, especially in relation to authenticity?

Participant:

Usually, since we're handling store layouts or our online stores, when we have campaigns with a lot of mechanics, sometimes there are errors or confusions within the consumers. So, we have to change the mechanics or communications of our stores immediately. So, usually, that's what we do.

We need to adjust our communication strategies.

Interviewer:

Okay. In general, how would you describe the ongoing communicative interaction between the brands that you have handled and the Gen Z consumers? As they interact with each other, how would you describe that interaction that eventually gives rise or accounts up to what counts for both of them as being authentic?

So, there's an interaction between the brands and the consumers, right? And in that interaction, the perception of authenticity emerges for each side, right? The brand has a perception, the Gen Z has a perception about the authenticity of the brand.

So, how would you describe that process, their ongoing communicative interaction?

Participant:

From the brand’s end, we communicate through the products, the content, and then the consumers communicate through feedback. So, the feedback that we receive from the Gen Z consumers is the reason why we adjust our messaging or behavior so that our strategies become authentic. So, it becomes a cycle of what the consumers will be saying about the brand and then what we will be adjusting.

Interviewer:

I see. Based on that, would you say that brand authenticity is something that a brand enacts or I will do this, therefore, when I do this, my brand becomes authentic? Or would you say that it is something that is negotiated or continuously adapted through the interaction between the brand and Gen Z consumers?

So, basically, is it something that the brand does, therefore, it becomes authentic? Or is it something that comes out because of the continuous interaction between the brand and the Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

I think it's more on the interaction. For me, it's not just relying on what the brand is doing but with the interactions. For me, as a consumer, it's important for me how the brand communicates with me or how it interacts with us.

So, I can feel the authenticity of the brand through the way they interact with the consumers rather than what they just do.

Interviewer:

Okay. I noticed you mentioned for you as a consumer, you believe that it's about the interaction. Brand authenticity comes out from the interaction, right?

But that's from your perspective as a consumer, as a Gen Z consumer. What about from the perspective being a Gen Z brand communicator? Do you view it in the same way or do you have a different view?

Participant:

As a communicator, I think it goes hand-in-hand with what the brand does and the interaction with the consumers. But for me, I lean towards the same thing that interaction is important with the consumers.

Interviewer:

I see. So, whether you put yourself in the shoes of the brand communicator or the consumer, both you believe or you perceive brand authenticity as something that is brought about by the interaction between the two, the brand and the consumers. Is that what you're trying to say?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

We're now towards the last few questions. Looking back, do you recall any realization or what have the Gen Z consumers taught you and your brand and your team about authenticity through the interaction? What have you realized from the Gen Z consumers about brand authenticity through the interactions you had with them or your brand had with them that you did not initially know or you did not initially anticipate before?

Participant:

I realized that what we communicate should always align with the brand's actions. It's important to listen to the feedback, whether it be positive or negative. It's important in terms of authenticity.

Interviewer:

I see. Now, if you were going to advise another brand that is targeting the Gen Z consumers, what would you say about how brand authenticity emerges through communication and interaction in practice? What would you advise them, the brand that's targeting Gen Z consumers regarding brand authenticity and how brand authenticity comes out?

Participant:

My advice is more on the importance of consumer feedback. It should really be taken seriously. The earlier question about interaction with the consumers, it should really be taken into consideration.

We should not just rely on the marketing plan. We should always consider how the brand responds to feedback and criticism and how they treat consumers. It's not just about the what was planned, but how we genuinely treat the consumers.

That's what's important so that the brand can be seen as authentic.

Interviewer:

I see. Okay. Thank you very much, (name withheld), for your insights, for your responses to the questions that I've asked.

I'm sure your insights will help enrich the findings of my research. Again, thank you very much for that.

APPENDIX E

Transcript of In-Depth Interview 5

Date of Interview: May 20, 2026

Time of Interview: 6:00PM

Duration of Interview: 1 hour and 1 minute

Place of Interview: BGC, Taguig City

Name of Participant: NAME WITHHELD

Brands Handled/Worked for: EJ Obiena (celebrity athlete brand), Alyssa Valdez (celebrity athlete brand), Pia Wurtzbach (celebrity brand), Angelique Manto (celebrity online influencer brand), Julie Eigenmann (celebrity online influencer brand), Milo, Summit Natural Drinking Water, TAC Tours & Travel Corporation, and Profil Holidays

Interviewer:
Okay, good evening (name withheld). Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview for my research on brand authenticity. Now let's start with, can you give us a brief description first of the brands that you've handled.

And your role, I know it's a bit indirect role but can you discuss that and also mention the major brands that you've handled.

Participant:

I recently worked as a talent manager at a talent agency and the brands that I've worked with were for example Milo, Uratex, Summit Water, Rebisco. And I think there were other ones but those are the main ones that I remember working directly with the brand themselves.

Interviewer:

I see. And you were also handling talents or celebrities?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

And we can consider them as brands also?

Participant:

Yes, possible.

Interviewer:

Who are the major talents that you're handling?

Participant:

The major talents that I've handled were EJ Obiena, Alyssa Valdez. They were the main athletes that I was working with. Then I had influencers that has a following on social media which were Angelique Manto, Julie Eigenmann, I don't know how to say her last name.

Then there was also Pia Wurtzbach and others but those are the main ones that I've worked with closely.

Interviewer:

Okay. EJ Obiena is with pole vaulting?

Participant:

Yes, he is the Olympian pole vaulter.

Interviewer:

And Alyssa Valdez is with volleyball?

Participant:

Yes. Those are the main ones. Yes, correct.

Interviewer:

Anyway, from your perspective, how do you perceive or how do you make sense of brand authenticity? In the context of the brands that you mentioned, in the context of their everyday communication practices, especially with Gen Z consumers, how do you perceive? Where does brand authenticity come in there or how does brand authenticity come in their everyday communication between the brands and the consumers?

Participant:

I believe that it comes with the consumers and the brand themselves with how they present themselves. For example, see Milo is mostly for, they've been presenting themselves as a drink for kids up until growing up that even in their marketing and with how they show their product, their services, they show that it's not only just for kids. They always have this history of having kids in the commercials, for example.

And then there's like an elevation on how they grow up. So that's how the people, us, Gen Z can relate to it because I've always known Milo since when I was a kid. And then now I still use Milo.

They have the cereal version and all of that. So I still drink that. Same for Summit water.

I think Summit is one of the pH clarity, the one that has a good acidity level in the Philippines. So ever since we were kids, we've always been using Summit. And in any convenience store, you can always find Summit, whether it's the small version or the big version.

Interviewer:

Okay. Milo was endorsed by EJ, right?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

So you were the one who...

Participant:

I was partly during my time there, yes. I was the one who was coordinating between the brand Milo with the talent EJ. So I was like their main communication person there.

Interviewer:

How do you think the endorsement of EJ Obiena influenced the perception of the Gen Zs in terms of Milo as a brand, as being authentic or inauthentic?

Participant:

I think it's authentic because a lot of people look up to EJ, especially given his history and then how he made his way to the Olympics. And I think everybody knows him by now and look up to him, not only for pole vaulters or aspiring pole vaulters, but even as an athlete or just any normal human being. Like me, for example, I'm not an athlete, but I look up to him and see his dedication and hard work as something that correlates with Milo as the brand because Milo promotes it.

He doesn't make EJ, but the way Milo promotes their product through EJ is in a sporty way, for example. So it's like taking in Milo when you were a kid, like I said before, they always have EJ. There's this growing up version.

I'm not sure if you've seen it, but I'm not sure if EJ has this, but for Alyssa, she has this video where it's like a young version of her, for example. And then while she smashes the ball, she slightly grows up like there's this evolution of her face. So Milo presents it in that way, and it's kind of inspiring to see that as a Gen Z.

So of course, as a Gen Z, when you see something, you'd, oh, maybe if I do that, I'll also be the same. So I guess that's how the brand also considers the consumers as part of their marketing and authenticity. They make it a way to make it relatable to the people.

Interviewer:

Making it relatable to people. Okay. You mentioned also about Summit.

Participant:

The water.

Interviewer:

Yeah, the water. Did you also provide an endorser for Summit among your talents?

Participant:

That one was mostly, they reached out to us as a way for the endorsement. Because when I joined, they were already into the contract, so I just took over.

Interviewer:

Oh, it's ongoing already.

Participant:

It's ongoing, yes.

Interviewer:

And who was this talent?

Participant:

Ah, same. EJ Obiena and Alyssa Valdez.

Interviewer:

Oh, the two also.

Participant:

Okay. Mostly on the athletic side for that as well.

Interviewer:

I see, I see.

Participant:

Because I feel like for the brand then, water is necessary for every athlete since they need to hydrate themselves all the time. So it's common then that they would opt for an athlete for their branding.

Interviewer:

I see. Okay. Can you recall a situation, although you mentioned already that EJ and Alyssa, the way they were portrayed in the promotions of the two brands.

It already elicited authentic impressions of being authentic among the Gen Zs. On the other side, can you recall a situation, maybe not in those, maybe in your other brands that you've handled. Can you recall a situation wherein the brand's communicative actions were on the opposite side, were interpreted by the Gen Z as something that diminishes the authenticity of the brand?

And how did you or your team respond to that situation?

Participant:

I feel like I haven't encountered a situation like that at the moment.

Interviewer:

I see.

Participant:

Where the brand did something where Gen Z reacted negatively, would you say? I don't think I've handled a situation like that yet.

Interviewer:

What kind of brand action or brand's communicative action do you think would lead to that kind of situation, hypothetically?

Participant:

For a brand to lead to a part where the viewers or the Gen Z would see it negatively is when it doesn't reflect well on their branding at all or it kind of goes out of limit. It doesn't go with who they are, their vision or anything of the sort. And if they kind of, like right now, Gen Z is very invested, let's say in politics.

So if the brand goes, promotes their product or service in a way that is completely the opposite of what the Gen Z or consumers are right now, then it could backlash, especially in that sense. Because I believe Gen Zs are very socially aware with what's happening right now in the world. So if the brand does something that would not agree to what they want, they would react negatively in a way.

Interviewer:

Okay. Let's move on to brand elements. What I'm referring to is basically, of course, the brand name, the logos, the symbols, the characters, the packaging, the slogans, and including the endorsers.

Of course, there are some brand elements that you, in your role as a supplier of talents for the brands, you may not really have much of an influence, such as the choice of brand name perhaps. But there may be some brand elements that you have somehow an input to. So how do you think brand elements such as those function as communicative forms or forms of communication to which the concept of authenticity would form in the minds of the Gen Z consumers?

So in other words, what I'm trying to say is, how do you think brand elements or what is the role of brand elements in terms of influencing the perception of Gen Zs about the authenticity of a brand?

Participant:

It has to be catchy in sense of wording for slogans, easy to remember. Color-wise, usually it would have to have not necessarily a striking color, but a color that has a reason for why did you pick that color for said brand and readable for the logo especially. It has to be readable because how would you expect people to remember your brand if they can't even understand or see it?

It's like, Summit is blue because water and then Milo is actually I'm not really sure why it's green. I haven't asked them on that end. But if I were to go with other brands like Nike, it's a check.

It's easy for people to remember on those end. And the slogan is just as important because when you hear it, you hear of that brand. Like BDO, We Find Ways.

Interviewer:

Okay, so it has to be catchy and somehow according to what you said. Do you consider that in the existing brand elements of the brand that you're negotiating with or that you're targeting to supply an endorser or probably they contacted you because they're interested in a certain talent? Do you consider the matching between the talent or the endorser and the brand elements of the brand?

Participant:

Yeah, it has to make sense I would say because why would the brand pick a person if they don't have a reason to pick that person for example?

Interviewer:

Can you give an example as to what probably the ones that you've handled, what matched between EJ and Milo? I don't know if there are probably some other brands that you've handled aside from Milo and Summit, right? So can you give a few examples?

Participant:

For example, for Pia Wurtzbach, everyone knows her as Miss Universe 2015. So when you think of Miss Universe, you think beauty, pageant, all of that. So she endorsed L'Oreal which is also a beauty product, cosmetics.

So of course, it matches with her identity as a beauty queen for example. Summit, I think ever since, they've always been promoting in an athletic way. So they'd go for athletes.

Puma, also known for athletic clothing, shoes, all of that. So they'd go for an athlete as well. And see, Julie Eigenmann, right now, I think she's mostly on lifestyle.

So she once handled Dyson which is also known for lifestyle content, for hair, for house cleaning. So those are some examples I believe that they have to always correlate with the talent or with the person that they're going to promote it with because why would you promote something that doesn't relate to your values or who you are as a person?

Interviewer:

I see. Aside from brand elements, there's also among the strategies of brands, the marketing mix, the so-called marketing mix which is composed of, I'm sure you know this, the product, the price, the place, the distribution and the promotions. And for service businesses, you have the addition of people strategies, process, and physical environment strategies also.

Based on what you see, what you have experienced, how do these marketing elements get used or become utilized as a communication tool from the brand going to the Gen Zs and of course the ensuing interaction between them?

Participant:

Well, I think right now, a lot of people can admit that social media is a great placement for promotion and marketing because a lot of people, a lot of Gen Zs are on social media, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, I don't know if Twitter or X is a thing right now. But a lot of people are on there and the reason why it's also a good place for promotion is because Gen Zs have this tendency to react and comment and share on what they like, on the smallest things that they relate to, they just share it, they just like it, they have that. And yeah, I think that's the main place on social media because I don't think LinkedIn is a thing for Gen Zs as much right now, even when finding jobs, it's always online on Facebook and all of that.

So I think having it on social media is the main platform for promoting a brand and with that, they have to pick up talent who also has a high following. So that is also something that people take into consideration, I believe.

Interviewer:

How do you think all that affects the perception of Gen Zs about the authenticity of a brand?

Participant:

Because they look through, like if it still sticks to their values. Like, well, I can't speak on the behalf of Milo, Summit or any other brands that I've worked with on what their value, what their mission is. But let's say as the travel agency that I'm working with, our mission and value is to always provide the best experience, always have the best service regardless what happens and all of that.

So as our way, we always make sure to always stick to that. Any conflict that comes to it, we stick to that. And then the color-wise also sticks to how we promote the product itself.

And that's how the viewers or the consumers portray us and that's how they will judge us because what they see is also what they see online. So you have to stick to that.

Interviewer:

I see. How do you conceptualize these strategies whether brand elements or marketing mix? How does your team, when I say team, it's not only you maybe on the part of the brand, you're working as a team, right?

So how does your team conceptualize and act whether these brand elements or marketing mix elements as part of the broader communication efforts of the brand in relation to Gen Zs?

Participant:

They ask the talent to promote the brand in their everyday way. They don't give them specific instructions to follow when they promote it. So for example, let's say Summit provides an athlete a bottled water.

They'll give them like a marketing deck to just follow like a small instruction that says, let's say, use it, promote the product in a non-hard sell way for an everyday use. And they will just adjust it to how the athlete does their day in the life, a day in their life project. So it doesn't have to be, for example, they'll just ask them wear blue, for example.

Like they'll just provide, they'll just tell them to wear the color blue, for example, to keep on the same of the branding, on the same brand's branding and their value. And yeah, more or less in that sense, they let them do it themselves. They'll just find a way to collaborate together to make it either non-hard sell or just something that sticks to themselves.

And since it's a long-term contract, then they're already familiar with it also. Okay.

Interviewer:

So basically, what you're trying to say is somehow they're giving the talent guidelines on how to promote, but then the brand allows them to be natural or spontaneous in the way they promote it.

Participant:

They don't tell them what you see on social media exactly. They don't tell them to do that exactly. The talent has their own liberty and freedom to give in their own inputs.

They can say, I don't want to do this. I don't want to do that. Well, technically, I'll be the one to tell the brand that since I am the talent manager.

So sometimes they don't get to talk to the talent directly. They go through me. So I'm the one who tells the brand, I think it's better if we do it like this.

So we find a way to make it work all together until it comes to a point that, okay, we can work with that. Both sides agree to something.

Interviewer:

So basically, you're the one who checks first what is the idea of the talent, how they're going to promote it, or are they really given a total free hand?

Participant:

The brand gives a suggested deck, for example. So it has what kind of content they want to do. If there's a specific color he has to wear, a specific this or that.

And then I give it back to the talent. They read through it. It's either option one, they're all okay with it, no problem at all.

Or option two, they'll be like, I can't do that. It's not feasible because I have no time. I'm training the whole day and I won't be having dinner with friends.

I won't be seeing my family. So is there a way we can find another way around this to make it work? And then I can talk to the talent and we'll coordinate, we'll collaborate on how, okay, you can't do that.

How about you make it work like this instead? And then if the talent is okay with that idea, then I'll be like, okay, let me just check with the brand if they're okay with that idea. They will either tell me, yes, it is okay or no, it's not okay.

And then if once we all have an idea that we all agreed, all parties have agreed, okay, then they can proceed with shooting the content and then give it back to me once it's done.

Interviewer:

I see. So it's a collaborative conceptualization.

Participant:

Yes, it's a very collaborative, yes.

Interviewer:

Okay. Is there an instance wherein, you know, the way they, oh, by the way, before that, so the talent themselves, do they shoot and post it on their social media accounts or what?

Participant:

Ah, yes, they do.

Interviewer:

So it's like, how often do they?

Participant:

It depends on the contract, that's one thing. It depends on the contract because in the contract, there is a specific amount of, like, if it's an IG post, an FB post, a YouTube, like, it really depends on where the social media platform is going to be posted on. And it depends on the length of the contracts and how often.

And it also depends on when it will be posted because sometimes it will have to be seasonal, for example, only on Halloween or only it has to be specific on Chinese New Year, for example, Valentine's, New Year's, Christmas, specific posts related to that holiday. And it depends because before they post it, it has to be approved by the brand. So it goes through a pre-approval phase.

Interviewer:

And how fast is this process of approval or pre-approval?

Participant:

Sometimes the brand answers really quickly. Sometimes it takes a while on the talent's end, especially if they're an athlete. Because, for example, EJ, he trains in Italy.

So there's that time difference between me and him back then where we would, I would have to be awake at night and he would, it's morning over there. And then his scheduling on his regional competitions, the Olympics, that was also something. And there's the time difference.

So I have to take into account that for the brand. And the brand will also be able to understand if he can't do certain things because of the training. The training limits him to do specific content also.

Interviewer:

So is it difficult to, really? Because some posts, some content are time sensitive, right? It has to be in line with a certain holiday or certain occasion.

So is it difficult to meet those deadlines, to meet the posting date in time for the holiday?

Participant:

For athletes specifically, yes, it is pretty difficult to reach those holiday deadlines.

Interviewer:

So how do they cope with that?

Participant:

There are times, from my experience, when the athlete, for example, EJ, he's back here in the Philippines for five, seven days only. The brand is going to request one special day just for them where they will shoot all type of content, all photo shoots, all video shoots, and they will keep it on their end and then just give us the content for that said holiday as a backup if he can't do what they're requesting. So there are some brands that are very understanding.

There are other brands that you would have to, not say argue, but you have to really stand firm. If you can't submit it, you can't submit it. So you just have to adjust it.

So they'd give an option two.

Interviewer:

They themselves shoot it, the talents, and they edit?

Participant:

Some of them, yes. Sometimes they have their own videographer, but sometimes, yeah, most of the time it's them who edit it. For athletes, usually they may have videographers who help them out, but for other talents, like Angelique Manto, they edit it on themselves.

They shoot it and they edit it themselves.

Interviewer:

The output is a bit different. If it's done by a professional videographer or done by themselves, there's going to be some difference?

Participant:

A little bit.

Interviewer:

How do you think the agency would perceive those differences, would react to those differences? Like for example, this one looks very done by an ad agency. The other one is, oh, this is like a vlogger's…

Participant:

I think people would see it instantly. At least me, I can see if a video is like, oh, okay, he's a vlogger type.

Interviewer:

Would that affect the perception of authenticity among the agencies?

Participant:

I don't think so. Kasi catchy naman eh. As long as it's catchy, it's okay.

Kasi I've seen, for example, yung mga new promotional videos ni EJ on one of the brands that I've handled before. Alam ko naman it's not him who edited it. And I know it's probably a video team because the quality is really good and it's very hard sell.

But it's okay. There's nothing really bad. It still sticks to him as an athlete and it still sticks to the brand themselves.

So, it's okay. I think people would just be like, wow, mas maganda yung quality ng mga ganoon.

Interviewer:

I see. Based on your experience, which, or can you cite some instances wherein some content or some strategies turned out to, on one side, further support the perception of the Gen Z about the authenticity of the brand, and on the other side, on the negative side, are there instances wherein somehow it diminished the perception of the authenticity, perception of the genesis about the brand? How did you respond to those situations?

Participant:

Parang wala naman. I don't think I've had a situation where it negatively or...

Interviewer:

What about the positive?

Participant:

Positively...

Interviewer:

Which particular probably, which particular content of EJ or Alyssa or what, really made an impact on the... On the... Gen Z in terms of authenticity perception.

Participant:

The video that I mentioned previously, the video that, parang, yung evolution nila from kids. Because if I'm not mistaken, si Hidilyn Diaz then was in that video, where it kinda like, from when they were kids up until they grow up, they've been with Milo, mga ganun, something that... That one, I know there was one video of Milo that positively impacted a lot of people, kasi they can all relate to it in that sense.

Interviewer:

The one that shows the growing up?

Participant:

Yes, I think it's that one. I'm not sure if there's... But I know there's a video like that that seems like it got a lot of people's attention.

A lot of people were waiting for that. It's either EJ or C. Alyssa, one of them.

I know it positively impacted a lot of people, kasi I had a lot of people, I saw it on social media that a lot of people shared it, and were saying that it was a great video. So our generation, my Gen Z, I think that you'd see that they, it affected them nicely or positively, is because one, they're going to keep sharing it on social media, and two, they will comment. They have this thing, I like to believe Gen Z likes to give their comments, if it's nice, if it's worth it, if it's relatable.

They like to share their opinion on social media.

Interviewer:

Is there a time when there are strategies or content or posts that your talents have posted, or the brands that you've handled have posted, and the reactions or the perceptions of the Gen Z audience in terms of general reaction and in terms of their authenticity perception was not what you expected of them. It's like you were expecting something else, and then it turned out that the reaction of the Gen Zs were different from what you expected from among the content that you've seen done by your talents.

Participant:

It's more on the negative side as well, I think. Based on the question, it seems like it's more heading towards the negatives. But since it's not exactly what they expected, kasi syempre when a brand posts something, they'll expect a positive feedback.

No one really anticipates a negative feedback. So if it's positive, it's good for the brand, they got what they wanted. And on the negative side, I guess it's more on people's opinion and how they see the person also.

For example, for Fashion Week, everyone knows Heart Evangelista as the main fashion icon of the Philippines. And then suddenly you see other Filipinos entering these Fashion Weeks like Ann Curtis, Pia Wurtzbach. But then people, or maybe Gen Z, have this negative aspect when they see other fashion icons post it, they would bash them in the sense that why are you stealing Heart Evangelista's title as a fashion icon?

So that's not exactly what the brand or the talent would expect. Instead, you'd think that people would be supportive. But there are always going to be that backfire.

I think that's the only negative part.

Interviewer:

What about on the positive? It could be possible that you're only expecting this much response and then it was overwhelmingly positive.

Participant:

I think on the positive, more brands would come to you as the talent. More brands would come to you for them to want you to promote their product. That's in the positive aspect.

You wouldn't expect, or maybe you would, but maybe brands that you didn't expect would reach out.

Interviewer:

But is there a specific instance wherein the content earned a very overwhelmingly positive reaction from the Gen Zs?

Participant:

Not exactly. I don't think I've encountered a moment where it got more than what they expected. Maybe in the meet and greet of EJ Obiena that he held here in the Philippines, they didn't anticipate that amount of people.

I mean, they did anticipate a lot, but they didn't expect it would go beyond what they were expecting. I don't know how I forgot exactly how many people we had that day, but the amount of supporters were pretty overwhelming for that.

Interviewer:

Why do you think there was an overwhelming quantity of supporters that showed up?

Participant:

Everyone looks up to him. A lot of people, he is well-known and he's barely in the Philippines. He is well-known.

He is, I think, the second after Duplantis as an Olympian. He's a pole vaulter and pole vaulting is not a big thing here in the Philippines. He's the first one to, I think he opened up a pole vaulting center somewhere in the Philippines.

I forgot where. I think a lot of people look up to that. He's known to make pole vaulting a big thing now.

I think that's why a lot of people supported him for that as well.

Interviewer:

In what ways, this is more general, in what ways do you see Gen Zs expressing their perceptions, their reactions about the authenticity or inauthenticity of a particular brand or whether it's a product brand or a celebrity brand? In what ways have you observed, have you seen, do the Gen Zs express their perceptions?

Participant:

They're very vocal on social media. Whether it's a story, a share, a post, they're very vocal on social media, I would say. Any comments, they would just comment everywhere.

I think that's the main place.

Interviewer:

And they're very vocal also when it comes to product brands and celebrities?

Participant:

Yes. Celebrities-wise, yes. Brand-wise, yes, I would say.

Anything that they relate to, they would share it. Or that they don't agree with, they would just share it. Sometimes they don't consider.

Interviewer:

What are the kinds of comments that you've seen made by the Gen Z audience? Comments about the talents you've handled and the brands also that they represented. The types of comments.

Participant:

It's either bashers. It's either bashers mentioning, for example, that they don't belong in Fashion Week or that it's all just paid, that they don't believe it's an actual endorsement. They will either attack the person or the brand themselves, that it doesn't fit who they are as a person.

So that's really opinionated for the Gen Z. They're just really basically judging the person based on what they see. And then the positive side, it's...

I don't know exactly, I've seen positive comments. I guess more on it's nice having athletes raise the Philippine flag, for example, or represent the country even abroad.

Those were mostly of the Philippine comments that I've seen. Philippine-related comments.

Interviewer:

Now, when you see those comments, both the positive and the negative, how do you interpret them? How do you react to them, to the comments?

Participant:

As the talent manager? As the talent manager, you take both into account. You can't please everyone, so eventually you're bound to see negative comments here and there.

So it's either you address it or you ignore it. But most of the time, celebrities don't really address it as much unless needed. Unless it goes kind of out of hand.

But most of the time, you don't really need to address it.

Interviewer:

What would make you address it? You said most of them, you simply ignore. But what will make you address it?

Participant:

From the talents I've handled, nobody really addressed any negative comments because it never really went out of hand that you'd go through ABS-CBN for it to be handled. It's not one of those comments that needs to gain attention. Gen Z will either think you're addressing it solely for the purpose of gaining attention or just wanting to cause more drama.

Sometimes it backlashes, having to address a negative comment sometimes backlashes.

Interviewer:

What about addressing the positive comments?

Participant:

Personally, I don't think there's a reason to address positive comments because it's just there. And then if you're just doing your own thing, you're just a normal person,

you just leave the comments. Or you say thank you for positive comments, but you don't need to physically address it in a video or whatsoever.

Interviewer:

Do you think ignoring most of the comments, whether positive or negative, do you think ignoring them has an effect on the perceptions of the Gen Z about the authenticity?

Participant:

Of a brand?

Interviewer:

Of a brand or of a celebrity.

Participant:

Ignoring comments? I don't think you have to.

You don't have to address each one. A simple like goes a long way, I would say, liking a comment. At least it shows the Gen Z that, okay, you see what we're saying.

Because if you're gonna let the comments be there and then not even bother liking 1, 2, 3, 10 comments there, it's like, are you even reading what we say? So seeing that the talent or the brand likes it, it already shows that we are being heard as the consumers. It's like far-fetched, like in a general way.

Concert tickets, for example. They have a day 1 that's sold out, you have so many comments saying, please have day 2, day 2. If you're just gonna ignore it, it's like they don't hear us.

The celebrity or the organizer doesn't hear us or what we say in the comment. They don't care. But then after like, what, 2 days, they mention, oh, we've released a day 2.

It's like, okay, they actually know what we're saying. They know what we want. They're finding a way to adapt to what the consumers want.

It's either they're gonna add a day 2 or they're gonna say they really can't. Or the artist says on the day of the concert that they are not able to have a second day because of time schedules or whatsoever. It's a general concept.

That's how it kind of makes us, the consumers, feel heard. That's why we comment.

Interviewer:

Do you think being heard or feeling heard, being and feeling heard, do you think it contributes to the Gen Zs perception of the authenticity of a particular brand or celebrity?

Participant:

Yes, because at least if you compare one brand or celebrity, one who listens and one who doesn't, why are you gonna keep on supporting the one who doesn't? For example, if you keep asking that one person, you're already being ignored. Why bother?

Sure, you can support them from time to time but you're not gonna always support them compared to the one brand or celebrity who actually listens to you and to what you want as a consumer.

Interviewer:

Speaking of comments and reacting to comments, can you give one or two specific adjustments or changes that you and your talents made about perhaps their content as a result of hearing what the Gen Z audience is saying, being influenced by the comments? Are there instances wherein you and your talents made adjustments or changes in what you do based on the comments of the Gen Zs?

Participant:

I'm trying to think if there was a moment of that. I'm not sure if there was a comment or specific moment during the meet and greet of EJ Obiena that he held here in the Philippines. If there were any comments.

I think it was about opening up more slots for winners or event goers, viewers, those who went to the event to open up more slots. If there were moments like that in the comment section. I wasn't able to check on the comment section of what was posted that day since I was handling everything.

I can't exactly answer that precisely if I remember any specific day or situation for that.

Interviewer:

What about in the travel agency that you're working for? Are there changes or adjustments in your strategies that you made brought about by hearing the comments of your Gen Z customers? Can you probably cite an example?

Participant:

Our travel agency is mainly known for European group tours. Given the situation in the Middle East right now, a lot of people are afraid of traveling to Europe. Especially since we use Middle East carriers such as Emirates Airlines who is one of the affected airlines going to Europe because of what's happening in the Middle East.

Of course, we are aware of the comments of people, of the consumers who are traveling. As a way to reassure them, we mentioned that we have a video from the CEO of Dubai Tourism over there who is there to reassure that the situation is okay. We posted that on social media and show it to our groups who are currently going to Europe with Emirates Airlines that it is completely safe.

Other situation is when people are looking for example American tours or El Camino walk tour. We adjust by making an itinerary specifically for those also and then we promote it.

Interviewer:

Okay. Where was I? Okay.

By the way, what's the name of your travel agency?

Participant:

TAC Tours and Travel Corporation.

Interviewer:

TAC Tours?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

TAC? T-A-C?

Participant:

Yes. Or Profil Holidays because we're a wholesaler.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Participant:

So, the agency name itself is TAC Tours and Travel Corporation.

Interviewer:

But the brand that you're carrying is?

Participant:

Profil.

Interviewer:

Profil.

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

As in P-R-O-F-I-L?

Participant:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Profil Philippines. Oh, sorry.

Participant:

Holidays.

Interviewer:

Profil Holidays, sorry. Yes. Holidays, Holidays. It's redundant when you say Profil Philippines. Okay.

Anyway, the next questions would be more or less a bit general. How would you describe the ongoing communicative interaction between the brands and the talents that you handle and between them and the Gen Z consumers in the context of shaping what counts as authentic? So, let me rephrase that.

How would you describe the interaction between your brands and your talents and the Gen Z consumers, their interaction as to coming up with what counts for both of them as authentic? Because probably they may have a different view of what is authentic. So, how would you describe the interaction between the two of them, your side, the brand side, and the consumer side?

Participant:

The brand has to be willing to adapt also to what the consumers want while sticking to their mission, vision, and their values. Because we can't always stick to the past, so they have to adjust or adapt to how society is also right now and the consumers now.

Interviewer:

In what ways do you adapt in order to reshape how the brand and the Gen Z consumers understand or view the authenticity of the brands or the celebrities?

Participant:

Well, right now, a lot of people have been using AI. So, I'm not sure if there are specific brands who are currently using AI as part of their marketing, but it's not a surprise if they do. And I don't think the consumers would bash them fully for that because I'm pretty sure they also use AI as well.

So, they have to be able to adapt it in that sense. For example, let's say in a travel agency perspective, they would use a booking platform and that booking platform also has an AI feature to make it easier for us, the consumer of that booking platform, to search for what they're looking for. For example, they would look for a hotel in Makati, but their AI has given them a feature that limits it to, let's say, Oceanview or Parkview since we're in Makati.

So, it makes it easier for us, the consumer, to use their booking platform.

Interviewer:

How about the talents? Do they also use AI?

Participant:

I can't say right now if they use AI. For what I've been seeing on my end though, from the talents that I've been following on social media, it doesn't seem like they're using AI as much.

Interviewer:

What about for editing? Maybe they do?

Participant:

Maybe. I cannot speak on their end.

Interviewer:

Because they just give you the output and then you...

Participant:

Maybe if they use AI, it's probably for content creation in the sense of giving ideas when they have to create a content. I'm not surprised if they use ChatGPT for helping them construct the content.

Interviewer:

The script?

Participant:

Maybe the script, maybe the idea on the outcome, the flow on how the video is going to come out. If there's something that they can adjust here and there, maybe. I'm not surprised if they use that for inspiration.

Interviewer:

Would you say brand authenticity, whether of a product or the brand, the celebrity brands, or both, would you say brand authenticity is something that is planned and implemented by the brand? Or is it something that is continuously negotiated and adapted through the interaction between the brand and the consumers?

Participant:

I think it's continuously adapting.

Interviewer:

Why do you say so?

Participant:

Because how's the brand supposed to grow if they don't adapt? They won't be able to have these milestones if they don't adapt to what the consumers want. They can't stick to the past on how they were 10 years ago.

It will not work the same way for the consumers now at the current present time. It's like how brands sometimes change their logos every now and then, either their logos, their slogan, because they want to be able to also adapt to how the people are right now. For example, Spotify.

Spotify has evolved their logo gradually throughout the years. Now, when you update your Spotify app, it's a new logo. The reason there, according to Google, according to the news now, is because it's a way for them to celebrate a specific milestone, I think.

I think it's a milestone as a way to say thank you to the consumers, the buyers, for celebrating that. For example, us and our travel agency, it is their 35th year this year in the industry, and yet they haven't specifically changed the slogan, but they did change up the color a little bit by having it at emerald green as a way to make it more commemorable and fit to the 35th. I don't know if it's like a, not superstition, but when it's the 35th, they're known for the color green, emerald green.

It's just a way to adapt to those ways, because you can't really grow as a brand or as a talent if you don't consider what other people say.

Interviewer:

So you think adapting and continuously adapting through the interaction between the brands and the agencies would contribute to growth, and in relation to brand authenticity, would it contribute to the perception of both sides, how they see the brand as authentic?

Participant:

Yeah, because it's not that they're not going to support the brand per se if they don't grow, but it's nice to see that when a brand grows with you in the process of you using it, it's not like you're stuck to the past. You grow with the consumers while sticking to your mission, vision, and values as a person and as a brand.

Interviewer:

Okay, growing with the consumers as well, but at the same time sticking to your values.

Participant:

Yes, I think sticking to your values is the most important part, not only for the brand, but also for the celebrity themselves. Because people are going to notice if you don't stick to your values.

Interviewer:

Okay, now we're almost towards the end of the questions. Looking back, what have you realized or what have the Gen Z consumers made you realize about brand authenticity through the interaction between the brands and the Gen Z consumers that you've encountered or you've experienced or you've seen? What realizations or what have you learned about brand authenticity that you learned from the Gen Z consumers through the interactions?

Participant:

When people say to not care what other people say about you, that's still always going to stick. There's this concept nowadays that you shouldn't care what other people say about you, but at the end of the day, I think you're still going to take in what other people say about you, whether you're the celebrity or the brand, because that's the way you grow as a person or as the brand themselves. You're going to always have to take in the comments that the Gen Z have.

Because they're going to either say what sucks, what needs improvement, or what is good, what you're doing is actually good. I think that works both for the person as a celebrity and for the brand themselves.

Interviewer:

I see. Now, if you were advising another brand that is targeting Gen Zs, what would you say about how brand authenticity emerges through the communication and interaction between the brand and the consumers? Or rather, is it something that the brand should plan and implement?

What would you advise a particular brand that's targeting Gen Zs? Whether they should treat brand authenticity as something that they should plan for, or is it something that they should try to continuously negotiate or adapt through the interaction between the brand and the Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

You always have to have a plan for your authenticity, especially if you're a brand, because that is how people are going to know you, as I mentioned. So you really have to have like a business plan and a proper branding, a proper authenticity, how you want to be known, how you want to be remembered as a brand. It works also as a person, but you should be also open-minded to changes and to consider what other people think or have to say to criticism.

And that, for example, if the brand is going to do something that relates to politics, to be very careful in that sense, especially if it's in the Philippines, since it is not the best topic to touch as a brand and as a person, because they are very socially aware on the politics side. And to be careful with how you portray your message. It shouldn't be, it shouldn't be homophobic, it shouldn't be in the wrong side of politics, if that's even the right way of saying things.

It shouldn't be anything that you think is close-minded, because the older generation, Gen Z would think they are very close-minded compared to them. So that's something that to consider.

Interviewer:

Okay. How would you reconcile that? You said the brand should be careful as to, you know, when it comes to political views and other stuff that may be divisive among the public.

But how do you reconcile that with being true to itself, you know, sticking to your values?

Participant:

If you were never political from the beginning, then there's no reason to be political now, just to fit in the trend. Because people will notice that. But if you were political back then, and stick to your same politics now, then no one's gonna really make a big fuss about it unless you switch sides, and it becomes a bit of a mess, a chaos.

But if you were, if the brand was never aiming for any politics side, then there's no reason for you to join in the trend and just stick to your same branding, with just emerging it in a subtle way. You don't have to join each trend that happens that Gen Z has been putting up.

Interviewer:

Okay. Thank you for your insights. I'm sure your responses and the experiences you've shared will help enrich the findings of this research.

Thank you very much.

Participant:

Thank you.

APPENDIX F

Transcript of In-Depth Interview 6

Date of Interview: May 23, 2026

Time of Interview: 2:00PM

Duration of Interview: 52 minutes

Place of Interview: Escartine's, Carmona City, Cavite

Name of Participant: NAME WITHHELD

Brands Handled/Worked for: Vitamilk (Asia Brewery), CDO Katsu/Tonkatsu (CDO Foodsphere), and CDO Chicken Nuggets (CDO Foodsphere)

Interviewer:

Okay, hi, good afternoon, (name withheld). Thank you for participating in this research. And I'm sure your insights and your experience will enrich or contribute a lot to the findings of the research.

Now, before we start with the main questions, maybe you could give us a little bit of background on the experience that you've had handling brands, especially in terms of their brand communications. The brands that you've handled, the roles that you have played, and the strategies or the actions that you've made on behalf of the brands. With particular probably emphasis on how the brands interact with the Gen Z consumers.

Participant:

Okay, so thank you, Sir Ron, for having me for this interview and this research. So, very much appreciate that. So, yeah, I guess I'll start with how long I've been in the marketing or in the brand space.

So, I've been part of the brand team for almost five years already. And I've transitioned already from almost two brands, basically. So, I started with Vitamilk.

So, it's a brand under Asia Brewery. It's actually the number one leading soy milk brand in the Philippines. And I'm particularly handling their tetra products and also all the innovations under their 300ml or their one-way bottle SKUs.

And then for that particular role, I've been handling basically all the communication efforts on digital and going to the trade as well. So, that's one. And then after almost four years of being part of the brand, handling Vitamilk, I've also transferred to another company, which is CDO Foodsphere.

So, in the CDO Foodsphere, I was assigned to handle their breaded category. So, it's actually one of the fifth largest frozen category. It's still a likely small category for CDO, but they're very on an investment mode for that category, given its bigger market size.

So, for breaded, just to give a context on what is breaded, so that covers the nuggets, the katsu. So, for both of those brands, Vitamilk and Katsu, we're actually dealing with young adults, which is very much aligned with the research. And then for nuggets, and basically for CDO brands.

So, yeah, I've been doing the same. So, we do the research, the insighting, and then we transition that to strategies. And then, yeah, strategies on digital and also on the trade as well.

Interviewer:

Okay, thank you for that background. Let me start with the main questions. From your perspective, from being a brand assistant up to higher rank of brand manager,

Participant:

Assistant brand manager

Interviewer:

Assistant brand manager…how do you make sense or how do you perceive brand authenticity in the context of the brand's everyday communication and interaction practices with the Gen Zs?

Participant:

From my perspective, Sir Ron, brand authenticity actually builds on consistency and also your relatability and relevance on the everyday experiences of the Gen Zs in particular. So, for the likes of Vitamilk that I handled in the past, actually Vitamilk is positioned mainly as a solution to Pagudtom. So, if you're familiar with that term, it's Pagudtom.

And we're using that coined term to really communicate the benefits of the product offering healthy feeling energies that really fits the lifestyle of the young adults basically. So, for that, I guess, we communicate the authenticity because it captures the problem, the main struggles of the Gen Zs in particular. And then, for my new brand, basically, which is the Katsu and also the Nuggets, we deliver the authenticity in a way of communicating or delivering the promise of delivering the product, the promise of being satisfying, more convenient, and really resonates with the Gen Zs that are looking for practicality but also the convenience of recreating the dish at home.

So, I guess, that for me is what makes sense, the brand authenticity, as long as you're able to really capture your relatability to the Gen Zs everyday life or struggles.

Interviewer:

Can you recall or give a situation that somehow your brand's communicative actions were interpreted by the Gen Zs as really authentic or on the other side, on the negative side, inauthentic? So, during that situation that you can recall, what happened and how did your team interpret and respond to that situation?

Participant:

Sure, I'll give an example for Vitamilk, sir, because as we know, Vitamilk is a soy milk drink. And soy milk is being perceived as something that answers to lactose intolerance. However, there's this particular variant of Vitamilk, which is the original SKU variant that actually contains 1% cow's milk.

So, we actually experienced a report on the consumer side that they tried original Vitamilk because they thought that it is good for lactose intolerance. But they experienced diarrhea because it contains 1% of cow's milk, basically. So, with that, there's a question already on authenticity because we know that Vitamilk is a soy milk.

And although it's not part of our comms (that) it's good for lactose intolerance. But that's the general perception already. So, what we did to address that is basically we apologized, basically we handled the situation or the complaint well.

We apologized, we explained really the product composition of Vitamilk. And also, moving forward, we added that in our FAQs. And also, we really highlight or improve the claims whenever we're featuring that original variant.

To ensure that we have transparency also on having that 1% cow's milk in the nutrition or in the ingredients list of Vitamilk.

Interviewer:

So, basically, it's in the communication transparency that you adjusted and not the product itself because your company is an importer of that? Or a distributor?

Participant:

Yes. We follow the formulation of not just one country but all other countries that carry the brand.

Interviewer:

And your company has no authority to change the formulation, right?

Participant:

Yes, right. And also, there's a reason why they have that 1% of cow's milk for original but all the rest of the variants contains 100% soy milk. So, it's just the original.

Interviewer:

Do you happen to know that reason or if I may ask?

Participant:

I forgot.

Interviewer:

Okay. Anyway, I'm sure you're familiar with brand elements such as the brand name, the logo, symbols, characters, even mascots, packaging and slogans, etc. Now, how do you perceive this or how do you see these brand elements as part of the communicative forms through which brands communicate with the Gen Z?

And the Gen Z interprets the communication whether the brand is authentic or not?

Participant:

I guess brand elements is really part of the way we communicate our brand. It's basically the foundations of everything for the brand. So, I think first for Vitamilk for instance, the brand elements that we use is number one, the color.

So, for the color, we use the color red because red actually connotes the fun, the energy which is also aligned with the promise or the purpose of the brand. And then for the brand name, we communicate the functionality or the category that it's milk, Vita because it vitalizes the mind and body of the consumers. And then all the other elements that we use on our packaging like the use of the soy field, the use of the milk splashes on all the elements actually relates or is anchored to the message that it's really a healthy drink that consumers can help to fulfill or fill their day or something like that.

So, I guess the authenticity on the brand elements also support the positioning of the brand.

Interviewer:

Okay. Which brand elements, of course, some are already given by the supplier, I mean the principal, right? But which of the elements does your team have somehow an influence on?

I presume, of course, not the brand name, not the logo, but perhaps slogans or campaigns or whatever other brand elements that your team has an influence on.

Participant:

The influence of the team basically is the use of the Pagudtom because, of course, that is only a communication message that is being applied only for the Philippine market, not with the others. So, basically, it came from an insight that what is the struggle of the young adults, the young working adults now that they really experience the fatigue, they really experience the stress, the burnout for their work or even with their studies. And with that, we use the coined term Pagudtom for us to also resonate with the Filipino market.

So, that is the one thing that we did.

Interviewer:

How were you able to conceptualize and, of course, how were you able to learn about the insight, the basis of the Pagudtom? How did your team conceptualize that particular brand element or campaign, the Pagudtom term that you're using?

Participant:

We did a lot of research, the FGDs, the quant, and then we looked for the white space for our brand because I think authenticity also starts with what is unique to your brand. So, that is one thing. So, we look for the white space and we see that there is no soy milk brand or even an RTD milk brand that is highlighting on that messaging first.

So, since we own that, and then with the help of our creatives as well, we come up with that term, the Pagudtom.

Interviewer:

When you say white space, do I understand it correctly that it means the opportunity or that particular positioning or image that your competitors have not yet conquered?

Participant:

Yes, during that time.

Interviewer:

So, it's an empty… No other brand has conquered that space.

Participant:

Yes, during that time.

Interviewer:

That's why you call it a white space.

Participant:

Yes, during that time.

Interviewer:

During the time that was the white space.

Participant:

So, apart from that, we use the tagline or the additional handler, Fills Good. Fills Good, Reborn, and all of our communication that also forms as part of our elements because Fills Good actually comes from the insight that Vitamilk is very filling. So, mabilis makabusog si Vitamilk.

So, we also integrate that in our comms and also in our brand elements basically.

Interviewer:

Okay. In your experience, which brand elements, whether from Vitamilk or from CDO, which brand elements tend to support the perception of authenticity in the minds of Gen Z consumers? And which brand elements tend to raise questions or diminish the perception of authenticity in the minds of Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

I start first with the authenticity or the elements that support understanding of authenticity. So, I guess number one is on the product, the visuals that you use with your packaging. So, that should also stay true, actually.

So, that's one. It should be aligned very close to what the consumer is expecting from the appearance on how they see it on shelves up to the time that they will try it on their own. And second, I guess would be for elements is on your communications about the brand.

And then for inauthenticity, I guess for that one, really more on the claims that you're using for your product. So, it should really be correct or validated by research because sometimes there are brands that uses a lot of claims that would go for their support. And that also adds, I mean, sometimes add questions to consumers.

That's why for us, as a marketer, we always ensure that we align first with our R&D team to check what are the applicable claims on the product before we really add that on our packaging. Because that also adds to the questions that consumer might ask in the future as well.

Interviewer:

Okay. So, now let me move on. How does your team observe, interpret, and make sense of the Gen Zs reaction to brand elements in both the physical and in the digital realm?

Participant:

For digital, we used to do social scan. We listen, we look at the sentiments of the consumers online. What are their perceptions for a particular, let's say, campaign or elements.

And with the help also of our media team, we do that. And then for digital, we observe and interpret the Gen Zs reaction. For digital also, before we launch any campaign, we do a pre-ad test so that we also get to capture if the messaging that we want to really resonate to the consumer, is that really what they're getting or it's different.

And then for physical, we interpret it basically based on how our product is pairing versus competitor when you see it on shelf. If you look at the packaging, is it better or is it more visible, more elegant to them? That's the thing that we also look at.

Interviewer:

I see. Do you also base it on sales?

Participant:

Yes, we also base it on sales, even on internal and also external, like the comparing data, what's the impact on penetration.

Interviewer:

Can you cite a time or an instance when a brand element decision that your team made unexpectedly affected the perceptions of the Gen Z about the brand authenticity of your brand?

Participant:

I guess I'll give an example for Vitamilk. So for Vitamilk, we actually have this campaign that really uses a strong messaging cues like sabaw, lutang, gapang. So those cues are actually supported with strong visual hooks.

For lutang, we showed the head that became a bubble, the head that became sabaw, which is also aligned with what is the experience or what the young adults feel in their everyday life. So that actually received a lot of positive feedback on consumers, particularly on Gen Zs because they're very more visual, as we know. So they look at the cues, the strong cues, and how relatable that is.

Interviewer:

Okay, now let me move on to a very much related aspect of the ongoing communication between brands and Gen Zs, which is basically your marketing mix. Although perhaps in your discussion, in your answers with regards to brand elements, some of them were already mentioned. So it's okay.

It's really expected that this will be, because these are somehow interrelated concepts, intertwined concepts. So anyway, for marketing mix, I'm sure you're familiar with the product price, place, promotions, and for service businesses, people, processes, physical environment strategies. Although I would expect more of probably the first four because you're handling physical or tangible products.

But anyway, in your experience, how do these marketing mix elements, what's their role? Basically, how do they become part of the brand's ongoing communication with the Gen Zs, especially with regards to brand authenticity?

Participant:

I guess all the marketing mix should work together in communicating a single or a core message that aligns with the brand purpose and basically brand role. For Vitamilk, for instance, on the product, since the role of or the positioning of the Vitamilk is really more on the Pagudtom, on how it helps the consumers to be revitalized or to keep going. For the price, we ensure that we make sure that it is accessible since we want to promote everyday usage. So that should also be aligned.

For distribution, we make sure that we're highly distributed across channels. So we're available mainly in convenience stores because most of the young adults or the Gen Zs are mainly purchasing Vitamilk in convenience stores.

So we make sure of that. Also supermarkets and sari-sari stores because we understand also that Vitamilk doesn't only tap the higher income class but also those that are on the lower or the more mainstream. So we actually introduce our returnable glass bottle to really capture those who are buying from sari-sari stores or the lower income class consumers.

So that's one. For promotions, we make sure that everything is also aligned with our communication. We stay true on the claims that we communicate, the all-natural, the benefits of the fillingness, and also the flavors to really capture the Gen Zs.

We also have physical because we partner actually with a lot of establishments for Vitamilk. We partner with the gym. We do the sampling with them to really communicate the trust that you can actually use Vitamilk after your workout.

Something like that. We also partner with coffee shops that promote the healthy drink alternative which is using soy milk.

Interviewer:

Okay, so you've mentioned quite a lot in terms of marketing mix strategies that you are doing. How does your team conceptualize all these marketing mix elements?

Participant:

First, we conceptualize all of those marketing elements because we actually have a brand architecture basically. So we use that architecture as a guide for all the communication that we will be doing. Also, we do a lot of insighting before we do that.

And we really just stay true to the purpose of the brand and how we can find it or we can put the brand or make the brand more relatable to young adults. Where are the young adults is and how we can reach them. That's why we also started to partner with a lot of gyms and also a lot of restaurants as well.

Interviewer:

Where does your brand architecture and brand insighting come from?

Participant:

The brand architecture actually came from the research. We do the research first, UAI, everything, the likes. And then from there, we actually work with an agency to come up with that architecture.

How can we strengthen the messaging of the brand to really capture one single-mindedness, even the brand visuals, the brand visual identity. We also have that to

ensure that all captures or all of our contents will look the same and the message will also be the same.

Interviewer:

When you said agency, is it a market research agency or ad agency?

Participant:

It's a creative agency. After the research, we invite the creatives to join that research. And then eventually, part of their task is how can we improve. Basically, the brand will streamline.

We will have a working and then we give it to the creatives and how we can creatively communicate it in a way that's very resonating to the target market.

Interviewer:

Who does the research?

Participant:

Do you mean like a particular agency?

Interviewer:

Not particular. Is it your team, brand team? Is it a third-party market research agency?

Participant:

We work together with a third-party marketing research agency.

Interviewer:

Based on your experience, it's a bit similar to the question earlier with the brand. Based on your experience, which of these marketing mix strategies tend to support the perception or shared understanding of authenticity and which tend to pose as a challenge to the authenticity perceptions of Gen Zs?

Participant:

First, for those that support the shared understanding of authenticity, I guess the most important would be the product. We really need to deliver, live up to what we communicate because the Gen Zs always do their fact check, always do their actual testing of the product. Then also the promotions, whatever promotions that you did, it should really be supported also with the research.

For those that raise questions, I guess number one would be the price because there are instances that whenever you communicate this in your communication, let's say this is more sulit but there are a lot of trade partners that actually added a lot of margins to your product. There are instances that you really need to push also for price compliance so that you stay true also with your message basically to consumers. Also, I guess the promotion at some point raised questions if you partner with a lot of KOLs, the influencers and then the KOLs would somehow do a lot of hard sell.

That's why we really ask the KOL to as much as possible personalize their caption, put their own style in their content so that it will really come out as authentic as possible.

Interviewer:

Just a clarification, what's KOL again?

Participant:

Sorry, influencers sir.

Interviewer:

Influencers.

Participant:

Yes, the key opinion leader.

Interviewer:

Oh, KOL. Anyway, you spoke about one of the most important aspects with regards to authenticity which is the product itself. There's something I've heard before from gym goers.

Protein content of homemade soya drinks allegedly contain more protein than the manufactured ones. In general, the manufactured ones, not necessarily Vitamilk. Have you encountered this rumor or concept or idea?

If yes, how did your team respond to that?

Participant:

Unfortunately, we haven't received or encountered that complaint. I guess if we were able to receive that, we will just communicate the claims of the product that is actually made from all natural soy to really capture the health element of the product. Unlike the home-based, we actually have a lot of flavors that consumers can choose to.

I think that's something that will really address the concern.

Interviewer:

Okay, now, of course, you said earlier you were able to, when you were talking about brand elements, you were able to receive comments or observe the reactions of Gen Zs towards your brand elements. Now, on the side of marketing mix, how do you interpret also their comments, their reactions towards your marketing mix strategies?

Participant:

We do also the social scans, especially for new campaign launches. So for new campaign launches, we actually do a post-campaign analysis to check whether the message that resonates is about the brand or does it resonate to the celebrity more because that is something that we don't want to happen. Because there are instances that if you have a new campaign and then there's a big celebrity, the focus on the message shifts towards the celebrity more than the brand itself.

So that's something that we do check as well after the campaign. And then also the impact or the engagement on how really the consumers or the target audiences respond to the campaign. For example, do they take it positive?

Do they like the product or something like that? Or what would be their action after seeing that?

Interviewer:

Does Vitamilk and CDO use celebrity endorsers or non-famous endorsers, ordinary people?

Participant:

For Vitamilk, we actually used to partner with Alex Gonzaga before. And then for CDO, they're actually partnering with a lot of endorsers for their bigger bets or bigger brands. But for Katsu, for instance, right now, typical, not so big.

We partner with Macro more than Omega or Celebrity QL.

Interviewer:

Okay. This is a bit similar also to the brand element question earlier. Can you describe an instance when a particular marketing mix decision unexpectedly affected the perceptions of Gen Zs in terms of brand authenticity?

Participant:

There's this time for Vitamilk that ever since we launched Vitamilk, we've been communicating this as a product that is being consumed out of home. But there's a pandemic. So the problem is how can we communicate that authenticity and relevance that Vitamilk can also be consumed in home?

Because we actually struggled a lot with our sales during the pandemic. Because our main channel, which is convenience store, no one is out, everyone is home. How do we make our product relevant?

How do we make, stay true to our promise while changing the setup, the consumer settings that it's more in home? So with that, we actually changed our communication strategy or promotion or our messaging to be more of like aspirational. So from functional, we shifted to emotional on how Vitamilk can actually support you in reaching your goals because it helps you to fill your day, something like that.

So we launched this project Survive and it's actually very timely. So I think authenticity also roots on being very timely. You need to have the proper timing whenever you launch your campaign.

So it should be very timely for Gen Z. So during that time, we launched the campaign a day before the lockdown. So yeah, so very relevant to the Gen Zs as well.

Interviewer:

Can you repeat that part? You launched your campaign a day before the lockdown?

Participant:

Yes. So that's a very timely launch for us.

Interviewer:

But you did not predict the lockdown?

Participant:

We did not. It is actually set during that day. And then there's an announcement that there will be another lockdown.

And then, yeah, very helpful for us. And then we launched the campaign, the Survive campaign during that time. So very positive comments from the consumers.

And even to them, they also started to sing along with the project Survive. The song is happy. I'll just share it afterwards.

Interviewer:

Okay. Now, these questions are more in general than the next ones. How do Gen Z consumers typically express or communicate their perceptions of authenticity or inauthenticity in response to your brand's actions?

Participant:

I guess for Gen Z, since they are the techie, the techie market, so they're really very expressive online. So whenever they are not happy with a particular product, so they would post their reviews online. Or if they are happy with the brand, they would actually do a lot of organic content for us.

So I think that's their way of showing or how they respond on the authenticity of the brand.

Interviewer:

Okay. On the other hand, how does your team interpret these responses? And what do you do about them?

Participant:

Usually, if it is a positive feedback from them, of course, we will take that. But if it is not, of course, we will improve and probably apply that on our next strategy. So for example, if consumers or the Gen Zs would actually mention that they want this new product or this new flavor, we will also apply that with our strategy.

Or if they mention that they're not happy with the size of our product, like for the Nuggets. Actually, we actually have Nuggets for CDO and we receive a feedback from consumers that it's too small for them or the packaging is too dark. So we do a lot of adjustments to really address the feedback of consumers.

And also we stay true for CDO on the value of really communicating the convenience, the practicality, so that we also ensure that in terms of pricing, we are very much competitive versus our competitors.

Interviewer:

So what I hear now is your response is more in terms of actions. How about in terms of communication? Do you respond to the comments online?

Participant:

Yes. We have an agency to do that for us. So we call them as a social management…manager. They're part of the creatives team.

We have this FAQs. They will respond to that. But if it's a new matter, the agency will raise it to the brand team and then the brand team will prepare a draft spiel.

To be sent or to be replied on the comments.

Interviewer:

Okay. Going back to the actions that you did as response to the feedback from the Gen Z consumers, can you cite notable adjustments or changes that your brand, any of your brands, whether CDO or Vitamilk, that you did in response to the Gen Z feedback in relation to authenticity?

Participant:

I guess this is more of on the product as I have shared. So there's this issue before that CDO is Halal certified, but it's actually not. So the team actually released a statement to address that concern.

And then we also made sure that it is not being or part of the claims on our packaging. So that's another route also that we did. And then for tweaking of the communications as well on how we can be…to relate to the trend or to what the Gen Zs are looking for.

Interviewer:

Okay. Now, again, in general, how would you describe the ongoing interaction between your brand and Gen Z consumers in shaping what counts as authentic?

Participant:

In general. Sorry, can you repeat, sir?

Interviewer:

How would you describe the ongoing communicative interaction between your brand and the Gen Z consumers in shaping what counts as authentic?

Participant:

I think for the ongoing communicative interaction, I'll share for Katsu because that's the one that I'm handling now. So basically, in terms of communication, we follow, we stay true on the brand purpose of delivering the Japanese experience at home. And we stay true to that by also ensuring that in our communication efforts or in our content, we also showcase what Gen Zs is looking for, like the very curated content or very curated dishes because for Gen Zs, they're really more into visual, but they're looking for the practicality of recreating the dish at home.

They love going out, but they also want the practicality of recreating that at home. So we use that as our guide as well. And I guess in terms of authenticity, we really listen to the Gen Zs.

Interviewer:

In what ways do the Gen Z consumers influence, negotiate, or reshape how your brand understands and enacts authenticity in the long term?

Participant:

Actually, Gen Z consumers influence us on how we will reshape mainly our communication over time. So we also need to be very agile. We need to be very flexible and perhaps adapt to a simple, regular trend that these Gen Zs are looking for.

So for instance, during the pandemic, there's this Dalgona craze that consumers or the Gen Zs. So we adapt to that as also our way to as how the Gen Zs influence our comms in a simple or in an ordinary day, basically. And then it reshapes basically everything for our communications on what are these Gen Zs looking for in brands now.

Interviewer:

Would you say that brand authenticity is something that the brand enacts or implements or when the brand does this, automatically they're authentic? Would you say it like that? Or would you say that brand authenticity entails negotiation, continuous adaption, continuously adapting through the interactions between the brand and the consumers?

Participant:

I guess it's the latter. So we need to continuously adapt on the changing Gen Zs' language. Even their tonality is also important because the way the brand or the tonality of the brand also affects how the Gen Zs perceive you as authentic or not.

And also in the way you communicate, basically. So I think you need to adapt to the Gen Zs and interact with them closely as well, from digital even up to the store. So it should be consistent.

Interviewer:

Looking back to your brand career or brand management career, what have the Gen Z consumers taught you or your brands about authenticity? What realizations have you had through your brand's interactions with the Gen Zs that you did not initially anticipate?

Participant:

I guess for Gen Zs, it's actually at some time you need to also go beyond your brand promise to really align and adapt to what the Gen Zs are looking for. So we also need to process what they're looking for. We need to be more straightforward since Gen Zs are more straightforward now.

We also need to do a lot of genjacking as well. So let's say during that time, this election time, last 2022 actually, because there's this - the kabataan, the Gen Zs, they're really into the Kakampink. So what we did is we actually participated in a 7-Eleven store.

And then in that 7-Eleven store, we promoted the strawberry (flavor). And it actually sell a lot because we adapted a trend. So I guess that is what taught me in terms of how we can make the brand more authentic to the Gen Zs.

You need to really adapt on their language, on what they're looking for, what's their experiences now, what's their struggles, and even the way they interact with other brands. Because with a lot of options in the market now, you really need to stand out. So being authentic is also being able to stand out both physically and also mentally to your consumers.

Interviewer:

Okay, let me probe a little bit into that part. You mentioned that was CDO, right, that participated during the election?

Participant:

Sorry, it's Vitamilk.

Interviewer:

Sorry, Vitamilk. Yeah, it was 2022. Vitamilk through 7-Eleven?

Participant:

Yes, a promo.

Interviewer:

Promoted the strawberry flavor?

Participant:

Yes, near the campaign site.

Interviewer:

Okay, in support for?

Participant:

No, no, no. It's more of like the…

Interviewer:

Just going on with the color trend?

Participant:

Yes, just going on with the color trend.

Interviewer:

Not really supporting…?

Participant:

No, no, no. We don't really…

Interviewer:

That's what I was going to ask.

Participant:

Because it will affect the brand.

Interviewer:

Even then, wouldn't that affect the other consumers who are not pink-leaning?

Participant:

We don't explicitly communicate the support with the tandem, the Kakampik tandem. We just really promoted the brand, the color of the brand, the flavor of the brand. To hype on the campaign.

Interviewer:

Okay, now if you were advising another brand targeting Gen Z, what would you say about how brand authenticity emerges from communication and interaction? Is it something that emerges from communication and inaction? Is that what you're going to tell them?

Or are you going to tell them that brand authenticity is something that is planned? If you plan this, your brand will be seen as authentic?

Participant:

For a brand like us, we actually did our brand plan ahead of time. Most likely a year before. So I guess we…

It is not planned. Because there are instances that you really need to do a lot of tweaking with your strategies to really make it look more authentic and to really adapt to the trend or to what the consumer is looking for by the time that you launch or before you launch that campaign. So you really need to listen, respond genuinely to the consumers, and really look for both the short term and also the long term to stay true on that or to really have that authenticity perception for your brand.

Interviewer:

For now, you're currently handling CDO Katsu, right?

Participant:

Yes, and Nuggets. But for Nuggets, we're just starting to promote it now. We will start that.

Interviewer:

So for now, from your perspective, do you see CDO Nuggets and Katsu as authentic,,,in the context of what we're talking about. As authentic? And why do you say so?

And how do you think you will be able to keep or maintain that authenticity of the two - Nuggets and the Katsu?

Participant:

I guess for CDO Breaded – the Katsu and Nuggets, the promise is we champion mealtimes by really providing the quality, the convenience, and also the affordability while delivering the same enjoyment for the family. So to really carry on the promise of authenticity, we need also the support of our team, of the R&D team to really ensure that the product will be of quality, that it delivers on the promise that it's made of premium meat cuts. For Katsu, it's crispy.

So that whenever the consumer will try that, they will believe whatever that we will be communicating as well. And also aligned on basically on the visual that we have from the packaging because for Katsu, we follow that Japanese font style to really align on the Japanese messaging as well.

Interviewer:

Earlier you mentioned that Gen Zs, their perceptions change, right? How do you know and how do you keep or make sure that, first of all, how do you know that as time goes by, they still perceive CDO Katsu and Nuggets as authentic? And two, how do you maintain?

Participant:

How do I know?

Interviewer:

How do you know that they still perceive? You said earlier that Gen Zs' perceptions change. So through time, how do you know that they will still see it as authentic?

Participant:

I guess we just really need to listen to them online, do the social scans, and even listen to the feedback from trade partners. Because even the feedback from trade partners can also be your source of truth on what the consumer perceives about you. And I guess that's really it.

We just really need to listen to them and how we will maintain. Basically, we just deliver on the promise, on the quality, and then if there's a need to do tweaking on the communication, we can do so. But it should still be aligned on the core.

Because that core will preserve the longevity and also the long-term purpose of the brand.

Interviewer:

Just one last clarification for the record. When you say trade partners, these are the wholesalers and retailers, right?

Participant:

Yes, even the trade partners, the buyers that interact with sales, and then the sales team will be the one to feedback to the brand.

Interviewer:

So in other words, these are the middlemen in terms of selling the product between the brand and the consumers.

Participant:

Yes, because we actually receive feedback from them, mostly on packaging. So we address that as a way also to ensure that whatever negative feedback that we receive from consumers, we listen to them and address it.

Interviewer:

Okay. I believe you have shared a lot of insights for this research. Thank you very much.

It will help enrich the findings of this study, I'm sure.

Participant:

Hopefully.

Interviewer:

Thank you.

Participant:

Thank you.

APPENDIX G

Transcript of In-Depth Interview 7

Date of Interview: May 26, 2026

Time of Interview: 11:30AM

Duration of Interview: 1 hour 26 minutes

Place of Interview: Online via Google Meet

Name of Participant: NAME WITHHELD

Brands Handled/Worked for: Carlo Rossi, Barefoot, Arbor Mist, Carnivor, Pik-Nik, Mezcal, San Miguel Foods (Purefoods, Magnolia, Magnolia Timplados), San Miguel Mart, Sunny Side Up Pet Cream, IN2IT, Instant

Interviewer:

Hi, good morning (name withheld). Nice to see you again. And thank you for participating in this research of mine.

I'm sure your experiences will contribute a lot to the insights of this research. Before we start with the main questions, may I ask you to give a little bit of background about your brand management experience in the last few years, including the roles that you played and the brands that you have handled, and the companies of course where you belong to. Okay, go ahead.

Participant:

Okay, I'll just do a quick brief from the time I graduated to my current position. So, I graduated from Treston International College with marketing management background, and then I started with Celavive Skincare. So with that, I had to go abroad for that job.

This was during the pandemic. And then I was handling there as a brand assistant. Celavive, it's a natural skincare brand in the US.

They're located in Salt Lake City, Utah. So I was handling their social media and also product launches. And then when I came back to the Philippines, I had my own brand.

This was around 2020 to 2021. This was during the pandemic, and it's with a collaboration with Liza Soberano and Enrique Gil. So we were distributing.

We had our own alcohol brand, ethyl alcohol brand. It's called HKT Essentials. So we had an overall campaign for that when we launched it, and then it gained around 2 million in sales within the first six months.

So I was handling there the brand executions and also the campaigns that we were doing. Digital, and at the same time, all of the shoots that features Liza Soberano and Enrique Gil. And then after that, I went to Primeline Products Philippines, where I was handling 16 brands with different categories, specifically beauty, lifestyle, and then home.

And also beverages. So with beauty, I had IN2It, Instant beauty. And then for lifestyle, I had one of the growing brands back then.

It's called Sammy J. It's the waist trainer. And then Aquadry, the competitor of Aquazorb, and also Scentchips.

And then JML Home, the appliances of SM. And then for the beverage category, it's the Crazy Carabao Beer. And then once I left, I went to San Miguel.

So I was handling there, at first, the digital marketing side. So all of the socials, digital execution of all the brands. So from Pure Foods, Magnolia, Magnolia Timplados.

And then I had a promotion as the e-commerce specialist and brand marketing specialist there. So I was handling all of the e-commerce executions, and also the specific brand of San Miguel, which is San Miguel Mart. So it's a website that has all of the San Miguel products.

So I'm coordinating with all of our brands, and making sure execution of all their campaigns are replicated in our e-commerce, and specifically San Miguel Mart's promotions. And then after that, I went to Pili Ani. I was the brand and marketing head.

So I was handling all of our campaigns, including a successful campaign with Iza Calzado. I was handling digital marketing, e-commerce, all of our in-store promotions, and at the same time, digital e-comm, in-store. And at the same time, we call them the beauty consultants.

So I was handling their training and how to really promote the products, like the product trainings and all of that. And then now I am with Emperador Distillers. I am the senior category manager for Emperador.

I'm handling IWF, which is International Wines and Food. This includes all of our international wines. The main brand that I'm handling is for the wines.

Our main, most popular is Carlo Rossi, Barefoot, Arbor Mist, and Carnivor. And for foods, for the food category, it's Pik-Nik, the potato shoestring snack. And now, I was just given the task to handle Mezcal, which is…our upcoming tequila brand.

Interviewer:

So yeah, it's a lot. Quite a long list of companies and brands for such a young Gen Z like you. Quite an achievement already in those several years.

Anyway, let me go to my main questions. From your perspective, the perspective of having handled so many brands in the past, how do you make sense of brand

authenticity in the context of each brand's everyday communication practices with its Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

Well, I think the most important thing that brands should really take note of is having their own persona. Because Gen Z nowadays, they're very keen to authenticity. Even myself, whenever I would scroll on socials and stalk different brands, I would really check if they're very authentic when it comes to their messaging.

Let's say, I even have my own business actually that I'm running. So I'm really making sure that everything that I post there sticks to my own brand persona and branding. So for example, from my perspective in terms of the brand, I think this is a general thought for all brands out there.

I think it's lessening the claim to be real, but sticking to their own identity and also their brand values, their behavior. Like I said, it's very important to have their own persona. So if Gen Z nowadays, they're very observant.

I've noticed that they're very observant, even myself. So I detect certain elements. For example, I'm following this brand for quite some time.

And I noticed that this brand has a new execution that doesn't feel like the usual posting that they have. Sometimes, that's when I think, are they trying to transition or are they trying to be more relevant? But sometimes, at the end of the day, it doesn't really stick if it's not rooted in their own persona.

Like I said, that's the most important thing that I'm really highlighting when it comes to different brands, especially in the eyes of Gen Z. It's to really maintain their persona and at the same time, their behavior, their messaging, and also the look. What I noticed for the past few years, grabe ang Gen Z sa aesthetics.

And if they see that it's relatable, it fits their aesthetic, more or less, that's where the brand really communicates and it really sticks with them. If the concept of the brand is unique.

Interviewer:

I see. Can you cite a specific situation wherein one of your brand's communicative actions were interpreted by the Gen Z as either authentic or inauthentic? In that situation, what happened? And how did you and your team interpret and respond to the situation?

Participant:

Well, okay. I'll give you two examples, one for the authentic and also the inauthentic one. For the authentic one, I will relate this to my own brand.

It's called Sunny Side Up. It's a pet cream, actually. So the execution that I usually do when it comes to Sunny Side Up, the persona is to be fun, it's welcoming, and it's pet friendly, basically.

So the name itself is Sunny Side Up. So every time I would do executions, even the pop-up booth, the content that I do, it's very authentic. So I would always include the elements of the sun, animals, blues, sunshine, basically.

So whenever I would do the executions in our booth, it always stands out. Even our customers would say, Oh, your booth really stands out because it looks different. It looks authentic, it's unique.

I think that's where brands really should focus on, is to have their own identity. Because nowadays, if they're going to copy, for example, this certain look or content of a brand, sometimes it just blends in. So in terms of authenticity, I would really recommend for brands nowadays to have something different, not just because of ginagaya yung content.

Content na ginagaya, it can be a trend. But nowadays, a brand itself has to really have their own content that really resonates with their branding. And at the same time, how they look should be consistent.

I always emphasize this when I'm handling my team. Always make sure that it fits the branding. Because if it doesn't, they're going to associate it with other brands.

And it's not going to stick. One inauthentic brand that I handled before was IN2It Beauty and Instant. It's the same company, but at the same time, it doesn't stand out.

Why? Because when I was a brand manager back then, I was handling the digital side of it. So what I learned from there was, if your brand doesn't have a specific messaging or doesn't have their own persona, it's just going to blend in with each other, especially if they're offering the same product.

And you're offering the same look. For example, you're offering just photos of people featuring their face or something like that. You have to do something different.

Because nowadays, there are so many competitors in the market. And you really have to do something that makes you stand out. Like what I said, for the authenticity of the brand.

For the brand that I have, highlighting authenticity, there are so many pet creams in the market. But on my end, the advantage that I have is, not only I have good claims on the product because it's FDA and all of those, that adds to it, but it really sticks on how you execute the brand and how people see you overall. Especially Gen Z, they like to take photos, they like to take videos, even the experience itself.

Because even in our booth, whenever they would buy the product, the concept is Sunny Side Up. So we cook the product in a pan, and then we pack it up. So every time they remember that, and then they search for it, that's when it sticks to them.

Oh, this is the brand, I saw you guys. Oh, you're also here in this booth. That was two booth executions that I did.

And then three of those remembered who we are, even if we're new in the market.

Interviewer:

Let me just clarify, the sunny side up product is a pet cream? Pet cream.

Participant:

Pet cream, it's an ointment.

Interviewer:

Ointment, I see. And you cook it?

Participant:

Yeah, the concept is when you buy the product, we cook it in a display. It's like a play, it's like a role play. So we pack it up and then we flip it.

Interviewer:

Who does the cooking?

Participant:

Well, I have a friend who does the cooking. I'm usually on the back.

Interviewer:

The company side? I thought the customer will cook it himself.

Participant:

The company side, yeah, we do that.

Interviewer:

It's ready to apply already.

Participant:

Yes, and then what we do is we pack it up in this lunch to-go box. That's the packaging. And then we include so many stuff.

We include postcards. And then we tell them, oh, put this on your ref. Stick it on your ref so you can remember if you need to reorder.

And then we also give them samplers. But with the samplers, I always emphasize this whenever we would have an execution with my team. Every time we would have a booth execution, I usually refrain from giving free items.

Because the concept of giving free items is, wala free lang yan. I really want them to know the brand and know the product. And I think it's very important.

So what I do is whenever they would buy or they ask, I explain to them in a quick elevator, shorter than an elevator pitch, what the product is, what it does, what it's known for, FDA approved, all of those. And then we ask them if they buy, we tell them, oh, if you follow us on Instagram, we'll give you another free stuff. And then we make the whole packing up very fun for them.

That's why it really sticks. And then I noticed if we do that execution, the unfollow rate for executions like that is usually just two unfollows. That's the average.

Compared to the others who just give, oh, follow us, we'll give you freebies. They don't really talk about the brand. But on our end, we talk about the brand first.

If they buy, we give them a freebie if they follow. It's the other way around. Hence, it reduces the unfollow rate.

Interviewer:

Okay. Let's proceed to brand elements as communicative forms. How do brand elements such as brand names, logos, symbols, characters, packaging, slogans, and even endorsers function as communicative forms through which the Gen Z consumers interpret brand authenticity in your experience among the different brands?

Participant:

I would say brand elements are really important. It's a matter of having it be consistent in how you execute it. For example, branding colors.

For Carlo Rossi, let's say, Carlo Rossi is known for deep red, gold, and then they have other products with white wine. It's blue, the others are green. But every brand should have their primary colors.

I think it's very important to really have a brand book with all of the elements stated there. Because if we're not going to be consistent in highlighting the brand elements, it's really going to confuse your audience, especially Gen Z. Grabe ang memory ng Gen Z if they really like the execution of the brand.

And nowadays, Gen Zs don't really focus on that. Sometimes, they don't really focus on the product. Sometimes, they just want to look at the aesthetic.

Oh, I want to have this aesthetic. That's where Gen Z is heavily invested. It's how they look, how it will be incorporated in their life, and if it's relatable.

For example, for my team, we view brand elements as an extension of our storytelling rather than curated design assets. Because every element that we use, for example, for Sunny Side Up, the logo is handwritten because we want to make it fun. Then the elements, like for Sunshine kasi Sunny Side, and then we include animals since it's a pet cream.

We just make the whole thing fun so it's memorable. We want to make it colorful because usually, if it's like ointments, they think it's serious. Pharmacy, pharmaceutical, they never expected that an ointment can be fun.

That's why it sticks. And we stick to that overall imaging, even the tone of voice that we have. We even have a mascot.

His name is Eggsy. It's an egg that they always remember when we do executions. Even in Korea, Eggsy is quite popular actually there.

So that mascot of ours really goes around even in different countries. And then, it really sticks to their element. And also, the majority of our audience are Gen Zs because they like to watch Eggsy overall.

I think for a brand, when communicating to Gen Z consumers, it's really important that they evaluate the feel of the elements, the relatability, and at the same time, the emotional engagement to their audience because you want to make it relatable. And at the same time, you want to make it memorable. You want to make it engaging, memorable, and relatable.

I think that's the most important thing because sometimes brands just really focus on, oh, aesthetic, aesthetic. That's the goal of most of the brands. But it's a matter of sticking to what they have and being consistent with it.

So the goal is not simply to appear trendy overall, but to make it recognizable. There's coherent communication and also, like I said, relatability across all digital platforms and physical platforms. So that's the goal overall for my brand.

The brands that I'm handling is to be consistent. Even when they check it online, when they see it in stores, or if I have a booth, they can easily say, oh, I know that, Sunny Side Up yan.

Interviewer:

I see. Well, in conceptualizing those brand elements that you said should be memorable and relatable, how does your team, or if you do have a team, how do you conceptualize and enact these brand elements as part of the communication efforts of your brand with the consumer, with the Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

Well, I'll just stick, for now, I'll stick with Sunny Side Up since it's just one brand. Because if I'm going to highlight the whole Emperador, it's going to be multiple brands. For Sunny Side Up, it's going to be the easiest.

Since this is coming from experience. So what we did with Sunny Side Up, like I mentioned, the usual conception of people on pep ointment is you can find it in a clinic. You can find it in Mercury Drug or any veterinary clinic.

That's the goal for us. But at the end of the day, we want to make it different. So what we did was, well, you taught me this.

You break the box. So what we did was, anong pwedeng perception ng mga tao when it comes to ointments, for pet ointments? And what can we do to change that?

So what we did is, we really, really had that brainstorming. What can we do so that they won't see us as a regular pet cream? So that's where we conceptualized, oh, let's make it fun.

Let's not make it boring na medical study ang naka-focus doon. Let's focus on the story. So what we're using is, for example, the main ingredient is centella.

It's based on a lore in Korea. Tigers there back in the day would, whenever they would fight, they would roll around centella leaves to heal their wounds. So that's our main ingredient.

And then for the look of the brand, we want it to be fun, engaging. And why is it sunny side up? Because my friend, she's the one who conceptualized everything.

And this is based on her childhood. She likes to draw eggs. So that's why we made it Sunny Side Up, because she wanted to relate it to that.

And then our calling card actually is a drawing that she made when she was a kid. She was able to preserve it, and then that's the main design of our credit card. Sorry, our calling card.

So I think it's a matter of thinking differently when it comes to the elements. Because nowadays, there's so many brands in the market. Not just for pet cream, it's a lot.

All of the categories, there's so many products in the market that would invest in different executions. That makes you think, what can I do? And you really have to sit down and study your brand.

What can you do that can be different in the same category that you're in? Our products, I can see the similar products on TikTok. There's a spray to it.

Our cream is different. I mean, it's different because we have different testings in Korea. We're also US FDA approved, and we're also supplying to the US Army and US Navy.

But at the end of the day, in terms of the execution, the execution of what I see is very common. That's why it doesn't really stand out. Even the ones that I see on TikTok, it doesn't really stick.

I just remember it's a spray, but there's no branding to it because it doesn't stick to me. What always stands out is how I execute Sunny Side Up. Even my friends would say that when they see the post on socials, they know immediately it's Sunny Side Up.

It's the color, it's the element, and also the look. As in unang tingin pa lang, even if they don't look at the handle, they know it's Sunny Side Up. So I think that the most important thing for a brand is to really, really plan it.

And make sure it's something different. Because there are so many competitors in the market. You really need something to really stand out.

Interviewer:

How's the presence of Sunny Side Up in the Philippine market? Because I know it's present in international markets, but in the Philippine market?

Participant:

Well, it's been available in the US. Our head office is in the US, actually. And then our manufacturing is in Korea.

We're available in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong. It's huge in Korea, definitely. Because that's where it started overall.

In the US, it gained a bit of traction, given that we're supplying to the US K9. And from there, US Army and US Navy. But in the Philippines, we just started last February.

And we planned it, actually. Because there's an increase when it comes to pet products. Because the pet industry is growing.

Interviewer:

How do the Gen Zs in the Philippines respond to the brand elements that you did in the Philippines?

Participant:

Well, I noticed this. Because the first time that we did... Because Sunny Side Up came to the Philippines last February.

So what I did was, I joined the SMX convention booth for Pet Expo. And a lot of... Actually, the majority of our buyers were either Gen Zs.

And also middle-aged women who have a lot of pets at home. And they're actually very... In the booths, it's usually plain.

They're usually selling animals and such. But for us, we really made our booth pop out. So there were a lot of elements.

And then we made sure na may pakulo kami. So there's music, and then our Korean friend, Rose, speaking in Tagalog. We really get people's attention.

And then she was cooking. So all of those... Number one, it grabs the attention of the audience.

Number two, it makes them ask, what is this? Because our executions are different. And we covered the whole corner booth.

The executions are different. That's why a lot of people would get curious. So they get a lot of...

We got a lot of questions regarding, what is this? What brand is this? Is this available in the Philippines?

Or is it just in this event? So I think in the perception of Gen Z, it really stands out. Because what they notice initially, and when they're far away, all they see is the booth.

And it grabs their attention. Let's ask, what do you have here? So it's usually like that.

And also, just to give you an insight, every time we have an event, a pop-up, we usually have a sold-out. It's sold-out, basically. Every execution, we experience a sold-out on the second day, and then the third day as well.

Even when we had a small pop-up booth for the mall, the allocation that we have initially for that was sold-out two days straight.

Interviewer:

I see. Based on your experience, which brand elements tend to support the Gen Zs perception of authenticity? And which brand elements tend to pose a challenge in terms of authenticity in the minds of the Gen Z consumers?

But this time, can we cite some of the examples from the brands that have been in the Philippines for a long time? Perhaps from the Emperador line-up or from the San Miguel line-up?

Participant:

Okay, so for, I think, in terms of like the brand elements that really works, number one, it's the brand name, definitely, and the logo. That can't be missing because for Carlo Rossi, for example, for Carlo Rossi, there's so many wines in the market with the same look and everything, but if they read Carlo Rossi in the label, that's what they choose. And Carlo Rossi is well-known already in the Philippines.

So if I remove the name Carlo Rossi, it's just going to be a regular wine. They're not going to consider that. And then number two, the second thing, it's the look, the packaging, your packaging.

I think, like I said, for wines, usually they just come in a regular wine bottle. I think that's one thing that I want to explore with Carlo Rossi, if given the chance, is to have a unique bottle. One brand that I'm handling as well is Arbor Mist.

Before I came in, I was already a consumer of Arbor Mist. Even when I was in college, that's the wine that I would buy because it was affordable and at the same time, it had a unique look to it and the flavor. So the packaging of Arbor Mist used to be a frosted bottle.

So every time I see it, that's what I drink. It sticks. Now, they changed it to a plain bottle.

I cannot even distinguish it anymore. This was from our manufacturer in the US, so they changed it already due to cost cutting. But I think that's one element that really stood out.

And one thing that I would really highlight as well for a brand, like for example, Carlo Rossi. For Carlo Rossi, the brand name, not specifically the color, but the overall communication as well of the brand, how they communicate. Because with Carlo Rossi, it's targeted to moms or women who cook, who likes to cook, who has a lifestyle, who invites people over.

And we're being consistent with that. Even the campaigns that we do, we always communicate to those consumers. We're not communicating to men overall.

Our main communication elements, even the hashtags that we use, even the captioning, it really ties in with Carlo Rossi. Because if I use a different campaign, if I use a different caption for Carlo Rossi, usually, they don't really understand it. That Carlo Rossi doesn't speak like this.

So I think that's one thing that I would consider. Brand colors, yes, it's important. But it depends on the brand that you have.

For Carlo Rossi, we have so many wines that's associated with different colors. So I think, like I mentioned earlier, it's very important to have your primary colors, to really stick with that. Carlo Rossi's main color is maroon.

All of the content that we have, even if it's pink wine or white wine, there's always the maroon element to the content.

Interviewer:

Can you describe a time when a particular brand element decision unexpectedly turned out or affected the perceptions of brand authenticity of the Gen Z? Different from what you expected.

Participant:

Well, this is coming from the historicals that I received here when I came in here. Number one, Arbor Mist. Because the main consumers of Arbor Mist, it's targeted towards Gen Z.

Fresh out of college, we're still exploring wines. So I was the target market…prior. So Arbor Mist, the bottle, that specific element, the packaging, the color, brand colors, it used to be, the brand colors of Arbor Mist used to be, it's a muted purple, then the bottle is frosted.

It really looks elegant, especially with the look of the wine inside. When they changed it, actually, even my niece, na Gen Z, told me, Oh, Tita, di ba you're handling this? Why did they change it? We love the bottle. We actually use it in the condo as a water bottle.

I think that's one thing for a brand to consider. If they change it, kailangan swabe siya.

Because even here nowadays, if we change the bottle, if the market noticed it, if they didn't notice it, that means it's good. If they noticed it,..And if the reception is bad, it's a bad execution overall.

So yeah, I think that's the most relatable experience I've had with brand elements in terms of Gen Zs authenticity and perception overall.

Interviewer:

Okay, let's move on to Marketing Mix. This is more of a parallel questioning with the brand elements. So this might be overlapping with some of what you've already discussed earlier.

In your experience, how does the marketing mix? Of course, you know the product price, place, promotions, people, process, physical environment, the seven Ps and the stuff. How do these strategies become part of the brand's ongoing communication with the Gen Z consumers in relation to brand authenticity?

Participant:

Okay, so basically, with my experience, what I usually do is the strategies that I would usually consider or the elements that I would use or factors that I would usually consider when it comes to having different strategies is to communicate the values that we have as a brand beyond the product itself. For product, basically, for the product, quality basically communicates reliability. So if your product has quality, definitely it's going to be a reliable product.

Pricing, it's mostly focused on fairness or accessibility. Can I afford it? Is it easy to acquire?

And then distribution, of course, inclusivity, and then convenience. And then in terms of promotion, we would all consider the identity, of course, the branding elements and all. And then cultural awareness, I think.

So similarly, when it comes to customer interactions or operational process and such, retail as well, I think for Gen Z, it's very important that they interpret authenticity of your brand, not just through your advertising, but the overall consumer experience. Like I mentioned earlier, from how they see the brand, even until the execution, until the part where they buy the product, I make sure that they get it and it sticks with them. So from the price, like the quality, I communicate it with the spiel.

The pricing, I tell them that, oh, this cream, for example, for Sunny Side Up, oh, this cream for 33 grams, this lasts for 3 to 4 months, and then you can get it for 849, this will last you up to 4 months, and then you can use it overall. And then I highlight all of the product quality, so at least it covers the price. Usually, because they want to see how valuable the product is.

And then in terms of distribution, I tell them, oh, we're just available now on Instagram, and then we're setting up our website to maintain the distribution and not have counterfeits. And then that's where they really focus on, oh, this is nice, and then it really sticks. And nowadays, I have actually customers who buy, like almost every day, we have an order for Sunny Side Up because they always remember it.

And then they discovered us through social media and also through booths. So I think it's the consistency of what we're doing from the product until the execution, until they get the product, that sticks to it.

Interviewer:

How do you conceptualize these marketing mix strategies of yours, and how do you implement them in relation, well, in targeting Gen Zs, of course?

Participant:

Yeah. So basically, sir, what I do is I consider a lot of factors, again, for it. So for the pricing decision, we evaluated it not only based on the financial capability, but of course we want to, as a business, I want to earn as well.

I want to make it profitable. But at the same time, I have to interpret the value and the fairness of it in terms of the perspective of my consumers. Now, for example, if this cream is, if my margin is really big, how much can I go, like, surprise?

How much do I want to earn? How much I want to give to the discounts that I can give to my consumers like that? So I always consider those, especially when it comes to promotional campaigns.

I consider a lot when it comes to promoting Sunny Side Up because that's where the awareness comes in and also the consideration of the product. So my usual framework

is I design it to get the attention that they need in terms of cultural relevance. So it's the aesthetic and also the participation of the audience.

Like I said, the booths or executions that I do are very interactive. Even with Carlo Rossi nowadays. With Carlo Rossi, I actually have, it's an ongoing campaign.

It's called That's Bagay. It's a food and wine pairing. So what I do there is I make it interactive with my consumers.

So it's a food and wine pairing. That's what I'm trying to build because Filipinos are not wine drinkers. So what I do is I created a community.

I'm starting to create a community group or like an engaged community management chat where when we promote Filipino food and wine pairing, they can easily message our Facebook page and ask, oh, what's good with this wine? What's good with this wine? And then you can post and you can share it.

And then we're also planning to do giveaways for people who post content. It's a monthly thing that we do. So we really want people to be engaged with our brand and get something out of it because I really want to have that strong emphasis on consistency across different touch points, especially when it comes to the operational experiences and at the same time the external messaging.

So from content to the experience of them just curious. Oh, i-message ko nga si Carlo Rossi, what can I pair with pink Moscato? What can I pair with sweet red?

Something like that.

Interviewer:

I see. Based on your experience, which of these marketing mix strategies support or tend to support the perception of authenticity among the Gen Zs? And which of those marketing mix strategies did you observe to, you know, pose some doubts in the minds of the Gen Zs when it comes to the authenticity of your brand?

Participant:

Well, product is number one, definitely. If you have a good product, if you communicate it well, it would sell. Number two is for me is I wouldn't say price because pricing nowadays, I mean, the ang Gen Z nga bumili ng POP, they spend so much on POPmart, Labubus and such.

So it's very important. Like I said, it's the product and it's also the promotion. It's how you communicate your product.

It's the product and how you communicate it that really, I would say, gives the strongest…that gives the strongest communication to Gen Z. Because with pricing, they can easily do something. Like what people usually say, kung gusto gagawan ng

paraan, kung ayaw maraming dahilan. With that, I think the best example there is with POPmart. They spend so much.

We kind of replicated a bit of that. Even in this brand that's called Jellycat. It's a plushy brand. It's stuffed toys. But the experience that they're selling and how they promote their product is, you go to their store, they make something out of it. It's the experience that they're going for...na niluluto yung pancake plush.

They cook the pancake in front of you. And then they're going to pack it up and everything.

And then it's like you're buying a cake at the store. It's like that. So I think one of the, out of the marketing mix, it's the product and the promotion that really, really stands out…na kailangan nung brand to really highlight.

Because the price itself, if they see the value of it, and if you're able to create a demand for it through your promotions, the pricing, they don't really consider it. Because Gen Zs, they're not the wisest when it comes to saving up.

This is based on a study that we did too. The average savings of Gen Z is actually smaller because they're very, very keen in maintaining the lifestyle that they want. They want to treat themselves, oh, I deserve this.

It's their lifestyle. So I would say, at some point, I have that aspect. I'm very meticulous when it comes to my financials.

But I have that certain aspect, oh, I want to have this too. I want to splurge on this because this is what I like. It's like that.

Interviewer:

How do you observe, interpret, and make sense of the reactions of the Gen Zs towards these marketing mix strategies in both the physical and digital realm?

Participant:

So number one, of course, I check the analytics of it. And then with the campaign, like for Carlo Rossi, this is relating to our That's Bagay campaign. And what I notice is most of our consumers there, surprisingly, are ages 25 to 35.

So technically, may Gen Z na pasok doon because Gen Z actually started with 1997, which I'm 98. So I would say there are a lot of Gen Zs actually starting to try wine. That's what I noticed.

So what we do is we do a lot of analytics. We have a dashboard to really track their behavior, to track the consumer behavior through online, like digital, like if this content, ang nag-react is mostly Gen Z ba or what?. And then we also do social listening, engagement analysis.

We get customer feedback. There are a lot of people messaging Carlo Rossi's Facebook. They would send us pictures.

Oh, I like Carlo Rossi. Or they would tag us. We also do retail observations.

And then at the same time, sales trends. We're also working with Nielsen to really study the behavior of Gen Z because that's really important for us. But at the same time, for digital, it's immediate feedback.

Physical environments, usually they reveal the behavioral. For example, we do a store check. We check if someone's going to buy Carlo Rossi, what age group that is.

That's how we do it. We interpret it involving or our interpretation usually focuses on identifying if the consumers, like for Gen Z, perceive the decisions or the consumer-centered or if it's profit-centered or product-centered. Because usually with Gen Zs, actually it's another insight for Gen Zs.

They're unpredictable. If they see a trend on TikTok and if they see that a lot of people are doing it, they usually follow the trend. I think that's why nowadays TikTok is really powerful, actually.

It's a big influence on Gen Z. So now, sadly for Carlo Rossi, it's alcohol. There's that restriction.

We can't really have a lot of executions on TikTok. We can do ads, but we can't do the typical approach of the influencer. But that's actually my plan for Pik-Nik.

That's where I'll build Pik-Nik with TikTok. I really want people… Pik-Nik has a brand equity already.

I mean, you know Pik-Nik. I've been eating Pik-Nik for the longest time, even when I was in preschool. So what I'm planning to do is make it relevant again.

I want this generation, the Gen Z generation, to be aware of what Pik-Nik is. And Pik-Nik is also evolving, by the way, sir. We already have potato chips.

And it's actually becoming a fast-moving SKU already. Because potato chips has three… Currently, it has three flavors.

The original, the Pik-Nik original, just the salt. And then there's the Pik-Nik ketchup flavor, the sweet ketchup. We incorporated it through our potato chips.

And then we have the cheesy cheese. It's a different taste of cheese. It's not the typical Filipino cheese.

It's like a creamy taste of cheese, which is unique. Because I've never tasted anything like that. I think the closest one is, if I'm not mistaken, sa Lays.

Interviewer:

I'm interested in that cheesy flavor.

Participant:

Ha?

Interviewer:

I'm interested in that cheesy flavor.

Participant:

I'll send some to you, sir. Actually, just to give you an insight, we sold out this month. It's a good problem.

But we sold out. We don't have anything here in our warehouse. Even in the whole Philippines, it's sold out.

So we just ordered 100,000 cases for Pik-Nik, just potato chips. So in two weeks, we'll have it. I'll send it to you.

Interviewer:

Okay, thank you. Thank you very much for that.

Participant:

I will send it over so you guys can try it at Treston.

Interviewer:

Yes, yes. Okay. Was there a time when a particular marketing mix decision that you made turned out unexpectedly affecting the perception of authenticity among the Gen Z consumers? You did not expect it to turn out that way.

Participant:

Actually, what surprised me actually was Pik-Nik. Because we were actually targeting for Pik-Nik potato chips, we were targeting moms. For them to buy for their kids, pambaon

Like how Pik-Nik used to be, pambaon yung can. But when we launched the Pik-Nik potato chips, actually, the initial targeting, like the product, we were communicating it na pambaon ng anak nila yan. But we realized that ang bumibili ay yung adults for their personal consumption.

So from our communication, it's mostly focused on the promotion. We were promoting it for moms na pambaon. What surprised us is when we launched it, a lot of young adults reacted.

So nowadays, our strategy is we're participating in different product sponsorships. Like we're trying to participate in fun runs. Because nowadays, Gen Zs love to run.

And then what they like, what they usually enjoy, what I noticed is, Pik-Nik, when the booth is there, they usually get, they participate because number one, they would always say, oh, we like the potato chips of Pik-Nik. Even my friends, they didn't know that I was handling Pik-Nik. And then they told me, hey, try the Pik-Nik potato chips, masarap.

I even went out with a friend last week. I was surprised that her snack in the cinema was Pik-Nik potato chips. And that friend of mine is just 26 years old.

So I said, ah, young adults will really buy it. For their personal consumption. Not moms, na pambaon ng mga bata.

And even I have friends who are a bit older. They buy it for their personal consumption.

And they have kids. For personal consumption pa rin. Not for pambaon ng kids.

I think that's what surprised us. Because initially talaga, it's marketed as pambaon like the shoestrings, yung madaling baunin na naka-tin can. We thought it would be like that, but it has a different approach to it. So that's it.

I think that's where we figured out that, oh, our potato chips, it's going to be a different…than the shoestrings.

Interviewer:

What's the packaging of the potato chips?

Participant:

It's the typical.

Interviewer:

The typical pillow pack?

Participant:

Yeah. So it's very different. But the flavor itself, it's the same.

What's unique is the cheese one. That's my favorite.

Interviewer:

Anyway, I'll be looking forward to tasting that cheesy cheese.

Participant:

Sige sir.

Interviewer:

Anyway, in general, how do Gen Z consumers typically express or communicate their perceptions of authenticity or inauthenticity towards a brand? How do they express it?

Participant:

Well, Gen Zs are very tech-savvy. So I think brands overall should be wary on how Gen Zs perceive them and how they're being talked about on social media. Because social media, it reaches so many people.

Unlike TV before, if you're able watch it on TV, that's it. If you weren't able to watch it, that's a miss. Nowadays, social media, it sticks.

Everything you put on the internet sticks. It's not going to go away. So I think Gen Z consumers, usually they express it…it's here.

And also, they're very outspoken. So anything that they say about the brand, a lot of people consider it as a reliable source. For example, a lot of Gen Zs say, Oh, pangit yung brand, pangit ito.

It sticks to the other Gen Zs. Oh, they say this, especially with influencers. Oh, I don't like it. I don't like this brand. I like this more. That's what sticks to them.

And there's also, there's so many platforms as well, Sir Ron. I have to always look at before I do a lot of executions. For example, Reddit.

I have to read so many things on Reddit first before I execute something, or if they're talking about my brand already. That's where I get info. Because that's community discussion.

That, I get insights from there. And then at the same time, I check on socials. I check if, let's say, Oh, Carlo Rossi, is the campaign working?

How do people perceive it? And I also, sometimes I test the waters. I do a lot of engagement content as well.

So, I look at how people would react to it. And sometimes, I also participate in trends. I want to see how they react overall.

Did they perceive this as relatable? Did they find this as funny? Because I remembered this.

This is related. Before, since I used to handle the digital of a lot of brands in San Miguel, like Purefoods, Magnolia, ganyan. I noticed when I left, when they posted on socials, a lot of people found their content, I would say the word, but Gen Z said, cringe, when they tried to do the trends.

So, I think, sometimes, as a brand, you have to consider if it's going to be relatable, if it's going to be funny, or sometimes, Gen Zs really perceive it as, like I said, cringe. Because sometimes, they would say, sana hindi na lang nag-try itong brand, sana hindi na lang nakisama itong brand sa trend kasi nagmukha lang pangit yung execution nila and it sticks.

I think, for inauthentic content, usually, Gen Z, they usually communicate through criticism. Sometimes, it's sarcasm. And then, public call outs, engagement.

Interviewer:

How do you respond to these? To these ways of expressing how they feel about the authenticity of a brand? How do the brands respond?

Participant:

For us, feedback is really important. Because I really want to know what they think about us. Internally, what I usually do, how we usually handle this is, we compile everything, all the feedback I get, I find it on Reddit, wherever.

Whatever platform I find, usually, screenshot, or screen record, download the video, compile everything. And then, I usually hold an internal meeting with the team. Everyone is involved, from digital, from even our salespeople, and then us, the brand.

What we do is, we analyze the feedbacks. And then, what we can do to change that. If it's a negative perception, we usually discuss, what can we do?

What can we test? What can we do to change their perception? Do we do something like a digital post?

Do we make another campaign to change their perspective? It's usually the process of balancing out the brand consistency and adaptability.

With Purefoods, they tried this Gen Z trend. Millennial marketing, very informative. And then, Gen Z marketing, very cringe. And then, a lot of people said, that's not what Gen Z said.

Who said that? I think that's one thing what we do is, we analyze, what can we do? What is relatable?

How can we stay consistent and at the same time, adapt to what's trending nowadays? It's a tedious process, but it's a must for every brand to really go through that and really identify if this fits my branding? Will I still be relevant?

Or this just makes my brand look bad?

Interviewer:

Can you cite an example of the kind of adjustments or changes that your brand did, what you did with your brand in response to the Gen Zs feedback related to authenticity?

Participant:

With Carlo Rossi, before it was usually targeted to adult, to really like middle-aged, yung mga nag-wine talaga na audience like 35 and above, now we created a campaign to change that. We want to make it relatable to the younger audience kasi with our market, yung Gen Z, it's either hindi sila umiinom or they're looking for a healthier alternative to it. So what we do is, we're relating it to celebrations, get-togethers, so that's what we're changing.

So we have actually, like I said, an ongoing campaign. It's with Abi Marquez, the food content creator, yung lumpia queen. Her, our campaign, it's called That's Bagay.

Ang Gen Z kasi mahilig mag-Taglish. Yung, oh that's bagay. So we're, that's the whole theme of our campaign.

It's, we're matching it with Filipino food and we're, um, we're incorporating Filipino celebrations such as get-together, karaoke times, ganyan. So I think that's how we, that's how Carlo Rossi is trying to adapt nowadays to a younger, younger market. Especially si Abi Marquez din kinuha namin influencer for this campaign.

And it's actually, it's gonna be a three-year campaign for Carlo Rossi.

Interviewer:

I see. Quite a long, long term campaign.

Participant:

It is, it is. And also, Sir Ron, with, with that, given she's gonna be our endorser for three years, we're gonna be having different executions with Abi. So we're gonna have a landing site, nandun lahat ng recipes ni Abby that they can go to that pairs with Filipino food and the Carlo Rossi wine.

And then we're also gonna be having an influencer convention or influencer expo, which is gonna be sponsored by Carlo Rossi. So different content creators siya that they're gonna be vlogging overall. Kasi we're really targeting the younger generation and we really wanna educate them na...

Oh, yung salong-salong ganito, you can incorporate wine and just have fun with your friends. And then, um, another thing is we're also gonna do a travel vlog with Abi.

We're going to the U.S. on October. It's gonna be a Filipino Heritage Month there. Um, magluluto si Abi dun sa mga Filipino community sa U.S., sa Modesto. She really wants to tap the Filipino market.

Specifically, ang target, ang audience kasi ni Abi are Gen Z. So she really wants to maximize that, yung traveling niya, and also yung pag-cook niya in America, something like that. It's a lot.

Interviewer:

Okay, uh, let's proceed to, uh, how would you describe the ongoing communicative interaction between your brands or your past brands and the Gen Z consumers in shaping or, you know, co-constructing what counts as authentic, the idea of what is authentic?

Participant:

Okay. Well, from my experience, being authentic, it's, it's always, how I see it, it's like a transaction. Being authentic is actually a transactional relationship with your audience because you have to be very collaborative with them.

And at the same time, you have to continuously negotiate and set that balance. Like I said, if, how do I stay consistent and how do I adapt to, how, how do I adapt to it? They're actually, like, for example, for my brands, um, usually brands may, like, this is also based from my observation.

Some brands, they actually may have, um, they may initiate, like, for example, um, the messaging targeted for um, their target audience. For example, um, for, I think, this is, um, this is coming from my perspective as an audience, but for myself, I don't think I have ever experienced this, na, yung Gen Z, they interpreted the brand that I have as something na, parang, na interpret nila in the wrong way. ‘Cause I'm Gen Z, I'm part of the Gen Z group.

So I think I have that advantage, na, I know how to talk to that specific audience. I've never experienced it, but I've seen a lot of brands na, they're targeting towards, kunyaring, millennial groups. Pero ang nangyari is, um, yung Gen Z naman, since they're also savvy on, kunyari, digital, they actively interpret or challenge it.

So na…reshape, and then sometimes they validate the different meanings through their responses or their comments, it's the engagement that they have and their participation. So with social media nowadays, dunno, that's, that's why I'm trying to really be updated when it comes to digital. ‘Cause social media is, is, it opens so much doors for brands.

Na really, na a brand should really stay relevant on digital. Kasi especially when you're creating, for brands, if you're creating an environment where your brand is not, parang ganun Sir Ron, your Gen Zs are really engaging, engaging for, on, on TikTok,

Facebook, Instagram. If they're not engaging with your brand, it means you're doing something wrong.

It means you're not being authentic. It's just, ah, scroll lang ako. But if they're really engaging, there, there's something that you're doing.

It's either right, or you're doing something wrong, and it's getting them triggered. ‘Cause nowadays, they don't really care if, if may maka-away sila. Nag-aaway nga sa comment section eh.

You just really have to, like I said, balance it out. If your messaging is correct, and if they're engaging well, that's a good sign. But if they're engaging and nag-away sila, I mean, if your goal is to really increase your engagement, hayaan mo silang mag-away.

But if your goal is to really, um, is to really have a good perception of your brand, you really have to make sure na you're getting noticed by this specific target group. Kunwari Gen Z, kung target mo yung Gen Z sa digital campaign mo, you really want them to comment. If not, if they're just, if naka-target dun yung campaign mo, but they're not engaging, there's something wrong with you.

Interviewer:

Was there a time when, uh, you as a brand manager, um, the way you see, uh, the way you perceive brand authenticity, was there a time when the Gen Z consumers have reshaped the way you, you view brand authenticity as a brand manager?

Participant:

Definitely, definitely. This is coming from someone who's part of the Gen Z, and I'm very meticulous with the things that I see on socials plus, and this is coming from a professional who's handling brands. So basically, um, Gen Z consumers, they usually influence the brands by, of course, sometimes they redefine the expectations of it.

And at the same time, Gen Z, Gen Z consumers, they're very transparent and they want, oh, I want inclusivity, sustainability, oh, I want humor, I want relatability, I want related, I want, um, relatable content. So I think, ang ano ko dun Sir Ron is, yung reaction ng, yung reaction ng Gen Z towards a brand, and parang their reaction to really, it's either towards a brand to really support, or let's say, um, how do I say it?

Parang for me, it's like I said, the Gen Z group, they're very, the Gen Z consumers, they're very transparent, they're very engaging, and it really, it really shapes how brands, um, how do I say it?

Sorry, can you clarify it, sir?

Interviewer:

It's basically, um, how do brands, or how are brands, or brand managers like you, um, how, was there a time when you, when your, um, when your perception about brand authenticity was reshaped by the, by your consumers, by your Gen Z consumers? Meron ba time na naiba yung perspective mo, naiba yung pananaw mo sa brand authenticity, um, because of the Gen Z consumers?

Participant:

Yeah, okay. Okay, I got back on track there. So, with my exposure with digital, I, whenever I scroll on socials, I don't just scroll just to be updated.

I observe a lot of brands. Ang dami kong brands na ini-stalk. So, what I would usually do is I would check the comment section. I would read it.

Sometimes, sobrang lalim ko na if there's like 12,000 comments, I would stay there for like 15 minutes scrolling and checking what they're talking about. So, it really sets that perspective on my end, and this is not just my, the brands that I'm handling. I stalk a lot of brands that are very well known, and ang target market niya are usually Gen Zs.

So, that's where I, that's where I take advantage, actually, of the situation. Okay, this is not what I'm going to do. I'm not gonna copy this execution kasi ganito yung ayaw nila.

These are the things that I am going, I'm gonna, usually, I write it down. It's either on my phone. I'm gonna screenshot it, put it on my notes or save it, and then these are the things that I can do, and these are the things that I'm not gonna do kasi ganito yung perception nila because of it.

So, I take note. That's what I usually do as the brand manager and also as part of Gen Z. I take a lot of notes of the other brands, even if it's not a direct competitor, if it's, even if it's not in the same category.

I usually check the executions of each brand of how are they going to be perceived. I think one brand that really stands out, that really taps yung Gen Z, Sunnies is a good example of it. Sunnies is a good execution of it kasi tinitignan ko lagi yung comments nila.

It's, I don't really see much of the negative comments, but it's a strong branding of Sunnies na ganun talaga sila, and they're usually curated overall, the Gen Z market, and that's, sometimes I get inspo from them. Even how they execute it on e-commerce, minsan ginagaya ko kasi it really has a good perception. Even the design of their e-commerce, that's what they're known for, yun yung ginagaya ko din minsan on the executions.

Because they're really, really good in maintaining their branding, even sa, even sa stores nila. I remember, I was in college when I, when they opened their first store, pinanood pa namin nila Anthony, I had to drag them, yung three boys ko, I had to drag them sa Sunnies, and they had to wait outside. Sabi ko, I wanna see this brand.

I really wanna see this, I wanna have it, I wanna try it. It sticks. Even until now, yung branding ni Sunnies, from the time I was in college up to now, they're very consistent with it. That's why it sticks with me every time.

Interviewer:

That's the eyewear brand, right?

Participant:

Hindi lang sir, Sunnies Face, Sunnies, um, Sunnies Glass, ang dami na nila. But they maintain, yung tumblers nila, yung glasses nila, Sunnies Specs, Sunnies Face. It's a whole ecosystem already.

But the thing is, they maintain such good branding. And you're able to, you're able to distinguish ano yung look ni Specs, ano yung look ni Face, ano yung Sunnies Flask, all of those. You can easily identify it.

Interviewer:

Would you say, based on what you have observed, what you have experienced through the years of handling brands, would you say that brand authenticity is something that the brand enacts or negotiates, or continuously adapts through interaction with the Gen Z consumers? Which is which?

Is it something that the brand enacts? Is it something that it negotiates? Or is it something that it continuously adopts through, because of the interaction?

Participant:

Well, I would say authenticity of a brand is continuously, like I said, continuously negotiated siya. And the adaptability of it always on the line. Because like I said, yung authenticity, you have to maintain brand consistency, because they really want to make sure na hindi ka lang gaya-gaya ng brand.

So there's that thin line. And then at the same time, you want to make it relatable and adaptable to them. So I would say, it is, it is, it enacts its negotiations.

I would say na the authenticity, that's where it continuously, that's where it continuously negotiated, and then adapted. And then how I see it is, it cannot be fully, the authenticity and all of those cannot be controlled by the brand. Because at the end of the day, you don't know what's gonna, you don't know how your market is gonna perceive it.

Like even the studies, sometimes they say, oh, this is, this is what your audience is gonna perceive. Sometimes it goes the wrong way. It really depends on the execution of it.

So there are certain values and communication, communication strategies that I would always consider when it comes to executing certain communication with the brand. But overall, from my belief is, authenticity ultimately depends on how your consumers would really interpret your brand, and how it's going to, how they're going to validate it over time. Like I said, it really, it's really important to have that consistency, because if they have that authenticity, it's gonna keep valid, they're gonna keep validating your brand, and it's gonna make it adaptable and authentic in their eyes.

So I think with Gen Z consumers, they are highly, highly, highly participatory. They're very engaged, and also vocal. So authenticity for me, as a brand manager, it becomes like, it's like a social process.

On my end, I have to always make sure that it's being shaped through the interactions that I have with my audience. And at the same time, they, I want to make sure that they, that my brand, and the audience that I'm targeting really have a good relationship. It's like having fans of the brand.

So it's really, it's really making sure that they're well engaged, and you're still going to be relevant overall. Like I mentioned with Sunnies, like, when it opened, na-curious lang ako, I went in. Until now, I'm still, I'm still, I'm not a fan of it.

But their branding sticks with me. Ang ganda ng branding nila. I'm not a fan of their products anymore, but their branding overall, the look and feel of the store, it sticks with me.

When I see it, oh, Sunnies kaagad yun. And even the content that they do, I like it. I like their content, I like their, I like their design and everything, but I just don't like the product.

And this is as a consumer.

Interviewer:

So yeah. I see. Now, looking back, what was the most important realizations, what were the most important realizations or learnings that you had, that you've got from your consumer, Gen Z consumers, with regards to brand authenticity?

Participant:

Less perfection.

Interviewer:

That you did not initially anticipate. Yung nagulat ka, oh, ganun pala yon, something like that.

Participant:

Stop the curated content and focus on honesty and consistency. Even, that's what I learned, and it got validated when I was, when I received yung content ni Abi for Carlo Rossi. Because sometimes, ang training ko kasi bago pa magboom si socials is curated, advertising, kailangan maganda yung look.

And I'm, as I went along with my branding journey, I learned na kailangan, relatable talaga sya. It doesn't have to be perfectly curated. And it got validated when I had a meeting with Abi, and then she sent over the content for Carlo Rossi.

Because she did this video. Ang nangyari was, sinasadya niya yung mga mali ng video. Because nowadays, as content creators, nga, sabi nila na their market, like specifically since madaming Gen Z nanonood sa kanya, she wants to make it look like it's authentic.

Na sya yung nag-edit, even if she has an editor who does her videos. Ano talaga sya, sinasadya. So I think, yun.

Basically, yun, from what I learned is, you wanna make it raw. And you wanna make it consistent. Ganun yung ginagawa ni Abi.

She wants it to look like. She wants it to look like na sya yung nag-edit. She's just the only one on her team, even.

Or something like that. So yun. I think with the brand also, I also learned na your consumers don't really value, overall, participation and dialogue. What they're mostly, sorry, sa other way around, ang focus ng Gen Z is more on the participation and how relatable your content is, than just saying, oh, my brand is 100% natural, this and that. There's so many natural brands in the market. What they want is something relatable to them.

So Gen Z consumers, and as part of that, for me, if a brand talks to me, I want the brand to listen to what I am saying. Oh, this, maybe you can improve this, or like that. It's how the brand also responds on how, let's say, may controversial, something like that.

May controversial thing that happened. It's how the brand responds, and at the same time, how the brand evolves in the long run. Like I said, yung best example for the evolution, si Sunnies still sticks with me kahit nagkaroon na sila ng different product lines.

I think that's the best example with brand authenticity, and at the same time, how their Gen Z consumers remember them and make them relatable, even until now. I see.

Interviewer:

I'd like to, before I go to my last question, I'd like to go a little deeper into what you mentioned, the intentional, what we call this, yung sinasadyang magkamali in doing the shoot of your videos. I heard there's a concept that started from the tourism industry, which they call the staged authenticity, or some people call it the engineered spontaneity. Now, how would you reconcile that?

Because I believe what I heard about the stage authenticity is somehow contrary to what authenticity really is, and the same with engineered spontaneity. So how would you reconcile that as a brand manager?

Participant:

Well, how I see it, Sir Ron, for now, I'm not saying this is going to be a long-term thing, but as a brand manager, if that's the current thing that makes your brand relatable, because our goal overall is to make your brand look authentic, and you want, especially for, like I said, I'm revamping Carlo Rossi's branding kasi from older yung target audience, and I want it to be relatable. My goal is to make the brand authentic and relatable. So if I get it, it's a staged authenticity, but if it makes your brand authentic, it's internal.

I mean, that's the dark side of it. It's an internal thing. It's staged authenticity.

But at the same time, if your staged authenticity is as good as the real authenticity, I think, and if you're not hurting anyone, like I said, edit nga lang ng video, that's where it got validated na our goal. Like, goal ko is to make the brand authentic. Ang goal ni Abi is to make her video authentic.

At the end of the day, we made the whole execution authentic, even if hers is staged, mine is authentic, yung strategy. So I think there's always that middle ground for now, na yung staged authenticity, it's gonna work. Like, I mean, as a brand manager, I would say it will work for now.

And it's new. It's new. Di ba, nag-boom siya sa tourism industry? It's still new.

But your audience is Gen Z, especially. Matalino yung mga Gen Z na audience. You can only, as marketing, you can only push it for so long.

And then they're gonna say, wala na staged na yan, fake yan, di yan totoo. They'll find out. So for now, staged authenticity is still a good way if you wanna push for that.

But in the long run, it's not gonna be a long-term strategy. Because your audience will definitely keep up. And that's the thing.

That's what makes brand management fun, kasi you always look for other ways to really make your brand authentic. Ngayon, it's staged authenticity. Maybe five years from now, or two years from now, it's gonna be a different approach again.

Interviewer:

I see. Now, moving on to my last question. If you were going to advise, if you're going to advise another brand that's targeting Gen Z with regards to brand authenticity, what advice will you give them?

Participant:

For an upcoming brand, it's better to be relatable than to have a well-curated brand and fake. Kasi if you're, than to have a well-curated brand na full-prim and polished na, na fixed na lahat. Because if you're a new brand, what you want is relatability with your new audience.

Bago ka eh. You want, it's like going to a new school. You wanna make friends, and you wanna be relatable to them.

So what you're going to do is, you're gonna find their interest na, oh, mahilig si ganito sa content na ganito. Oh, I'm gonna do content like this too. I'm not gonna be, you know, when you go to a school na you wanna be the, it's either you be the prim and proper na nobody wants to talk to, or you wanna be yung relatable person who interacts with everyone.

So I think that's the most relatable thing a brand can do, is have something na you can interact with your audience with, than just be curated. Kasi your audience knows na, oh curated na to, naka template na yung mga ganito. But if you're posting, kunwari, ad hoc content, na kunwari may nag-trending na content, that's really funny and you're gonna do the same thing, people more or less, it's gonna react, they're gonna react to it.

And algorithm-wise, lalabas yun. ‘Cause that's what's trending. But if you're gonna be the prim and proper na naka curate na lahat-lahat, that's not really the best solution for it.

Kasi wala na eh, fixed ka na. People are just gonna read about you. There's nothing interesting about you.

You're just gonna be a fixed, templated brand on Instagram or on Facebook, than something that's fun and relatable.

Interviewer:

Okay. Thank you very much, (name withheld), for sharing your experiences, for participating in this research. I’m sure what you discussed will contribute a lot in enriching the findings of this study. Again, thank you.

APPENDIX H

Transcript of the Sentence Completion Responses

Sentence Stem A:
A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when it is _____.

1. Good quality of the materials
2. Transparent, consistent and is true to its values.
3. Honest and consistent
4. Consistent, honest and aligned with what it truly stands for
5. Quality
6. Prioritise costumer
7. verified and well-known
8. genuinely connects with customers
9. Transparent
10. Good to their employees
11. willingness to say that " its not for everyone "
12. I can test its quality
13. Honest
14. It is expensive
15. proven and tested
16. very well known for a long time.
17. honest and consistent
18. found inside a luxury mall
19. High quality
20. genuinely cares about its customers instead of making profits.
21. Famous
22. Transparent. In terms of its certifications, use of raw materials, services that are not harmful not just to the consumer but also to the environment.
23. Consistent with their message.
24. When it’s transparent and relatable
25. Known and being used/consumed by multiple customers specially those people around me.
26. Close to my interest
27. actual product performance aligns perfectly with its marketing claims across every consumer touchpoint
28. A brand feels highly authentic to me when it is transparent, consistent with its values, and genuinely cares about its customers instead of only focusing on profit.
29. True to what is advertised for
30. maintaining its credibility by delivering its promised standard across generations.
31. natural
32. Established itself differs in the market.
33. Has it’s own unique brand image
34. Makeup
35. highly reviewed by a lot of buyers or recommended to me
36. trust-worthy
37. Real and true to itself

38. A brand feels highly authentic to me when i have a true connection with it, when it truly meet my needs and have shared values with.
39. Relatable
40. relates to my needs
41. Unique and stable.
42. In good quality when it comes to its usage and meets the expectations of its market base
43. interacting with its consumers and being consistent with the quality of their product/service
44. Based on truth and facts, not assumptions or opinions
45. high quality, where it's really good and it works for me, and when it has good reputation. I also like it when it has a good packaging.
46. Locally made with high-quality materials
47. Well-built.
48. advertised.
49. Recommended by trusted experts regarding on a specified subject
50. Shown or used in a real-life and not scripted environment
51. doing its purpose and used by many
52. Consistent providing good quality
53. Usable
54. locally sourced
55. Supported by other consumers
56. A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when it is promoted by influencers within my age group, especially when they can show that they have genuinely used the brand for a long time.
57. Made with high-quality materials instead of syntethics.
58. Focused on one or a few product or service/s
59. aligned with the specifications of the actual product being sold (e.g. truthfulness of materials used, accurate content)
60. When the brand has a story.
61. transparent, being recommended by a lot of people, especially by friends or relatives, or it is a big name in the industry already with no history of fraud or any negative pr.
62. Priced higher
63. When their products are high quality. By high quality, the item should be sturdy, able to use efficiently, and most importantly (to me), the materials used to make/assemble the item are well-crafted and detailed. It also feels highly authentic when the brand is consistent and trustworthy.
64. something that creates connection to us and not just selling
65. prestigious, distinctive, and makes high-quality products that people would die to buy.
66. High quality
67. aligned with my values.
68. it has good quality
69. Durable
70. inside the mall and also has a service center.
71. Referred by a friend
72. exceptionally new to my knowledge
73. true to itself like it is transparent to its customers.
74. honest, consistent, and true to its values.

Sentence Stem B:
A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as _____.

1. Billboards and tv commercials
2. genuine and relatable because they feel realistic instead of overly exaggerated.
3. Relatable
4. Transparent and real, and not exaggerated for overly
5. fine and clearly shows the true purpose of their product.
6. Perfectly aligned to with the brand actually delivers
7. Original
8. Relatable
9. Real Life Story
10. funny
11. come across as consistent with customers' actual experiences.
12. Genuine
13. Real
14. Investor
15. Transparent and credible
16. it is transparent, genuine, and the brand cares for the customer.
17. genuine and trustworthy
18. human, transparent, and aligned with its actual behavior.
19. Engaging and interesting
20. transparent and emotionally real instead of overly commercialized.
21. Relatable
22. Socially aware/relevant. I feel like some brands are gearing towards this approach, that's why sometimes some brands are satirical in terms of their advertising because it attracts gen zs for their wit and relevance to the realities in the country. Specially those brands that are really progressive in nature.
23. coherent, and relevant.
24. Its advertising and marketing communications come across as honest and genuine
25. Honest and genuine to its brand's claim.
26. Non intrusive
27. conversational and realistic, communicating to consumers like real people instead of a corporate entity
28. A brand feels highly authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as honest, relatable, and realistic rather than overly exaggerated or misleading.
29. relatable especially to targeted age group
30. something that would entice me with the product's goal.
31. effective.
32. A different product in that distinguishing itself from the other products in the market.
33. relatable and within the trends
34. long lasting
35. genuine, straightforward, no sugar coating
36. honest/genuine
37. Natural and relatable
38. honest, transparent, and consistent with what the brand actually does

39. candid
40. relatable and realistic
41. Genuine and transparent.
42. Strategic and Coordinated.
43. relevant and timely to current societal and political issues, but not in a way that is bandwagon-ing or performative
44. Relatable and relevant to my situation
45. honest or being true to its claims.
46. Unique to the place it represents
47. Well-researched.
48. Sleek
49. Facts-based and uses actual data to help support and promote a product
50. In touch with reality or down to Earth
51. influencers reviewing good and bad about the product
52. Honest and genuinely aligned with the brand's actual values and behavior
53. Appealing
54. inspirational videos or it comes with evidence
55. Legitimate
56. A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as TikTok-style content because it easily captures my attention despite my short attention span, aside from the content itself.
57. Trustworthy, reliable, credible
58. Informational and true
59. realistic and not overly hyped
60. Natural, meaning not staged. I also don't believe in influencer marketing anymore. I like when owners/founders engage in their marketing.
61. video testimonials or PR from reputable news/media platforms and trusted online communities.
62. Transparent, backed by actions and relatable
63. Honest and real. I believe that brands and their advertisements and marketing communications should come across as genuine to its target consumers.
64. consistent messages across all platforms
65. captivating, polished, and immediately engaging.
66. Straight-forward
67. genuine and consistent with my core values.
68. relatable, transparent, and aligned with the brand's actual values and behavior.
69. Genuine and transparent
70. honest, consistent, and genuinely aligned with the brand's values and customer experience.
71. Something helpful or a solution to a problem.
72. a unique online campaign through mainstream social media platforms like Facebook with a unique purpose
73. straightforward and unscripted.
74. genuine, transparent, and relatable.

Sentence Stem C:
A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as _____.

1. Unique and Good quality

2. ethical and customer-focused because it prioritizes trust and quality.
3. Ethical
4. Genuinely customer focused
5. genuine and honest about their product.
6. When the brand is driven by genuine care sa customers
7. original
8. transparent
9. executed and well planned
10. aligned with their image
11. its strategies and actions are seen as aligned with what it promises customers.
12. Honest
13. Fair
14. Popular
15. consistent with its promised results/values
16. honest and if the values and promises of the brand is aligned.
17. transparent with its products and customer-focused.
18. intrinsically motivated and consistent with its core purpose.
19. Innovative and strategic
20. customer centered.
21. true to its values
22. Progressive, or culturally relevant, inclusive or diverse across social class, or CREDIBLE.
23. aligned with the companies values, rather than riding on trends.
24. Ethical and sincere
25. Transparent.
26. Ethical
27. being transparent and accountable, especially navigating mistakes, operational challenges, and supply chain issues
28. A brand feels highly authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as socially responsible, customer centered, and aligned with what the brand promises to deliver.
29. trendy or attention catching
30. useful and trustworthy.
31. consumer centric.
32. New and inoperative in the market.
33. consistent in serving quality
34. cheaper
35. quite creative, actually working
36. consistent
37. Transparent and customer-focused
38. genuine and not just for publicity and aligned with what they promise the customers
39. relevant to real life
40. sincere, looking out for customers
41. Consistent and ethical.
42. Significant and Impactful to their market base.
43. taking something that is trending right now but innovating it to a higher level or personalizing it to their brand and its consumers
44. straight to the point with relatable stories
45. honest and sustainable.

46. Loyal to the place/people it represents and/or caters to regardless of profit
47. Inclusive to consumers.
48. Useful
49. Sincere and genuine
50. Credible or backed by evidence
51. mostly bought by consumers
52. Genuine, transparent, and driven by more than just short-term profit
53. Attractive to the eye
54. Help
55. Ethical
56. A brand feels HIGHLY authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as creative, fun, and engaging toward customers, while also partnering with influencers who genuinely use and enjoy the brand.
57. Something that is focused on giving me benefit like vitamins for overall health.
58. Helpful for the consumer
59. effective or well-known to the mass public.
60. Natural
61. a smart or insight-based, intentional, and genuine or sincere way to solve my problems or address my needs as a consumer.
62. when their actions match their words and when they prioritize genuine value for customers instead of just trends.
63. When their strategies and actions are principled and live by their core values. It feels highly authentic when they are value-driven and true to their words.
64. personable/ where I can relate
65. genuine, consistent, and purpose-driven for the community.
66. Consumer-friendly
67. Purposeful and genuinely driven by its core values.
68. Inspiration to their craft
69. Consistent and driven by genuine purpose
70. transparent, consistent, and genuinely focused on delivering value to its customers.
71. Casually used and not like a commercial.
72. influential and impactful using fresh ideas
73. they are driven by their values and they are driven by a clear purpose.
74. ethical, customer-focused, and aligned with what it promises.

Sentence Stem D:
A brand feels LESS authentic to me when it is _____.

1. Cheap Materials used
2. misleading or inconsistent because its actions do not match its promises.
3. Fake and inconsistent
4. When it feels inconsistent or misleading
5. breaks quickly and not true about their product.
6. Fails to deliver what its in their ads about the product
7. comes across as dupe
8. misleading
9. the promotions and product descriptions are vague and general
10. inconsistent with their marketing
11. when it is overly performative or trend-chasing.
12. The quality isn't high

13. Fake and has a low quality advertising
14. It is not popular
15. not reviewed by a lot of people or when it seems shady
16. has a lot of bad reviews and dishonest with the ads.
17. fake, inconsistent, or misleading.
18. animal tested!
19. Low quality
20. trying too hard to follow trends or pretending to care about issues only for publicity.
21. misleading or fake
22. Only for OPTICS, does not have meaningful substance that is really worthy of experiencing.
23. inconsistent, trend-hopping, and has neutral values.
24. Fake or overly profit driven
25. not well-known.
26. Irrelevant
27. being opportunistic and changes its identity just to chase short term trends in the media
28. A brand feels less authentic to me when it is inconsistent, overly profit driven, or pretends to care about issues only for publicity.
29. too much or over hyped
30. not meeting my expectations as a consumer.
31. doesn't deliver the expectation vs reality
32. Not related to its original purpose or goals.
33. inconsistent
34. cheap material
35. exaggerated advertising, too many bad reviews, low quality that also perishes quickly, advertised by someone i don’t like, when the brand owners are problematic
36. overhyped but is mid
37. Inconsistent or only focused on profit
38. inconsistent between what it says and what it actually does
39. too formal
40. lazy, money driven
41. Insincere and keeps on selling without the customers’ concern.
42. Useless to its intended purpose.
43. not consistent with its message and lacking in customer service
44. Click baity or drags on and on without getting to the point
45. poor quality, where it easily gets broken or is not good enough, and when it does not meet my expectations. For example, I expect the food to be delicious, but in reality, it only looks aesthetic.
46. Not made with high-quality materials
47. Lower in production quality.
48. Cluttered
49. Not recommended by professionals
50. Scripted or forced
51. has no bad reviews since I believe that consumers have their opinion regarding a product especially thru online
52. Inconsistent, performative, or says one thing while doing another.
53. Not usable, not good quality, and not worth the price.

54. advertised by the wrong unreliable influencers
55. Catering to a minority group
56. A brand feels LESS authentic to me when its content relies heavily on AI-generated promotions and AI voiceovers, making the brand seem less personal and genuine.
57. Cheap, only made for profit.
58. Trending or hyped up
59. inaccurate in terms of marketing, contradicting pros and cons
60. Staged and just copies from other brands.
61. too good to be true and hard sells.
62. Over pushing the brand image to the end users.
63. A brand feels less authentic when they are deceptive, hypocritical, and out of touch.
64. only focused on selling
65. inconsistent, made easy without planning, doesn't leave a good impression, and gives you doubts.
66. Fake
67. not aligned with my values.
68. the item doesn’t have a good quality or performance
69. Inconsistent and the price doesn’t mirror its reliabity and durability
70. an online store that has incomplete basic details such as contact number, email address, and brand logos.
71. When they get an influencer telling you to use the product rather than use it and wait for others to be curious.
72. somewhat that looks like a version of some existing brands
73. shallow
74. trying too hard to look relatable

Sentence Stem E:
A brand feels LESS authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as _____.

1. Social media
2. fake or manipulative because they seem designed only to attract attention.
3. Forced
4. Overly polished, exaggerated, Manipulated it's like trying too hard
5. does not show the true purpose of the product.
6. Inconsistent with what it actually delivers
7. copyrighted or low-quality
8. inconsistent
9. rage baiting
10. fake, not aligned with their image
11. come across as overly scripted, polished, or performative.
12. Backed by endorsers who aren’t honest
13. Misleading
14. Non buyer
15. Performative and manipulative
16. misleading and exaggerated.
17. exaggerated or dishonest.
18. if they promote green washing
19. Repetitive

20. insensitive or obviously forced.
21. Misleading
22. Classist, irrelevant to todays' generation, not resonating to its consumers.
23. forced, overly-scripted.
24. Fake and exaggerated
25. Falsely advertised.
26. Too personalized
27. being manipulative such as using of clickbaits or exaggerated claims to force consumer engagement
28. A brand feels less authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as misleading, exaggerated, or manipulative. I tend to distrust brands that use unrealistic claims, scripted emotions, or messages that do not match the actual customer experience.
29. dull or something I can't relate to
30. too good to be true.
31. questionable.
32. Failed attempt to convince its consumers.
33. exaggerated and scripted
34. offensive
35. exaggerated advertising, using irrelevant words to attention bait (ads), forcing to be relatable to the masses
36. misleading
37. Exaggerated or misleading
38. exaggerated, unnatural or too salesy or pushy
39. desperate
40. bland, not purposive
41. Deceptive or a lying product.
42. Failed to meet the expectations of their market base.
43. tacky, not researched well, insensitive
44. Too desperate
45. dishonest and has bad reputation.
46. Unoriginal
47. Overly marketed/AI Generated
48. Just selling
49. Using catchy phrases without actual evidence supporting the item
50. Out-of-touch or trendchasing
51. purely endorsed by famous people
52. Manipulative and disconnected from reality.
53. when it was only used for clout
54. by not being able to provide evidence of it’s reliability or effectiveness
55. Political
56. A brand feels LESS authentic to me when its advertising and other marketing communications come across as Facebook ads that rely heavily on AI-generated content and AI-written captions.
57. As if the product is made to be shoved down my throat without any regard about my needs.
58. Vague
59. purely based on hype
60. uses so much AI materials (posters, captions)
61. ai-powered human photos/videos and as a random sms with link.

62. Over selling the image without supporting. When it made me question about their product and it gives me doubt of even buying it.
63. exaggerated and generic. When they make unrealistic claims and lacks uniqueness.
64. posting content that feels unnatural or like scripted
65. trying too hard, fake, or lacking that "wow" factor at first glance.
66. Copying another brand
67. not genuine.
68. disconnected from the brand's actual actions and values
69. Manipulative
70. exaggerated, misleading, or disconnected from the actual customer experience.
71. A paid ad
72. a generic campaign that only spread through word of mouth without showing and explaining its credibility as a brand
73. polished but i can't feel the spirit it like it doesn't feel real its 100% scripted type of feeling.
74. fake or overly scripted

Sentence Stem F:
A brand feels LESS authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as _____.

1. common and cheap looking materials used
2. insincere because they appear profit-driven rather than customer-driven.
3. Manipulative
4. Self serving, value inconsistent or disconnected from its stated mission
5. if the product
6. Unaligned with their product to deliver
7. Replicated
8. Forced
9. more on to catch people's attention instead of highlighting its own benefits
10. lazy
11. seen as performative rather than genuine
12. Manipulative
13. Unfair
14. Not expensive
15. Inconsistent and unreliable
16. inconsistent, misleading, and confusing.
17. manipulative or purely profit-driven
18. purely performative, opportunistic, or contradictory to its stated values
19. Repetitive and no changes compared to other brands
20. Inconsistent with what it promises to consumers.
21. not trustworthy
22. Apolitical, unsustainable, ecofascist, and basically promotes child labor. Most likely these products are for mass production, just for consumption and has no meaning when consumed. It breeds materialism, fuel unsustainable choices among gen zs and finally reward capitalism.
23. inconsistent, lacking genuine intention.
24. Dishonest and unethical
25. Trying hard or overdoing it.
26. Too good to be true

27. performative such as exposing a direct mismatch between operational decisions and public branding
28. A brand feels less authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as insincere, unethical, or contradictory to the values it publicly promotes. For example, when a company claims to support sustainability or social causes but its actual practices show otherwise, it becomes less believable to me.
29. half-hearted or low efforts
30. not meant to resolve or even help with my needs and wants.
31. Weak
32. Not fully sound and structured to influence the consumers.
33. only want to make profit without considering customer’s feedback
34. weak
35. performative and inconsistent
36. incompetent
37. Dishonest and insincere
38. done mainly for publicity rather than genuine intent or when it is inconsistent with what the brand claims to stand for
39. self-interested
40. "fake and manipulative"
41. Phony.
42. Incompetence and lacking vision.
43. bare minimum, lacking in creativity
44. Confusing with no clear cta
45. misleading and not eco-friendly.
46. Manipulative
47. insubstantial.
48. Desperate
49. A way to encourage others to do things that isn't normally a good thing
50. Scripted or rehearsed
51. paid ads of influencers in social media which I think that they do not really use
52. Opportunistic, profit-driven at the expense of values, or inconsistent with its public image.
53. cheap and not good quality
54. burden
55. Political
56. A brand feels LESS authentic to me when its strategies and actions are seen as overly scripted, even when many influencers promote the brand, because the content can feel unnatural when they strictly follow brand-provided scripts just to seem â€œcohesive.â€•
57. Only done for quick profits with little to no regard on consumer benefit
58. Inconsistent
59. Controversial
60. Forced and overly calculated. I like to see more life and personality.
61. a way purely just to make a sale and makes me even think/say that "nah, it's just marketing".
62. When their actions are not aligning with what they communicate or when they appear to follow trends only to improve their image.
63. It feels less authentic when its strategies and actions are seen as exploitative and short-sited. Taking unfair advantage of workers, suppliers, and consumers and chasing quick profits without considering their long-term values.

64. feeling disconnected or can't relate
65. just for profit, copycatting others, or not caring about the community.
66. Being advertised my influencers
67. just for marketing tactics.
68. profit-driven at the expense of customers
69. Inconsistent
70. manipulative, inconsistent, or primarily driven by profit rather than genuine customer value.
71. Obvious tactics
72. the common or usual and not appealing to its target market
73. if they would say something and they would do different or another action.
74. dishonest or only focused on making money

Sentence Stem G:
When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I usually think _____.

1. Expensive
2. the brand is trustworthy because it delivers what it promises.
3. This brand genuinely cares about it’s customers and value
4. They're real and trustworthy
5. what’s the quality
6. True to its stated values
7. of its quality
8. trustworthy
9. they’re more credible and reliable
10. I wanna buy their product
11. they care about more than just selling products.
12. It’s quality must be high
13. it is trustworthy
14. Quality
15. That it is worth investing in
16. it is pricey, but surely it is high quality.
17. is reliable and worth supporting
18. Expensive
19. That I should consider buying it
20. this brand deserves support and practices what it promotes.
21. that their product works or is durable
22. Original ideas have become exhausted, probably long ago, that everything now must have been imitation of those ideas, or imitation of imitations. I think that to be told as a highly authentic brand in this generation, must be a rewarding experience to those who put it out to the market. To be authentic now, one must be highly innovative and consistent, and for the authenticity to thrive, it must stay purpose-driven, transparent and relevant.
23. They genuinely understand their costumers
24. I can trust this brand
25. Of buying and using/consuming it.
26. Their products must be good
27. pricey and expensive but top grade quality
28. When I encounter a highly authentic brand, I usually think that the company is trustworthy, reliable, and genuinely committed to providing value to its

customers. I also think that the brand is confident in its identity because it does not rely on misleading tactics just to gain attention.
29. it's good and worth the purchase
30. that the creator must have an excellent taste, goal, and unwavering commitment to consistency.
31. it's iconic
32. It’s a good brand that has good products.
33. trustworthy and values it’s customers
34. great quality
35. the quality might be great, will avail if needed in the future.
36. that it is reliable and i will come back/repurchase
37. I can trust this brand
38. I usually think that i can trust what they say and what they do
39. someone worked hard to build that
40. they genuinely care about customers
41. It is effective and safe.
42. That there is a value behind their products and services to their customer base.
43. if it's a necessity and how it affects my social and financial status
44. I don't think I know it's for real, so I just proceed with what's there in offer which can help me. If I don't know if it's for real, then I do research if I need it
45. how they always mantain their products to be in good quality.
46. It’s cool for a brand to be loyal to the place or audience it aims to cater to
47. of considering the purchase.
48. Its quality
49. It has a good quality
50. How I can relate to it
51. that it has a good quality and worth the money
52. They really know who they are and stand behind what they promise.
53. I can make use of this in the long run
54. of buying or purchasing
55. Feedback or reviews from other consumers
56. When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I usually think I can trust the quality of their products even if they are expensive, because the brand feels genuine, credible, and consistent with its image and values.
57. Its expensive
58. Established
59. that the brand offers high-quality products that I can trust and rely on.
60. It’s worth it
61. they've been in the industry for ages that's why they are trusted by people already and they always comply to legal requirements and other necessary permits to keep the business running.
62. Its a must to have
63. that they use high quality materials, care and value their products and consumers, consistently improves, and worth to spend on.
64. more connected to the brand
65. Wow, this brand is the real deal and totally worth the hype
66. it is expensive
67. they truly care about their customers.
68. Quality
69. That it will lasts longer and I will benefit more than it costs me

70. premium quality, premium services, and authenticity of the products/services they provide.
71. Wow I wanna be like that guy
72. that it is something new, thus I want to know it better
73. that they mean what they say.
74. the brand actually seems real

Sentence Stem H:
When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I usually feel _____.

1. Good quality and for long term
2. comfortable and confident because I know I can rely on it.
3. Comfortable and confident
4. Confident and comfortable
5. to buy
6. It's truly worth to buy
7. convinced as a potential buyer
8. comfortable
9. safe
10. excited
11. feel loyal toward the brand over time.
12. I can trust them
13. Comfortable
14. Respected
15. That it is trustworthy and genuine
16. trust, and confidence to buy to that brand
17. I usually feel relieved and satisfied
18. Luxurious
19. Good and amazed
20. Comfortable
21. Trusting
22. that I resonate with it? It's a personal experience when I encounter one.
23. more trusting towards the brand
24. More trusting and loyal
25. That it is effective/tastes good.
26. Intrigued
27. assured and motivated knowing that a highly authentic brand aligns my personal values to the brand. Not only that, it can also maintain my long term loyalty as a consumer
28. When I encounter a highly authentic brand, I usually feel comfortable, respected, and emotionally connected to the brand. I feel more confident supporting the company because it gives the impression that it values honesty and long term relationships with consumers.
29. happy and satisfied with its quality
30. valued, confident in my choices, and emotionally connected to the brand.
31. persuaded
32. Like it's true to itself costumers, and it's brand image.
33. valued and seen
34. satisfied
35. i could trust the brand and could recommend it as well
36. reassured

37. Comfortable and confident
38. confident, secure, and connected to the brand
39. inspired
40. valued and understood
41. Satisfied and happy.
42. Interested in becoming loyal or neutral, depending on the usefulness of the brand.
43. intrigued and curious
44. Trust and that it will be returned
45. confident, great, and feel a sense of stability for being consistent to its product quality and service.
46. Fascinated
47. Impressed.
48. Elegant
49. Safe and comfortable
50. Appreciative
51. that I also want to try the brand to experience the product
52. Confident and more willing to trust and support them.
53. I can get it is a good quality
54. happy
55. Sceptical
56. When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I usually feel more tempted to buy their products even if I do not necessarily need them, because the brand itself feels appealing, relatable, and worth supporting.
57. I can't afford it
58. Secure
59. that my money is well-spent.
60. Emotionally invested.
61. safe or that it's alright to make a purchase even on impulse or without a second thought.
62. I feel premium. Luxurious.
63. confident and reassured. I also usually feel happy with what I purchase.
64. that the brand values me as a consumer/customer
65. super excited, confident to buy, and proud to support them.
66. Amazed
67. a sense of trust and confidence.
68. willingness to support or recommend the brand
69. Satisfied
70. safe when purchasing their products/services. Since I can already felt the authenticity when I saw their brand name/logo.
71. Like I’m missing somethung
72. curious about it
73. confident
74. comfortable and trusting

Sentence Stem I:
When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as _____.

1. Checking the materials and the quality
2. support and recommend the brand because of my positive experience.

3. Support the brand, recommend it to others and stay loyal to it
4. Try it, recommend it, and stay loyal
5. to buy that product
6. confident to buy their product
7. scrolling through their socmed pages before considering purchasing an item from them
8. recommend it to others
9. over spending
10. look into their products and maybe buy
11. recommend the brand to others and purchase from the brand again
12. Purchase from them
13. Buy and Recommend
14. Looking for product
15. Investing on its products/services
16. purchase and recommend the brand to my friend and family.
17. I am likely to do things such as recommend it to others and continue buying its product's
18. Purchase the product
19. Check its background and where it came from
20. Recommend to my friends.
21. repeat purchases
22. Buying more of their products or subscribing to their services or even participating to their events. Maybe even recommending them to my friends and family.
23. support the brand by purchasing, and recommending to peers.
24. Buy from the brand again
25. Flexing it or sharing it to others.
26. Research more about the brand
27. prioritize the brand’s product over competitors and also establish a long term purchasing habit with the brand
28. When I encounter a highly authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as continue purchasing its products, recommend it to friends and family, engage with its social media content, and remain loyal to the brand even when competitors offer alternatives.
29. share it other people and budol them
30. searching for more details about their products.
31. buying the brand
32. Praise it to others and if I have any of their products, I’ll also recommend it.
33. supporting the brand by being a returning customer or recommending it to people i know
34. influence
35. add the items to my cart or in my list, search more on what other items the brand could probably offer
36. sharing it to friends
37. Buy again and recommend it
38. purchase and stay loyal from the band and would highly recommend it to others
39. support the business
40. support and recommend the brand
41. To buy the product.

42. Buying their products and checking up on its status and announcements for new things.
43. researching more about it, as well as any competitors for comparison
44. Purchase or consider especially if I need it
45. purchasing the product and would likely purchase them again in the future. I would also give them a good rating or feedback.
46. Buying from them again
47. Purchase.
48. Purchase it
49. Looking at the price tag, the packaging and the nutrition fact (For food). When I also have the chance, I would also go research about the possible benefits and harm of the product to our body.
50. Search for more info about the brand
51. try the brand
52. Recommend it to others, stay loyal to it, and engage more deeply with its products or community.
53. buying it all over again
54. purchase
55. Research reviews related to the brand
56. When I encounter a HIGHLY authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as signing up for memberships or loyalty programs because I see the brand as credible, trust them with my money, and feel willing to allocate part of my budget to support the brand.
57. Think of ways to one day buy high authentic brands
58. Recommending it to others
59. promote the brand online, or become a repeat customer.
60. Engage or follow
61. follow their sns pages or visit their physical store, check out their product offerings, make a purchase and sometimes, even share or talk about it with my friends/colleagues.
62. Talk about it, research, compare it with other brands.
63. buy fron them again. I would also promote and recommend their products to others consumers.
64. recommending them to others
65. save up to buy it, recommend it to friends, and follow their updates closely.
66. Search it on web for its price
67. recommend to others and stay loyal to it.
68. post them online for good reviews
69. Researching it and see its reviews
70. checking out their latest product/services, Research their brand history, and promote by telling to my family, close-friends and other people that I believe in their products/services.
71. Search more about it.
72. checking its credibility and brand details/associations online
73. giving them a good rating
74. support the brand, buy from it again, and recommend it to friends

Sentence Stem J:
When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I usually think _____.

1. Cheap

2. the brand is unreliable because it seems dishonest or inconsistent to its values as a business
3. They only think about the money but not to satisfy it’s customer
4. They're being fake or misleading
5. find some other brand
6. That the brand is inconsistent with their products and services
7. it is the cheaper alternative that is better for those who aim for more affordable products or not preferred due to its quality
8. they only want sales
9. it’s cheap
10. i dont want their product
11. this brand is just trying to sell to me
12. It’s not high quality
13. not worth buying
14. Not durable
15. That it’s not worth my time and attention
16. the brand is not so much trustworthy and genuine for me.
17. I usually think it cannot be trusted
18. Cheap
19. Not to buy it or not consider it as my first option
20. gain attention
21. bad quality
22. These brands do not have ethos. It felt like these brands are just in the market to diversify options but actually they do not have anything to offer.
23. they care more about their image than the customers
24. The brand is not trustworthy
25. That it is not effective and might have a harmful side effects.
26. I wouldn't buy from them
27. false marketing and advertising products that are high priced but low quality
28. When I encounter a less authentic brand, I usually think that the company is more focused on profit, popularity, or image rather than genuinely meeting the needs of consumers. I may also question whether the brand is being honest about its products, values, or intentions.
29. I won't buy next time
30. that the products are made for the purpose of convenience.
31. it's lacking
32. It’s trash
33. it’s just the same knockoff brand trying to make profit
34. poor quality
35. probably a scam brand who scams customers with over exaggerated advertising
36. untrustworthy
37. This feels fake
38. that i cant fully trust what the brand promotes and that the brand feels exaggerated or not geniune
39. its reliable
40. they are not genuine or trustworthy
41. It is risky.
42. That there is a lack of value nor vision behind the brand.
43. it's tacky or boring

44. Of alternatives
45. if the product would truly be useful to me for its price and quality. I would also consider if their claims about the product is true or misleading.
46. This looks fake/just like another brand I've seen
47. That it's not worth it.
48. Fake
49. Harmful
50. About what they want to convey.
51. it is not worth my money
52. They're trying too hard to look trustworthy instead of actually being trustworthy
53. it is not worth it
54. don't knock it til you try it
55. To ignore it
56. When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I usually think that spending money on it would not be worth it, especially if the product quality is poor, and I would avoid purchasing from the brand even if I need the product.
57. Is it good enough?
58. Disconnected to the consumer
59. it's all gimmick.
60. It's too commercial and too predictable
61. or assumes that it can be a scam/fraud, delivers poor product/service, or it's just a startup.
62. Why would they create a counterfeit of that brand?
63. When I encounter a less authentic brand I would be suspicious and skeptical of their products or claims.
64. less trusting
65. Mukhang cheap or fake ito, parang hindi mapagkakatiwalaan and expected that it would offer low quality
66. of not paying attention to
67. it's just for marketing tactics.
68. not worth my money
69. Its durability and how long does it take to be usable
70. that it is difficult to trust and may not genuinely deliver on its promises.
71. Ok sure whatever
72. unbothered
73. that it is a trap or scam.
74. something about the brand feels off

Sentence Stem K:
When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I usually feel _____.

1. Not good or quality materials
2. disappointed or skeptical because it loses my trust.
3. Disappointed
4. Skiptecal or uneasy
5. not to buy that brand
6. I doubt to their company
7. skeptical
8. doubtful
9. fake
10. disinterested

11. feel hesitant to engage or purchase.
12. It’s cheap
13. disappointed
14. Not Respected
15. Skeptical about learning more about it
16. scared to purchase to that brand.
17. disappointed and doubtful
18. affordable
19. Normal.
20. disconnected to the brand.
21. Scammed
22. Bad for myself for even considering them as a choice.
23. skeptical towards the brand
24. Disappointed and skeptical
25. That it will not be effective for me.
26. Less engaged with he brand
27. skeptical and hesitant to use my money on purchasing skeptical products
28. When I encounter a less authentic brand, I usually feel disappointed, skeptical, and less emotionally connected to the company. I may also feel frustrated if the brand creates expectations that are very different from the actual experience it provides.
29. it's not worth my attention
30. that it is more affordable than the authentic ones.
31. not to interact with it
32. It’s not worth the time or the money.
33. doubtful and disappointed
34. not satisfied
35. sometimes disappointment or nothing cause of exposure to less authentic brands and expectations of poor quality
36. disappointed
37. Skeptical
38. skeptical and less confident about the brand
39. indifferent
40. skeptical and disappointed
41. Unsure and dangerous.
42. Annoyed or Neutral.
43. Indifferent
44. Suspicious
45. honestly disappointed and frustrated because I would feel that I didn't spent my money wisely, where I should've just used it to buy from a brand that sells good quality products.
46. Indifferent to it
47. like it’s a scam.
48. Not worth it
49. Uneasy
50. Cringe or apathetic
51. I do not like to try or buy it
52. Less inclined to trust what they’re saying.
53. uncomfortable knowing it is not made with care
54. cautious

55. Less adamant to pursue it
56. When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I usually feel unwilling to purchase their products even if they look appealing or are something I initially want, because the brand does not feel trustworthy or genuine enough for me to spend my money on.
57. It's not worth my time.
58. Doubtful
59. that buying items from the less authentic brand is a waste of time and money
60. Uninterested
61. hesistant to make a purchase or make any interactions with it.
62. Dissatisfied
63. wary and doubtful of their products.
64. not interested in engaging/or not buying
65. hesitant, skeptical, and instantly turned off.
66. Weird
67. disconnected.
68. Skeptical
69. Unsatisfied
70. skeptical, disappointed, and hesitant to engage with or support it.
71. Annoyed
72. less engaged
73. tricked
74. annoyed or doubtful

Sentence Stem L:
When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as _____.

1. check the materials used
2. avoid purchasing from it because I do not feel confident in the brand
3. Avoid buying from it
4. Question their claims, double check review
5. look some quality brand
6. I'm likely avoid buying their product
7. ignore
8. ignore the advertisements
9. avoiding from purchasing
10. not buying from them
11. avoid purchasing from the brand
12. Not purchase it
13. not buying
14. Buy product
15. Ignore it
16. just scan the brand and not purchase it.
17. avoid buying from it or switch to another brand
18. not purchase
19. Check its background and where it came from, just to confirm if it is a legit brand or not.
20. ignore the advertisement.
21. Ignoring

22. Leaving feedback to their products or services in hopes of their improvement. But I feel like less authentic brands are really just for the money. They do not most often care about consumers feedback unless its collective or is already impacting their sales.
23. avoid purchasing from such brand, and express my wariness with peers.
24. Switch to another brand
25. Avoid purchasing it.
26. Tag the brand as irrelevant
27. switching to a more transparent competitor and purchase their product for a long term relationship
28. When I encounter a less authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as avoid purchasing its products, ignore its advertisements, unfollow its social media accounts, or search for other brands that appear more trustworthy and genuine.
29. just either scroll away or walk past it
30. not recommending it with someone I know.
31. skipping it.
32. Ridicule it.
33. avoid purchasing from it and will advise people i know to be careful buying from them
34. reviewing negatively
35. ignore it/swipe out of the page, will tell my acquaintances about my opinion on the brand and probably de-influence
36. doubting the brand
37. Avoid it or switch to another brand
38. hesitate to purchase their products/services and choose other brands instead
39. base off facts
40. avoid or stop supporting them
41. Avoid or leave.
42. Look for another useful brand that cares about their market base.
43. ignoring it
44. Check it out, maybe there may be something here in value but otherwise I ignore it
45. avoiding that certain brand to avoid further feelings and thoughts of disappointment and frustration.
46. Just look for alternatives
47. Ignore it.
48. Just passing
49. Looking for other products that are more reliable and safe.
50. Ignoring it.
51. research about the brand and look for its reviews/feedbacks
52. Ignore its messaging, avoid engaging further, and choose alternatives I trust more
53. waste all of it immediately without actually spending the time to appreciate it
54. don’t usually do anything
55. Ignore such brands
56. When I encounter a LESS authentic brand, I am likely to do things such as avoid purchasing from the brand, ignore their promotions, and look for other brands that seem more genuine and trustworthy.
57. Ignore it.
58. Suggest improvements

59. avoid it at all costs.
60. Not pay attention
61. double check their sns pages and/or website, particularly to look for their business/legal permits, who are endorsing the brand, and to check the profile of those who made a review of the brand (if there is any)
62. Compare it with authentic brand
63. look them up on the internet and their reviews online. I am also likely to find other brands that are more highly recommended.
64. disconnected from the brand
65. skip their ads, look for better alternatives, and avoid buying from them.
66. Ignoring it
67. avoid purchasing.
68. switch to competitors
69. Doubt the brand's claims
70. avoid purchasing its products, look for more trustworthy alternatives, and rely more heavily on reviews and recommendations before making a decision.
71. Swipe
72. checking a little bit of its backgroud but not too engaged
73. looking for an alternative
74. avoid the brand, ignore its ads, or choose another brand instead

Sentence Stem M:

I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it make me think _____.

1. Expensive and good materials
2. it is sincere and dependable because it consistently treats customers fairly.
3. This brand is true to it's promisea
4. They're consistent and genuine care
5. have a quality product
6. Consistent with their words and product
7. positively about the brand
8. brand delivers
9. that it's prestige and luxurious
10. that it sticks to its brand image
11. make me think the brand is genuinely customer-focused.
12. I can trust them
13. it cares about customers
14. Quality
15. That it is a reliable brand and I can buy it again
16. that it genuinely delivers its promises.
17. it truly cares about its customers
18. that they genuinely care about my experience and share my perspective on what matters
19. That I like the brand
20. the brand consistently delivers on it and values the consumers beyond transactions.
21. that buying from them is worth the money
22. The brand is specifically made for consumers like me. Or well researched, or highly sustainable.
23. brand genuinely stays true to its values and customers.

24. The brand is honest and reliable
25. Of buying it again because of satisfaction.
26. That the brand provides good product
27. that the brand's marketing and advertising is transparent and matches the quality of the product delivered to consumers
28. I ultimately decide that a brand is highly authentic when my interactions with it make me think that the company consistently fulfills its promises, values customer satisfaction, and behaves in a way that matches the image it presents publicly.
29. that I can actually use it or compatible to what I need
30. that the product has a high quality and is consistent with different channels.
31. I should buy a product from the brand.
32. It's of good quality.
33. when it's claim and actions are aligned
34. its good
35. this is good quality and the price is right for it, the brand for sure has a reason on why it has a status
36. of the good/high quality
37. Their actions match their words
38. that the brand is genuine, consistent, and when they deliver on their promises
39. they put care in every customer transaction
40. they are consistent with their values
41. It is good.
42. That brand is immersive and show willingness to fulfill the expectations of their marketable.
43. I am being heard and appreciated as a consumer, and the quality is consistent
44. It can help me
45. it would be worth it and the item would stay in good quality for a long time.
46. This is real and human, not just manufactured for the masses
47. That it's worth it.
48. Classy
49. that the money spent on the item was worth it.
50. Highly or proud of myself or the brand.
51. that my family will also like it
52. Everything about this experience matches what they claim to stand for
53. I can buy all of these again
54. that it really is good and sought after
55. It's reliable
56. I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it make me want to explore more about their offers, products, and services because the brand leaves a genuine and trustworthy impression on me.
57. It will provide me with the maximum benefit at the minimum cost.
58. They mean what they say
59. that I am more confident and happier.
60. There's real intention in the brand
61. less. Meaning, my personal checklist or considerations for a brand to be authentic has been met.
62. How did this came up? Who had the idea? When did this happen?

63. that they are respectful and responsive. It makes me think that they aren't trying to hide something and stands by their promises. It also makes me think that they value my satisfaction with their items.
64. their message feels sincere like the brand was really intentionally made for the needs of consumers
65. they actually care about their standards the way it show case it's branding, and don't just talk.
66. Of adding it to my wishlist in a specific online shop
67. that they are truly consistent and committed customers
68. that the brand is genuine and trustworthy
69. honest, genuine, and consistent
70. that it consistently delivers on its promises and genuinely prioritizes its customers' needs and experience. A good example of highly authentic brand for me would be Apple Inc.
71. I wonder if this would help me?
72. that the brand will give or do something that will me improve myself as an individual
73. that they value me as a customer for my satisfaction, far more than a quick transaction.
74. they really practice what they preach

Sentence Stem N:

I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it make me feel _____.

1. Safe/secured
2. appreciated and connected because the brand creates positive and meaningful experiences.
3. Valued
4. Respected, confident and value
5. satisfied
6. I feel respected and important because I can take what I really want to get.
7. convinced about its authenticity
8. satisfied
9. Seen and rich
10. good and creative
11. make me feel reassured that the brand delivers on its promises.
12. That I can trust them
13. Satisfied and Amaze
14. Confident
15. That I can safely use the product/service
16. that it is honest, true, and transparent.
17. valued and respected
18. empowered, respected, and confident that my investment reflects my true self.
19. Good and aligned with what I like
20. Comfortable
21. Confident
22. Confident, sure, secured, or I sometimes, it makes me feel like I am contributing to a larger picture even when I consume their services or products.
23. confident in the brand and its intentions.
24. Valued and respected as a customer

25. Satisfied
26. At ease
27. assured that the brand im purchasing consistently delivers their promises to me and other consumers
28. I ultimately decide that a brand is highly authentic when my interactions with it make me feel respected, valued, and confident in the company's credibility. Positive experiences with the brand strengthen my belief that it is honest and dependable.
29. excited because I like to get my own products from this brand
30. like it would last for a long time.
31. purchasing something from it.
32. Like it's worth buying it.
33. satisfied and understood
34. good
35. justified
36. reserved, like i will think of the brand as an essential
37. Respected and valued
38. confident, comfortable, and secure in trusting the brand
39. considered
40. confident and reassured
41. Respected and valued.
42. Inspired and Satisfied.
43. satisfied, that my money is well-spent and my perception of the brand is positive
44. Connected and heard of
45. heard and understood, which would make me trust the brand even more.
46. Respected as a consumer
47. Contented.
48. Good
49. Satisfied with the use of the product
50. Satisfied.
51. that I will buy the product
52. That I can trust them consistently over time, not just in isolated moments.
53. I can make use of it in the long run which can also make me save up money
54. very intrigued
55. Content
56. I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it make me feel encouraged to visit their store, place, or branch because the brand experience feels genuine and appealing.
57. Comfortable and satisfied.
58. Content
59. Proud to use the brand's products.
60. I feel like there are real people behind the brand.
61. carefree. Meaning, I don't hesitate or worry engaging and even being associated with it.
62. That I am actually in a place where it originated
63. respected and reassured. It makes me feel that they are confident with their work and the product itself.
64. i can really trust the brand.. my go to brand haha.
65. valued as a customer and secure with my purchase.

66. Of byung it
67. respected and valued.
68. that the brand is genuine, and trustworthy
69. Satisfied and happy
70. want to purchase it as soon as I saw their brand name/logo and products.
71. I need this in my life
72. empowered and improved
73. like an equal partner in a relationship built on mutual respect
74. appreciated and understood

Sentence Stem O:
I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it lead me to do things such as _____.

1. Testing it or using it for a long term
2. continue supporting and engaging with the brand because it leaves a strong positive impression.
3. Purchase repeatedly
4. Trust them recommend them and stay engaged
5. qualit
6. Give them positive feedback and share to others
7. looking at reviews then adding to cart
8. engage with the brand
9. Professional
10. buying their products
11. lead me to continue purchasing from the brand over time and lead me to choose it over competing brands
12. Purchasing again
13. Recommend it to others
14. I asking questions about the brand
15. Buying it again
16. recommend it to other because I feel confident in that brand, and repeatedly purchase from them.
17. stay loyal and engage positively with the brand
18. advocate for them to my friends, integrate their products into my personal identity, and forgive them when they make an honest mistake.
19. Asking myself if I need the product
20. Continue to support the brand
21. choosing it over competing brands
22. Supporting other products under their brand and recommending it to my family and friends.
23. continue supporting the brand and recommending it to others.
24. Continue supporting and recommending the brand
25. Persuading others to buy, use, or consume it.
26. Buy a product
27. participating on their product events and consistently giving constructive feedback to show more for improvements
28. I ultimately decide that a brand is highly authentic when my interactions with it lead me to do things such as continue supporting the company, recommend it to others, participate in its campaigns, and trust its future products or services.

29. looking forward to a new product or making me come back to the store even if window shopping only
30. trust its recommendations, continue supporting it over time, and confidently recommend it to others.
31. spending.
32. Spread the word that it is a brand that can be trusted.
33. repurchasing from them, recommended to others
34. influence
35. buying & recommending from them
36. repurchasing/sharing to friends & family
37. Purchase again or recommend it to friends
38. purchasing their products and remaining loyal to the brand and when I start recommending the brand to others
39. chika with the salesperson
40. engage, purchase, and advocate for it
41. Sharing and encouraging them to buy as well.
42. Interact with the brand.
43. participating in discussion about it, and purchasing more in the future
44. Buying and repeat buying
45. trusting it, like for example, when they would publish a new product from that same brand, I would likely be encouraged to check on it or even purchase it. I would also share to others how good the brand is for their high quality products and good customer service.
46. I can proudly recommend this to my friends
47. Purchase and/or repurchase/recommend to others.
48. Recommending it
49. Buying for more and recommending it to others.
50. Engage with it more and learn more about it.
51. buy it repeatedly
52. Choose it repeatedly, speak positively about it without prompting, and defend it when others question it
53. Promoting the product since i love its usage, quality, and price.
54. repurchase
55. Buying more in the future
56. I ultimately decide that a brand is HIGHLY authentic when my interactions with it lead me to do things such as asking inquiries and engaging with the brand more because it makes me genuinely interested and comfortable interacting with them.
57. Save for it.
58. Becoming a regular customer/client
59. Buying other items from the same brand.
60. Purchase something from them or hype them up to my friends
61. giving them a follow on their sns pages, reacting to their posts, and making a purchase.
62. Research the brand and the company. Research the area or country it originated. Even watch the production of it.
63. becoming a long-term customer and recommending their products to friends and family.
64. recommending it to others

65. leave a good review, buy from them again, follow them on social media to support and pitching them to others to encourage buyers.
66. Saving it to my wishlist
67. trust them and repeat purchase.
68. continue purchasing, and recommend the brand to others
69. Buying it
70. inquiring a lot regarding with their products/services and checking their pricelist catalog to have my own reference of which products/services that I will purchase.
71. I check the price
72. engagement to the campaigns that aligns to my goals and moral values
73. sticking around with them for good
74. stay loyal to the brand and talk positively about it to others

Sentence Stem P:
I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it make me think _____.

1. Unsafe/risks
2. it lacks honesty because its actions seem different from its public image.
3. This brand is pretending to be something it is not
4. They're pushing an image but not backing an up
5. have no quality
6. Only profit-driven to their company
7. Doubtful
8. Misleading
9. it’s cheap and fake
10. their fake
11. make me think the brand’s messaging feels exaggerated or not credible.
12. It’s not worth it
13. it is dishonest
14. UnConfident
15. That it isn’t reliable to invest in
16. that my experience does not match my expectation from them.
17. it is only pretending to care
18. that I am just a data point or a transaction to them, rather than a person with unique needs
19. Like it is cheap and low quality
20. the brand only cares about image or sales
21. that they are just selling for personal profit
22. I am not confident using their products or I feel it is not worth it anymore. Usually, it is more on the choices that I feel like brands become less authentic.
23. the brand is not being honest or genuine with its customers with confusing inconsistent messaging.
24. The brand is not being honest with its customers
25. To discontinue using it.
26. That im not their target market
27. that the brand’s marketing is clearly off compared to their actual business operations

28. I ultimately decide that a brand is less authentic when my interactions with it make me think that the company is dishonest, inconsistent, or only trying to create a positive image without actually practicing the values it promotes.
29. that it's not worth my money to spend on
30. that the product would break easily.
31. if I should consider the brand
32. That it’s not worth my time.
33. they’re dishonest
34. its poor
35. their items are poor quality, not the same as advertised, a lot of complaints abt the company
36. that its not driven by customer satisfaction but only on profit
37. Nothing about this feels genuine
38. that i cannot fully trust the brand based on my experiences
39. this is just business
40. they are misleading or inconsistent
41. Negative or bad.
42. That they should improve their overal brand identity.
43. my money and attention is being wasted, or that it doesn't contribute to society
44. They're desperate
45. it wasn't worth my money and what they did was solely for profit rather than being true to their consumers.
46. This looks like they just want to copy other brands
47. Of not purchasing/repurchasing.
48. None
49. that I should not buy it anymore
50. About how it or will it benefit me?
51. influencers/celebrities does not use the brand/product and that is solely for a paid endorsement only
52. There’s a gap between what they claim and what they actually deliver
53. that my money is wasted on it.
54. by it’s poor quality
55. It's dubious
56. I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it make me think that the brand is more focused on selling than creating genuine connections with its audience.
57. It's not worth my time.
58. They're doing it for money
59. Embarassed
60. I think they are trying too hard.
61. twice. Meaning, I question myself if it's even worth my time, effort, and money.
62. Why even push it? I would think that the owner is just lost or is having a hard time ti find his/her niche
63. that what they show in public is not how they actually operate.
64. less confident in the product/service
65. they are just after my money and inconsistent with their service.
66. Ignoring it
67. they are just prioritizing profits.
68. Inconsistent
69. dishonest, inconsistent, and overly commercialized

70. that it does not consistently deliver on its promises and appears to prioritize sales over genuine customer value/experience.
71. I don’t want this
72. that it is just like the ordinary ones
73. that they only care about the sale they will make
74. they only care about their image

Sentence Stem Q:
I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it make me feel _____.

1. Unsafe/Risks
2. uncertain or dissatisfied because the experience does not meet expectations.
3. Frustrated
4. Frustrated and disappointed
5. not satisfied
6. Magiging doubtful na ako sa pg bili sa company nila
7. negative
8. frustrated
9. less valuable
10. like they're frauds
11. make me feel disappointed in the brand experience
12. That I can’t trust it
13. Upset
14. Less respected
15. That what it advertised is inconsistent with what I got
16. that it prioritizes its own image than honesty.
17. feel ignored or deceived
18. manipulated, undervalued, or like I’ve been 'tricked' by clever marketing
19. A bit embarrassed
20. Misled
21. that I am being scammed or falsely advertised
22. Not satisfied with the result or experience as compared to their promise in their advertisements.
23. skeptical, disconnected, or doubtful of the brand’s intentions.
24. Frustrated and disconnected from the brand
25. Disappointed.
26. Ignored
27. when it makes me feel hesitant to trust the brands marketing campaign or their upcoming advertisements
28. I ultimately decide that a brand is less authentic when my interactions with it make me feel misled, dissatisfied, or disconnected from the company. Negative experiences reduce my trust and make the brand seem less credible to me.
29. like it's a waste of time
30. manipulated or like the brand cares more about appearances than genuinely delivering value.
31. indecisive.
32. It’s not worth anything important.
33. skeptical
34. bad
35. disappointed

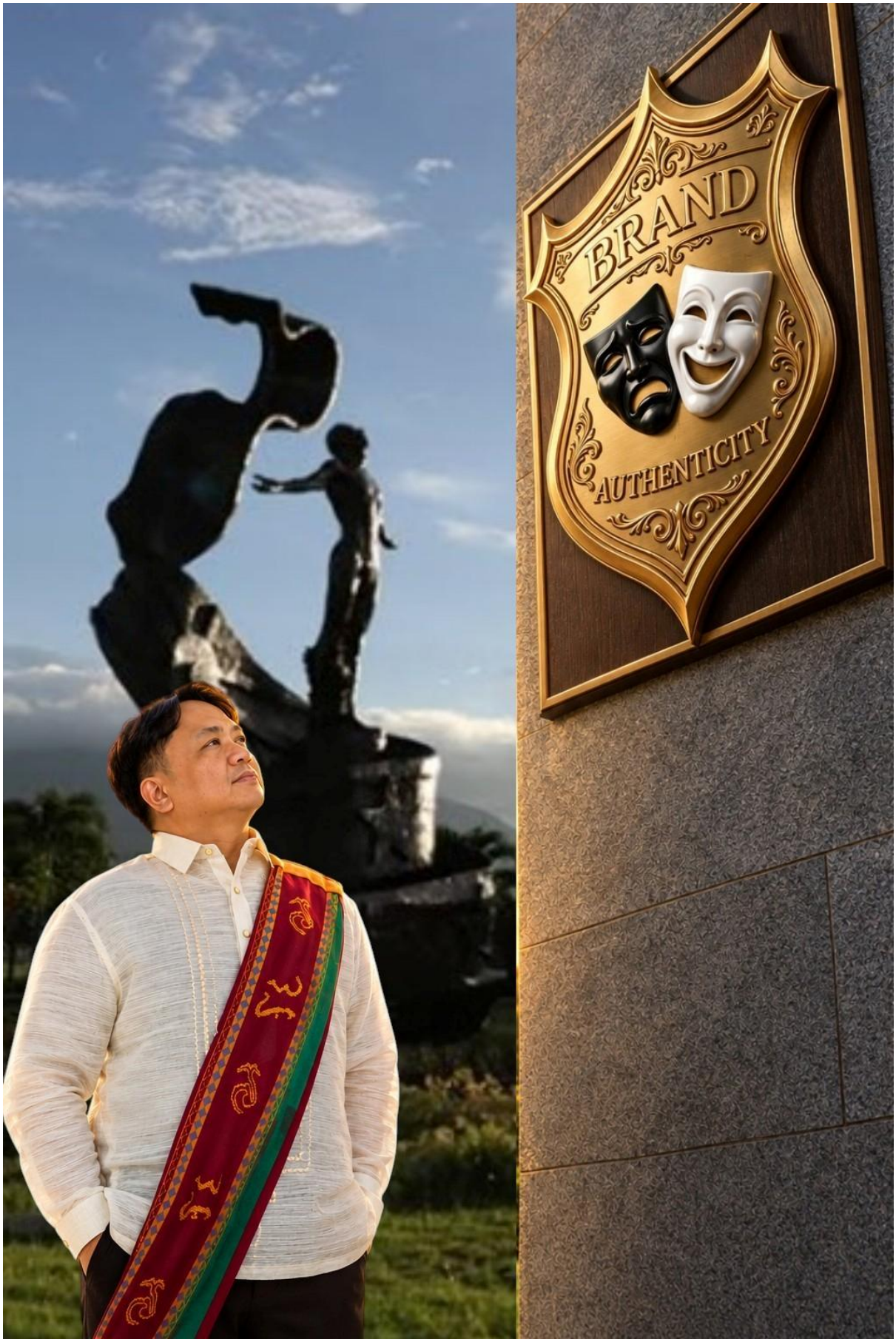
36. like i can’t trust the brand
37. Disrespected or ignored
38. skeptical and less confident about the brand
39. confused
40. frustrated and distrustful
41. Fooled.
42. Annoyed or Neutral.
43. like my concerns are being dismissed
44. It can't be trusted
45. disappointed, manipulated, misled, or when it does not meet my expectations.
46. Disposable as a consumer
47. Regret.
48. Cheap
49. Uncomfortable and feel unsatisfied with the results
50. Like I want the interaction to be over.
51. that is just a hype of the people
52. Uncertain about whether I can rely on them or believe what they present
53. it can make ones health or usage be affected by the looks of it.
54. Disappointed
55. Discontent
56. I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it make me feel uninterested and not intrigued by what they say or do.
57. Like my money will be wasted.
58. Regretful
59. unconvinced with its items.
60. I feel less engaged
61. disappointed. Meaning, regretting as to why did I even engage with it in the first place.
62. Doubtful
63. insignificant and regretful with their customer service.
64. Misunderstood
65. disappointed, scammed, or like I wasted my time.
66. Ignoring it
67. ignored.
68. doubting if I should still trust the products
69. misled, disconnected, skeptical, or manipulated
70. uncertain, dissatisfied, and doubtful about its credibility and intentions.
71. Im sick of seeing this
72. apathetic to it
73. disappointed and ripped off
74. disappointed and distrustful

Sentence Stem R:
I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it lead me to do things such as _____.

1. Too careful for my actions to prevent any accident
2. ignore or avoid the brand because I no longer feel confident in it.
3. Look for better alternatives and give negative feedbacks
4. Avoid them and stop supporting them or warn others
5. to buy other brand

6. Negative feedback
7. scrolling away
8. negative feedback
9. never purchasing from it again or ignoring it in the first place
10. not buying
11. lead me to stop purchasing from the brand and lead me to switch to competing brands instead
12. No longer purchasing
13. stop buying from it
14. Overthink
15. Not using it anymore
16. switch to other brands, stop purchasing from them, and telling others not to buy from them.
17. complain, stop supporting it, or warn others about it
18. warn others to stay away, actively seek out their competitors, and double-check every claim they make in the future
19. Question my self if I'm going to sacrifice quality over price
20. stop following the brand and avoid future purchases.
21. thoroughly read reviews to check if the brand is as good as they say
22. Eventually not interested to their product anymore.
23. avoid the brand, question its credibility, and share my concerns with others.
24. Stop purchasing from the brand or avoid engaging with it
25. Throwing it in the trash bin.
26. Ignore it
27. by posting negative feedback about their products and advising my friends to avoid this company's products
28. I ultimately decide that a brand is less authentic when my interactions with it lead me to do things such as stop supporting the brand, avoid purchasing its products, share negative opinions about my experience, or switch to competitors that appear more genuine and reliable.
29. ignoring it right away
30. question its sincerity, regret my purchase decisions, or feel pressured into engaging in ways that don't align with my needs or values.
31. making the brand as an option.
32. Ridicule it.
33. likely giving negative feedback
34. review negatively
35. not recommending it to acquaintances and telling them the brand is not worth it
36. warn others about it & leave reviews
37. Stop supporting it, lose interest or leave negative feedback
38. switching to more trustworthy brands and reduce engagement with the previous one
39. remember it less
40. avoid, ignore, or switch to other brands
41. Quitting the product.
42. Consume less or not use it at all from the brand.
43. considering competitors
44. Be upset if it didn't meet my expectations or deliver
45. avoiding the certain brand in real life, unfollowing/muting them online, and simply not purchasing from them.

46. Hesitate before buying from them again
47. Refrain from recommending it to others.
48. Giving it away
49. Not using it anymore and setting it aside.
50. Put the brand on my blacklist or ignore list
51. will not try the brand and its products
52. Pause before buying or seek alternatives
53. it is a counterfeit where it is not going to be exactly the same as the original one.
54. look for a more authentic brand
55. Ignoring such brands
56. I ultimately decide that a brand is LESS authentic when my interactions with it lead me to avoid engaging with the brand, especially when their approach feels too focused on sales talk, causing me to ignore or immediately decline their offers in person.
57. Ignore it.
58. Avoid it
59. Avoid buying their items.
60. Unfollow
61. no longer engaging with the same brand again and not recommending it to my friends/relatives/colleagues.
62. Research the history and study the culture of the brand and would even create a brand image that is fit to that brand
63. not wanting to spend on their products and warning people with my experience with them.
64. less likely to support or buy
65. ask for a refund, unfollow them, or warn others to stay away. They are not worth to try and it would a waste of money to invest or support on it.
66. Ignoring it
67. avoid buying from them and look for other options.
68. questioning the product and its production
69. stop trusting the brand and avoid purchasing its products
70. stop engaging with it, switch to competitors, and avoid recommending it to others.
71. Buy a premium YouTube account so I don’t have to see it anymore
72. ignoring it in the first place
73. cutting ties with them and taking my business elsewhere.
74. stop supporting the brand and look for better alternatives


BRAND
AUTHENTICITY