What's Said, What's Meant:
How Messages and Motives Shape Perceived Authenticity in Beauty Brand Activism

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA) has become a prominent and often contested element of brand communication, especially in industries tied to identity and cultural expression. The beauty sector, with its image-driven narratives and symbolic consumption, has seen an increasing number of brands publicly supporting humanitarian and political causes via social media. As this trend evolves, authenticity has emerged as a central lens through which consumers, particularly Gen Z and Millennials, evaluate whether a brand's activism is genuine or merely performative. While CSA is attracting more scholarly attention, most existing research focuses on utilitarian sectors, leaving open the question of how activist messaging operates in emotionally and symbolically rich domains like beauty branding.

This thesis addresses that gap by examining how message type (advocacy vs. product-focused) influences perceived brand authenticity and how corporate motive framing (value-driven vs. profit-driven) moderates this relationship. Drawing on attribution and framing theories, a 2×2 between-subjects experiment (N = 209) exposed participants to simulated Instagram posts from a fictional beauty brand. Authenticity was measured using a concise, multidimensional scale spanning credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity. Although the manipulations were pre-tested for clarity, the motive framing manipulation failed to create a clear interpretive differentiation, and no significant main or interaction effects appeared at the overall authenticity level.

However, a deeper analysis across dimensions revealed that advocacy messaging significantly boosted perceptions of credibility and integrity, two dimensions linked to sincerity and ethical alignment, even though symbolism and continuity remained unchanged. These results imply that activist messaging can selectively influence trust-based impressions while falling short of shifting deeper perceptions tied to brand heritage or identity. Moreover, consistently high baseline authenticity scores and the limited perceptual impact of motive cues underline the constraints inherent in digitally mediated messaging environments like Instagram.

Overall, these findings highlight the need to treat brand authenticity as a layered construct that does not respond uniformly to single-message interventions. While brief activist content can enhance moral perceptions, it is unlikely to affect broader authenticity judgments without sustained narrative coherence and clear motivational transparency. For beauty brand strategists, this means that meaningful CSA cannot stop at singular, brief statements. Instead, it must be woven into a long-term, relationship-driven branding strategy.

KEYWORDS: CSA, Advocacy Messaging, Perceived Brand Authenticity, Beauty Branding, Corporate Motive Framing, Digital Communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA), where companies take visible stances on polarizing social and political issues, has evolved from a fringe approach into a core element of brand strategy (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 2). Recent findings from the 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer reveal that 64% of consumers now consider a company's political and social positions into their purchasing choices, reflecting a growing demand for brands to engage in public discourse beyond profit motives (Edelman, 2023). Unlike traditional marketing, which focuses on product features; CSA calls for principled commitments that often touch morally or politically sensitive debates (Moorman, 2020, p. 389). This shift is especially pronounced in the beauty industry, where consumption is deeply tied to self-expression, cultural identification, and ethical values (Confetto et al., 2023, p. 22; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 843).

This paper discusses brand authenticity in the presence of CSA. It is therefore critical to distinguish between the two. CSA represents a brand's external engagement with sociopolitical discourse (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 443), whereas authenticity is a consumer-constructed perception shaped by judgments of sincerity, consistency, and ethical grounding (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 203). Brands may lean into activism to appear authentic, but this strategy can backfire if consumers perceive the underlying motive as opportunistic (Chen et al., 2020, p. 500). Clarifying the conditions under which CSA enhances or undermines authenticity is therefore essential to understanding its reputational risks and rewards.

This distinction becomes particularly salient when considering Gen Z and Millennial consumers, who exhibit heightened expectations for ideological alignment in brand relationships (Kumar, 2022, p. 7; Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019, p. 225). In industries like beauty, where products serve as tools of personal expression, consumers are more attuned to inconsistencies between stated values and actual brand behavior (Eyada, 2020, p. 31; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 841). A notable example is Huda Beauty's endorsement of Palestinian rights, which generated both praise and skepticism depending on how observers interpreted the brand's underlying motive (Eyada, 2020, p. 31; Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 450). Similarly, Fenty Beauty's vocal support for the Black Lives Matter movement was largely praised, in part due to Rihanna's longstanding record of activism, reinforcing the idea that perceived authenticity hinges not only on message content but on perceived consistency and intent (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 16; Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 447).

Such interpretive variability foregrounds the importance of attribution processes in shaping consumer responses. Attribution theory posits that individuals actively infer motives behind observed behaviors, rather than accepting messages at face value (Kelley, 1973, p. 107; Foreh & Grier, 2003, p. 350). Consequently, the same message may be judged as either principled or strategic depending on how the brand frames its motive, which is defined as a process that consumers engage in through active attribution (Kelley, 1973, p. 107; Foreh & Grier, 2003, p. 350). This becomes strongly visible

in fast-paced, visually compressed platforms like Instagram, where moral cues are presented in brief formats and motive attribution plays a decisive role in shaping authenticity judgments (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 447; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780).

Based on the previous, through a 2×2 between-subjects experimental design, this paper explores how advocacy messaging, which is defined as brand communication that openly supports sociopolitical causes, affects perceptions of brand authenticity in the beauty industry for Gen Z and Millennials as compared to product-focused messaging that emphasizes functional and tangible attributes while avoiding ethical entanglements (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 204; Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020, p. 41; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780). To moderate this relationship, the concept of corporate motive framing is introduced, which refers to how brands explain the rationale behind their public stances (Foreh & Grier, 2003, p. 351; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 781). Whether a message is presented as value-driven, rooted in ethical principles, or profit-driven, aimed at strategic advantage, it gradually affects how consumers interpret that stance (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780; Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 2). The paper further builds on recent scholarship by disaggregating authenticity into four dimensions: credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity, as proposed by Morhart et al. (2015, p. 203), allowing for a more nuanced analysis of how specific aspects of authenticity are affected by communication strategy. Finally, the geographical focus of the research is on Western markets, particularly North America and Europe, where CSA is both more common and more heavily scrutinized (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 447).

1.1 Societal Relevance

Within the context of beauty branding, CSA frequently represents a pivotal moment in a brand's public evaluation, where reputational trajectories are shaped by how its activism is interpreted. Beauty products often function as more than aesthetic tools; they diffuse symbolic value and contribute to individual identity construction and broader cultural visibility (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 843; Confetto et al., 2023, p. 22). As a result, consumers, and particularly the younger demographics, scrutinize brands not only for their explicit statements but also for the coherence, transparency, and underlying intent that those statements convey (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 447). When activism appears insincere, ambiguous, or misaligned with a brand's established identity, it can provoke swift and severe backlash, ranging from viral criticism to enduring reputational harm (Chen et al., 2020, p. 500; Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 447).

This thesis provides actionable insights for managers in beauty branding by clarifying how different combinations of message type and motive framing influence perceptions of brand authenticity across its four dimensions. Specifically, the findings inform decisions on whether to adopt advocacy or product-orientated messaging and whether to communicate motives as ethically driven or strategically beneficial. These insights are particularly relevant when addressing controversial issues. For practitioners operating within highly visual and emotionally charged

platforms such as Instagram, where communicative clarity and perceived authenticity are critical, this research identifies which messaging strategies are more likely to enhance authenticity and which are prone to being perceived as performative. In doing so, it supports brand managers with a framework for constructing activist messages that resonate with consumer expectations, mitigate reputational risk, and reinforce long-term brand authenticity.

1.2 Academic Relevance

Although academic interest in CSA has grown substantially, the majority of empirical investigations remain concentrated in utilitarian sectors such as food, retail, and technology, domains in which product evaluations are typically grounded in functional performance rather than symbolic or ethical resonance (Bhagwat et al., 2020; O'Neill et al., 2023, pp. 3–4). Existing studies have primarily examined outcomes such as experiments on corporate political advocacy centred on mainstream food-retail brands by Hydock et al. (2020), consumer trust by Bode and Vraga (2017), and analyzing CSA effects almost exclusively within utilitarian categories such as grocery and tech as addressed by Vredenburg et al. (2020) and O'Neill et al. (2023), thereby leaving symbolically laden beauty brands under-explored. Moreover, while some studies have acknowledged the influence of perceived corporate motive on consumer evaluations of brand sincerity (e.g., Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780), few have undertaken a systematic examination of how distinct dimensions of authenticity respond to specific communicative strategies. However, much of the existing literature tends to blur the line between what a message says and what motivates it, often overlooking the possibility that framing itself may influence how authenticity is judged (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 2; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780). This gap is particularly evident in symbolic industries such as beauty, where brand engagement is often filtered through moral, cultural, and identity-based lenses (Confetto et al., 2023, p. 22; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 843).

Therefore, this study intervenes in that gap by reframing authenticity not as a fixed brand trait, but as a multidimensional and situational judgment shaped by how activist messaging is structured. It first deepens conceptual understanding by applying the four-dimensional model of perceived brand authenticity proposed by Morhart et al. (2015, p. 203), thus enabling a more nuanced analysis of how consumers assess alignment between brand values and messaging. Second, it extends attribution and framing theory within a marketing context by experimentally disentangling message content from motive framing to test how the interaction of these two variables shapes perceptions of authenticity. Through a 2×2 between-subjects experimental design, the study contributes methodologically by isolating causal relationships while preserving ecological validity via mirrored social media stimuli. In doing so, it establishes a clearer linkage between communication strategy and consumer evaluations of brand authenticity, especially in contexts where symbolic meaning is central to brand identity.

1.3 Research Question

Taken together, this leads the paper to the following research inquiry:

To what degree does the type of messaging (advocacy vs. product-focused) affect perceived brand authenticity in beauty branding among Gen Z and Millennials? And to what extent does corporate motive framing (value-driven vs. profit-driven) moderate this effect?

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured across five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the central research problem, contextualizes CSA within the beauty industry, and formulates the guiding research question. Chapter 2 develops the theoretical framework by exploring the constructs of perceived authenticity, message type, and corporate motive framing. Chapter 3 details the research methodology, including the experimental design, participant sample, and measurement approach. Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings derived from the analysis. Chapter 5 offers a critical discussion of the results, highlights theoretical and practical contributions, acknowledges the study's limitations, and suggests avenues for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper explores how beauty brand advocacy messaging affects perceived authenticity and whether corporate motive framing moderates this relationship. Particularly, how Gen Z and Millennials in Western markets perceive authenticity in relation to advocacy messaging because they place a high value on ethical transparency and are more inclined to support brands that match their sociopolitical ideals (Kumar, 2022, p. 7). Since corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA) emerges as a central component of brand identity, its implications for authenticity are still debated. This chapter further introduces the theoretical framework for discussing these concepts.

2.1 Perceived Brand Authenticity

Perceived brand authenticity (PBA) has become a central construct in contemporary branding theory, particularly as consumers increasingly demand that brands act in ways that reflect their stated values (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 203; AlQahtani, 2025, p. 95). This demand is especially acute in symbolic industries such as beauty, fashion, and wellness, where branding functions as a site of identity expression and moral signaling, rather than merely facilitating product utility (Kumar, 2022, p. 7; Eyada, 2020, p. 31). Morhart et al. (2015) refers to authenticity as the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as sincere, ethically consistent, and aligned with its stated identity (p. 203). Authenticity often functions as a heuristic for trustworthiness, shaping emotional attachment, integrity perceptions, and brand loyalty, a mechanism that is evident in the beauty sector, where engagement is driven more by symbolic and ethical meaning than by product efficacy (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 203; Kumar, 2022, p. 7).

In such contexts, authenticity is no longer a desirable brand trait but a consumer demand, especially among Millennials and Generation Z (Kumar, 2022, p. 7). These demographics have grown up in a media environment saturated with moral and political discourse, and they bring a sharpened sensitivity to inconsistencies between what brands claim and how they behave (Eyada, 2020, p. 31; AlQahtani, 2025, p. 95). In response, beauty brands increasingly incorporate sociopolitical messaging into their communication strategies in an effort to establish cultural relevance and ideological alignment (Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 444; Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295).

Yet despite growing theoretical and managerial prominence, there is no singular definition of brand authenticity in the literature. Some scholars emphasize continuity, understood as a brand's capacity to maintain a coherent identity over time (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019, p. 227). Others focus on the symbolic resonance or the emotional and cultural meanings that consumers attach to a brand (Napoli et al., 2014, p. 1099), while still others focus on the degree to which ethical alignment is perceived between a brand's discourse and its actual practices (AlQahtani, 2025, p. 95).

This plurality of perspectives has led to the emergence of a multidimensional approach to authenticity. One of the most widely adopted frameworks includes four factors advanced by Morhart

et al. (2015), which distinguishes between credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity. This model facilitates a more granular understanding of how consumers arrive at judgments of authenticity (p. 203). Specifically, credibility refers to perceptions of brand reliability and transparency; integrity captures moral consistency and sincerity; symbolism relates to the brand's alignment with personal or cultural values; and continuity addresses the perceived stability of the brand's identity over time (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 203). This thesis adopts Morhart et al.'s multidimensional framework not only because of the theoretical richness of authenticity, but also because it enables empirical differentiation in how consumers respond to distinct forms of communication.

Recent theoretical work suggests that not all dimensions of perceived brand authenticity are equally responsive to digital branding stimuli. Bruhn et al. (2017) argue that credibility and integrity are more immediately influenced by emotionally charged, short-form content, which often provides moral cues that help consumers quickly assess sincerity and trustworthiness (p. 552). By contrast, symbolism and continuity tend to require prolonged brand engagement and cultural depth, as they are tied to long-term narratives and personal identity formation (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 850; Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295). In the beauty sector, where sociopolitical themes such as inclusivity, feminism, and body positivity are often central to branding strategies (Eyada, 2020, p. 31), this variation in responsiveness becomes especially relevant.

Importantly, this differentiated responsiveness is not merely a function of message format but also reflects distinct modes of cognitive processing (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 850). Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) contend that credibility and integrity are typically assessed through deontological reasoning that resonates with judgments rooted in perceived moral duty or ethical obligation (p. 777). In contrast, other studies propose that symbolism and continuity are more closely tied to teleological reasoning, wherein consumers evaluate how well a brand aligns with their long-term goals, values, or identity projects (Bruhn et al., 2017, p. 552; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 850). These distinctions underscore a critical challenge for brands: even when advocacy messaging is perceived as morally framed, it may only partially influence authenticity if it fails to address all four dimensions meaningfully.

Accordingly, perceived brand authenticity should be understood as a fluid, context-sensitive judgment rather than a fixed brand attribute. It emerges through consumers' interpretive engagement with brand communication that is shaped by what is said, how it is said, and how these signals align with broader normative and cultural expectations. In digital-first beauty branding, where communication is compressed and hyper-visible, authenticity emerges as a fragile, rapidly constructed judgment, one that can enhance or undermine a brand's identity in seconds.

2.2 Message Type

In recent brand communication, the type of message a brand delivers plays a significant role in shaping how consumers interpret sincerity, ethical stance, and overall authenticity (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 5; Morhart et al., 2015, p. 203). This dynamic can be witnessed in the beauty industry, where branding is closely tied to symbolic meaning and personal identity construction (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 841; Eyada, 2020, p. 31). Here, message content does more than convey information; it actively shapes consumer perceptions of brand authenticity by framing the brand's values and intentions (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020, p. 41; Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 296). Within this context, message type is typically classified as either advocacy-focused, centering on sociopolitical causes, or product-focused, emphasizing functional attributes (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780). Although both categories can influence consumer judgments of authenticity, advocacy-oriented communication carries potential to evoke perceptions of moral sincerity due to its emotional tone and value-driven framing (Duffek et al., 2025, p. 12; Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 16).

Advocacy messages often employ ethical language and alignment with issues such as sustainability, racial justice, gender equity, and body inclusivity (O'Neill et al., 2023, pp. 6–7; Confetto et al., 2023, p. 13). According to Bhagwat et al. (2020), these messages may deepen consumer-brand relationships by signaling shared values and a commitment to broader societal change, functioning as expressive extensions of brand identity (p. 16). However, this interpretation overlooks a critical tension raised by Vredenburg et al. (2020), who argue that advocacy messaging may be perceived as superficial signaling if not supported by concrete actions, exposing brands to allegations of "woke-washing" when their public statements are not matched by internal practices (p. 447). Therefore, while advocacy messages can strengthen perceived authenticity, their effectiveness hinges on consistency between what the brand communicates through textual and visual presentation and how it behaves with respect to relevant sociopolitical values (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780). This study builds on these dual interpretations by treating advocacy not as inherently credible, but rather as a message type whose persuasive potential depends on emotional resonance and ethical clarity, holds a distinctive persuasive potential to influence perceptions of authenticity (Duffek et al., 2025, p. 12; Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020, p. 41).

By contrast to the former, product-focused messaging emphasizes the functional qualities of a product, such as its formulation, performance, inclusivity, and compatibility with various skin types (Kumar, 2022, p. 7; Moorman, 2020, p. 389). These messages tend to be rational in tone, structured around consumer benefits rather than beliefs (Moorman, 2020, p. 389). Within traditional marketing paradigms, such clarity is often equated with trustworthiness. Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) argue that in oversaturated and emotionally charged markets, product-focused messages may appear more authentic than advocacy, especially when consumers grow fatigued by performative branding (p. 780). In this sense, product messaging provides a kind of ethical neutrality, where consistency and

clarity may matter more than ideological signaling (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 204; Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020, p. 41). However, this argument risks overstating the credibility of functional appeals. Even seemingly neutral product claims are situated within broader cultural scripts, particularly in the beauty sector, where notions of empowerment, gender, and self-care are deeply embedded in branding narratives (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 841).

Building on this distinction, product-focused messaging typically evokes lower emotional engagement and provides fewer moral cues (Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295). As a result, while such messaging may contribute to authenticity when aligned with performance and consistency (Moorman, 2020, p. 389), it is less effective in triggering intuitive evaluations of credibility and integrity (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 204; Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 16; Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020, p. 41). Therefore, this thesis argues that advocacy is more likely to serve as a compelling driver of perceived brand authenticity.

These differences in impact are partly due to underlying cognitive mechanisms. For example, Cinelli and LeBoeuf (2020) suggest that emotionally salient messages encourage quick assessments of intent and values (p. 41). However, the influence of message type is not uniform across all dimensions of authenticity. Morhart et al. (2015) note that while credibility and integrity are responsive to short-term cues, dimensions such as symbolism and continuity require sustained brand engagement and a coherent narrative (p. 204). This distinction is reinforced by Rodrigues et al. (2024), who argue that symbolic alignment and temporal coherence emerge gradually through repeated exposure and long-term brand behavior (p. 295). Thus, in the beauty industry, where branding often intersects with sociopolitical themes, advocacy messaging may strongly shape initial impressions of sincerity but have limited influence on more enduring judgments of brand identity unless reinforced across time and touchpoints.

This study aligns with earlier research that treated authenticity as both a unitary construct (e.g., Hydock et al., 2020) and dives deeper to explore other recent scholarship emphasizing the fragmented and dimension-specific nature of brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015; Rodrigues et al., 2024). Particularly, the paper adopts a multidimensional framework of authenticity to assess how different message types engage authenticity as a whole and its four dimensions proposed by Morhart et al. (2015). It hypothesizes that advocacy messages, due to their emotional and ethical resonance, are more likely to enhance perceptions of authenticity, specifically in terms of credibility and integrity. On the contrary, product-focused messaging, while capable of supporting perceptions of authenticity, is expected to have a more limited effect. Therefore, these insights were synthesized into a testable claim, leading to the following hypothesis:

H1: Advocacy messaging has a stronger positive effect on perceived authenticity than product-focused messaging.

2.3 Corporate Motive Framing

In digital brand activism, what a brand says is only part of the equation. How it frames its reasons for speaking up can be just as influential. Corporate motive framing refers to how brands explicitly present their intentions for engaging with sociopolitical issues, whether positioned as value-driven, grounded in ethical principles, or as profit-driven, aligned with strategic business objectives (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780; Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 2). This study treats motive framing not as a perception inferred by consumers but as a deliberate textual element embedded in brand messaging, operating as a framing device that directs how the message should be understood, particularly in high-speed, attention-limited environments such as Instagram (Pescarin et al., 2024, p. 6214).

Therefore, clarifying the distinction between motive framing and message type is essential for both conceptual clarity and empirical precision. While message type refers to the thematic focus and content of the communication, such as whether it addresses a social cause or a product feature, motive framing specifies the rationale the brand publicly gives for that communication, whether ethically based or for strategic benefits (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 5). For instance, an advocacy message may be framed as a moral duty ("we act based on what we believe in") or as a strategic response ("we act to remain relevant in a changing market") (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 781). Thus, message type conveys what is being said by the brand, whereas motive framing shapes how the audience should interpret it and why the brand says it.

The use of motive framing is theoretically supported by attribution theory, which posits that individuals explain observed behavior by attributing it to either internal traits (dispositional) or external pressures (situational) (Kelley, 1973, p. 107; Foreh & Grier, 2003, p. 350). When brands frame their motives as value-based, they invite audiences to make dispositional attributions that suggest the message stems from deeply held principles (Kelley, 1973, p. 107; Foreh & Grier, 2003, p. 351). In contrast, profit-driven framing emphasizes external pressures and strategic reasoning, prompting situational attributions that imply the message is self-serving or strategic (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020, p. 42). These frames are not passive add-ons; they actively shape how the audiences read the core message, especially in contexts where authenticity is closely scrutinized (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780). This interpretive role is further supported by framing theory, which emphasizes that the presentation of a message, particularly how intent is articulated, plays a critical role in shaping how audiences interpret it (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Gier et al., 2023, p. 2). In the context of ethical branding, several scholars have shown that such motive cues can meaningfully influence perceptions of sincerity and value congruence (Duffek et al., 2025, p. 13; Weinberg, 2021, p. 60). This theoretical lens reinforces the expectation that not only what a brand communicates, but how and why it frames its reasons for doing so, may significantly alter perceived authenticity.

Several empirical studies support the claim that how a brand frames its motives significantly

shapes audience response. Bhagwat et al. (2020) found that consumers responded more positively to advocacy messages when they perceived the motives as authentic, even when message content remained unchanged (p. 5). Similarly, Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) demonstrated that textual cues indicating moral intent led to greater trust and sincerity when compared to messages framed around competitive advantage (p. 781). Khan and Fatma (2023) further showed that motive framing affected perceptions of authenticity, particularly when consumers were already familiar with a brand's market positioning or communication history (p. 1243).

However, the effects of framing are not universal. Their impact depends on contextual factors such as brand history, industry norms, and consumer expectations (Chatterji & Toffel, 2019, p. 179). In highly symbolic sectors like beauty and fashion, where sociopolitical messaging has become increasingly prevalent (O'Neill et al., 2023, pp. 6–7), audiences tend to scrutinize advocacy claims more harshly, especially when statements echo trends rather than reflect longstanding commitments (Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 296). Likewise, Chatterji and Toffel (2019) describe this reaction as "activism fatigue," wherein consumers become desensitized to or skeptical of value-laden messages, particularly when such messages appear trend-driven or lack historical consistency (p. 179). In these situations, even ethically framed content can provoke skepticism if it contradicts a brand's prior behavior or seems strategically timed (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780; Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 447).

This study extends these insights by conceptualizing corporate motive framing not as automatically credible, but as a strategic communication tool that can either strengthen or undermine the persuasive force of advocacy messaging. When motive framing aligns with both the content of the message and the brand's broader narrative, value-based motives are more likely to enhance perceptions of authenticity and ethical coherence (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 16). Conversely, when there is a dissonance between stated intentions and prior actions, or between moral rhetoric and market reality, such framing may trigger skepticism rather than trust (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780). As a result, the effectiveness of motive framing depends on its alignment with message content, brand history, and the cultural expectations of its target audience.

Based on this reasoning, the current study hypothesizes that the impact of advocacy messaging on perceived authenticity will vary depending on how the corporate motive is framed. Specifically, value-driven framing is expected to enhance the effectiveness of advocacy communication, while profit-driven framing may decrease its influence, which leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: The positive effect of advocacy messaging on perceived authenticity is expected to be stronger when corporate motive framing is value-driven rather than profit-driven.

2.4 Conceptual Model

This conceptual model visualizes the connection between the variables Type of Messaging (IV),

Perceived Authenticity (DV), and Corporate Motive Framing (MOD).

Figure 1 Conceptual Model

Corporate Motive Framing
(Value-Driven vs. Profit-Driven)

H2+

Message Type
(Advocacy vs. Product-Focused)

H1+

Perceived Brand Authenticity
(Credibility. Integrity, Symbolism, Continuity)
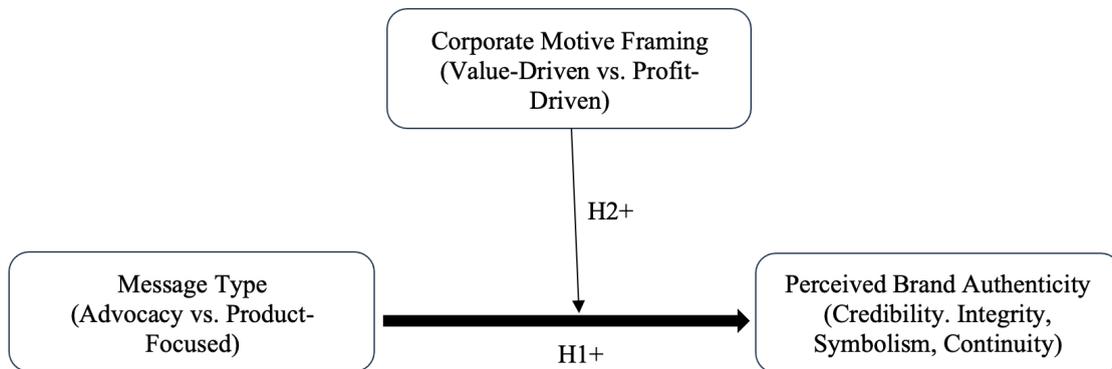
3. RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, the methodology elements and research design of this study are discussed to provide a clear insight into the conducted research.

3.1 Research Design and Justification

This study employs a 2×2 between-subjects experimental design to investigate how message type (advocacy versus product-focused) influences perceived brand authenticity within the beauty branding sector among younger generations and how corporate motive framing (value-driven versus profit-driven) moderates this relationship. An experiment method was chosen because it alone can establish causality between manipulated framing and authenticity perceptions. According to attribution theory, consumers do not passively receive brand messages; rather, they interpret these messages by attributing intent, often based on perceived motives (Foreh & Grier, 2003, p. 351). In order to determine whether such attributions are influenced by message content, motive framing, or the interaction between the two, a research method capable of isolating and manipulating these variables is required. Experimental design uniquely enables this level of control (Babbie, 2020, p. 115; Field, 2018, pp. 473–475).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four stimulus conditions, which prioritizes that any observed variation in perceived authenticity can be attributed to the manipulated variables rather than to pre-existing individual differences (Babbie, 2020, p. 115). This design structure allows for a direct test of both hypotheses: first, whether advocacy messaging leads to higher perceived authenticity than product-focused messaging (H1); and second, whether this effect is moderated by how the brand frames its motives (H2).

In addition to offering internal validity through experimental control, the study enhances ecological realism by embedding stimuli within simulated Instagram posts. This design choice mirrors the actual format and context in which beauty brands frequently engage with their audiences (O'Neill et al., 2023, p. 15; Yu et al., 2024, p. 10). As a result, the study balances methodological rigor with practical relevance, particularly for digital marketing and branding contexts.

3.2 Sample Characteristics and Data Collection

A total of 219 individuals participated in the experiment. Following data cleaning protocols outlined by Pallant (2020, pp. 55–59), eight incomplete responses were removed, along with two additional entries that failed attention checks (one based on an instructed-response item and one on a factual control item). This process resulted in a final dataset of 209 valid responses. The required sample size was determined through a priori power analysis conducted using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009, p. 1150), which indicated that a minimum of 180 participants would be needed to detect a small-to-moderate interaction effect ($f^2 = .025$) in a 2×2 factorial design, assuming a power level of 0.80 and an alpha threshold of 0.05. The final sample exceeded this benchmark, ensuring sufficient

statistical power to evaluate both the main and interaction effects outlined in Hypotheses 1 and 2.

The questionnaire was developed via Qualtrics and distributed through Prolific. Data collection was completed in about seven hours at a cost of around 135 euros (€0.60 per participant). The average completion time was approximately six minutes (M = 362.55 seconds), with minimal variation across conditions. Prolific was selected for its rapid turnaround time, reliability, and built-in fraud prevention mechanisms, all of which are particularly advantageous in experimental research requiring efficiency and quality control (Palan & Schitter, 2018, p. 23). Further, sampling criteria were applied using Prolific's demographic filters and custom screening items to recruit participants aged 18 to 43, falling within the Gen Z and Millennial cohorts, and residing in Europe or North America. These consumers are not only more frequently exposed to brand activism, but also more critically engaged with its ethical implications due to higher rates of political consumerism and entrenched expectations of authenticity in brand communication (Alhouti et al., 2016, p. 1243; Kumar, 2022, p. 7; Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 447).

All participants (N = 209) were recruited using non-probability convenience sampling. While this approach limits the generalizability of findings, it allows for precise control over experimental conditions, making it well-suited for identifying causal relationships within factorial designs (Palan & Schitter, 2018, p. 22). Nonetheless, the limitations of this sampling method must be acknowledged. The findings are not generalizable to the broader population of beauty consumers, but rather apply specifically to digitally literate Gen Z and Millennial users in Western markets. Self-selection bias is also a potential concern, as participants with higher levels of digital literacy or sociopolitical awareness may be overrepresented, limiting the applicability of results to offline or less engaged consumers (Peer et al., 2017, p. 159). For this reason, the study focuses on causal comparisons between experimental conditions rather than estimating prevalence or incidence rates across populations.

Furthermore, participants were randomly assigned into four nearly equal groups: Advocacy × Value (n = 53), Advocacy × Profit (n = 52), Product × Value (n = 51), and Product × Profit (n = 53). All respondents met the age and residency requirements, with ages ranging from 21 to 35 years (M = 26.71, SD = 3.31). A majority of participants (58.4%) identified as female, which aligns with established gender distributions in beauty consumer research (Septianto et al., 2023, p. 692). Lastly, educational attainment was high, with 80.4% holding a bachelor's degree or higher, suggesting robust media literacy and the cognitive capacity to interpret complex framing cues. A complete summary of sample characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample's Characteristics and Demographics

	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.	Percentage

	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.	
Age	209	26.71	3.31	21	35	
Gender	209	1.58	.49	1	2	
Female	122					58.4%
Male	87					41.6%
Education	209	2.83	.81	1	4	
High School Diploma	24					11.5%
Vocational Education	17					8.1%
Bachelor's Degree	139					66.5%
Master's Degree	29					13.9%
Total	*209*					

Note: N= valid cases; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; Min.= Minimum; Max.= Maximum.

3.3 Procedure

The study was conducted as an online experiment using Qualtrics for survey development and Prolific for participant recruitment. Upon accessing the survey, participants were first presented with an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, data anonymity, the inclusion of sociopolitical content, the estimated duration, and participants' right to withdraw at any time. Only after providing electronic consent were participants permitted to proceed.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions using Qualtrics' block-level randomization tool, which ensured balanced distribution across groups and minimized the risk of systematic bias. Each participant was exposed to a single random stimulus, tailored to their assigned condition. Immediately following this exposure, they were directed to the main survey questionnaire.

The survey began with the dependent measure, assessing perceived brand authenticity, followed by manipulation checks, control variables, and demographic questions. This sequence was intentionally designed to capture participants' initial and intuitive judgments before the possibility of retrospective rationalization. This procedural structure is consistent with prior studies in corporate social advocacy (CSA), such as (e.g., Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 782).

Participants were not allowed to revisit the stimulus once they had advanced in the survey. This restriction was implemented to preserve the integrity of first impressions and to mirror the fleeting nature of content exposure typical of social media platforms.

To ensure data quality, two attention checks were embedded within the survey. One was a multiple-choice question that was factual in nature ("How many faces did you see in the post?"), while the other was instructional on a Likert scale ("Please select 'somewhat disagree' here"). Only

participants who passed both checks and met all pre-screening criteria were included in the final dataset.

Upon completion, participants were presented with a debriefing message that explained the fictional nature of the stimuli and clarified the broader aims of the research. Contact information for the researcher was also provided to facilitate transparency and allow for follow-up communication. The data was then exported and analyzed in IBM SPSS. The full survey is included in Appendix B.

3.4 Experimental Design and Operationalization

3.4.1   Manipulation Materials

This study operationalized the two independent variables, message type (advocacy versus product-focused) and corporate motive framing (value-driven versus profit-driven), within a fully crossed 2×2 between-subjects experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions, as outlined in Table 2. Each condition was presented as a simulated Instagram post attributed to a fictional beauty brand, Sila Beauty. To preserve internal validity and isolate the effects of textual variation, all visual elements, including layout, font, brand name, imagery, and color palette, were held constant across conditions. The four stimuli are presented in Appendix B.

Table 2 Experiment's designed conditions

Messaging Type	Corporate Motive Framing	Condition
Advocacy (0)	Value-driven (0)	Group 1
Advocacy (0)	Profit-driven (1)	Group 2
Product-focused (1)	Value-driven (0)	Group 3
Product-focused (1)	Profit-driven (1)	Group 4

The manipulation of message type was embedded in the thematic content of the caption. In the advocacy conditions, the language emphasized humanitarian support for displaced women and children, using emotionally resonant phrasing typical of brand activism in the beauty sector (Confetto et al., 2023, p. 13; O'Neill et al., 2023, pp. 6–7). For example, one version read, "we renew that commitment by supporting humanitarian aid…," highlighting the brand's engagement with sociopolitical themes. In contrast, the product-focused conditions emphasized innovation in formulation and the expansion of shade ranges, with a focus on tangible product benefits (e.g., "proud to announce our newest foundation line…,"), avoiding any reference to sociopolitical causes.

Corporate motive framing was introduced in the final line of the caption, positioned separately from the main message content to reflect Instagram's stylistic conventions and to improve

clarity (Yu et al., 2024, p. 10). In the value-driven framing conditions, the brand expressed its actions as guided by ethical beliefs in statements such as, "we act based on what we believe in, not what sells." In the profit-driven framing conditions, the same initiative was framed as a market-responsive strategy, as in the line, "to stay relevant, increase engagement, and remain competitive…," Emojis were consistently used across all conditions to support the intended emotional tone, based on evidence that such visual markers function as peripheral cues enhancing digital message interpretation (Ge & Gretzel, 2018, p. 1274).

These design choices align with contemporary practices in beauty marketing, where brand authenticity is often communicated through subtle textual framing and emotionally charged surface cues. Following a consistent visual framework and manipulating only the linguistic framing of the message and motive, the study isolates the effects of these independent variables on perceived authenticity in a manner that closely mirrors real-world digital brand interactions.

3.4.2   Operationalization

Perceived brand authenticity was measured using an abbreviated version of Morhart et al.'s (2015) multidimensional scale, which conceptualizes authenticity as a higher-order construct encompassing its four dimensions. Internal consistency scores for each dimension are reported in Section 3.6.1. To balance brevity with conceptual rigor, two items per dimension were retained from the original 16-item scale (8 total), selected based on their semantic clarity, distinctiveness, and relevance to the social media context. Items that most directly captured the theoretical essence of each dimension (e.g., sincerity for integrity, value alignment for symbolism) and avoided redundancy were prioritized to ensure interpretive clarity in an online setting. This abbreviated structure is supported by prior studies and was chosen to reduce cognitive load and minimize participant fatigue, particularly in mobile survey environments where participant attention is limited, without compromising construct validity (Diamantopoulos et al., 2012, p. 445; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2009, p. 200; Galiana et al., 2020, p. 2; Zhenzhen et al., 2024, p. 3). In addition, items were slightly reworded to suit the fictional brand context, using perceptual qualifiers such as "seems" to preserve both ecological validity and conceptual precision. Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree").

To account for individual differences in advocacy orientation, participants' support for humanitarian causes was measured using a four-item adaptation of the scale developed by Sen et al. (2015, p. 72). These items assessed levels of issue salience and sociopolitical engagement (e.g., "I follow news or influencers who focus on sociopolitical topics"). One item, which addressed brand boycotting behavior, was removed due to a low item-total correlation and conceptual misfit. The resulting three-item scale captured participants' general orientation toward advocacy themes, a necessary control under attribution theory, which suggests that prior attitudes may shape how consumers interpret brand motives (Foreh & Grier, 2003, p. 351). Additionally, prior engagement

with humanitarian or sociopolitical causes may heighten sensitivity to advocacy messaging and thereby influence authenticity perceptions, which emphasizes the importance of using cause support as a control variable (Sen et al., 2015, p. 72). The scale's internal consistency is reported in 3.6.1.

A second control variable, consumer–brand relationship strength, was assessed using an adaptation of Fournier's (1998) scale. Although the study featured a fictional brand, prior research shows that emotional and symbolic connections can form rapidly when identity-relevant cues are present (Escalas & Bettman, 2005, p. 381; Paananen et al., 2025, p. 847). One item, "I remain loyal to brands that align with my values," was excluded due to its negative impact on reliability; the exact values are addressed in section 3.6.1. Similarly, existing symbolic connections to brands can shape consumer responses, potentially biasing authenticity evaluations (Fournier, 1998). This measure was included to control for individual differences in relational brand engagement, which could otherwise confound effects on authenticity judgments.

To test the effectiveness of the experimental manipulations, two single-item checks were administered immediately after the perceived authenticity scale. The first item assessed message type by asking participants to rate the perceived focus of the brand's message (1 = "promoting a product," 7 = "a social or humanitarian cause"). The second item assessed the interpreted framed motive (1 = "to increase commercial success," 7 = "to show moral or ethical principles"). The items were presented on a bipolar 7-point Likert scale and were refined after pre-testing. This approach is consistent with prior work on framing and attribution (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 4; Dodd & Supa, 2014, p. 420). Placing the manipulation checks after the dependent variable helped minimize priming effects, in accordance with best practices in experimental design (Teeny et al., 2020, p. 386; Chaudoin et al., 2021, p. 1853).

Lastly, demographic variables, including age, gender, region, and education level, were collected at the end of the survey. These data were used descriptively to assess group equivalence and explore how background characteristics may influence perceptions of brand authenticity.

3.4.3 Pre-test

A pre-test involving 67 valid participants was carried out to assess the clarity, reliability, and effectiveness of the experimental manipulations for message type and motive framing. Participants were randomly assigned to the same 2×2 design used in the main study. While randomization checks confirmed balanced groups, the original three-item manipulation scales showed weak internal consistency. After removing the lowest-performing items, reliability improved to a level considered acceptable for exploratory purposes ($\rho = .60$). Results on manipulation checks indicated that participants clearly distinguished between advocacy and product-focused messages ($d = 1.12$, $p < .001$) and the manipulation worked, but the motive framing contrast remained modest and statistically non-significant ($d = 0.35$, $p = .152$). In light of these findings, the stimuli were refined to

enhance clarity, emotional tone, and visual segmentation. A follow-up factor analysis confirmed the appropriateness of the revised two-item scales, supporting their use in the main experiment. Further details on the pre-test process, statistical outcomes, and item adjustments can be found in Appendix A.

3.5 Data Analysis Strategy

To test the hypotheses, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 30). This statistical approach is well suited to experimental designs involving categorical independent and moderator variables and continuous outcome measures, as it enables the adjustment of theoretically relevant covariates while estimating group-level effects (Field, 2018, pp. 473–475). The analysis was structured to test two core effects: the main effect of message type on perceived brand authenticity (H1), and the interaction effect between message type and corporate motive framing (H2). Hypothesis testing was based on estimated marginal means, adjusted for the included covariates. Statistical significance was evaluated using two-tailed tests at an alpha level of .05, following established conventions in psychological and communication research (Field, 2018, pp. 82–84).

Two covariates were included in the ANCOVA models: cause support and consumer–brand relationship strength. Both were selected on theoretical grounds. Including these variables as covariates improves internal validity by accounting for underlying attitudinal and relational differences that could otherwise obscure the effects of the experimental manipulations (Field, 2018, pp. 605–610).

In addition to the primary hypothesis tests, a series of ANCOVA models was conducted to examine each of the four dimensions of perceived brand authenticity (credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity) independently. This dimensional-level analysis was intended to determine whether specific facets of authenticity were differentially sensitive to the experimental manipulations.

Given the weaker differentiation observed in the motive framing manipulation during pre-testing, any moderation effects related to H2 are interpreted with caution. This issue is revisited in Chapter 5, where potential limitations related to statistical power and conceptual salience are discussed in greater depth.

3.6 Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

3.6.1 Reliability

Internal consistency was evaluated for all multi-item constructs used in the study. For the Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBA) scale, which was adapted from Morhart et al. (2015), the overall reliability was acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha reaching .71. Given that each dimension of authenticity was measured using two items, inter-item reliability was assessed using Spearman-

Brown coefficients, which are more appropriate than Cronbach's alpha for short subscales. The results indicated satisfactory reliability across dimensions: credibility (ρ = .73), integrity (ρ = .79), and continuity (ρ = .73) all demonstrated strong internal consistency, while symbolism showed excellent reliability (ρ = .90).

For the cause support scale adapted from Sen et al. (2015), initial reliability was modest (α = .63). Upon inspection, the item "I have boycotted a brand due to ethical concerns in the past" exhibited a negative item-total correlation (r = −.08), suggesting conceptual misalignment with the remaining items. This item was removed, and the resulting three-item scale produced a substantially improved reliability coefficient (α = .86), indicating strong internal consistency.

The consumer–brand relationship scale, adapted from Fournier (1998), initially returned an alpha of .61. Removing the item "I remain loyal to brands that align with my values," improved overall reliability to α =.69. While slightly below the conventional threshold of .70, this is considered acceptable for short-form measures in experimental contexts, particularly when constructs are adapted for brief exposure to a fictional brand (Hair et al., 2020, p. 106).

3.6.2   Validity

Construct validity was assessed through exploratory factor analyses (EFA) for each multi-item scale. For the Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBA) scale adapted from Morhart et al. (2015), an EFA using principal axis factoring revealed three factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, collectively explaining 73.95% of the variance. Sampling adequacy met acceptable standards (KMO = .65), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity confirmed that the data were suitable for factor analysis, $\chi^2(28)$ = 630.16, p < .001. The dimensions of symbolism, integrity, and continuity emerged as distinct factors with strong loadings. The two items representing credibility, "This brand delivers what it promises" (.61) and "This brand is honest in its communication" (.42), exhibited relatively weaker loadings and low communalities. Although credibility demonstrated comparatively weaker statistical performance and loaded onto the same factor as symbolism in the exploratory analysis, but keeping the full set of authenticity dimensions intact is essential, not only to assess whether elements like credibility and integrity are more sensitive to variations in message type (Bruhn et al., 2017, p. 552; Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295), but also to uphold the conceptual integrity of Morhart et al.'s (2015) four-factor model, which remains a foundational framework in brand authenticity research. In addition, measurement scholars generally advise researchers to retain items grounded in theoretical rationale, even when some statistical metrics like communalities fall short, to protect content validity and theoretical integrity during scale reduction (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003, p. 98; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006, p. 823; Boateng et al., 2018, pp. 3–4). Moreover, credibility in particular, plays a central role as it reflects consumers' belief that a brand will follow through on its promises, which is a core feature of perceived authenticity, especially in contexts where trust is at stake (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 203). In this context, excluding credibility would weaken the model's

explanatory power by neglecting a key facet of how authenticity is judged. Complete factor loadings appear in Table 8.

For the cause support scale derived from Sen et al. (2015), the initial four-item EFA showed adequate sampling adequacy (KMO = .70) and a significant Bartlett's test, $\chi^2(6) = 328.02$, $p < .001$. One item, "I have boycotted a brand due to ethical concerns," was removed due to low communality (.12) and failure to load onto any factor. The remaining three items loaded robustly onto a single factor, accounting for 84.72% of the variance, and were averaged into a composite score. Full factor details are reported in Table 9.

The consumer–brand relationship scale adapted from Fournier (1998) similarly produced a single-factor solution. Sampling adequacy was acceptable (KMO = .66), and Bartlett's Test was significant, $\chi^2(6) = 121.43$, $p < .001$. The item "I remain loyal to brands that align with my values" exhibited very low communality (.04) and was excluded. The final three-item configuration explained 48.25% of the total variance and were also averaged into a composite score and then used in all subsequent analyses. Table 10 provides complete results for this factor solution.

3.6.3   Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to widely accepted ethical guidelines for experimental research, including principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, and data confidentiality (Babbie, 2020, p. 67). Participants were briefed on the study's sociopolitical content and proceeded only after giving informed consent, with all responses anonymized, securely stored, and devoid of any personally identifiable information (Babbie, 2020, p. 69).

To mitigate potential harm, participants were cautioned beforehand about the nature of the content, which included references to sensitive social topics. The stimuli themselves were pretested for emotional neutrality and clarity to avoid inadvertently influencing participants' ideological positions. These measures were implemented in line with established ethical principles prioritizing respect for persons, minimization of harm, and participant autonomy (Resnik, 2018, p. 34; Babbie, 2020, pp. 67–74).

4. RESULTS

In this chapter, all the relevant statistics for this study are interpreted, based on the tests conducted in IBM SPSS and the cleaned, coded data.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the study's primary variables. Perceived brand authenticity was rated highly overall (M = 6.16, SD = 0.69), with sub-dimensions such as credibility (M = 6.34, SD = 0.94) and continuity (M = 6.31, SD = 0.87) showing particularly elevated means. This clustering toward the upper end of the 7-point scale suggests a potential ceiling effect, which may have constrained variance across conditions, an issue that is revisited in Chapter 5.

Cause support exhibited greater variability (M = 4.44, SD = 1.56), while consumer–brand relationship strength was moderately high (M = 5.21, SD = 1.27), indicating a relatively engaged sample.

Manipulation check variables, including message type (M = 4.54, SD = 2.81) and motive framing (M = 4.24, SD = 2.79), showed broad distributions, underscoring the interpretive complexity of framing effects in a simulated social media environment.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Main Variables.

	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.	Percentage
Perceived Brand Authenticity	209	6.16	.69	3.5	7.00	
Credibility	209	6.34	.94	2.00	7.00	
Integrity	209	5.94	1.32	1.50	7.00	
Symbolism	209	6.06	1.18	1.00	7.00	
Continuity	209	6.31	.87	2.50	7.00	
Cause Support	209	4.44	1.56	1.00	7.00	
Consumer-Brand Relationship	209	5.21	1.27	1.33	7.00	
Message Type Manipulation	209	4.54	2.81	1.00	7.00	
Advocacy	105					50.2%
Product-focused	104					49.8%
Motive Framing Manipulation	209	4.24	2.79	1.00	7.00	
Value-driven	104					49.8%
Product-Driven	105					50.2%
Total	*209*					

Note: N= valid cases; M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; Min.= Minimum; Max.= Maximum.

4.2 Randomization Check

To assess the effectiveness of random assignment, ANOVA and chi-square tests were conducted across core demographic variables. Age did not vary significantly by message type ($F(1, 207) = 0.10$, $p = .750$) or motive framing ($F(1, 207) = 1.41$, $p = .237$), with Levene's tests confirming homogeneity of variance ($p > .560$) based on the ANOVA test.

Gender and education were also evenly distributed: chi-square analyses showed no significant association between gender and message type ($\chi^2(1, N = 209) = 2.57$, $p = .109$) or motive framing ($\chi^2(1, N = 209) = 0.41$, $p = .520$).

Similarly, education levels remained consistent across all conditions ($\chi^2(3) = 2.34$, $p = .506$) for message type and ($\chi^2(3) = 0.82$, $p = .845$) for motive framing. These results confirm the success of the randomization procedure and support the study's internal validity.

4.3 Correlations Analysis

Table 4 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients among the continuous variables. Perceived brand authenticity correlated weakly but significantly with both message type manipulation ($r = .18$, $p = .009$) and motive framing manipulation ($r = .23$, $p < .001$), suggesting that authenticity ratings were higher when participants perceived the messaging as advocacy-driven and ethically motivated.

In contrast, authenticity showed no meaningful correlation with the control variables, cause support ($r = –.01$), consumer-brand relationship ($r = .04$), or age ($r = .01$), indicating these factors had minimal influence on participants' evaluations. A modest correlation was found between age and consumer-brand relationship ($r = .16$, $p = .023$).

Additionally, a moderate correlation emerged between message type and motive framing ($r = .45$, $p < .001$), reinforcing the theoretical connection between message content and brand intent.

All coefficients remained well below multicollinearity thresholds ($r < .80$), supporting the integrity of the subsequent analyses.

Table 4 Pearson Correlations Among Main Continuous Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Perceived brand Authenticity	—								
2. Message Type Manipulation	.179**	—							
3. Motive Framing Manipulation	.233**	.445**	—						
4. Cause Support	-.008	.021	-.002	—					
5. Consumer-brand relationship	.040	.067	.105	.037	—				
6. Credibility	.532**	-.180**	-.038	-.131	-.044	—			
7. Integrity	.621**	.372**	.364**	.115	.117	-.109	—		
8. Symbolism	.772**	.020	.007	-.004	-.044	.412**	.254**	—	
9. Continuity	.613**	.174*	.219**	-.052	.057	.215**	.233**	.267**	—

*Note: *. p < 0.05. **. p < 0.01.*

4.4 Manipulation Check

Two independent samples t-tests were conducted to confirm that participants correctly interpreted the intended manipulations, one for message type and one for corporate motive framing. Each was measured with a single bipolar item on a 7-point Likert scale.

For message type, participants assessed whether the post was more about a humanitarian cause (7) or a product promotion (1). The result showed a strong and significant difference: those in the advocacy condition perceived the content as more cause-oriented (M = 6.09, SD = 2.02, n = 105) compared with the product-focused condition (M = 2.98, SD = 2.64, n = 104), Welch's t(192.97) = 9.55, p < .001, 95% CI [2.47, 3.75]. Levene's test indicated unequal variances (F(1, 207) = 31.05, p < .001). The manipulation effect size was very large (Cohen's d = 2.35), based on pooled standard deviation (standardizer), underscoring a strong manipulation success.

Table 5 Success degree of manipulation checks for Message Type using an Independent Samples T-test.

	Advocacy Messages[a]		Product-focused Messages[b]				CI 95%		
Variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t(192.97)*	*p*	Lower	Upper	Cohen's d

Message Type Manipulation	6.09	2.02	2.98	2.64	9.55	<.001	2.47	3.75	2.35

Note. N=209. M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; CI= Confidence Intervals.

[a]n= 105. [b]n = 104.

For motive framing, participants rated the brand's intent from morally driven (7) to commercially driven (1). The difference between the value-driven group (M = 4.35, SD = 2.77, n = 104) and the profit-driven group (M = 4.14, SD = 2.83, n = 105) was minor and non-significant, $t(207) = 0.53$, $p = .600$, 95% CI [–0.56, 0.97]. Levene's test suggested equal variance ($F(1, 207) = 0.87$, $p = .353$), and the effect size was negligible (Cohen's $d = 0.07$), confirming that participants did not broadly distinguish between the framing conditions despite enhanced clarity post-pre-test.

Descriptive patterns offer further insight. In the message type condition, 51.7% of participants rated the advocacy message at the highest point (7), whereas 34.4% rated the product message at the lowest (1). A similar bimodal pattern was seen in motive framing: 42.6% rated the value-driven message at 7, while 37.8% rated the profit-driven message at 1. These dual peaks suggest that while framing did not shift mean ratings, it may have led to polarized interpretations, an issue to be explored in Chapter 5 as a possible source of interpretive variability.

Table 6 Success degree of manipulation checks for Motive Framing using an Independent Samples T-test.

	Value-driven[a]		Profit-driven[b]				CI 95%		
Variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t(207)*	*p*	Lower	Upper	Cohen's d
Motive Framing Manipulation	4.35	2.77	4.14	2.83	0.525	.600	-0.56	0.97	0.07

Note. N=209. M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; CI= Confidence Intervals.

[a]n= 104. [b]n = 105.

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

4.5.1 Main Effect of Message Type (H1)

To test Hypothesis 1, ANCOVA was employed to determine whether advocacy messaging yielded higher perceived brand authenticity compared to product-focused messaging. Message type served as the independent variable, perceived authenticity as the dependent variable, and two theoretical covariates were included: cause support and consumer-brand relationship.

Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variances, $F(3, 205) = 0.16$, $p = .926$. The overall model did not reach statistical significance, $F(5, 203) = 0.60$, $p = .703$, $R^2 = .014$, adjusted $R^2 = –.010$, indicating a poor fit and minimal explanatory power. Specifically, the main effect of message

type was non-significant, $F(1, 203) = 1.87$, $p = .173$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$. Adjusted means revealed slightly higher authenticity scores for the advocacy condition ($M = 6.23$, $SE = 0.07$) compared to the product-focused group ($M = 6.09$, $SE = 0.07$), but this small difference ($\Delta M = 0.13$) was not statistically reliable ($p = .173$) and reflected a negligible effect size. Consequently, Hypothesis 1 is not supported.

In addition, neither covariate contributed significantly: cause support, $F = 0.10$, $p = .747$, $\eta^2 = .001$, and consumer-brand relationship, $F = 0.20$, $p = .652$, $\eta^2 = .001$. These non-significant covariate effects persisted in all subsequent analyses.

These results suggest that while advocacy messaging directionally aligned with higher perceived authenticity, it did not generate a meaningful or statistically reliable difference. This null finding may be influenced by a ceiling effect, as described in Section 4.1, where scores clustered at the high end of the scale. Such compression may have reduced the model's sensitivity to detect group differences. This limitation and its broader theoretical implications are examined further in Chapter 5.

4.5.2 *Moderating Effect of Motive Framing (H2)*

Hypothesis 2 suggested that corporate motive framing (value-driven versus profit-driven) would moderate the impact of message type on perceived brand authenticity. To evaluate this, an ANCOVA was performed with message type as the independent variable, perceived authenticity as the outcome, and motive framing as the moderator. Cause support and consumer-brand relationship continued to serve as covariates.

As in the previous model, Levene's test reported the same results and supported equal variances, $F(3, 205) = 0.16$, $p = .926$, and the overall model remained non-significant, $F(5, 203) = 0.60$, $p = .703$, $R^2 = .014$, adjusted $R^2 = -.010$, reflecting limited explanatory power.

However, the interaction between message type and motive framing did not reach significance, $F(1, 203) = 0.18$, $p = .676$, with a partial $\eta^2 = .001$. This indicates that the interaction accounted for less than 1% of the variance, representing a negligible effect, and leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2. Estimated marginal means revealed slightly higher authenticity scores for value-driven framing ($M = 6.20$, $SE = 0.07$) compared to profit-driven framing ($M = 6.13$, $SE = 0.07$), but this difference was minimal ($\Delta M = 0.07$) and non-significant ($p = .464$).

Similar to previous results, cause support ($F = 0.10$, $p = .747$) nor consumer-brand relationship ($F = 0.20$, $p = .652$), contributed significantly to the outcome.

Taken together, these results offer no support for the hypothesized moderation. The framing of corporate motives did not condition how advocacy messaging influenced perceptions of authenticity. This null finding may reflect interpretive ambiguity inherent in digital message framing

and highlights measurement challenges identified during pre-testing. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Table 7 ANCOVA Results for Testing H1 and H2 with Covariates.

Variables	Advocacy Messages[a]		Product-focused Messages[b]		Value-driven[c]		Profit-driven[d]		$F(1, 203)$	p	η^2
	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE			
Message Type	6.23	.068	6.09	.069					1.872	.173	.009
Message Type * Motive Framing					6.20	.068	6.13	.068	.175	.676	.001
Cause Support									.104	.747	.001
Consumer Brand Relationship									.204	.652	.001

Note: N= 209. M= Mean; SE= Standard Error. η²= Partial Eta Squared.

$R^2 = .014$, adjusted $R^2 = -.010$

[a]n= 105. [b]n = 104. [c]n= 104. [d]n = 105.

4.6 Additional Analysis: Dimensional Differences in Perceived Brand Authenticity

As an additional exploratory analysis, this section investigates whether specific facets of perceived brand authenticity respond differently to the manipulated variables of message type and motive framing. Four separate ANCOVA models were conducted to evaluate these effects and to offer a deeper understanding of how brand communication may selectively shape these dimensions, with reliability for the subscales confirmed in Section 3.6.1 and Table 8.

Advocacy messages significantly increased participants' perceptions of credibility compared to product-focused content, $F(1, 203) = 18.51$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .084$. The same pattern emerged for integrity: participants exposed to advocacy messaging rated the brand as more ethically motivated than did those in the product condition, $F(1, 203) = 44.17$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .179$. These medium effect sizes suggest that advocacy-oriented content improved perceptions of honesty and ethical motivation relative to product-focused content.

By contrast, message type did not significantly affect symbolism, $F(1, 203) = 0.94$, $p = .333$, partial $\eta^2 = .005$, or continuity, $F(1, 203) = 1.18$, $p = .279$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$. This indicates that message content did not meaningfully influence participants' identification with the brand or its

perceived consistency over time.

Across all four dimensions, none of the interaction effects between message type and motive framing reached significance. Credibility showed $F(1, 203) = 0.73$, $p = .482$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$, whereas integrity had $F(1, 203) = 0.96$, $p = .386$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$. Symbolism measured $F(1, 203) = 1.12$, $p = .329$, and partial $\eta^2 = .011$, and continuity had $F(1, 203) = 0.81$, $p = .445$, and partial $\eta^2 = .008$. These null results mirror those found in the aggregated authenticity analysis and suggest that motive framing, whether value- or profit-driven, did not enhance or diminish the impact of message type on any dimension of authenticity. As in the main ANCOVA, two theoretically relevant covariates, cause support and consumer-brand relationship, were included in each model, but neither significantly influenced the outcomes nor altered the observed patterns (all were $p > .05$).

Levene's test confirmed that the assumption of equal error variances held for the symbolism and continuity dimensions, but was violated for credibility and integrity (both $p < .001$). To ensure these violations did not distort the findings, follow-up tests such as Welch's adjustment were conducted. The credibility effect held strong: advocacy messages ($n = 105$, $M = 6.50$, $SD = 1.11$) were rated significantly more credible than product-focused ones ($n = 104$, $M = 6.26$, $SD = 0.61$), Welch's $F(1, 162.27) = 21.24$, $p < .001$. The integrity dimension showed an even more pronounced difference, Welch's $F(1, 143.52) = 47.70$, $p < .001$, with advocacy posts ($n = 105$, $M = 6.51$, $SD = 0.70$) outscoring product-focused posts ($n = 104$, $M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.53$). Welch's test is widely recommended when group variances are unequal, but group sizes are very similar, as it guards against inflated Type I error without being overly conservative (Ruxton, 2006, p. 689; Curtis, 2024, p. 3983). Given the nearly equal group sizes in this study, ANCOVA remains robust to modest heteroscedasticity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019, p. 207), allowing the results for credibility and integrity to be interpreted with reasonable confidence despite the variance imbalance.

Overall, the findings indicate that advocacy messaging specifically enhances perceptions of brand credibility and integrity, while symbolism and continuity remain unaffected. Motive framing in interaction with message type continued to show no detectable influence on any of the four dimensions of perceived brand authenticity, neither did the control variables.

5. DISCUSSION

This thesis set out to explore how different brand messaging approaches and corporate motive framing influence consumer perceptions of authenticity in the beauty brand activism space particularly among Gen Z and Millennials in Western markets. Specifically, it examined whether advocacy messaging, where a brand supports sociopolitical causes, would enhance perceived authenticity more than product-focused messaging and whether this effect would be strengthened by corporate motives being driven by ethical values rather than by strategic objectives. Drawing on framing and attribution theories, the study aimed to show that perceived authenticity depends not only on what brands say, but also on how they explain why they are saying it.

Unexpectedly, neither hypothesis was supported. Advocacy messaging did not significantly boost overall perceived authenticity compared to product-focused messaging, and the way motives were framed, as value-driven or profit-driven, did not change this relationship. These findings challenge common assumptions in existing CSA literature that position value-framed advocacy as a consistently persuasive strategy (e.g., Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 5; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 781). However, the absence of a main or interaction effect does not imply that messaging strategy is unimportant. Instead, it highlights the complexity of authenticity judgments and the challenge of shifting them with brief, isolated brand communications.

A more granular look at the four dimensions of authenticity, credibility, integrity, symbolism, and continuity, revealed that advocacy messaging significantly raised credibility and integrity ratings, both tied closely to perceptions of trust, honesty, and ethical alignment (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 203; Bruhn et al., 2017, p. 552). In contrast, symbolism and continuity, dimensions that depend on ongoing cultural engagement and narrative consistency (Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 850), remained unaffected. These divided findings underline the multidimensional nature of authenticity and suggest that only some facets (e.g., moral impressions) are responsive to single-message interventions. Furthermore, no interaction effects were found at the dimensional level, and motive framing again failed to shift perceptions in any condition of authenticity. Additionally, neither cause support nor consumer-brand relationship influenced outcomes, reinforcing the consistency of previous results.

Altogether, these findings suggest that brief, stylized brand advocacy on platforms like Instagram may raise perceptions of credibility and integrity (honesty and ethical alignment), yet fall short of shifting deeper or more durable authenticity judgments (Symbolism and continuity). In high-trust environments like the one simulated here, where authenticity scores were already elevated, such subtle shifts may still carry interpretive weight. Rather than viewing the absence of overall effects as a failure, they invite us to refine our understanding of how different authenticity dimensions are activated by brand messages and how younger audiences filter moral intent significance in the world of beauty digital branding.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study complicates usual understandings in brand authenticity literature by showing that authenticity, as perceived by consumers, does not respond evenly to CSA. Rather than functioning as a unitary outcome, authenticity emerges as a nuanced, context-dependent judgment. The implications of this finding unfold across three key insights: the differentiated nature of authenticity's dimensions, the limitations of framing within fast-paced digital environments, and the interpretive schemas consumers bring, particularly within symbolic industries like beauty.

The first and perhaps most consequential insight concerns dimensional specificity. The results make clear that not all facets of authenticity are equally sensitive to activist messaging. While advocacy content notably increased perceptions of credibility and integrity, qualities anchored in trust and moral alignment, it had no measurable impact on symbolism and continuity. This dimension-specific responsiveness affirms Morhart et al.'s (2015) four-factor model while extending its theoretical utility, suggesting that each dimension of authenticity is ruled by a distinct cognitive process (p. 203). Credibility and integrity appear to operate via deontological reasoning and are responsive to surface-level moral cues, likely processed through fast, rule-based judgments (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 777; Bruhn et al., 2017, p. 552). In contrast, the symbolic and continuity dimensions demand teleological processing rooted in long-term engagement, cultural alignment, and consistency across time (Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 850). From a theoretical standpoint, this distinction calls into question the validity when using aggregate authenticity indices. Such composite measures conceal the divergent responsiveness of these dimensions and risk overstating the persuasive power of single-message interventions. Researchers should instead approach authenticity as a layered construct, asking not only if it shifts, but which part, how, and under what conditions.

Secondly, the failure of motive framing to produce a measurable effect, despite successful message manipulation, offers a timely challenge to assumptions drawn from attribution and framing theory. While prior work has shown that cues about corporate intent can sway consumer judgments (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 5; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 781), this study found no significant impact of motive framing on perceived authenticity. The explanation likely lies not in a flaw within the attribution theory but instead identifies a boundary condition: framing only influences perception when two conditions are met, first the pre-existing brand familiarity and second the redundancy across multiple message reinforcements. On a platform like Instagram, where attention is fractured, subtle motive cues embedded in brief captions are likely to be ignored or misinterpreted, especially when presented by an unfamiliar or fictional brand (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020, p. 41; Jiang et al., 2024, p. 6). In such contexts, participants appeared to rely more on heuristic shortcuts, such as emotional tone or pre-existing attitudes toward CSA, than engage in explicit attribution of intent (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 781). This pattern suggests that in high-load digital contexts,

framing effectiveness may be contingent, not generalizable. It functions effectively only when the message is reinforced across multiple formats and backed by an existing sense of trust between the brand and the audience. Theoretical models of framing should therefore be updated to reflect platform conditions and brand equity as structural variables that contribute to interpretive outcomes (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Gier et al., 2023, p. 2).

The final implication emerges from the consistently high authenticity scores observed across all conditions, which suggest not only a statistical ceiling effect but also an interpretive one shaped by cultural saturation. In symbolic sectors like beauty, authenticity is no longer a rare or exceptional quality; it becomes expected. As Alhouti et al. (2016) argue, consumers now approach brand messaging with pre-formed assumptions about persuasive intent, particularly in sectors where signaling virtue and aligning with identity branding have become routine (p. 1246). The consistently high scores across all dimensions, even for fictional brands, suggest just how normalized activist discourse has become in this space. This kind of normative saturation may dull consumers' sensitivity to subtle framing shifts, echoing Rodrigues et al.'s (2024) argument that authenticity is not built through isolated gestures but assembled over time through coherent actions, brand history, and symbolic alignment (p. 307). These findings point to the need for theoretical models that treat cultural saturation as a central factor in shaping how flexible or fixed authenticity perceptions can be. In markets where moral messaging is already deeply embedded, brands cannot expect single interventions to shift authenticity judgments; they must invest in sustained and demonstrable ethical consistency.

In sum, these insights suggest a need to rethink how authenticity is understood within CSA research. This study makes clear that not all dimensions of authenticity respond equally, framing effects are conditional on cognitive and relational support, and that in categories already saturated with moral messaging, the perceptual bar is raised much higher against which brand actions are judged. Future research must avoid overgeneralizing findings from utilitarian sectors to symbolic ones and must engage more directly with the layered, cumulative, and context-sensitive nature of authenticity construction. Simply, authenticity in brand activism is not simply a function of what is said or why; rather, it is a product of how well those signals resonate with, and are sustained across, a broader narrative of brand behavior, cultural expectations, and consumer worldviews.

5.2 Practical Implications

This study provides practical direction for beauty brand managers engaging with corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA) in fast-moving digital settings and targeting young audiences. Although no overall shifts in aggregate authenticity were detected, the findings reveal a more nuanced structure in how consumers respond. Certain dimensions, specifically credibility and integrity, showed positive movement in response to a single advocacy post, whereas deeper traits like symbolism and continuity were unaffected. For practitioners, this uneven responsiveness carries clear

implications for deciding when, how, and for what purpose activist messaging should be used.

To begin with, credibility and integrity can be strengthened through short, emotionally resonant content. The data indicate that even a single activist post is enough to lift these two dimensions, both of which tend to be shaped by heuristic, deontological judgment, and quick assessment about whether a brand seems honest and ethically grounded (Bruhn et al., 2017, p. 552; Morhart et al., 2015, p. 203; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 777). This suggests that when a brand seeks an immediate, low-cost credibility lift (e.g., during a campaign tied to a cause or a limited-edition solidarity product), issuing a brief, value-signalling statement can be effective (Bruhn et al., 2017, p. 552; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 777). Regardless, such gestures should be treated as entry-level moves rather than substitutes for a coherent ethical identity. Both theoretical and empirical insights caution that trust built on surface cues tends to be shallow and reversible unless those cues are consistently reinforced through ongoing behavior (Foreh & Grier, 2003, p. 351; Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 450).

Second, for brands aiming to influence the deeper dimensions of authenticity, namely symbolism and continuity, activism must be planned as a coherent, narratively rich sequence rather than a single post. Symbolism captures how well a brand aligns with consumer values and cultural meanings, while continuity signals long-term consistency and commitment (Morhart et al., p. 203). These qualities rely on teleological reasoning and tend to develop only through repeated exposure and a sense of thematic cohesion over time (Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 850). A practical strategy would involve mapping out multi-part campaigns across digital platforms: for instance, one post to state the brand's position, another to show concrete actions, a third to highlight community partnerships, and a fourth to elevate consumer perspectives. When layered in this way, activist messaging shifts from a one-time performance to a more meaningful narrative arc (Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014, p. 850; Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 450). To ensure effectiveness, managers should measure changes in perceptions of symbolism and continuity before and after the campaign by using surveys or sentiment analysis to assess whether deeper forms of authenticity have taken root.

Third, the study's bimodal manipulation responses suggest that in fast-paced digital environments, subtle framing cues often go unnoticed or are misinterpreted. Rather than interpreting the intended motive, participants frequently relied on their existing perceptions of the brand or on affective resonance. According to framing theory, motive cues are unlikely to register meaningfully unless they are made especially prominent, for instance, through bold headlines or by linking them to clear, factual content (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 781). One practical approach for managers is to use A/B testing: one version of an activist post includes an explicitly stated value-based motive with verifiable facts (e.g., "We support this initiative because 10% of profits fund X"), while the control version excludes that detail (Palan & Schitter, 2018, p. 23).

Comparing engagement levels and perceived credibility between the two can help determine whether greater salience improves trust (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 781).. If no difference emerges, it may be wiser to drop the framing altogether and allow the brand's actions to speak on their own.

Fourth, the polarized reactions to motive framing highlight just how important it is for brands to maintain a transparent, verifiable record of their actions. Consumers, especially younger ones, tend to assess the authenticity of activism by looking back at a brand's previous behavior to judge whether the message reflects genuine commitment or opportunistic signaling (Vredenburg et al., 2020, pp. 449–450). This challenge is illustrated in real-world contrasts: Huda Beauty's public support for Palestinian rights received mixed reactions, while Fenty Beauty's endorsement of #BlackLivesMatter earned credibility, largely because it aligns with Rihanna's long-standing social-justice positioning. In both cases, the perceived credibility of the activism was tied not just to the message itself but to the brand's broader ethical trajectory (Vredenburg et al., 2020, pp. 449–450; Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 16). To avoid accusations of "woke-washing," brand managers should consider implementing a regular transparency audit (Vredenburg et al., 2020, pp. 449–450; Alhouti et al., 2016, p. 1246). Every activist statement should be matched with a concrete action, whether that be donations, partnerships, or policy shifts, and these should be publicly documented on brand-owned platforms. Moreover, no new advocacy messages should be released until prior commitments are visibly followed through (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 16). This kind of pacing helps ensure that the brand's activism is seen as consistent and value-driven, rather than reactive or opportunistic (Alhouti et al., 2016, p. 1246; Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 186).

Finally, the absence of significant findings related to the consumer–brand relationship variable highlights a key challenge for managers: brands that are fictional or still in early stages simply do not have the relational depth required to trigger stronger authenticity perceptions. This supports Fournier's (1998) argument that authenticity is not inherent but co-created through shared meaning and emotional connection (p. 344). For newer beauty brands, this means that sociopolitical activism cannot function as a fast track to credibility. Instead, such efforts need to grow out of a well-defined brand identity and be reinforced over time through consistent storytelling, meaningful engagement, and collaboration rooted in shared values (Napoli et al., 2014, p. 1099; Morhart et al., 2015, pp. 202–203).

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study provides novel insights into how advocacy messaging, motive framing, and perceived authenticity interact in beauty branding, several limitations influence the generalizability and interpretive clarity of the findings which also open important directions for future theoretical and methodological development.

One notable limitation lies in the framing manipulation, which, despite careful revision following the pre-test, did not produce a statistically clear distinction between the value-driven and profit-driven conditions. Internal reliability remained low (α = .44), and even after removing one item, the improvement was only moderate (ρ = .61). This suggests that the cues intended to signal motivational intent lacked the clarity or strength needed to prompt deeper attributional processing (Foreh & Grier, 2003, p. 351). A likely reason is the design of the stimulus itself: although the Instagram posts were purposefully styled to mirror the platform's aesthetic conventions using emojis, informal phrasing, and visual spacing, these same elements may have diluted the framing signal (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 781). Additionally, descriptive results showed a polarized pattern in motive framing responses, with many participants rating value-driven messages very high and profit-driven ones very low. This bimodal distribution suggests interpretive variability, indicating that the framing manipulation may have been too ambiguous. Such divergence likely weakened its overall effect, highlighting the need for clearer, more distinct framing cues in future studies. This points to a familiar methodological tension in digital communication research: the need to strike a balance between ecological authenticity and construct clarity. To address this, future studies might experiment with more vivid or layered framing strategies, such as integrating storytelling narratives, using spokesperson imagery, or making direct ethical declarations. Combining these with both psychometric testing and qualitative techniques during pre-testing would help ensure that manipulations are not only theoretically grounded but also contextually legible (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 781).

Second, the data revealed a notable ceiling effect in authenticity ratings. A majority of participants (87.6%) rated the brand 6.00 or higher on a 7-point scale, leaving little variability for the experimental manipulations to work with. This ceiling effect likely contributed to the lack of significant differences between message type and motive framing conditions, particularly at the aggregate level. Even at the dimensional level, where advocacy only shifted credibility and integrity, but not symbolism or continuity. Such skewed distributions suggest that the widely validated Morhart et al. (2015) scale may be overly sensitive to positive brand stimuli in controlled settings. Future research could address this by using more nuanced visual analogue scales to increase granularity or reverse-coded items to reduce acquiescence bias. Alternatively, researchers may supplement attitudinal scales with behavioral or affective indicators of authenticity to capture more subtle differences in perception.

Third, using a fictional brand, Sila Beauty, was an intentional methodological decision aimed at eliminating biases linked to brand familiarity or pre-existing reputations. This helped isolate the experimental variables, but it may have weakened ecological validity, especially for dimensions like continuity and symbolism often depend on consumers' long-term exposure to a brand's values, cultural signaling, and past actions (Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295; Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis,

2019, p. 227). Without a real-world brand narrative to anchor their judgments, participants may have struggled to form evaluations that reflect deeper, identity-linked authenticity. To address this trade-off, future studies might run field experiments using real brand content to simulate real-world communication contexts while preserving experimental control.

A fourth limitation concerns the sampling strategy. The non-probability sampling used in this study via Prolific, produced a sample of young, highly educated Western participants. While this cohort aligns with the core audience of socially engaged beauty brands, its relative homogeneity limits the broader applicability of the findings across cultural and ideological contexts (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019, p. 227). Importantly, political orientation, a key factor in shaping moral and symbolic interpretations of brand activism, was not measured, potentially masking meaningful subgroup variation in authenticity judgments (Hydock et al., 2020, p. 1136; Rodrigues et al., 2024, p. 295). Given that cultural values, media habits, and consumer-brand relationships vary significantly across global markets and political systems, particularly in response to corporate activism, future research should incorporate political identity as a covariate or moderator. Expanding the sampling frame to encompass more culturally and politically diverse populations, perhaps through stratified or quota designs, would also improve the external validity of CSA research (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

The last limitation concerned the assumption of equal variances being violated for the credibility and integrity dimensions, as shown by Levene's tests. Although such violations can compromise the reliability of ANCOVA outcomes, this concern was mitigated by running supplementary analyses using Welch's ANOVA, a method that accommodates variance inequality. With group sizes nearly identical across conditions (N = 104–105) and the consistent significance of results across tests, Welch's procedure confirmed both the significance and direction of effects. Still, it's important to note that heteroscedasticity may still affect generalizability under different sample characteristics, making this a methodological constraint worth keeping in mind (Ruxton, 2006; Field, 2018, pp. 407–409; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019, p. 82; Curtis, 2024, p. 3983).

Importantly, these limitations do not undermine the central contributions of this thesis. Instead, they highlight the interpretive and methodological challenges of studying brand activism and authenticity within fast-evolving digital environments. Addressing these constraints through improved stimulus design, broader sampling strategies, and greater theoretical sensitivity to ideological positioning will enable future research to better capture the complex, fragmented, and situational ways consumers evaluate brand authenticity.

5.4 Conclusion

This thesis examined how different forms of corporate sociopolitical advocacy, specifically how variations in message type and motive framing, shape perceptions of brand authenticity within the beauty industry among Gen Z and Millennials in Western markets. While the main hypotheses were

not supported when looking at the overall authenticity measure, a closer, dimensional analysis revealed a more nuanced outcome: advocacy messaging significantly improved perceptions of credibility and integrity, both of which are linked to trust and moral alignment. In contrast, symbolism and continuity did not show meaningful changes, likely because they depend more heavily on established brand narratives and long-term consistency.

The absence of effects related to motive framing highlights the difficulty of triggering attributional reasoning through brief, text-based cues, especially in rapid, visually dominated settings like Instagram. Collectively, these findings reinforce the idea that authenticity is not a simple, uniform construct. Instead, it is a layered, interpretive process shaped by both what a brand says and how that message fits within a broader contextual interpretation. While advocacy can signal sincerity, building a reputation for authenticity requires more than a single post, as it calls for an ongoing, coherent alignment between brand messaging, behavior, and identity over time.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Pre-test Results

       A pre-test was conducted prior to the main experiment to assess the clarity, reliability, and interpretability of the experimental manipulations. The pre-test employed the same 2×2 factorial design as the main study, with participants randomly assigned to one of four conditions. A total of 75 responses were collected via Prolific. Following data cleaning procedures outlined by Pallant (2020, pp. 55–59), eight incomplete responses were excluded, yielding a final sample of 67 valid cases.

       Participants ranged in age from 20 to 34 years (M = 26.96), with 56.7% identifying as female and 64.2% reporting a bachelor's degree or higher. This demographic profile indicated sufficient levels of media literacy and sociopolitical awareness to engage meaningfully with framing manipulations in digital brand contexts (Kumar, 2022, p. 7; Vredenburg et al., 2020, p. 447).

       The study started with briefing that included consent, and instructions, followed by the randomly assigned condition stimulus, then by the message type and motive framing manipulation, and the final set of questions was demographic enquiries. Lastly, a debriefing followed with more transparent information on the study.

       Randomization checks further confirmed group equivalence. ANOVA results indicated no significant differences in participant age by message type, $F(1, 65) = 2.743$, $p = .102$, or by motive framing, $F(1, 65) = 0.547$, $p = .462$. Levene's tests supported homogeneity of variance in both comparisons ($p = .470$ and $p = .063$, respectively). Chi-square tests showed no significant association between gender and condition for message type, $\chi^2(1, N = 67) = 0.005$, $p = .941$, or for motive framing, $\chi^2(1, N = 67) = 0.020$, $p = .889$. Educational attainment also did not vary significantly by message type, $\chi^2(3, N = 67) = 4.657$, $p = .199$, or by framing condition, $\chi^2(3, N = 67) = 0.799$, $p = .850$. These outcomes confirm the internal validity of group comparisons and the reliability of the random assignment process (Babbie, 2020, p. 115; Kumar, 2022, p. 11).

       The reliability test revealed internal consistency issues within the original manipulation check items. The initial three-item scale for motive framing exhibited poor reliability ($\alpha = .44$), which improved modestly to $\rho = .61$ (Spearman-Brown) after the weakest-performing item was removed. Similarly, the initial alpha for the message type scale was low ($\alpha = .21$), but increased to $\rho = .60$ after item "The message communicated the brand's involvement in a cause or social concern" was removed. While these reliability coefficients fall below conventional thresholds ($\alpha \geq .70$), such values are not uncommon in exploratory studies or pre-tests using abbreviated or adapted measures, particularly when scales are shortened to balance brevity and ecological realism in experimental contexts (Hair et al., 2020, p. 106; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2009, p. 200; Diamantopoulos et al., 2012, p. 445). In this paper case, manipulation check items were adapted from multiple validated sources but were necessarily tailored to the study's unique conceptual distinctions; namely, the simultaneous framing of ethical motive and message content within a single Instagram caption,

hence the lower reliability scores. As noted in the literature, such adaptations often prioritize ecological fit over psychometric robustness (Diamantopoulos et al., 2012, p. 445; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2009, p. 200). More details on reliability and validity can be found in Table 11 and Table 12.

The central purpose of the pre-test was to assess the effectiveness of the manipulation checks. The manipulation of message type and corporate motive framing were adapted from (Bhagwat et al., 2020) and (Dodd & Supa, 2014). They intended to test whether the Instagram post was perceived as advocacy- or product-focused, and whether as value- or profit-driven, successfully. A composite score was created after reliability test using two items: one measuring advocacy orientation ("The message primarily focused on addressing a social or humanitarian issue") and one reverse-coded item measuring product promotion ("The message was primarily aimed at promoting a new product or collection") showed strong interpretive differentiation between conditions. Participants in the advocacy condition (M = 5.17, SD = 1.13) rated the message as significantly more cause-oriented than those in the product-focused condition (M = 2.84, SD = 1.10), t(66) = 8.58, p < .001. The effect size was large (Cohen's d = 1.12), indicating that the manipulation functioned as intended and produced a robust contrast in perceived message type. However, the manipulation of corporate motive framing, whether the brand's actions were perceived as value-driven or profit-driven, was less effective. A composite score was created from two items: "Because the brand's actions were motivated by genuine ethical values" and the reverse-coded "Because the brand's message was primarily intended to serve strategic marketing or business goals." While participants in the value-driven condition rated the brand's motive as slightly more ethical (M = 4.05, SD = 1.37) than those in the profit-driven condition (M = 3.56, SD = 1.41), this difference did not reach statistical significance, t(66) = 1.45, p = .152. The effect size was small to moderate (Cohen's d = 0.35), suggesting limited interpretive differentiation between framing conditions despite textual manipulation efforts. These results indicate that the framing cues may have lacked salience or clarity when embedded in the Instagram caption format (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020, p. 780; Entman, 1993, p. 52).

In response to the pre-test findings, several refinements were made to the stimulus materials. First, the wording of the caption was revised to enhance semantic clarity and reduce ambiguity between value- and profit-driven motives, making the distinction more readily interpretable. Second, emojis were adjusted per motive (value- vs. profit-driven) to more accurately reflect the intended emotional tone of each condition, based on evidence that visual cues can amplify perceived sincerity and affect message interpretation in digital environments (Ge & Gretzel, 2018, p. 1274). Third, a line break was inserted between the core message and the motive framing sentence to visually segment the two elements, thereby increasing their cognitive salience in accordance with framing theory (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Yu et al., 2024, p. 10).

Factor analysis results supported the refinement of both manipulation check measures. For the message type scale, the KMO value was .55, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 16.88$, $p < .001$, indicating adequate sampling. A single factor was extracted (eigenvalue = 1.56), accounting for 51.83% of the variance. Two items "focused on a social/humanitarian issue" (.82) and "brand's involvement in a cause" (.55) and "promoting a new product" (.76, reverse-coded), loaded positively. These two strongest-loading items were retained for the main study and presented on a bipolar 7-point Likert scale. A similar factor structure was observed for the motive framing scale. The KMO value was .50, and Bartlett's Test was also significant, $\chi^2(3) = 14.53$, $p = .002$. One factor was extracted (eigenvalue = 1.46), explaining 48.56% of the variance. Two items, "motivated by ethical values" (.85) and "strategic business goals" (.82, reverse-coded), loaded clearly on the factor, while a third item, "intends to improve public image," exhibited a weak loading (.26) and low communality (.07). This item was excluded from the final scale, and similarly the two strongest-loading items were retained for the main study and presented on a bipolar 7-point Likert scale.

Appendix B: Survey and Stimuli of Main Experiment
Q1 **Welcome to the survey**

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study, conducted as part of a master's thesis project in Media & Business at Erasmus University. We kindly ask you to complete the following questionnaire.   In this study, you will be shown a social media post from a beauty brand. After viewing it, you will be asked a few questions about your opinion of the brand and its message. The purpose of this research is to investigate brand communication and brand perceptions in the beauty industry. The questionnaire will take approximately **5-8 minutes** to complete.

We kindly ask that you answer all questions carefully and truthfully, as we are genuinely interested in your honest perspective. There are no right or wrong answers.

SENSITIVITY OF THE MESSAGES PRESENTED

Please note that some of the posts may reference **social or political causes**. These messages are used strictly for **research purposes**. While the content is not intended to cause discomfort, we acknowledge that participants may hold diverse personal views. If at any point you feel uneasy, **you may stop the survey** at your discretion.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Only individuals **aged 18 years or older** are invited to participate. This restriction is in place to protect minors. All data will be collected **anonymously** and handled **confidentially**. No personal identifiers will be stored or traced back to you. There are **no foreseeable risks** associated with participation.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation is entirely **voluntary**. If you choose not to continue with the study now or at any point during the questionnaire, **you may withdraw without any consequences** and without providing a reason.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions about the study before or after your participation, please feel free to contact the responsible researcher: Rahaf Subhiyeh Email: 709474rs@eur.nl

This research project has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam. If you wish to exercise your data protection rights or have any privacy-related concerns, you may contact the university's Data Protection Officer at: fg@eur.nl.   If you have **read and understood** the information above, **voluntarily agree** to participate in this study, and you are **18 or older**, please click the "*I agree*" button below to proceed to the questionnaire:

○ I agree (1)

○ I disagree (2)

Q2

You will now be shown an Instagram post from a beauty brand. *Please read it carefully, as your impressions will form the basis of the following questions.* After viewing the post, you'll be asked to respond to a short set of questions about the brand and its message, followed by some general background information. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer honestly and thoughtfully. When you're ready, click on **Next** to begin.

Q3 Please, carefully look at the post below (**Image and Caption**). Once you have proceeded to the next question, you will not be able to view the post again. The following questions are related to this post.

Figure 2 Condition 1: Advocacy x Value-driven.

Sila Beauty ✓ · Follow

94,934 likes

Sila Beauty At Sila Beauty, we believe in dignity, protection, and the power of standing up for those most at risk. That's why we're renewing our long-standing support for humanitarian aid focused on displaced women and children in conflict zones.

This reflects the values we've upheld from the beginning! Because at Sila, beauty means purpose, not publicity. We act based on what we believe in, not what sells 🌍 🖤 ✊

📢 ... more

View all 1,016 comment

Figure 3 Condition 2: Advocacy x Profit-driven.

Sila Beauty ✔ · **Follow**

❤️ ○ ◁   🔖

94,934 likes

Sila Beauty At Sila Beauty, we believe in dignity, protection, and the power of standing up for those most at risk. That's why we're renewing our long-standing support for humanitarian aid focused on displaced women and children in conflict zones.

This initiative was developed using market insights and consumer trends to help us stay relevant, increase engagement, and remain competitive in today's fast-moving beauty industry 💸 📊 🔥 🛍️ ... more

View all 1,016 comment

Figure 4 Condition 3: Product-focused x Value-driven.

Sila Beauty ✔ · **Follow**

94,934 likes

Sila Beauty At Sila Beauty, we're proud to launch our latest foundation line, designed with enhanced wearability, smoother texture, wider shade range, and advanced skin-adaptive pigments. It's makeup engineered for all-day performance and comfort.

Behind every launch is our commitment to meaningful innovation. This reflects the values we've upheld from the beginning! Because at Sila, beauty means purpose, not publicity. We act based on what we believe in, not what sells 🌍 ❤️ 🤗 📢 ... more

View all 1,016 comment

Figure 5 Condition 4: Product-focused x Profit-driven

Q7 Based on the post you saw, on a scale from 1 (**Strongly disagree**) to 7 (**Strongly agree**), please

indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

Q8 **1. This brand seems to deliver what it promises.**

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Somewhat disagree (3)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (4)

○ Somewhat agree (5)

○ Agree (6)

○ Strongly agree (7)

Q9 **2. This brand seems honest in its communication.**

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Somewhat disagree (3)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (4)

○ Somewhat agree (5)

○ Agree (6)

○ Strongly agree (7)

Q10 **1. This brand seems true to a set of moral values.**

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Somewhat disagree (3)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (4)

○ Somewhat agree (5)

○ Agree (6)

○ Strongly agree (7)

Q11 **2. This brand seems motivated by caring.**

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Somewhat disagree (3)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (4)

○ Somewhat agree (5)

○ Agree (6)

○ Strongly agree (7)

Q12 **1. This brand seems to reflect who I am.**

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Somewhat disagree (3)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (4)

○ Somewhat agree (5)

○ Agree (6)

○ Strongly agree (7)

Q13 2. This brand seems to align with my personal values.

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Somewhat disagree (3)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (4)

○ Somewhat agree (5)

○ Agree (6)

○ Strongly agree (7)

Q14 1. This brand seems consistent in what it stands for over time.

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Somewhat disagree (3)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (4)

○ Somewhat agree (5)

○ Agree (6)

○ Strongly agree (7)

Q15 **2. This brand seems to have a clear and enduring purpose.**

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Somewhat disagree (3)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (4)

○ Somewhat agree (5)

○ Agree (6)

○ Strongly agree (7)

Q16 How many faces were there in the post you saw?

○ 1 (1)

○ 2 (2)

○ 3 (3)

○ 4 (4)

○ 5 (5)

Q17 Please, select **what** you think was the **primary focus** of the brand's **Instagram caption**:

*1 = Mainly focused on **promoting a product** (Strongly Disagree)*

*7 = Mainly focused on **a social or humanitarian cause** (Strongly Agree)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Promoting a product	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Humanitarian or social cause

Q18 Please, select **why** you think the brand shared this **message** in the **caption**:

*1 = The message was communicated to **increase commercial success.** (Strongly Disagree)*

*7 = The message was communicated to **showcase** the brand's **moral or ethical principles.** (Strongly Agree)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
To increase commercial success	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	**To show moral or ethical principles**

Please answer the following questions about your **personal experiences** and **views**.

Q19 On a scale from **1 (Strongly disagree)** to **7 (Strongly agree)**, please indicate how much you

agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I actively support social and political causes. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I often talk about social or political issues with others. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I follow news or influencers who focus on sociopolitical topics. (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have boycotted a brand due to ethical concerns in the past. (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q20 On a scale from **1 (Strongly disagree)** to **7 (Strongly agree)**, please indicate how much you

agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I frequently purchase products from my preferred beauty brands. (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Read carefully, select "Somewhat disagree" here. (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel emotionally connected to certain beauty brands. (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I trust the beauty brands I regularly buy from. (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I remain loyal to brands that align with my values. (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q21 You're almost done! What is your age?

_____

Q22 Are you resident in Europe or North America (U.S. or Canada)?

   ◯ Yes (1)

   ◯ No (2)

Q23 What is your gender?

   ◯ Male (1)

   ◯ Female (2)

   ◯ Non-binary / third gender (3)

   ◯ Prefer not to say (4)

Q24 What level of education have you obtained?

   ◯ High school diploma (1)

   ◯ Vocational Education (2)

   ◯ Bachelor's Degree (3)

   ◯ Master's Degree (4)

   ◯ Doctoral Degree (5)

Others: (6) _____

Q25 Thank you for participating in this experiment.

Clarification The social media post you were shown was entirely fictional and created specifically for the purposes of this academic study. While the post may have referenced social or political causes, these messages do not reflect the views of any real brand or organization. The design and content were inspired by actual industry practices but adapted to maintain experimental control. This research aims to explore how different types of brand messaging, particularly advocacy versus product-focused communication, influence consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity within the

beauty industry. Your responses will contribute to a broader understanding of how authenticity is shaped in branding, especially in contexts where ethical values and commercial strategies intersect.

This study is conducted strictly for academic purposes as part of a master's thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam. The findings will not be used for commercial purposes, and all data collected will remain anonymous and confidential.   If you have any questions about the study, or if you wish to withdraw your data, you may contact the researcher: **Rahaf Subhiyeh**

Email: 709474rs@eur.nl

Thank you again for your time and contribution! **Last but not least, please klick on Next to submit your answer!**

Appendix C: Used Scales with Statistics

Table 8 Scale's Items, Factor Loadings, and Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Spearman-Brown) for Perceived Brand Authenticity.

Construct	Items	Factor loadings
Perceived Brand Authenticity	Cumulative: (α=.708)	
	(1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)	
	Credibility (ρ =.727)	
	1. This brand seems to deliver what it promises.	.614
	2. This brand seems honest in its communication.	.418
	Integrity (ρ =.786)	
	1. This brand seems true to a set of moral values.	.699
	2. This brand seems motivated by caring.	.770
	Symbolism (ρ =.902)	
	1. This brand seems to reflect who I am.	.850
	2. This brand seems to align with my personal values.	.867
	Continuity (ρ =.727)	
	1. This brand seems consistent in what it stands for over time.	.785
	2. This brand seems to have a clear and enduring purpose.	.714

Note: all items were kept.

Table 9 Scale's Items, Factor Loadings, and Cronbach's Alpha for Cause Support.

Construct	Items	Factor loadings
Cause Support	Cumulative: (α=.630), after item dropping: (α=.864)	
	(1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)	
	1. I actively support social and political causes.	.902

	2. I often talk about social or political issues with others.	.808
	3. I follow news or influencers who focus on sociopolitical topics.	.783
	4. I have boycotted a brand due to ethical concerns in the past.*	-

Note: *item has been dropped

Table 10 Scale's Items, Factor Loadings, and Cronbach's Alpha for Consumer-Brand Relationship.

Construct	Items	Factor loadings
Consumer-brand relationship	Cumulative: (α=.613), after item dropping: (α=.688)	
	(1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)	
	1. I frequently purchase products from my preferred beauty brands.	.694
	2. I feel emotionally connected to certain beauty brands.	.667
	3. I trust the beauty brands I regularly buy from.	.622
	4. I remain loyal to brands that align with my values.*	-

Note: *item has been dropped

Table 11 Scale's Items, Factor Loadings, and Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Spearman-Brown) for Pre-test Message Type Manipulation.

Construct	Items	Factor loadings
Pre-test manipulation for Message Type	Cumulative: (α=.207), after item dropping: (ρ =.595)	
	(1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)	
	1. The message primarily focused on addressing a social or humanitarian issue.	.820
	2. The message communicated the brand's involvement in a cause or social concern.*	.547
	3. The message was primarily aimed at promoting a new product or collection.**	.764

Note: *item has been dropped.

**item has been reverse coded.

Table 12 Scale's Items, Factor Loadings, and Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Spearman-Brown) for Pre-test Motive Framing Manipulation.

Construct	Items	Factor loadings
Pre-test manipulation for Corporate Motive Framing	Cumulative 3-items: (α=.444), after item dropping: (ρ =.606)	
	(1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)	
	1. Because the brand's actions were motivated by genuine ethical values.	.848
	2. Because the brand intends to improve its public image through this message.*	.260
	3. Because the brand's message was primarily intended to serve strategic marketing or business goals.**	.821

Note: *item has been dropped.
**item has been reverse coded.

Appendix D: Declaring Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis
Student Information
Name: [Rahaf Subhiyeh]
Student ID: [709474]
Course Name: Master Thesis CM5050
Supervisor Name: [Kees Smeets]
Date: [June 26, 2025]

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:
- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically [Grammarly, Scribbr, and ChatGPT], in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [Rahaf Subhiyeh]

Date of Signature: [February 11, 2025]

Extent of AI Usage

☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in Appendix E.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was

used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: [Rahaf Subhiyeh]

Date of Signature: [June 26, 2025]

Appendix E: Prompts used in OpenAI

"Provide me with different examples of real-life beauty brands' Instagram captions that illustrate: 1. support for sociopolitical causes, 2. promote a product, 3. are value laden, 4. Or are profit/strategic driven. Make sure they are real Instagram captions/posts that include the previous. Provide links to the examples you introduce."

This prompt was necessary to comprehend how real beauty brands advertise their advocacy stances on Instagram. ChatGPT made it easier to spot these particular posts and captions related to the context of this study. The given examples by ChatGPT were used further as inspirational tools only to create the stimuli used in the pre-test and main experiment, which was created by the researcher.