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Analyzing and Localizing Brand Authenticity Components in the Healthcare Industry

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to present a localized model for brand authenticity in the healthcare industry. Initially, through a systematic literature review and qualitative content analysis using NVIVO software, 15 main factors of brand authenticity were identified in this study. In the next step, these components were localized for the Iranian healthcare services context using the Delphi method and surveying academic and industry experts (including 12 individuals), resulting in the extraction of 12 final factors (including transparency and honesty, brand heritage, existential authenticity, and brand social responsibility). The findings indicate that consistency between the stated values and the actual performance of healthcare organizations is the primary basis for the perception of authenticity in the minds of patients. This research, by focusing on the localized components, provides a scientific framework for managers of organizations active in the health sector to foster patient network trust and enhance the quality of the treatment experience by fundamentally shifting decision-making from an intuitive state.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In the last decade, the healthcare industry has faced fundamental changes in how it interacts with stakeholders. Today's patient is no longer a passive consumer; rather, through digital media and online feedback, they actively participate in evaluating healthcare services (Araújo et al., 2025). This transformation has paved the way for the emergence of "brand authenticity," a construct referring to the patient's perception of the healthcare organization's honesty, transparency, and alignment between its stated values and reality (Apriyana et al., 2024). The necessity of studying brands active in the healthcare industry stems from the fact that brand authenticity in this sector is shaped by factors that are objective, behavioral, and observable. These factors rely more on the brand's actual conduct, credible backing, and direct interaction with patients rather than on symbolism, claims, or historical narratives (Farzinmehr et al., 2025). Such a model indicates that patient trust is formed when a brand can demonstrate its authenticity in practice, not merely in discourse or mental imagery. Furthermore, in high-risk service environments like healthcare, patient trust is not only a prerequisite for treatment but also a key variable in the quality of the patient experience (Ghaffar et al., 2025). Despite the importance of this construct, scientific research on the precise role of brand authenticity in the healthcare industry is limited and scattered. Many managers, due to the lack of a localized framework, operate based on intuitive perceptions. This research seeks to answer the main questions: What are the scientifically-based factors of brand authenticity? And which of these factors, with an emphasis on trust-building, should be prioritized in the healthcare industry?

Theoretical Foundations

Brand Authenticity

In contemporary marketing literature, brand authenticity is defined as a psychological and strategic construct that extends beyond the technical quality of services. This concept pertains to stakeholders' perceptions of the alignment between the brand's declared values and the organization's actual behaviors (Hyun et al., 2024). Authenticity, in its true sense, means being genuine, honest, and avoiding hypocrisy. It is achieved when a brand exhibits consistent performance over time and adheres to its promises. This characteristic imbues brands with a unique identity that is inimitable (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019; Crisci, 2024).

Customer Trust

Trust, as a key construct in relationship marketing, reflects the sense of security a consumer experiences when interacting with a product or service (Bae & Kim, 2023). This construct is formed on the perception that the brand is reliable and responsible for the customer's interests and well-being. In essence, trust is a form of consumer belief and reassurance that they will be served in the long term to meet their needs and interests, acting as a lever of credibility for repeat purchases (Bhattacharjee, 2025). In a study by Deng et al. (2025) titled "Exploring the Role of Brand Authenticity on Customer Loyalty in Sport Brands," it was found that all dimensions of brand authenticity (real-to-ideal, real-to-reality, and real-to-self) have significant positive effects on brand attachment, trust, and loyalty. In research conducted by Anubha & Roy (2025) titled "Explaining the Role of Consumer-Perceived Brand Authenticity in the Context of Masstige Brands," findings indicated that all three dimensions of authenticity (including brand heritage, commitment to quality, and sincerity) influence customer purchase intention through the mediating variable of trust. In a study by Kim et al. (2021) titled "Examining Consumer-Based Brand Authenticity in the South Korean Coffee Shop Market," it was found that the dimensions of commitment to quality, heritage, and sincerity have significant impacts on brand credibility, ultimately leading to strengthened brand loyalty. Another study titled "Investigating the Impact of Green Brand Storytelling on Authenticity and Trust" was conducted by Huang & Guo (2021). The results showed that rhetorical strategies (such as symbolism) enhance narrative immersion, which in turn positively influences perceived brand authenticity and trust in the brand.

Research Methodology

Regarding its research philosophy, this study is situated within the pragmatic paradigm, which relies on a subjectivist approach. In terms of objectives, this research is developmental with an inductive approach; and in its nature, it is considered an exploratory-analytical study. From a methodological perspective, this paper employs a mixed-methods research design, utilizing a qualitative content analysis strategy to identify factors, and the Delphi technique for the localization of these components. The statistical population for this study is defined in two parts. The first part comprises articles related to brand authenticity. For the second part, intended for localization, the population included industry experts and academic faculty members with over 15 years of experience, possessing expertise in the core concepts of the research, as well as a history of publishing interdisciplinary research in business and healthcare; 12 of whom were selected by purposive sampling. Qualitative content analysis was conducted using open and axial coding in NVIVO 12 software, while the Delphi data analysis, including the calculation of means and the assessment of consensus, was performed using Excel.

Research Findings

The findings of this study led to the identification of 15 initial factors, which were ultimately localized and finalized into 12 key factors influencing brand authenticity within the context of Iran's healthcare industry. These factors include transparency and sincerity, uniqueness, brand authenticity protection, adherence and commitment to customers, brand distinctiveness, alignment with brand identity, existential authenticity, sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR), enduring brand heritage, core brand values, rich background and history, and strategic participation and engagement with customers.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicate that in the healthcare industry, brand authenticity is not merely a marketing construct, but an ethical and strategic foundation for building networked trust and improving the treatment experience. Organizations that successfully embed these components into their identity and operations can, under current complex conditions (including sanctions and international limitations), foster domestic trust, serve as an effective substitute for foreign brands, and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. This is consistent with studies by Anubha & Roy (2025), and the brand heritage component is also emphasized in the study by Kim et al. (2021). Furthermore, the results of this research underscore the importance of transparency as a dimension of brand authenticity in building patient trust; the study by Dehghan et al. (2022), consistent with our findings, emphasizes the role of transparency and brand storytelling in strengthening authenticity. The path of this study—redefining the position of brand authenticity and establishing it as the cornerstone of patient trust—elevates the trust-oriented perspective from the level of individual interactions (physician-patient) to the level of identity and macro-behavior of healthcare organizations. Specifically, this research highlights components such as uniqueness, commitment to customers, brand distinctiveness, and customer engagement, which have received less attention in other studies, as constituent elements of brand authenticity in this industry. Existential authenticity refers to the internal authenticity of a brand, reflecting a commitment to its unique essence and origin. This factor is vital in creating deep and lasting trust in patients, as the brand must consistently and genuinely demonstrate and defend its values. Behavioral consistency, another component emphasized in this study, refers to the degree of harmony, continuity, and integrity of a brand's behaviors, decisions, and actions over time and across all touchpoints with stakeholders. This concept indicates the extent to which a brand acts in accordance with its stated identity, values, and promises without experiencing fluctuations or behavioral contradictions. This factor serves as a powerful tool for increasing brand credibility in patients' minds, particularly in therapeutic contexts where a high level of patient trust is required. Based on these findings, the

following recommendations are provided to managers of organizations active in the healthcare industry:

- **Developing a Charter of Transparency and Sincerity:** Healthcare organizations should formalize and implement an official charter based on transparency in treatment, financial, and communication processes. Publishing periodic performance reports and patient feedback can be an effective step toward increasing public trust.
- **Developing Brand Identity Based on Authentic Values:** Managers should institutionalize brand authenticity in patients' minds by redefining their brand identity based on core values (e.g., social responsibility, commitment to quality, and organizational heritage) and aligning all communications and services with this identity.
- **Creating Strategic Engagement Mechanisms with Patients:** Designing digital and in-person platforms for active patient participation in treatment decisions and service improvement can increase the sense of belonging and trust.
- **Training and Empowering Human Resources:** As brand ambassadors, employees must receive continuous training in professional ethics, transparent communication, and behavior based on authenticity.
- **Utilizing Authentic Narrative and Storytelling:** Utilizing real, human-centric narratives regarding the organization's history, treatment successes, and social initiatives can strengthen the perception of brand authenticity.
- **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation of Authenticity Indicators:** Establishing a periodic monitoring system based on the 12 identified factors and gathering feedback from patients and stakeholders will assist managers in continuous improvement.
- **Turning Brand Authenticity into a National Competitive Advantage:** At the macro level, policymakers can help differentiate and elevate the status of domestic providers by introducing authenticity-based accreditation marks (e.g., "Authentic Health Brand").

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Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest relevant to this work.

Data Availability Statement
The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI Use Statement
The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation, writing, or editing of this manuscript.

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Ethics Approval
All procedures performed in this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible institutional and national research committee.