

When Authentic Brands Feel Like the Self: The Role of Self-Congruity in Brand Attachment

Research Paper

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Abstract: **Research purpose.** When authentic brands are aligned with consumers' sense of self, strong emotional bonds are more likely to be fostered. However, previous studies do not provide a clear picture of how brand authenticity, consumer self-congruity, and brand attachment are related, and whether self-congruity is a central psychological mechanism in this process. The present study aims to address this gap by developing and testing a framework in which perceived brand authenticity is associated with brand attachment, both directly and indirectly through consumer self-congruity.

Design / Methodology / Approach. This study is based on a quantitative research design using an online survey. Data were collected from a convenience sample of adult consumers (N = 482), primarily from Lithuania (74.9%), with additional respondents completing the survey in English (25.1%; including participants from England, Scotland, Germany, and the United States). The sample consisted of 71% women, 27% men, and 2% identifying as other, with a mean age of 26 years. All constructs were measured using established multi-item scales adapted to the context of this study. The hypothesised relationships were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM) with SPSS AMOS.

Findings. The findings suggest that perceived brand authenticity is positively and significantly associated with both consumer self-congruity and brand attachment. In turn, consumer self-congruity is positively and significantly associated with brand attachment. Furthermore, the analysis of mediation shows that the relationship between brand authenticity and brand attachment is partially impacted by consumer self-congruity. Taken together, these findings are consistent with a process in which authentic brands are associated with stronger self-brand alignment, which in turn is associated with stronger emotional attachment.

Value. The most significant theoretical contribution of the study is the identification of consumer self-congruity as a central psychological mechanism associated with the relationship between perceived brand authenticity and brand attachment. By integrating research on brand authenticity with self-congruity and identity-based perspectives in consumer behaviour, the study helps reconcile previously inconsistent findings and offers a more unified explanation of how and why authenticity fosters strong consumer-brand relationships. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that firms should prioritise the strategic cultivation of brand authenticity by emphasising heritage, core values, and distinctive brand characteristics. Importantly, authenticity should not be treated as an end in itself, but as a resource that enables consumers to perceive alignment between the brand and their self-concept.

Keywords: brand authenticity • brand attachment • consumer self-congruity • consumer behaviour • brand management

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Introduction

Brand authenticity has emerged as a central pillar of contemporary brand management. Across consumer segments, authenticity is increasingly expected rather than merely valued as a differentiating attribute. Supporting this trend, prior evidence indicates that authenticity is considered important by 90% of Millennials, 85% of Generation X, and 80% of Baby Boomers (Towns, 2024), highlighting its relevance across demographic groups. This shift reflects broader changes in marketplace expectations, in which consumers increasingly seek brands, products, and experiences perceived as genuine and credible (Oh et al., 2019). In this context, authenticity serves not only as a signal of quality but also as a basis for differentiation in competitive markets (Fritz et al., 2017; Hyun et al., 2024). In contexts where consumers cannot verify product features before purchase (e.g., in the nutrition or health market), authenticity serves as a trust cue (Lyu et al., 2026). Consumers who perceive a brand as authentic are more likely to engage in positive eWOM and exhibit favourable behavioural intentions (Ali et al., 2025).

An increasing number of studies suggest that authentic brands are particularly effective at fostering strong emotional connections with consumers (Arya et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2022). These connections are conceptualised as brand attachment, defined as a durable emotional bond characterised by affection, connection, and a desire to maintain a relationship with the brand (Chen et al., 2021). From a managerial perspective, brand attachment represents a strategically important outcome, as emotionally connected consumers exhibit stronger loyalty and long-term engagement (Lyu et al., 2026). Consistent with this view, prior evidence suggests that brands that establish strong emotional ties with consumers benefit from greater trust, loyalty, commitment, purchase intentions, and positive word-of-mouth (Södergren, 2021). Consequently, brand attachment is increasingly recognised as a key outcome of branding efforts (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019). Recent literature highlights authenticity as an important element of responsible brand communication that fosters emotional attachment and supports long-term consumer–brand relationships (Foroudi et al., 2025).

Despite this progress, the mechanisms through which brand authenticity translates into brand attachment remain insufficiently understood. One promising explanation lies in the concept of consumer self-congruity, which is defined as the perceived alignment between a consumer's self-concept and the personality or user image of a brand. Prior studies demonstrate that self-congruity strengthens emotional bonds with brands and enhances brand attachment (Guèvremont, 2021; Japutra et al., 2019; Rabbanee et al., 2020).

However, empirical findings on the relationships among brand authenticity, self-congruity, and brand attachment remain inconsistent. Prior studies have shown positive effects of self-congruity on brand attachment (Lim et al., 2020), while more recent research indicates that self-congruity can also strengthen the effects of perceived brand authenticity on consumer responses (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). Moreover, emerging evidence suggests that only specific dimensions of self-congruity, particularly actual self-congruity, are significantly related to brand authenticity (Fritz et al., 2017) and brand attachment (Huang et al., 2017). Evidence also suggests that actual self-congruity may exert a stronger influence on attachment than ideal self-congruity (Guèvremont, 2021). Further, recent research suggests that aligning with a consumer's ideal self-image may be a stronger driver of authenticity and pride than aligning with one's actual self (Zogaj et al., 2024). Publicly consumed brands help consumers build their social identity and reinforce desired social images (Haddad, 2026). Consumers rely on self-congruent brands to reinforce and extend their identities (Haddad, 2026; Shimul & Phau, 2023). Evidence shows that the effects of authenticity are not uniform but shaped by psychological and contextual factors, often operating indirectly (Lyu et al., 2026).

These inconsistencies point to a lack of theoretical clarity regarding the role of self-congruity in the authenticity–attachment relationship. In particular, prior research has not clearly established whether self-congruity functions as a central psychological mechanism through which brand authenticity fosters attachment, nor how different self-congruity dimensions operate within this process. Recent literature highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of mediating mechanisms, particularly those related to the consumer self, in explaining how authenticity translates into meaningful consumer–brand relationships (Chieng et al., 2022; Lyu et al., 2026; Zogaj et al., 2024).

In order to address this gap, this research develops and empirically tests a framework in which brand authenticity is associated with brand attachment both directly and indirectly through consumer self-congruity. Although prior literature conceptualises self-congruity as multidimensional, the present study is motivated by inconsistent findings regarding the role of its different dimensions. It therefore examines self-congruity as an overall perception of self-brand alignment. Accordingly, this research addresses the following question: *How is perceived brand authenticity associated with brand attachment, and to what extent is this relationship explained by consumers' perceived self-congruity with the brand?*

Drawing on identity-based and self-congruity perspectives, the study argues that authentic brands facilitate consumers' sense of self-brand alignment, thereby strengthening emotional attachment. This assumption aligns with recent literature suggesting that brand authenticity supports consumers' sense of identity alignment and fosters emotional attachment, which contributes to long-term relational outcomes such as trust, loyalty, and advocacy (Foroudi et al., 2025; Södergren, 2021). To test these assumptions, a cross-sectional survey design and an online questionnaire were employed. This research makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature by theorising and demonstrating that brand authenticity operates as an identity-relevant resource associated with brand attachment through self-brand alignment. Specifically, it identifies consumer self-congruity as a core psychological mechanism linking perceptions of authenticity to attachment outcomes, thereby moving beyond prior work that treats authenticity primarily as a direct predictor. Furthermore, by showing that consumers appear to process self-congruity holistically when evaluating authentic brands, the study suggests that the multidimensional structure of self-congruity may be less salient in authenticity-driven brand evaluations than previously assumed.

Literature review

Brand attachment refers to the strength of the bond between a brand and a consumer's self-concept (Park et al., 2010). Recent studies identify attachment as a strong predictor of brand loyalty (Chieng et al., 2022; Deng et al., 2025). Unlike evaluative attitudes, attachment reflects a deeper psychological connection integrating emotional and cognitive dimensions. Prior research explains brand attachment through attachment theory, self-congruity theory, social identity theory, and brand relationship theory (Shimul, 2022). Although conceptually distinct, these perspectives share the view that attachment develops when brands become self-relevant. Attachment theory emphasises emotional security and psychological comfort in consumer-brand relationships (Shimul, 2022), while self-congruity theory highlights alignment between brands and consumers' self-concept and identity aspirations (Chieng et al., 2022; Haddad, 2026; Rabbanee et al., 2020). From a self-determination perspective, attachment may emerge when brands help to fulfil consumers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan et al., 2019), whereas social identity theory stresses identity reinforcement and self-evaluation through brands (Klabi, 2020). Brand relationship theory further underlines the role of trust, commitment, and satisfaction in sustaining long-term relationships (Fournier, 1998). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that brand attachment is fundamentally driven by the extent to which brands become integrated into consumers' identities. Accordingly, this study adopts Park et al. (2010) conceptualisation, which captures attachment as a self-linked bond encompassing both emotional and cognitive aspects, and provides a foundation for examining identity-based mechanisms.

Brand authenticity. Brand authenticity has become an important topic in consumer research, although no universally accepted definition exists (Arya et al., 2019; Södergren, 2021). Brand authenticity is often understood as a subjective consumer perception influenced by brand signals (Fritz et al., 2017; Oh et al., 2019). Contemporary research increasingly views authenticity as constructed in consumers' minds rather than embedded in brands themselves. Grayson and Martinec (2004) distinguished indexical and iconic authenticity, while later studies proposed multidimensional frameworks including continuity, originality, sincerity, credibility, and symbolism (Bruhn et al., 2012; Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014). Recent studies further emphasise emotional resonance and perceived sincerity, trust, and engagement as important mechanisms in authenticity research, including in digital environments (Das et al., 2022; Kang & Ro, 2024; Khalfallah & Keller, 2025; Lyu et al., 2026). Consumers perceive brands as authentic when they are viewed as genuine, responsible, and supportive of self-expression. Building on this perspective, the present study conceptualises brand authenticity as an identity-relevant resource influencing self-congruity and brand attachment.

Self-congruity. Self-congruity refers to the alignment between consumers' self-concept and a brand's personality or user image (Chieng et al., 2022; Haddad, 2026; Malär et al., 2011; Sirgy, 2018). Rooted in the interaction between self-concept and brand personality (Huber et al., 2018), it reflects the extent to which brands represent the self. Recent studies describe self-congruity as dynamic and context-sensitive, shaped by changing identities and interactive brand environments (Kolańska-Stronka & Singh, 2024). Prior research identifies actual, ideal, and social self-congruity dimensions linked to self-verification, self-enhancement, and social signalling motives (Sirgy, 2018). Empirical evidence shows that actual and ideal self-congruity often have the strongest influence on consumer responses (Guèvremont, 2021; Japutra et al., 2019; Malär et al., 2011), while social self-congruity is particularly relevant in expressive consumption contexts (Chieng et al., 2022). Recent studies confirm self-congruity as a robust

predictor of consumer–brand relationship strength (Chieng et al., 2022; Zogaj et al., 2024). Self-congruity also functions as a psychological mechanism linking brand perceptions with relational outcomes, strengthening identity expression, emotional investment, and brand attachment (Malär et al., 2011). The present study therefore examines overall self-brand alignment and its mediating role between brand authenticity and brand attachment.

Hypotheses development. Building on the proposed identity-based framework, we argue that brand authenticity is associated with brand attachment both directly and indirectly through consumer self-congruity. Specifically, authenticity is expected to strengthen attachment by enhancing consumers' overall perception of self-brand alignment. Brand authenticity is widely recognised as a key driver of positive consumer-brand relationships. Authentic brands are perceived as sincere, reliable, and true to their values, which enhances trust and strengthens consumers' perceived connection with the brand (Arya et al., 2019; Lyu et al., 2026; Morhart et al., 2015). These perceptions foster emotional closeness and facilitate the development of enduring relational bonds (Chen et al., 2022; Lyu et al., 2026). As a result, authenticity is expected to directly strengthen consumers' emotional attachment to the brand. Accordingly, the present study proposes:

- *H1: Brand authenticity is positively related to brand attachment*

While authenticity may directly relate to attachment, its effects are likely to be, at least in part, explained by identity-based processes. In particular, authenticity may influence how consumers interpret and relate to brand meaning, thereby shaping perceptions of self-brand alignment. According to self-congruity theory, consumers prefer brands whose personality and user image align with their own self-concept, and this congruence influences their emotional and behavioural responses (Sirgy, 2018). This alignment manifests across multiple identity dimensions, including actual, ideal, and social self-congruity (Chieng et al., 2022; Rabbanee et al., 2020). Prior research further shows that congruity across these dimensions, whether reflecting consumers' true self, aspirational self, or desired social image, enhances emotional connections to brands (Guèvremont, 2021; Japutra et al., 2019). Building on this perspective, brand authenticity is expected to facilitate self-brand alignment. Authentic brands provide coherent, credible, and symbolically meaningful identity cues, which make it easier for consumers to interpret and integrate the brand into their self-concept. Recent research further indicates that authenticity enhances identity alignment by reducing cognitive uncertainty and strengthening consumers' ability to relate brand meaning to their self-concept (Lyu et al., 2026). As a result, higher levels of perceived authenticity should enhance consumers' ability to perceive alignment between the brand and their actual, ideal, and social selves. New work confirms that authenticity supports consumers' identity-related needs, increasing perceived self-brand alignment (Zogaj et al., 2024). Although self-congruity is theoretically conceptualised as a multidimensional construct comprising actual, ideal, and social self-congruity (Chieng et al., 2022; Rabbanee et al., 2020; Sirgy, 2018), prior empirical findings remain inconsistent regarding the relative importance of these dimensions. Some studies identify only actual self-congruity as a significant predictor (Fritz et al., 2017), while others report variation in the relative influence of different self-congruity dimensions (Guèvremont, 2021). Recent research has operationalised self-congruity as an overall perception of self-brand alignment rather than distinguishing among specific self-dimensions (Lyu et al., 2026). Given inconsistent findings regarding the relative importance of actual, ideal, and social self-congruity dimensions, the present study adopts a more integrative perspective and examines self-congruity at an aggregate level. Therefore:

- *H2: Brand authenticity is positively related to consumer self-congruity*

When consumers perceive congruence between their self-concept and a brand, the brand becomes integrated into their identity structure. This integration facilitates both self-expression and self-verification processes, increasing emotional investment in the brand and strengthening attachment (Chieng et al., 2022; Japutra et al., 2019). Prior research shows that different dimensions of self-congruity, including actual, ideal, and social self-congruity, can enhance consumers' emotional connection to brands, although their relative effects vary across contexts (Chieng et al., 2022; Huber et al., 2018; Rabbanee et al., 2020). Studies support the idea that self-congruity is a critical mechanism underlying the formation of attachments (Haddad, 2026). Thus, higher levels of self-congruity are expected to be associated with stronger brand attachment:

- *H3: Consumer self-congruity is positively related to brand attachment*

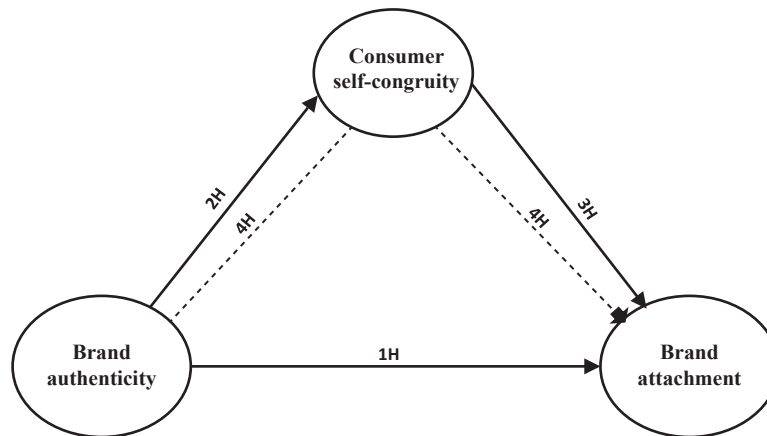


Figure 1. Conceptual model linking brand authenticity to brand attachment through consumer self-congruity (Source: Compiled by the authors)

Taken together, these arguments suggest a sequential process in which brand authenticity enhances self-brand alignment, which in turn strengthens brand attachment. In this sense, self-congruity functions as a key psychological mechanism linking authenticity to attachment by enabling consumers to construct identity-relevant meaning from the brand. This reasoning is consistent with prior research highlighting the mediating role of self-congruity in identity-driven consumer responses. Recent empirical evidence explicitly supports these mediation mechanisms, demonstrating that self-congruity and emotional attachment jointly translate perceptions of authenticity into relational outcomes (Lyu et al., 2026). Authentic brands support consumers' identity expression, enhance self-verification, and fulfil aspirational and social identity needs (Haddad, 2026; Oh et al., 2019; Rabbane et al., 2020). Accordingly, we propose that self-congruity mediates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand attachment:

- *H4: Consumer self-congruity mediates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand attachment.*

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual model.

In line with this integrative perspective, self-congruity is treated as a unified construct reflecting overall perceived alignment between the consumer's self-concept and the brand. Based on the reviewed literature, the proposed conceptual model positions brand authenticity as the antecedent (stimulus), consumer self-congruity as the mediating mechanism (organism), and brand attachment as the outcome (response).

Research methodology

The proposed hypotheses were tested using a quantitative study involving an online survey administered via Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com). This approach was chosen due to its efficiency and cost-effectiveness, as well as its suitability for large samples and ability to minimise interviewer bias. Consistent with prior research on brand authenticity, self-congruity, and brand attachment, respondents completed a self-administered questionnaire available in both Lithuanian and English. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were presented with a short study preamble outlining the research objective and defining brand authenticity. Following recommendations by Napoli et al. (2016) and Safeer et al. (2021), this procedure was implemented to ensure a consistent understanding of this complex construct across participants.

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the first condition, participants were asked to think of a brand they consider authentic, indicate the brand name, and respond to all subsequent items with this brand in mind. In the second condition, participants followed the same procedure but were instructed to identify a brand they considered inauthentic. This approach enabled natural variation in perceived authenticity and is consistent with procedures employed in prior authenticity and self-congruity research (Das et al., 2022; Morhart et al., 2015). The questionnaire included one open-ended question (brand identification). For measuring all constructs, established multi-item scales on 7-point Likert-type formats, adapted from prior studies, were used.

Brand authenticity was measured using the 15-item scale developed by Morhart et al. (2015), capturing four dimensions: credibility, continuity, integrity, and symbolism. Consumer self-congruity was assessed using a scale adapted from Malär et al. (2011), Rabbanee et al. (2020) and Sirgy et al. (1997), encompassing three dimensions: actual self-congruity (5 items), ideal self-congruity (5 items), and social self-congruity (6 items). Brand attachment was measured using scales adapted from Chieng et al. (2022) and Park et al. (2010), including two dimensions: brand-self connection (4 items) and brand prominence (4 items). To control for potential response bias, the short version of the Social Desirability Scale (Stöber, 2001) was included (16 items, including reverse-coded statements). Additionally, respondents reported demographic information, including age, gender, education, subjective financial situation, and country of residence (for international respondents).

Data were collected using non-probability convenience sampling. While this approach limits generalisability, it is widely considered appropriate for theory testing and examining relationships among constructs rather than estimating population parameters. Consistent with this rationale, convenience sampling has been extensively used in prior research on brand authenticity (Oh et al., 2019), self-congruity (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2019), and brand attachment (Shanahan et al., 2019). A total of 507 respondents completed the survey. After data screening, 482 valid responses were retained for analysis. The final sample consisted of 74.9% respondents from Lithuania and 25.1% international respondents (including participants from England, Scotland, Germany, and the United States). The sample comprised 71% women, 27% men, and 2% respondents identifying otherwise, with a mean age of 26 years. The required sample size was determined using three complementary approaches: (1) comparison with similar studies, (2) Soper's (2023) a priori SEM sample size calculator, and (3) recommendations by Pearson & Mundform (2010). Across these approaches, the minimum recommended sample size ranged from 390 to 460 observations. The final sample of 482 respondents, therefore, exceeds all thresholds and provides adequate statistical power (above 80%).

The data were analysed using SPSS and AMOS. First, descriptive statistics and data screening procedures were performed, including assessment of missing values, outliers, and normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, after which confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model. Subsequently, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesised relationships. Mediation hypotheses were assessed using bootstrapping procedures to test the significance of indirect effects.

Research results

Measurement model. To assess the proposed conceptual model, brand authenticity was specified as a reflective higher-order construct composed of two reflective lower-order dimensions identified through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses: (1) brand moral worth and meaningfulness and (2) brand continuity. This specification is consistent with prior research conceptualising authenticity as a multidimensional reflective construct (Oh et al., 2019). Consumer self-congruity, although theoretically conceptualised as multidimensional (actual, ideal, and social self-congruity), loaded onto a single latent factor in both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. This finding indicates that respondents did not differentiate between distinct forms of self-congruity but instead perceived self-brand alignment as a unified construct. Accordingly, self-congruity was modelled as a single reflective construct in subsequent analyses. Similarly, brand attachment, initially comprising brand-self connection and brand prominence, also emerged as a unidimensional reflective construct. Thus, the final measurement model includes one higher-order construct (brand authenticity) and two first-order reflective constructs (self-congruity and brand attachment).

Reliability and Convergent Validity. All constructs demonstrated strong reliability and convergent validity (see Table 1). Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.879 to 0.979, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Composite reliability (ρ_c) values ranged from 0.882 to 0.979, while average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.614 to 0.742, all above recommended levels. Item loadings were high across all constructs. Specifically, items measuring moral worth and meaningfulness loaded between 0.773 and 0.881, continuity items between 0.684 and 0.895, self-congruity items between 0.781 and 0.910, and brand attachment items between 0.660 and 0.846. These results confirm satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity.

Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs (Source: Compiled by the authors)

Construct	Items	Loading range	Cronbach's α	CR (pc)	AVE
Brand authenticity - Moral worth & meaningfulness	11	0.773-0.881	0.962	0.962	0.695
Brand authenticity - Continuity	4	0.684-0.895	0.879	0.882	0.653
Self-congruity	16	0.781-0.910	0.979	0.979	0.742
Brand attachment	6	0.660-0.846	0.922	0.905	0.614

Discriminant Validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using two different methods: the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. All HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating adequate discriminant validity among constructs (see Table 2).

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Source: Compiled by the authors)

Construct	Self-congruity	Brand attachment	Brand authenticity
Self-congruity		0.848	0.766
Brand attachment	0.848		0.710
Brand authenticity	0.766	0.710	

Criterion: HTMT < 0.85 (discriminant validity established).

Discriminant validity was further confirmed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. For all constructs, the square root of AVE exceeded inter-construct correlations (see Table 3).

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Source: Compiled by the authors)

Construct	Self-congruity	Brand attachment	Brand authenticity
Self-congruity	0.862	0.739	0.710
Brand attachment	0.739	0.783	0.657
Brand authenticity	0.710	0.657	0.850

Model Fit and Control Variables. An excellent fit to the data was demonstrated by the measurement model (CFI = 0.969, TLI = 0.962, RMSEA = 0.049, SRMR = 0.045), indicating a good representation of the observed data. Preliminary analyses revealed significant effects of survey language and gender. These variables were therefore included as controls in the structural model. Additional CFA analyses confirmed that including these controls did not affect the reliability or validity of the measurement model.

Common Method Bias. Correlation analysis between the social desirability scale and study constructs was conducted to assess potential common method bias, revealing no significant relationships (all $p > .05$). Additionally, Harman's single-factor test indicated poor model fit (CFI = 0.876; RMSEA = 0.097; SRMR = 0.0758), suggesting that common method bias is unlikely to have influenced the results.

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing. The structural model demonstrated good fit ($\chi^2 = 1203.232$, $df = 557$; CFI = 0.963; IFI = 0.964; TLI = 0.957; RFI = 0.923; RMSEA = 0.050; SRMR = 0.046). Brand authenticity was positively associated with self-congruity ($\beta = 0.808$, $t = 11.160$, $p < .001$), supporting H2. In turn, self-congruity was positively associated with brand attachment ($\beta = 0.739$, $t = 10.544$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. Brand authenticity was also positively associated with brand attachment ($\beta = 0.176$, $t = 3.210$, $p = .001$), supporting H1. The model explained 64.7% of the variance in self-congruity and 79.9% of the variance in brand attachment, indicating strong explanatory power.

Mediation Analysis. The mediating role of self-congruity (H4) was examined using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples; 95% confidence interval). The results indicated a significant indirect association between brand authenticity and brand attachment via self-congruity (congruity (unstandardized indirect effect $B = 0.867$, 95% CI [0.666, 1.133], $p < .001$). The direct path from brand authenticity to brand attachment remained significant in the structural model, indicating partial mediation. Taken together, these findings support H4 and suggest that brand authenticity is associated with stronger brand attachment both directly and indirectly through self-congruity.

Table 4. Structural Model and Mediation Results (Source: Compiled by the authors)

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	B	Significance	Result
H1	Brand authenticity → Brand attachment	0.176		$p = 0.001$	Supported
H2	Brand authenticity → Self-congruity	0.808		$p < 0.001$	Supported
H3	Self-congruity → Brand attachment	0.739		$p < 0.001$	Supported
H4	Brand authenticity → Self-congruity → Brand attachment	0.867	0.867	CI [0.666, 1.133]	Supported (partial mediation)

The indirect effect reported above (H4) is based on the unstandardized bootstrap estimate generated by AMOS, whereas structural path coefficients are reported as standardized estimates

Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationships among brand authenticity, consumer self-congruity, and brand attachment. Although each of these constructs has been widely examined in prior research, existing literature provides mixed and sometimes contradictory evidence regarding how they interact. By integrating these constructs into a unified structural model and employing a higher-order conceptualisation of brand authenticity alongside an empirically derived representation of self-congruity, this study helps clarify their interrelationships and contributes to ongoing theoretical development in branding research. The findings are consistent with recent work that positions authenticity as a central predictor of identity-driven brand outcomes (Zogaj et al., 2024).

The empirical findings indicate that brand authenticity is positively associated with brand attachment, which is consistent with prior research (e.g. Arya et al., 2019). This suggests that when consumers perceive a brand as authentic (credible, consistent, and aligned with its values), they are more likely to develop stronger emotional and cognitive bonds with it. In line with the conceptualisation proposed by Morhart et al. (2015), authenticity appears to function as a signal of trustworthiness and meaningfulness, thereby strengthening perceived connection and fostering relational closeness.

The results further demonstrate that brand authenticity is strongly associated with consumer self-congruity, supporting the notion that authentic brands facilitate self-brand alignment. These findings are broadly consistent with prior research showing that authenticity can strengthen self-brand alignment (Morhart et al., 2015). They are also aligned with recent empirical evidence demonstrating that authenticity strengthens consumers' ability to relate brand meaning to their self-concept, in part through its positive effects on self-congruity and emotional attachment (Lyu et al., 2026).

Although self-congruity is theoretically defined as comprising actual, ideal, and social dimensions (Chieng et al., 2022; Rabbanee et al., 2020; Sirgy, 2018), the present findings suggest that consumers do not always differentiate these motives when evaluating authentic brands. Instead, they appear to form an overall perception of self-brand alignment, which helps explain inconsistent dimensional effects reported in prior work, as some studies find only specific dimensions significant (Fritz et al., 2017), whereas others show variation in the relative importance of self-congruity dimensions (Guèvremont, 2021). This study, therefore, supports the view that the dimensionality of self-congruity may be context-dependent, with authenticity-driven evaluations activating a more integrated identity response. This interpretation aligns with recent work operationalising self-congruity as an overall perception of self-brand alignment (Lyu et al., 2026), while other studies show that specific self-congruity dimensions can operate differently (Chieng et al., 2022; Haddad, 2026).

Consistent with prior research, self-congruity was found to be strongly associated with brand attachment, reinforcing the idea that consumers develop deeper emotional bonds with brands that reflect their identity (Japutra et al., 2019; Rabbanee et al., 2020). Recent meta-analytic and empirical studies further confirm that self-congruity remains a robust predictor of attachment and broader relational outcomes across categories (Chieng et al., 2022; Haddad, 2026; Shimul & Phau, 2023). Notably, the results also suggest that self-congruity plays a partial role in mediating the relationship between brand authenticity and brand attachment.

This finding highlights that authenticity strengthens consumer-brand relationships both directly and indirectly through identity-based mechanisms. The partial mediation pattern echoes recent evidence showing that authenticity influences attachment both directly and through identity-related mechanisms (Lyu et al., 2026; Shimul & Phau, 2023). Present results suggest that authenticity remains directly associated with attachment even after accounting for

self-congruity. This indicates that authenticity not only facilitates identity alignment but also contributes independently to emotional attachment. Accordingly, the study advances a more nuanced understanding of how authenticity operates as both a relational and identity-relevant signal.

The study also assessed potential methodological concerns, including social desirability bias and common method variance. The results indicated that neither posed a significant threat, suggesting that the observed relationships are robust and not driven by measurement artefacts. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of a convenience sample, predominantly composed of younger respondents, limits the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, because the sample was largely drawn from Lithuania, the results should be interpreted primarily within the Lithuanian context. Future research should replicate the study across a broader range of demographic, cultural, and national contexts. Second, the correlational design does not allow for definitive causal inferences; future studies could employ experimental or longitudinal designs to establish causality more rigorously. Third, although aggregating self-congruity into a single construct is empirically justified, it may limit comparability with studies that treat its dimensions separately. Future research could further examine the boundary conditions under which different forms of self-congruity become more salient. Overall, the findings confirm that brand authenticity plays a central role in shaping consumer self-congruity and brand attachment, and that identity-based processes serve as a key pathway through which authentic brands foster stronger and more enduring consumer-brand relationships.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that brand authenticity contributes to brand attachment both directly and indirectly through self-congruity. By clarifying this identity-based mechanism, the study advances a more integrated understanding of how authentic brands foster enduring consumer-brand relationships.

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