

The Authenticity Pathway of Brand Activism: Consumer Trust and Advocacy in an Indian FMCG Setting

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Abstract

When a brand takes a public stand on a social issue, consumers rarely respond to it. What they respond to is their own judgement of whether it is genuine (Vredenburg et al., 2020). That judgement is where this paper begins. Working from signaling theory (Spence, 1973) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the paper builds and walks through an authenticity pathway a chain that runs from perceived brand activism to brand authenticity, then to brand trust, and finally to brand advocacy among fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) consumers in India. The numbers reported here come from a respondent of 126 valid responses (150 records to begin with; 24 incomplete ones dropped). All four multi-item scales held together well (Cronbach's $\alpha = .912-.934$). In covariate-adjusted regressions, perceived activism predicted authenticity ($\beta = .504$, $R^2 = .300$), authenticity predicted trust ($\beta = .689$, $R^2 = .520$), and trust predicted advocacy ($\beta = .720$), while the direct authenticity–advocacy path did not reach significance ($\beta = .073$); the advocacy model explained 58.5% of variance. A percentile bootstrap with 2,000 resamples pointed to a positive indirect effect of authenticity on advocacy through trust (.503, 95% CI [.369, .656]) a pattern consistent with full mediation.

Keywords

brand activism; brand authenticity; brand trust; brand advocacy; FMCG marketing; India; signaling theory; mediation analysis

Introduction

Brands today talk about far more than what their products do. They speak about public health, the environment, inclusion, economic fairness, community welfare, even civic participation. The usual label for this is brand activism, and it is not the same thing as ordinary promotion or narrow cause-related marketing. What sets it apart is the public value position: the brand steps into a social conversation as a visible participant, not merely as a seller of goods (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Recent reviews suggest activism has stopped being a fringe communication tactic and has become a mainstream strategic question for brand management (Cammarota et al., 2023).

Here lies the paradox. A public stance can set a brand apart, connect it with what consumers care about, and signal social responsibility. The very same stance can breed cynicism, backlash, or accusations of “woke-washing” if people sense a gap between what the brand says and what it

actually does (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). So, the real question is not whether a brand speaks about a cause. It is whether consumers read that stance as genuine, coherent, and backed by observable action.

Authenticity matters with particular force in fast-moving consumer goods. FMCG brands live inside routine household purchase decisions, and their claims turn up everywhere on packaging, in advertising, on retail shelves, across digital media, and in everyday conversation. In a category like this, public-purpose communication feeds into a slowly accumulating judgement about whether the brand is dependable, ethical, and worth mentioning to others. That judgement is built across many small, repeated encounters, not in a single evaluative moment (Fournier, 1998). The framework examined here traces an authenticity pathway running from perceived activism to advocacy. Perceived brand activism is the consumer's sense that a brand visibly engages with social and public-value concerns. Brand authenticity is the judgement that this engagement is true to what the brand actually values and practises (Beverland, 2005; Napoli et al., 2014). Brand trust captures confidence in the brand's honesty, reliability, and benevolence (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). And brand advocacy covers voluntary, socially exposed behaviour recommending the brand, defending it, and speaking well of it (Anderson, 1998; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Significance of the Study

Three things make this line of inquiry necessary. On the managerial side, Indian FMCG firms keep attaching social-purpose messaging to mass-market brands, yet the mechanism through which such messaging earns (or fails to earn) consumer support is still poorly specified; investment decisions tend to lean on visibility metrics when credibility is what actually needs measuring. On the theoretical side, much of the activism literature stops at attitudes or purchase intentions (Cammarota et al., 2023). That leaves an open question: how does a public stance turn into deeper relational outcomes trust, and the kind of voluntary advocacy in which the consumer puts personal reputation on the line by recommending or defending the brand (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)? And on the contextual side, India pairs enormous FMCG penetration with heavy reliance on word of mouth in household buying, along with wide variation in education, income, and media exposure. That makes it a demanding place and for the same reason an informative one to ask whether activism works through authenticity rather than through mere exposure. There is also a methods response for the paper. It supplies a complete, transparent, and ethically labelled analysis template screening rules, measurement coding, reliability assessment, regression and bootstrap-mediation reporting, common-method-bias diagnostics, and replication syntax that can be re-run without modification once genuine data are available.

Scope of the Study

Conceptually, the study covers four consumer-side constructs perceived brand activism, brand authenticity, brand trust, and brand advocacy along with five demographic and behavioural covariates: age, gender, education, product-use frequency, and campaign awareness.

Substantively, it sits in the Indian FMCG category, where brands are bought repeatedly and activism claims are encountered often. Analytically, it uses a cross-sectional, single-wave survey design worked through with reliability statistics, Pearson correlations, ordinary least-squares regression, and percentile-bootstrap mediation. The evidentiary scope, however, is deliberately narrow.

Review of Literature

Brand activism and signalling theory

Brand activism means a brand deliberately engaging in public with contested or socially important issues; its defining feature is the normative claim a position on how society or markets ought to operate (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). Vredenburg et al. (2020) draw the line between authentic activism and woke-washing at congruence: does the brand's purpose line up with its messaging and with its practices, internal and external? The gap between claim and conduct, they argue, is where consumer scepticism is born. The experimental record shows that taking a stand cut both ways. Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020) report an asymmetry in consumer reactions disagreement produces stronger negative responses than agreement produces positive ones. How the message is framed also shapes whether activism builds any affective bond at all (Ahmad et al., 2022). Signaling theory names the underlying problem: one party holds information the other cannot directly verify (Spence, 1973). Consumers therefore read a firm's true commitments off observable signals campaigns, operational choices, partnerships, and how the firm responds when criticised. A signal convinces when it is consistent over time, costly to imitate, and tied to obligations that mean something.

Brand authenticity

Brand authenticity is the perception that a brand is genuine, continuous, credible, and true to the values it professes (Beverland, 2005). Napoli et al. (2014) operationalise consumer-based authenticity through quality commitment, sincerity, and heritage treating it as a multidimensional judgement consumers make, not a factual property a brand simply possesses. In the CSR domain, authenticity has been tied to cause–firm fit, tangible impact, and remedial action, and authentic CSR communication tends to earn more favourable consumer evaluations (Alhouthi et al., 2016). Work specific to activism goes a step further, identifying six authenticity dimensions social-context independence, inclusion, sacrifice, practice, fit, and motivation along which consumers decide whether a stance is genuine or merely opportunistic (Mirzaei et al., 2022).

Brand trust

Brand trust is a consumer's willingness to rely on a brand, expecting it to deliver as promised and to act with integrity; the construct takes in reliability, honesty, and benevolence (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester, 2004). Trust matters most exactly where consumers cannot fully evaluate quality, motive, or future conduct before purchase a condition that describes most routine FMCG transactions. Authenticity should strengthen trust for a simple reason: it shrinks

precisely the uncertainty trust exists to handle. A brand that appears to practise what it publicly claims is telling consumers that its commitments are not purely instrumental.

Brand advocacy and social identity

Brand advocacy is voluntary behaviour that goes beyond purchase recommending, speaking favourably, sharing information, encouraging others to buy, and standing up for the brand when it is criticised. It carries social risk, because the advocate is staking personal credibility on how the brand behaves in future. Relationship-marketing research ties the willingness to take that risk to accumulated trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), which fits evidence that relationship quality built on satisfaction and trust drives positive word of mouth (Anderson, 1998; Fournier, 1998). Social identity theory adds one further piece: people draw part of their self-concept from valued symbolic affiliations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An authentic activist stance may support advocacy because it lets consumers publicly attach themselves to values, they endorse while trust reassures them that the attachment is safe.

Hypotheses derived from the review

H1: Perceived brand activism is positively associated with brand authenticity.

H2: Brand authenticity is positively associated with brand trust.

H3: Brand trust is positively associated with brand advocacy.

H4: Brand authenticity is positively associated with brand advocacy (direct path).

H5: Brand trust mediates the positive relationship between brand authenticity and brand advocacy.

Statement of the Problem

Indian FMCG brands are taking visible public positions on social issues with growing frequency, yet neither managers nor researchers can currently say with confidence whether or through what psychological mechanism those positions convert into consumer trust and voluntary advocacy. Visibility on its own may not be enough; it may even backfire if consumers read the stance as opportunistic (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). The problem taken up here is therefore this: does perceived brand activism relate to brand advocacy through an authenticity-to-trust pathway, so that authenticity's contribution to advocacy travels through trust rather than operating directly?

Research Gap

Four gaps motivate the framework. The first is an outcome gap: most activism studies stop at attitudes or purchase intention (Cammarota et al., 2023), leaving trust and advocacy relational outcomes with genuine social stakes comparatively under-examined. The second is a mechanism gap. Authenticity is invoked constantly as a boundary condition, but it is rarely modelled explicitly as the credibility judgement standing between an activism signal and relational outcomes, which is what signaling theory would actually suggest (Spence, 1973; Vredenburg et al., 2020). The third is a context gap: empirical activism research clusters in Western, often politically polarised settings, and the Indian FMCG context mass-market, household-embedded, word-of-mouth

intensive is under-represented. The fourth is a transparency gap in applied practice. Student and practitioner analyses of models like this one frequently lack auditable screening rules, reliability reporting, mediation inference with bootstrap intervals, and honest disclosure of data status. This paper models all four.

Objectives of the Study

- (1) to examine the association between perceived brand activism and brand authenticity among FMCG consumers;
- (2) to explore the association between brand authenticity and brand trust;
- (3) to identify the associations of brand trust and brand authenticity with brand advocacy when the two are modelled together;
- (4) to test whether brand trust mediates the authenticity–advocacy relationship using bootstrap confidence intervals; and

Research Design

Design, setting, and data status

The design is a quantitative, cross-sectional, single-wave consumer survey, written for FMCG buyers in an Indian metropolitan setting, and because a cross-sectional survey cannot establish temporal precedence, the hypothesis language throughout the paper stays associational (“is associated with,” or “predicts” in the statistical sense) and never causal.

Sampling, eligibility, exclusions, and final sample

The practice file held 150 records carrying a binary validity marker. Following that marker, 126 complete responses (84.0%) were retained and 24 intentionally incomplete records (16.0%) were dropped before any substantive analysis. For the practice file, this rule is transparent and fully reproducible. Pre-specifying and reporting the sampling frame (mall-intercept or online convenience sampling of urban FMCG buyers aged 18+), eligibility criteria, the collection window, incentives, response and completion rates, attention checks, duplicate detection, and straight-lining rules so that the final analytic sample can be audited end to end.

Analytical procedure

The analysis ran in seven steps: (1) response screening (2) internal-consistency assessment (Cronbach's α) for each of the four scales; (3) composite scoring as item means; (4) descriptive statistics, normality screening (skewness and kurtosis), and Pearson correlations; (5) three covariate-adjusted OLS regressions authenticity on activism (Model 1), trust on authenticity (Model 2), and advocacy on authenticity and trust together (Model 3) each controlling for age, gender, education, product-use frequency, and campaign awareness, with variance-inflation-factor (VIF) checks; (6) a 2,000-resample percentile bootstrap of the authenticity $\rightarrow$ trust $\rightarrow$ advocacy indirect effect; and (7) a Harman single-factor diagnostic for common-method variance. A genuine submission should further add confirmatory factor analysis with composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant-validity evidence (Fornell–Larcker or HTMT). Those require

item-level modelling not undertaken here, and they are flagged as mandatory next steps rather than reported as if they had been run.

Data Collection Tools

Structured questionnaire in two parts. Part A records the respondent's profile: age band, gender, education, occupation, monthly household income, family size, FMCG product-use frequency, and awareness of the focal brand's social campaigns. Part B carries 28 substantive items on five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree): perceived brand activism (PBA, 8 items; e.g., “This brand takes clear positions on important social issues”), brand authenticity (BAU, 6 items; e.g., “This brand practises what it preaches”), brand trust (BT, 8 items; e.g., “I trust this brand to keep the promises it makes”), and brand advocacy (BADV, 6 items; e.g., “I would recommend this brand to friends and family”). Item content was written to reflect the constructs as the literature defines them activism (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Vredenburg et al., 2020), authenticity (Beverland, 2005; Napoli et al., 2014), trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester, 2004), and advocacy (Anderson, 1998; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Discussion: Analysis, Results, and Interpretation

All values below are computed from the 126 respondents and were independently re-verified from the raw item-level records,

Respondent profile

Table 1 profiles the 126 retained responses. The simulated sample runs young (64.3% aged 18–35), is close to gender-balanced (54.0% male, 44.4% female, 1.6% other), and is relatively educated (60.3% graduate or above). Two-thirds report daily or weekly use of the focal FMCG category (65.1%), and 68.3% report at least some awareness of the brand's social campaigns a profile that would not look out of place in an urban Indian FMCG panel.

Table 1

Respondent Profile (N = 126)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age (years)	18–25	46	36.5
	26–35	35	27.8
	36–45	22	17.5
	46–55	15	11.9
	56 and above	8	6.3
Gender	Male	68	54.0
	Female	56	44.4
	Other / prefer not to say	2	1.6
Education	Below 10th standard	3	2.4
	Secondary (SSC)	22	17.5

	Intermediate	25	19.8
	Graduate	41	32.5
	Postgraduate	28	22.2
	Professional qualification	7	5.6
Product-use frequency	Daily	37	29.4
	Weekly	45	35.7
	Monthly	26	20.6
	Occasionally	14	11.1
	Rarely	4	3.2
Campaign awareness	Very aware	32	25.4
	Somewhat aware	54	42.9
	Not very aware	28	22.2
	Not aware	12	9.5

Note. Percentages are computed within each variable on the 126 retained responses

Reliability, descriptives, and normality screening

Table 2 reports internal consistency and composite descriptives. All four scales clear the conventional $\alpha \geq .70$ benchmark by a wide margin ($\alpha = .912-.934$), which means the items within each composite covary strongly in the practice file. Skewness ($-.19$ to $-.37$) and kurtosis ($-.61$ to $-.77$) sit comfortably inside ± 1 , so the composite distributions are roughly symmetric and OLS estimation is reasonable. Mean scores cluster a little above the scale midpoint (3.26–3.45 on a 1–5 scale).

Table 2

Scale Reliability and Descriptive Statistics for Study Composites (N = 126)

Construct	Items	α	M	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurtosis
Perceived brand activism (PBA)	8	.923	3.26	0.92	1.13	5.00	–0.19	–0.61
Brand authenticity (BAU)	6	.912	3.43	0.96	1.17	5.00	–0.37	–0.71
Brand trust (BT)	8	.934	3.45	0.97	1.13	5.00	–0.27	–0.77
Brand advocacy (BADV)	6	.912	3.41	0.98	1.00	5.00	–0.28	–0.74

Note. α = Cronbach's alpha. All items scored 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree; composites are item means.

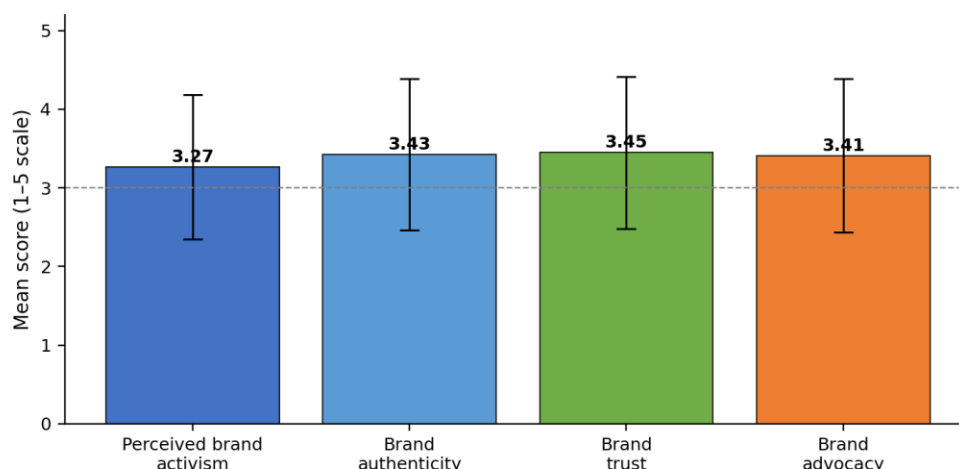


Figure 1. Mean composite scores with standard-deviation bars (1–5 scale; dashed line = scale midpoint). $N = 126$.

Correlation analysis

Table 3 reports the Pearson correlations. All six pairwise correlations are positive and significant at $p < .001$, running from $r = .43$ (activism–advocacy) up to $r = .74$ (trust–advocacy). The ordering fits the proposed pathway: activism correlates most strongly with its neighbouring construct (authenticity, $r = .52$; trust, $r = .62$) and most weakly with the far end of the chain (advocacy, $r = .43$), while trust shows the tightest link with advocacy. Correlations on their own settle nothing about temporal order or construct distinctiveness and the largest values here (.69–.74) are exactly why discriminant-validity testing on genuine data is essential.

Table 3

Pearson Correlations Among Study Composites ($N = 126$)

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived brand activism				
2. Brand authenticity	.52***			
3. Brand trust	.62***	.69***		
4. Brand advocacy	.43***	.57***	.74***	

Note. *** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

Regression results

Three covariate-adjusted Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) (models were estimated (Table 4). Model 1 (authenticity on activism) explained 30.0% of variance, $F(6, 119) = 8.50$, $p < .001$; Model 2 (trust on authenticity) explained 52.0%, $F(6, 119) = 21.48$, $p < .001$; and Model 3 (advocacy on authenticity and trust) explained 58.5%, $F(7, 118) = 23.73$, $p < .001$. Multicollinearity gave no trouble the maximum VIF anywhere across the models was 2.08. Among the covariates, only age reached significance, and only in the trust model ($\beta = .172$, $p = .009$); no other covariate came close in any model.

Table 4*Summary of OLS Regression Models (N = 126)*

Model	Outcome	Focal predictor(s)	R ²	Adj. R ²	F	p	Max VIF
1	Brand authenticity	PBA	.300	.265	8.50	< .001	1.08
2	Brand trust	BAU	.520	.496	21.48	< .001	1.07
3	Brand advocacy	BAU, BT	.585	.560	23.73	< .001	2.08

Note. Each model also includes age, gender, education, product-use frequency, and campaign awareness as covariates. Model 1: df = (6, 119); Model 2: df = (6, 119); Model 3: df = (7, 118). VIF = variance inflation factor.

Table 5*Hypothesis Path Coefficients (N = 126)*

Hyp.	Path	B	SE	β	t	p	Decision
H1	PBA → BAU	0.527	0.082	.504	6.45	< .001	Supported
H2	BAU → BT	0.691	0.066	.689	10.54	< .001	Supported
H3	BT → BADV	0.727	0.086	.720	8.41	< .001	Supported
H4	BAU → BADV (direct)	0.074	0.086	.073	0.87	.388	Not supported

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient. Coefficients are drawn from the covariate-adjusted models in Table 4 (H1 from Model 1; H2 from Model 2; H3 and H4 from Model 3).

Mediation analysis

H5 proposed that trust carries the authenticity–advocacy relationship. The total effect of authenticity on advocacy (Model 3 with trust left out) was significant ($B = 0.577$, $\beta = .570$, $t = 7.41$, $p < .001$). Once trust entered the model, the direct effect collapsed to non-significance ($B = 0.074$, $p = .388$), while the 2,000-resample percentile-bootstrap indirect effect through trust was positive, with a confidence interval clear of zero (Table 6). Significant total effect, significant indirect effect, non-significant direct effect: taken together, the pattern is consistent with full mediation in the demonstration data. Figure 2 summarises the estimated model.

Table 6*Total, Direct, and Bootstrapped Indirect Effects of Authenticity on Advocacy (2,000 Resamples)*

Effect	Estimate	95% CI lower	95% CI upper	Inference
Total effect (BAU → BADV)	0.577***			Significant
Direct effect (BAU → BADV BT)	0.074			Not significant ($p = .388$)
Indirect effect (BAU → BT → BADV)	0.503	0.369	0.656	CI excludes zero: supported

Note. *** $p < .001$. Percentile bootstrap with 2,000 resamples; all models include the five covariates. Because the interval excludes zero and the direct path is non-significant, the pattern is consistent with full mediation.

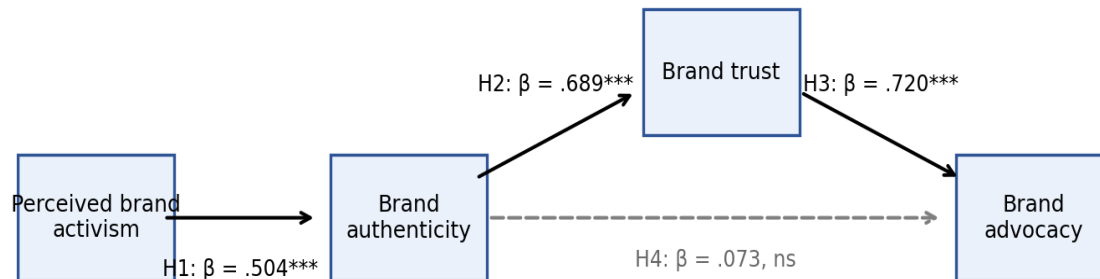


Fig: Indirect effect (BAU → BT → BADV) 0.503, 95% CI [.369, .656]

Figure 2. *Estimated authenticity pathway with standardized coefficients. Solid arrows $p < .001$; dashed arrow non-significant.*

Hypothesis-by-hypothesis interpretation

H1 (supported in the illustration). Perceived activism related positively to authenticity after covariate adjustment ($\beta = .504$). This sits well with signaling theory's account, in which authenticity is an inferential judgement built up from observable activist conduct rather than a fixed attribute the brand owns (Spence, 1973; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Activism explained 30% of authenticity variance which leaves considerable room for the other authenticity drivers the measurement literature identifies: heritage, quality commitment, and sincerity (Napoli et al., 2014).

H2 (supported). Authenticity related strongly to trust ($\beta = .689$), the largest single coefficient estimated in the study. The result fits the argument that authenticity reduces exactly the uncertainty trust exists to resolve (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester, 2004): in the demonstration, a brand seen as genuine is also seen as reliable.

H3 (supported). Trust related strongly to advocacy ($\beta = .720$), in line with the relationship-marketing account in which trust is the proximate precursor of the social risk involved in recommending and defending a brand (Anderson, 1998; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

H4 (not supported). The direct authenticity–advocacy path shrank to a small, non-significant coefficient once trust entered the model ($\beta = .073$, $p = .388$). In this illustration, genuineness on its own does not push people toward public support once their confidence in the brand has been accounted for.

H5 (supported). The bootstrap indirect effect (.503, 95% CI [.369, .656]), paired with the non-significant direct path, points to full mediation in the demonstration data. This is the theoretically

central result. It separates a purely attitudinal reading of activism (activism $\rightarrow$ liking) from a relational one (activism $\rightarrow$ authenticity $\rightarrow$ trust $\rightarrow$ advocacy), in which advocacy hinges on an intervening judgement of reliability rather than mere approval of the brand's stance (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Common-method-bias assessment

All constructs were measured from the same respondent, at the same time, in the same format so common-method variance is a design-level concern (single source, single wave). As a limited diagnostic, an unrotated principal-axis extraction of all 28 substantive items put the first factor at 47.9% of total variance. That is below the conventional 50% heuristic, but close enough that the test offers no real comfort and the Harman procedure is in any response widely regarded as insensitive. A genuine administration should build in procedural remedies (temporal or proximal separation of predictor and criterion blocks, mixed item ordering, anonymity assurances) and report a stronger statistical diagnostic an unmeasured latent method factor, say, or a marker variable alongside the substantive results.

Results summary

To pull the 126-response all scales were highly reliable ($\alpha \geq .912$); all constructs intercorrelated positively ($r = .43-.74$, $p < .001$); activism predicted authenticity ($\beta = .504$, $R^2 = .300$); authenticity predicted trust ($\beta = .689$, $R^2 = .520$); trust predicted advocacy ($\beta = .720$) while authenticity's direct path was non-significant ($\beta = .073$), with 58.5% of advocacy variance explained; and the authenticity $\rightarrow$ trust $\rightarrow$ advocacy indirect effect was positive (.503, 95% CI [.369, .656]), consistent with full mediation. Four of five hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H5) came out supported and one (H4) did not a coherent, theoretically interpretable pattern that exists here for one purpose only: to demonstrate reporting practice.

Theoretical implications

If the pattern replicates on genuine data, three theoretical implications follow. First, the framework puts signaling theory into direct conversation with brand activism: perceived activism is the observable signal, and authenticity is the receiver's verdict on that signal's credibility (Spence, 1973). That is a sharper claim than assuming purpose-driven communication yields uniformly positive outcomes, and it implies that activism's value is conditional on consumers inferring genuine, sustained commitment rather than promotional opportunism (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Second, authenticity is treated here as a mechanism, not a static virtue. In this framework it is the gateway through which activism reaches relational outcomes at all extending authenticity research emphasising continuity and integrity (Beverland, 2005; Napoli et al., 2014) as well as activism research documenting the risks of inauthentic value signaling (Mirzaei et al., 2022). Third, by centring advocacy rather than attitude or purchase intention, the study moves activism research toward outcomes with real social and reputational stakes for the consumer. That a fully mediated

model emerged even in this illustrative run suggests confirmatory work should test mediation explicitly instead of assuming a direct authenticity–advocacy effect (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Managerial implications

If confirmed with genuine data, Indian FMCG marketers can take three things from this. First, treat activist communication as a commitment architecture, not a campaign device. A credible stance should trace back to actual policy, resource allocation, and governance and the most persuasive communication shows what the company is doing and how progress is measured, rather than asserting values in the abstract. Second, assess authenticity before assuming trust will follow visibility. Pre-testing should ask whether consumers see the proposed stance as relevant to the brand's history, whether audiences know of contradictory practices, and whether the message implies a costly, verifiable commitment; transparency about limitations may outperform broad moral claims in categories where consumers meet the brand's claims daily and can accumulate disconfirming evidence (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Third, because advocacy in the illustration runs through trust rather than directly through authenticity, trust-building is the proximate lever for word-of-mouth outcomes. Measurement systems should track recommendation, defence, and voluntary sharing separately from awareness or liking a consumer who admires the cause but does not yet trust the brand may never advocate for it.

Conclusion

The authenticity pathway offers a focused answer to how brand activism could shape consumer relationships: a visible public stance supports advocacy chiefly when consumers judge it genuine and, as a consequence, come to trust the brand not through visibility or approval alone. Should the full-mediation pattern replicate with genuine data, the managerial message for Indian FMCG marketers is clear enough. Treat activist communication as a commitment architecture rather than a campaign device. Verify that a stance traces back to actual policy, spending, and stakeholder practice before amplifying it. And treat trust-building not campaign applause as the proximate lever for word-of-mouth outcomes, tracking recommendation, defence, and voluntary sharing separately from awareness or liking.

The decisive limitation bears would carry its own limits a cross-sectional, single-source, self-report character open to common-method variance, social-desirability bias, and reverse causality (pre-existing trust may colour how activism is perceived), together with the absence, so far, of confirmatory factor analysis and discriminant-validity evidence. Future research should field the instrument with ethics approval and documented sampling; verify measurement through CFA (loadings, CR, AVE, HTMT) before any structural modelling; move to time-separated or experimental designs that manipulate authenticity cues (costly, verifiable action versus mere statements); capture behavioural rather than purely self-reported advocacy; and probe heterogeneity across issue types, consumer ideology, and product categories including negative outcomes such as scepticism and boycott, which a positively framed pathway does not capture.

Read this way, the document does exactly what it honestly claims to do: it is a complete, verified, ready-to-populate blueprint for a publishable study not the study itself.

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