

Generational Cohorts' Reactions: Analyzing the Impact of Brand Authenticity on Consumer Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to better understand the consumer behaviour, analysing the impact of brand authenticity on two main behavioural outcomes. The research aims also at finding out the behavioural differences of each generational cohort and to understand the effects on consumers' willingness to pay a premium price and on brand loyalty in the case of technological brands. The study follows a quantitative research design and uses a survey as a tool to collect data. The present work may suggest firms to be more targeted in their approach to create competitive advantage and strong relationships with their audiences. In present times, academics and practitioners must therefore recognize and take into consideration the differences across generational cohorts when studying and developing new marketing strategies.

KEYWORDS

Authenticity, Consumer Behaviour, Generation, Loyalty, Premium Price, Technological Brand

INTRODUCTION

From the last 20 years world is living a new “smart age” due to a series of transformations regarding technology, globalization, political, economy impacting consequently on cultural, social, demographic aspects. Past decades have in particular been marked by incredible technological advancement and innovations. Just think that in 1998, cell phones were still a rarity, and internet was only just catching on. These deep changes continue to play themselves out shaping new lifestyle and consumption behaviour, on the one hand, and causing new firms processes, on the other hand. Notably, digitalization has changed consumers' everyday lives, and radical changes in consumer behaviours have taken place especially related to information acquisition and decision-making.

In this context of uncertainty and high competition, influenced by the fatigue determined by consumers' overchoice, we witness an amplified importance of the intangible assets of brands and authenticity appears to be a reply to hyperreality and globalness (Arnould & Price, 2003; Ballantyne & Varey, 2006; Lazzini, Lazzini, Balluchi, & Mazza, 2022). As such, the concept of authenticity was found to be one of the “cornerstones of contemporary marketing” (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003) and a new business imperative for the experience economy (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Södergren, 2021). These facts may be even greater for managers dealing with different typologies of consumers

DOI: 10.4018/IJBAN.318668

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that don't share the same behaviour, perception and preferences. In a digital and virtual communicative platforms world, not paradoxically, the "quest for authenticity" from consumers is becoming more emphasized and today it is defined as a socially constructed phenomenon (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2014; Pattuglia & Mingione, 2017; Södergren, 2021). On this line, a number of scholars have claimed that brand authenticity has the capability to legitimize a brand within its context and its consumers (Beverland, 2005, 2006; Beverland, Farrelly, & Quester, 2010; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Kates, 2004; Rose & Wood, 2005; Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006).

Consequently, how customers perceive brands as authentic and what motivates them to pay price premium is an important theme in research as well as among practitioners (Anselmsson, Johansson, & Persson, 2007; Nunes, Ordanini, & Giambastiani, 2021). In line with these, in acknowledging the interpretative nature of brand authenticity, it is evident that consumers may differ in their evaluation, perceiving the same brand as authentic or inauthentic (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Rose & Wood, 2005). Brand authenticity can now inform a new consumers' clusterization (Pattuglia & Mingione, 2017).

Finally, despite authenticity has been studied and analyzed in many sectors, such as luxury wine, beer, sport, green products, music (Beverland, 2005; D.R. Ewing, Allen, & R.L. Ewing, 2012; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Rose & Wood, 2005; Spiggle, Nguyen, & Caravella, 2012), the hi-tech companies haven't been analyzed yet.

Moreover, one of the main trend of these last years, after the seminal work about generational themes in economics and society (Mannheim, 1928, 1952), is again the importance of targeting through generational cohorts and megatrends (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Kamenidou, Stavrianea, & Bara, 2020; Ryder, 1965).

The purpose of this research is to establish which attributes make a technological brand authentic for each generational cohort and to understand the effect on loyalty and on the willingness to pay a premium price. The research also aims to explore the impact on consumer behaviour about different typologies of generation.

This paper aims to answer the following three research questions:

RQ1: What are the attributes that make a technological brand authentic and allow for a loyalty and a premium price?

RQ2: Is the belonging to a generational cohort a moderator between brand authenticity and its outcomes?

RQ3: How brand authenticity impacts on consumer behaviour?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Brand Authenticity: Definition, Dimensions and Outcomes

In an objective sense the "authentic" is often considered as the "original" and is contrasted with the copy, so it is strongly linked to an object and its characteristics (Bendix, 1997; Peterson, 2005; Södergren, 2021). Recent researches consider brand authenticity to be shaped by multiple stakeholders' perceptions (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Napoli et al., 2014; Nunes, Ordanini, & Giambastiani, 2021). So, the distinction between the authentic and inauthentic tends to be subjective and socially or personally constructed (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006). It is a behavioural experience by a person that is self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

In this new perspective, consumers may differ in their evaluation, perceiving the same brand as authentic or inauthentic (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Rose & Wood, 2005).

In general, academics from this stream of literature have tried to answer the question: "How do consumers attribute authenticity onto an object/service brand?". Scholars and practitioners have investigated consumers' ability to determine the difference between what can be conceived as real or fake (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Brown et al., 2003; Corciolani, 2014; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Nunes, Ordanini, & Giambastiani, 2021; Rose & Wood, 2005;). Empirical findings have revealed that consumers struggle to discriminate the real from the fake (Corciolani, 2014; Rose & Wood, 2005; Södergren, 2021).

Accordingly, Napoli et al. (2014) call for studies that investigate the effect that individual and personal differences across consumers have on brand authenticity perceptions. To the authors' knowledge, there is only one study (Moulard, Garrity, & Rice, 2015) that has investigated age-related consumers' perceptual differences on brand authenticity.

Currently, brand authenticity is shaped by sincerity, quality, heritage, originality, reliability and image (Bruhn, Schoenmuller, Schafer, & Heinrich, 2012; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Napoli et al., 2014; Wiedmann, Hennigs, Schmidt, & Wuestefeld, 2011).

The first dimension that emerges from brand authenticity literature is sincerity, which is achieved through vocational discourses (Beverland, 2005). It lies within brand processes, which must be narrated through a sincere story, and might be achieved using culture and history as referents (Napoli et al., 2014).

The second dimension is quality, which is strictly related to the concept of quality commitment. It represents an indexical cue (Grayson & Martinec, 2004), it is performance-based (i.e., functional) and is a dimension required and studied especially in the luxury, food and second-hand markets (Beverland, 2005; Ilicic & Webster, 2014; Spiggle et al., 2012).

In our decade, it emerges a third dimension that is heritage, which looks at the preservation of brand essence in space and time, standard and style (Burghausen & Balmer, 2014). In other words, the maintenance and leverage of some identity traits from the early roots (brand consistency). It is a dimension required especially in the luxury (pedigree) market (Beverland et al., 2010; Hudson & Balmer, 2013; Leigh et al., 2006; Wiedmann et al., 2011).

A fourth dimension is originality, which refers to brand uniqueness (Arnould & Price, 2000; Brown et al., 2003). In this case brand elements are perceived as unique and distinctive. It ascribes to particularity, individuality and innovativeness. It is an important dimension for luxury and mass markets (beer, sports) and is key in a global context (Arthur & Quester, 2006; Castaño & Eugenia Perez, 2014; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2015).

Reliability is the fifth dimension must be considered. Brands are what they say they are and this implies keeping and staying true to the brand promises. A brand is reliable when it has a high credibility because it is what it claims to be and because what is communicated conforms with fact, and thus is worthy of reliance and belief (Beverland, 2006; Bruhn et al., 2012; Holt, 2002).

Lastly, brand image plays a part in the authenticating process, especially regarding the Country of Origin image (A.S. Arora, Wu, A. Arora, Bacouël-Jentjens, & McIntyre, 2016). A credible image is also key to a genuine relationship with various audiences. Thus, incoherent brand images have a negative impact on the authenticity of the brand (Beverland, 2005; Bruhn et al., 2012; Burnett & Hutton, 2007; Thompson et al., 2006).

Moreover, it is important to underline that brand trust can affect the relationship between consumers and brands. It concerns authentic brands, in terms of benefit from competitive advantage and in terms of trust (Napoli et al., 2014). It implies being fully trustworthy, according to promises, and consistency between brand image and actions (Gustaffson, 2006). Brands can be trusted because they are genuine and because they have withstood the test of time (Balmer, 2012; Greyser, 2009).

Being a socially constructed phenomenon, several scholars have claimed that brand authenticity has the power to legitimize a brand within its environment (Beverland, 2006; Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008; Beverland et al., 2010; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Rose & Wood, 2005; Thompson et al., 2006).

Holt (2002) suggests that brands might help consumers in producing the self and cultivating their identities. Thus, a brand is authentic only if it is "a genuine expression of an inner personal truth" (Beverland, 2005; Postrel, 2003).

To conclude, building on an in-depth literature review of brand authenticity this research developed the following hypothesis:

- H₁: Sincerity, quality, heritage, originality, reliability and image are dimensions of brand authenticity.
H₂: The six dimensions of brand authenticity are positively related to consumers' willingness to pay a premium price.

- H₃: The six dimensions of brand authenticity are positively related to the brand loyalty.
H₄: Trust moderates the relationship between brand authenticity and the consumers' willingness to pay a premium price.
H₅: Trust moderates the relationship between brand authenticity and the brand loyalty.

Building on this, we initially tested our model on brand authenticity, price premium and loyalty (see Fig. 1).

Moreover, we can also postulate different perceptions on brand authenticity within each generational cohort, and different perceptions between the various cohorts.

So, after an investigation through the literature about generational cohorts, it is important to underline that generational cohorts can affect the relationship between brands and consumers' loyalty and willingness to pay a price premium.

Generational Cohorts: Definition and Features

From a social point of view, a generation can be defined as a group of individuals born within the same historical and socio-cultural context, who experience the same formative experiences and develop unifying commonalities as a result (Mannheim, 1952; Pilcher, 1994).

The Generational Cohort Theory, developed by Inglehart (1977), is based on two assumptions; a socialization hypothesis and a scarcity hypothesis. Adults' basic values reflect the socioeconomic conditions of childhood and adolescence (the socialization hypotheses) and place the greatest subjective value on the socioeconomic resources that were in short supply during their youth (the scarcity hypothesis). If we take into account a perspective based on Generational Cohort Theory (Howe & Strauss, 1991, 2000), we can also postulate similar perceptions on brand authenticity within each generational cohort, and different perceptions between the various cohorts.

Each generation's history limits its members to a specific range of opportunities and experiences, provides them with "collective memories" (Schuman & Scott, 1989) that serve as a basis for future attitudes and behaviours, predisposes them to a certain way of thought and action, and restricts their range of self-expression to certain predefined possibilities throughout their lives (Eyerman & Turner, 1998; Gilleard, 2004; Mannheim, 1952; Ryder, 1965). Although every generation is subject to the developmental processes of the human life course, each experiences a unique historical context that shapes the unfolding of that life course.

The present four dominant generational cohorts (Inglehart, 1977) are considered in this research: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (or Generation Y) and Generation Z.

In particular, Baby Boomer Generation (1946-1964) is the largest generation (Loroz & Helgeson 2013; Moore, 2012; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). This cohort is characterized by a high spending power, and despite different lifestyles and spending habits from following generations, they are also an important consumer group for technology firms. The economic value of brands drives Boomers' satisfaction, affected by factors such as quality and more objective, pragmatic brand-related characteristics (Kumar & Lim, 2008; Littrell, Jin Ma, & Halepete, 2005). They went through economic and social changes, thus they managed dealing with technology, without mastering it (Burnsed & Bickle, 2015; Jackson, Stoel, & Brantley, 2011). However, as just stated, even if conventional wisdom suggests that as a person gets older, the more adverse they become to new technologies, Baby Boomers appear to be experienced users of modern technologies as they have witnessed technological changes during their lifetime. Baby Boomers are more open to new media and technologies than previous generations (Kumar & Lim, 2008).

Xers are people (1965-1980) referred as 'baby busters', due to the drop-off or 'bust' in births following the Baby Boomer generation after World War II (Moore, 2012; Yu & Miller, 2005). The Gen X cohort is well educated, and media and technologically "immigrant" (Burnsed & Bickle, 2015; Eastman & Liu, 2012). Xers tend to be more independent, self-motivated and self-sufficient. Howe and Strauss (2000) also called it the "13th Generation" because it is proportionally smaller than its parents and its children: in general, marketers have ignored it, in comparison with the other generations

(Moore, 2012). However, GenXers are disillusioned, sceptical and prefer social relationships from a non-mobile connection (Eastman & Liu, 2012; Moore, 2012).

Millennials (1982-1995) are the new “Great Generation”, broadly defined as the Generation Y (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Meister & Willyerd, 2010; Wilson & Gerber, 2008). By 2017, this generational cohort is expected to exceed the Baby Boomers’ spending power. Yers are often early adopters of new technologies and are extensive users of the internet. They represent the first high-tech generation, preferring innovative brands, products or services (Amoroso, Pattuglia, & Khan, 2021; Moore, 2012; Norum, 2003), they perceive the emotional value of a brand has a stronger effect on satisfaction than economic value (Burnsed & Bickle, 2015; Eastman & Liu, 2012). Moreover, they want brands mirroring their personality and showing consistency between promise and delivery, otherwise the decline of trust may happen (Gurău, 2012). Being the highest technologically savvy cohort, they tend to share both delightful and bad brand experiences through their social networks (Gurău, 2012).

Generation Z is the newest generation (also known as Post-Millennials, the iGeneration, or the Homeland Generation) is the demographic cohort following the Millennials. Demographers and researchers typically use starting birth years ranging from the mid-1990s to early 2000s and ending birth years ranging from the late 2000s to early 2010s. Their parents marry later and are less likely to get divorced. They face global terrorism, the aftermath of 9/11, school violence, economic uncertainty, recession, and the mortgage crisis. In terms of characteristics, lifestyles, and attitudes, Generation Z individuals are the “new conservatives” embracing traditional beliefs, valuing the family unit, self-controlled, and more responsible. They are accustomed to high-tech and multiple information sources, with messages bombarding them from all sides. They have never lived without the Internet (Benjamin, 2008; Langford, 2008). Generation Z values authenticity and “realness.” Peer acceptance is very important to Generation Z, they need to belong. Their self-concept is partially determined by the group to which the Tween belongs (Soltan, 2004).

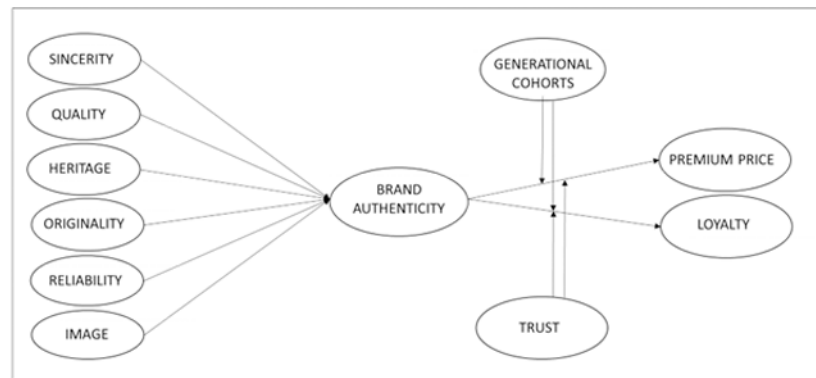
To sum up, strong differences exist between these four generational cohorts.

Other hypotheses are posited based on the literature around generational cohorts:

- H₆: Generational cohort moderates the relationship between brand authenticity and premium price.
- H₇: Generational cohort moderates the relationship between brand authenticity and brand loyalty.
- H₈: The driving forces of the willingness to pay a premium price are different for each generational cohort.
- H₉: The driving forces of the brand loyalty are different for each generational cohort.

All the hypotheses are represented in Fig. 1.

Figure 1. Brand authenticity and generations conceptual model related to premium price and loyalty Source: our elaboration on the basis of the extant literature



METHODOLOGY

We selected the brand Apple as case study for four main reasons: first of all because the technology usage represents one of the main characteristics differentiating the behaviour in consuming, consuming media and technological products, such as smartphones, pads, pc etc., of generational cohorts. Second because the brand has high brand awareness (Brandirectory, 2022; Forbes, 2022; Interbrand, 2022; Reputation Institute, 2022) allowing both customers and non-customers to be included in the sample. Third because Apple is a technological brand and there is no research on the authenticity related to brand loyalty and premium price of technological brands. Finally, because Apple can be considered outstanding thanks to its (relatively) long history and, most importantly, its iconicity. It has an innovative design (visual) and stores (Apple stores) allow consumers to use experientially the products on display (touch).

Data were gathered throughout a continuous Internet survey that was carried out in Italy (EU) in the period 2015-2017 (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials) and in June 2018 (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z). The constructs of brand heritage, quality and sincerity were adapted from the scale by Napoli et al. (2014); originality and reliability were based on the scale by Bruhn et al. (2012); image, trust, loyalty and price premium were based on the scale by Wiedmann et al. (2011). A seven-point Likert scale was used in all cases (see Table 1).

A correlation analysis was firstly run to test the relationship between the constructs and then Generalized Linear Model (GLM) on SPSS was performed to test the proposed model (Fig. 1). GLM is a flexible generalization of ordinary linear regression that allows for response variables that have error distribution models other than a normal distribution. The GLM generalizes linear regression by allowing the linear model to be related to the response variable via a link function and by allowing the magnitude of the variance of each measurement to be a function of its predicted value.

FINDINGS

The survey resulted in a total of 807 usable responses. The sample comprised 175 Boomers (22%), 168 GenXers (21%), 350 Millennials (43%) and 114 GenZed (14%).

Cronbach alphas were estimated to examine the internal consistency and the reliability (table 2) of each construct. Studies recommend that the generally acceptable threshold level for these tests is 0.7 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). All Cronbach alpha values were found to be above 0.7 in our study, which confirms the reliability of the constructs.

From a correlation point of view we found that all the six dimensions describing the authenticity are strongly correlated (table 4) to the willingness to pay a premium price and to the propensity of a consumer loyalty toward the brand (see Table 3).

On the basis of the generalized linear model we observed that the willingness to pay a premium price in regard of the brand Apple and the propensity to the brand loyalty are intensely linked to the sense of brand image and to the perceived quality. Moreover, the belonging to different generational cohorts strongly influences the relationship between the brand authenticity and the other constructs. In particular, the willingness to pay a premium price and the brand loyalty grow from the Baby Boomers to the Gen Z. Whereas the heritage of the brand seems to be a better predictor of the consumer loyalty affecting previous generations more than Millennials and Generation Z.

To conclude, results show that all the 9 hypothesis are verified.

Looking at the effects (Figure 2) on consumers behavior post-hoc tests show that the willingness to pay a premium price for Apple's products grows from Centennials to older generations (Gen X and Baby Boomers).

In particular, Premium Price 1 and Premium Price 2, namely the willingness to pay a premium price and the prime positioning, are also positively linked to the perceived quality of the products and to the image of the brand Apple.

Table 1. Section of the administered survey

BA DIMENSIONS	QUESTIONS
BA_HERITAGE1	The brand has a strong connection to an historical period in time, culture and/or specific region
BA_HERITAGE2	The brand exudes a sense of tradition
BA_HERITAGE3	The brand reminds me of a golden age of the great American industry
BA_HERITAGE4	The brand reflects a timeless design
BA_QUALITYCOMMITMENT1	Quality is central to the brand
BA_QUALITYCOMMITMENT2	The brand is made by a master craftsman who pays attention to detail and is involved throughout the production process
BA_QUALITYCOMMITMENT3	The brand is manufactured to the most stringent quality standards
BA_QUALITYCOMMITMENT4	The brand is a potent symbol of continued quality
BA_QUALITYCOMMITMENT5	The firm is committed to retaining long-held quality standards for the brand
BA_QUALITYCOMMITMENT6	Only the finest ingredients/materials are used in the manufacture of this brand
BA_QUALITYCOMMITMENT7	The brand is made to the most exacting standards, where everything the firm does is aimed at improving quality
BA_SINCERITY1	The brand refuses to compromise the values upon which it was founded
BA_SINCERITY2	The brand has stuck to its principles
BA_SINCERITY3	The brand builds on traditions that began with its founder
BA_ORIGINALITY1	The brand x is different from all other brands
BA_ORIGINALITY2	The brand x clearly distinguishes itself from other brands
BA_ORIGINALITY3	Brand x stands out from other brands
BA_ORIGINALITY4	I think the brand x is unique
BA_RELIABILITY1	The brand x makes reliable promises
BA_RELIABILITY2	The brand x delivers what it promises
BA_RELIABILITY3	My experience of the brand x has shown me that it keeps its promises
BA_RELIABILITY4	Brand's promises are credible
BRAND IMAGE1	I like brand X very much
BRAND IMAGE2	Brand X is really likable

Table 2. Reliability analysis

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Heritage	,748	,752	4
Quality Commitment	,941	,941	7
Sincerity	,784	,784	3
Originality	,886	,890	4
Reliability	,903	,907	4
Brand Image	,781	,782	2
Trust	,924	,924	2
Premium Price	,829	,830	2
Loyalty	,869	,870	3

Table 3. Correlation analysis

Costructs	PREMIUM PRICE Index	BRAND LOYALTY Index	TRUST Index
Heritage Index	,566	,600	,647
Quality Index	,656	,689	,832
Sincerity Index	,570	,584	,680
Originality index	,624	,668	,796
Reliability Index	,675	,734	,847
Brand Image Index	,656	,728	,838

Pearson correlation. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4. Strength of relationships between dimensions

<i>Dependent Variables</i>	Generational Cohort	Heritage Index	Quality Index	Originality Index	Brand Image Index	Trust Index
PRICE PREMIUM 1*	0,002	ns	0,033	ns	0,000	ns
PRICE PREMIUM 2**	0,002	ns	0,014	ns	0,013	ns
LOYALTY 1***	ns	ns	0,000	ns	0,000	0,000
LOTALTY 2****	ns	0,000	0,015	0,042	0,005	0,000
LOYALTY 3*****	0,039	0,001	ns	ns	ns	ns

NS= p-value>0,10

* I am willing to pay a higher price to buy brand Apple

** The products of brand Apple are worth a higher price than other products

*** I recommend brand Apple to my friends

**** I am loyal to brand Apple

***** I do not intend to buy another brand than brand Apple

Moreover, Loyalty 1 – recommendation of the brand to friends or family – mirrors the commitment to retaining long-held quality standards and the strong and reliable brand image.

Loyalty 2 – the pure loyalty to the brand – brings out most of all the connection to the historical period, culture and region, image e the trust toward the brand.

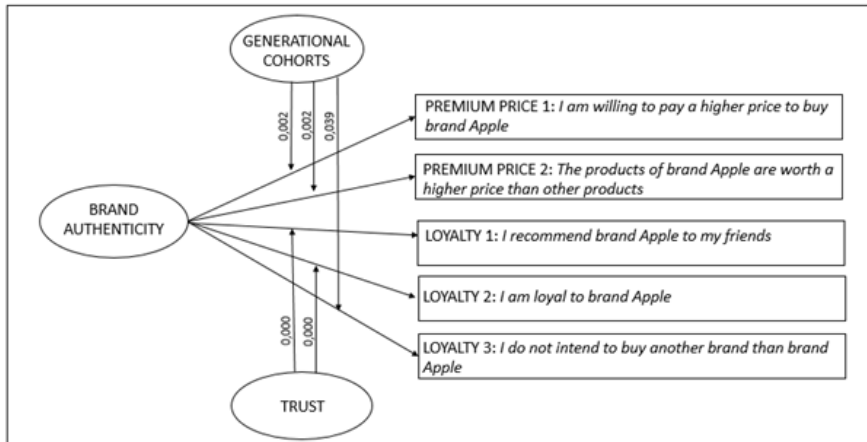
Loyalty 3 – repurchase intention – shows an inverse correlation with regard to generational cohorts and specifically for what concern the Millennials generation, while this dimension shows a strong positive correlation to brand heritage related to older generation cohorts.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our study gives a number of contributions to the existing literature on brand authenticity, generational cohorts, the (different) willingness to pay a premium price and the inclination to the brand loyalty.

First, the construct of brand authenticity is multidimensional and its perception is shaped from various dimensions (Bruhn et al., 2011; Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014; Nunes, Ordanini, & Giambastiani, 2021; Södergren, 2021) that can vary in strength and in length from consumer to consumer. This is especially true for what concern the belonging to different generational cohorts. This evidence is maybe due to the fact that the consumption of technology represents one of the main characteristics differentiating the behaviour of generations.

Figure 2. Moderator Effects and outcomes of Brand Authenticity

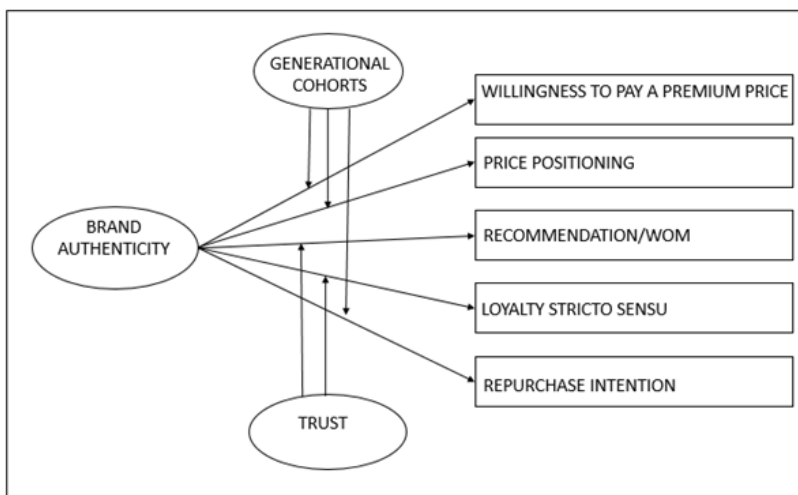


Our model describes technological brands necessitating most of all high brand image and perceived quality to allow superior sense of brand authenticity and allow for price premium and brand loyalty. We endorse previous research by underlining a positive mediator effect between brand trust and consumers' willingness to pay a price premium and between brand trust and brand loyalty (Chaudhuri, & Holbrook, 2001; Choi, Ko, Kim, & Mattila, 2015; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Napoli et al., 2014).

On this line, Regarding the outcomes on consumer behaviour, findings allow to split in sub-dimension the outcomes, each one moderated from brand trust or from the belonging to a specific generational cohort as described in fig.3. These outcomes are: the willingness to pay a premium price, price positioning, recommendation or word-of mouth, loyalty stricto sensu and repurchase intention.

Thus, from results a new detailed model has emerged regarding brand authenticity behavioural outcomes.

Figure 3. Behavioural Responses of Consumers



This research also adds some implications to the knowledge on generational cohorts. Noteworthy dissimilarities between generational cohorts were found, especially between the two older generations –Baby Boomers and Gen X- and the younger generations –Millennials and Gen Z-. Our findings suggest that brand image, over than other constructs, positively affects Millennials and Gen Z more than Baby Boomers and Gen X. This result endorses previous researches which explain that as consumers, young generations, especially Millennials, are more affected by the image and by brand *allure* than previous cohorts (Loroz & Helgeson, 2013; Moore, 2012; Norum, 2003). Moreover, GenXers are disenchanted and cynical about brand products and services (Jackson et al., 2011; Littrell et al., 2005; Moore, 2012) whereas Millennials do not tolerate misalignment between the brand promise and its actual delivery (Pattuglia & Mingione, 2016). Brand Heritage positively influences Boomers more than Millennials and Generation Z. Thus, it seems Boomers recognize the historical value of brands.

Our results, in alignment with previous researches, suggest that Boomers are inclined to be loyal to brands (Burnsed & Bickle, 2015; Jackson et al., 2011). In contrast, Millennials and Gen Z are the generations less disposed to be loyal. This might be due to the fact that they are very well informed about the existence of various brands, and thus feel a limited loyalty and usually look for the best offerings (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Parment, 2013; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

A majority of studies on marketing, brand management and research aims to uncover differences between the various generational cohorts that should take into account the peculiar differences among generation especially if we talk about technology.

Our findings highlight relevant managerial implications and show that marketing practitioners should take into account the differences among generations when developing their marketing strategies. This is because brands mean different things to different consumers, especially if we talk about different ages and different background and lifestyle. Thus, while brand management may strive to communicate a specific and consistent image to the market in order to obtain a premium price, consumers may develop different perceptions of the brand, also depending on their background, attitude and relationship with the brand. Brand management and research may be well advised to acknowledge the relationship between knowledge, affectation, behaviour for each generation. This view leads to several relevant implications.

Marketing managers should support a price premium positioning, should communicate credibility in focusing uniqueness and heritage elements.

Moreover, our study suggests to companies to approach targeting more deeply in order to establish effectiveness in relationships with stakeholders. For instance, managers should be aware of keeping their promises and being sincere with Millennials and GenXers, these being key drivers for their willingness to pay a price premium.

New media platforms (mobile and social networks) and shared connections can help to this by maintaining continuity – heritage – from the past, considered as a common framework of brand features and brand values adjusting continuously the company strategies.

Thus, from a practical point of view, firms should, nonetheless, invest in both generations (old and new) who show belief through communicative actions in social media channels (in order to achieve awareness, image and reputation objectives) but also in advertising and promotion to enhance customers' emotional engagement and willingness to pay a price premium. Regarding communication actions brands should moreover invest in public relations strategies (traditional and online PR) in order to catalize positive words-of-mouth and brand communities, above all regarding the Baby Boomers generation.

In order to cluster and target consumers with generational cohort criteria, our study finally suggests marketing managers should manage a sophisticated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategy. Especially regarding Millennials and Gen Z, marketers should invest in factual distinctiveness of the brand with trials and demonstrations. Not paradoxically, as said it is important to

note that Millennials and Zed are well informed and more skeptical compared to previous generations (their parents) and less influenced by communication activities. Because of this managers should consider a deep implementation of physical touch points and consider a combined online-offline customer journey in order to facilitate the interaction between consumers and products.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The objectives of this study were to determine what attributes make a technological brand authentic and allow for loyalty and premium price and to define the moderator effect of the belonging to different generations. The study was based on Apple case.

To the authors' knowledge, this is the first study investigating the driving factors and the behavioural outcomes in the case of technological brand across generational cohorts. We explored the impact of authenticity on price premium and loyalty of four different consumer cohorts in Italy and some important differences were found among the four groups.

The research provides an important step in defining, measuring, and testing the dimensions of perceived authenticity of one of the most well-known and reliable technological brand, Apple. We found that the image, the quality, the heritage, and the trustworthiness are the most important drivers in authenticating a technological brand.

This study also identifies an important moderating construct that is the belonging to different generations. The results suggest that younger individuals rely on originality and image more than older ones when assessing technology authenticity, while older individuals primarily rely on heritage and trust.

These findings suggest that for young generations the brand image is the most important factor to support a premium price and a consumer loyalty, whereas adults are more influenced by reliability and value-structure of the brand. The perception about brand authenticity evolves and varies with age.

The findings of the current research propose how the authenticity about new hi-tech sector can be determined and managed around premium price and loyalty affected by different dimensions (brand image, quality, brand heritage, brand originality).

This study was limited to a single brand in a single country. Further research is required in order to verify and generalize the findings.

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