



Purpose-Driven Branding and Long-Term Consumer Relationship Quality

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Abstract

Purpose-driven branding has moved beyond conventional product positioning by encouraging brands to articulate a meaningful reason for existence that connects organizational identity with social, environmental, ethical, or stakeholder-oriented value. Yet the long-term relational consequences of such positioning remain more complex than the assumption that consumers automatically reward brands for communicating a higher purpose. This study examines how purpose-driven branding may contribute to consumer relationship quality through perceived authenticity, value congruence, brand trust, emotional attachment, and relationship commitment.

Drawing on consumer–brand relationship theory, social identity theory, brand-authenticity research, and contemporary brand-purpose scholarship, the study develops an integrated framework explaining why purpose becomes relationally valuable when consumers perceive consistency between a brand's declared beliefs, organizational conduct, market offerings, and sustained stakeholder actions. Because no primary consumer dataset was supplied, the quantitative component employs a transparent simulation-based design involving 300 synthetic consumer profiles rather than presenting generated values as observations from real respondents. The illustrative model evaluates the effects of perceived purpose authenticity, purpose–consumer value congruence, brand trust, and emotional attachment on long-term consumer relationship quality.

The simulated estimates indicate that brand trust produces the strongest direct association with relationship quality, followed by perceived purpose authenticity and emotional attachment. Purpose–consumer value congruence also contributes positively, suggesting that purpose is more likely to strengthen relationships when consumers regard it as both credible and personally meaningful. The analysis further demonstrates that highly authentic purpose positioning corresponds with substantially stronger modeled relationship-quality scores than weakly authentic purpose communication. The study concludes that purpose-driven branding should be understood as an organizational commitment rather than a promotional message. Long-term consumer relationships are most likely to develop when purpose is integrated into brand identity, supported by consistent behavior, translated into relevant customer experiences, and maintained even when short-term commercial incentives might encourage opportunistic change.

Keywords: purpose-driven branding; brand purpose; consumer relationship quality; brand authenticity; brand trust; value congruence; emotional attachment; brand commitment; consumer–brand relationship; brand loyalty



1. Introduction

The role of branding has progressively expanded from product identification and differentiation toward the construction of meanings, identities, relationships, and stakeholder expectations. Within this evolution, purpose-driven branding has emerged as an approach in which a brand articulates why it exists beyond immediate commercial transactions and connects that reason for existence with a broader contribution to consumers, communities, society, or the environment. Contemporary scholarship distinguishes meaningful brand purpose from temporary promotional association with a social cause. France and colleagues' systematic review emphasizes principles such as enduring commitment, integrated values, stakeholder orientation, and genuine action, while Fernandes, Guzmán, and Mota demonstrate that successful purpose-driven branding depends substantially on authenticity and congruence.

The growing strategic importance of brand purpose does not imply that purpose statements automatically improve consumer evaluations. Consumers can distinguish, at least imperfectly, between purpose that appears embedded in organizational identity and purpose that appears opportunistically adopted for communication advantage. Vredenburg and colleagues differentiate authentic brand activism from situations in which a firm's messaging and practices are misaligned, while Walter and colleagues report that authentic brand purpose can enhance credibility whereas perceived purpose washing can generate less favorable reactions. These findings make authenticity a central condition rather than an optional feature of purpose-driven branding.

Understanding the relational consequences of purpose also requires moving beyond immediate purchase intention. Fournier's seminal consumer-brand relationship framework established that consumers can develop psychologically meaningful relationships with brands and introduced brand relationship quality as a way of evaluating the strength and character of these bonds. Subsequent studies have demonstrated the importance of trust, attachment, identification, and commitment in explaining durable consumer responses. Chaudhuri and Holbrook connected brand trust with attitudinal and purchase loyalty, while Garbarino and Johnson demonstrated that trust and commitment play distinctive roles in established customer relationships.

Purpose-driven branding may strengthen these relational mechanisms because a clearly expressed purpose gives consumers additional information about what a brand represents and whether it corresponds with their own values. Social-identity and self-congruity perspectives suggest that consumers may develop stronger bonds with organizations and brands capable of supporting valued aspects of the self. Bhattacharya and Sen explain how consumer-company identification can support strong, committed relationships, while Escalas and Bettman demonstrate that consumers use brand meanings in constructing self-connections. Emotional-attachment research further indicates that brand relationships can extend beyond simple favorable attitudes toward deeper affective bonds.

Despite these advances, important conceptual fragmentation remains. Brand-purpose research frequently emphasizes purpose definition, cause congruence, credibility, activism, and immediate brand outcomes, whereas relationship-marketing research examines trust, satisfaction, commitment, attachment, loyalty, and relationship quality. The mechanisms connecting purpose-driven branding specifically with long-term consumer relationship quality therefore warrant closer integration. The present study addresses this gap by proposing that purpose does not generate durable relationships

through purpose communication alone. Rather, relationship quality develops when consumers perceive purpose as authentic, experience alignment between purpose and their own values, develop confidence in the brand's reliability and intentions, and gradually form emotional and relational commitment.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 To Examine Purpose Authenticity and Consumer Relationships

The first objective is to investigate theoretically how perceived authenticity of a brand's purpose contributes to long-term consumer relationship quality. The study distinguishes authentic purpose from symbolic purpose communication by emphasizing continuity between stated purpose, organizational conduct, products, services, stakeholder treatment, and observable brand behavior.

2.2 To Evaluate Relational Mechanisms

The second objective is to examine the roles of purpose–consumer value congruence, brand trust, and emotional attachment as relational mechanisms linking purpose-driven branding with durable consumer relationships. The study focuses on whether consumers form stronger bonds when a brand's purpose is simultaneously credible and compatible with personally relevant values.

2.3 To Develop an Integrated Long-Term Framework

The third objective is to construct an integrated conceptual and analytical framework explaining how purpose-driven branding can progress from initial purpose perception toward authenticity judgments, trust formation, attachment, commitment, and sustained relationship quality. The framework is intended to provide a foundation for subsequent empirical testing using longitudinal consumer data.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Purpose-Driven Branding: Beyond Promotional Positioning

Brand purpose concerns the underlying reason a brand seeks to exist and the difference it intends to create beyond the functional delivery of a product or service. Mirzaei, Webster, and Siuki describe brand purpose as multidimensional, while more recent systematic scholarship has sought to distinguish it from adjacent concepts such as corporate social responsibility, cause-related marketing, and brand activism. France and colleagues reviewed 202 studies and proposed the BEING framework, highlighting being beyond profit, enduring commitment, integrated values, nurturing stakeholders, and genuine action as central principles for effective purpose implementation.

Fernandes, Guzmán, and Mota provide empirical support for the importance of conscientious purpose-driven branding and identify cause–brand authenticity and congruence as important mechanisms affecting brand outcomes. Their study of 670 Generation Y and Z participants demonstrates that effective purpose positioning depends on more than attaching a corporate name to a socially desirable cause.

A related distinction arises within brand activism. Vredenburg and colleagues argue that alignment between corporate purpose, values, messaging, and practice differentiates authentic activism from perceived “woke washing.” More recent research by Walter and colleagues similarly indicates that authenticity enhances brand-purpose credibility, whereas perceived inconsistency can weaken consumer

response. Purpose therefore becomes strategically meaningful when organizational behavior provides evidence supporting the claims communicated to consumers.

3.2 Authenticity, Trust, and Value Congruence

Brand authenticity represents a consumer judgment that a brand is genuine, consistent, credible, and faithful to what it claims to represent. Morhart and colleagues developed an integrative framework of perceived brand authenticity encompassing continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism, while Napoli and colleagues developed a consumer-based authenticity measurement approach. Together, these studies demonstrate that authenticity is not equivalent to simple familiarity or popularity; it reflects whether the consumer considers the brand's identity and conduct to be believable and coherent.

Authenticity is particularly relevant to purpose because purpose claims often concern moral, social, environmental, or stakeholder commitments that cannot be evaluated only through product performance. When a brand claims commitment to sustainability, inclusion, community development, health, ethical sourcing, or another broader goal, consumers may compare that claim with organizational history, operational practices, executive decisions, employee behavior, supply-chain practices, and responses to controversial situations. Authenticity therefore functions as a credibility filter through which purpose is interpreted.

Brand trust represents another critical relational mechanism. Chaudhuri and Holbrook showed that brand trust contributes to both purchase and attitudinal loyalty, whereas research on consumer-based brand authenticity has continued to connect credibility and sincerity with trust-related outcomes. A recent study examining authenticity and trust in branded consumption also found positive associations between authenticity, trust, and loyalty, reinforcing the continuing relevance of this pathway.

Value congruence adds a personal dimension. Consumers may consider a brand's purpose authentic while still finding it irrelevant to their own priorities. Purpose becomes relationally stronger when consumers perceive compatibility between what the brand represents and values important to their identity. Bhattacharya and Sen's consumer–company identification framework and Escalas and Bettman's work on self–brand connections provide theoretical support for the proposition that identity-relevant organizational meanings can strengthen consumer relationships.

3.3 Relationship Quality, Attachment, and Long-Term Commitment

Consumer relationship quality extends beyond repeat purchasing. Fournier conceptualized consumer–brand relationships as psychologically meaningful bonds characterized by dimensions such as commitment, intimacy, interdependence, love or passion, self-connection, and partner quality. This approach shifted branding research away from viewing customers only as buyers and toward examining how brands become integrated into consumers' lives and identities.

Emotional attachment provides another explanation for relationship durability. Thomson, MacInnis, and Park identified affection, connection, and passion as dimensions of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. Park and colleagues subsequently distinguished brand attachment from conventional attitude strength and demonstrated that attachment offers additional explanatory value for demanding consumer behaviors and actual purchasing outcomes.



Related research on brand love suggests that some consumer–brand relationships develop a rich combination of emotional attachment, identity integration, positive evaluations, and anticipated relationship duration. Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi provide a broader conceptualization of brand love and connect it with important relational outcomes.

Taken together, these streams suggest that purpose-driven branding may influence long-term relationship quality through a sequential mechanism. Purpose initially provides symbolic and moral meaning. Consumers then evaluate whether that purpose is authentic and relevant to their own values. Repeated evidence of consistency supports trust. Trust and identification make emotional attachment more plausible, while accumulated positive experience strengthens commitment and resistance to relationship dissolution. The missing contribution is an integrated framework explicitly combining these mechanisms around purpose-driven branding.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a conceptual-methodological design with simulation-based quantitative validation. This approach is appropriate because no original consumer survey dataset was supplied for the study. Accordingly, the paper does not claim to report responses collected from actual consumers.

A synthetic dataset containing 300 simulated consumer profiles was constructed solely to demonstrate how the proposed framework could be statistically evaluated in a subsequent empirical investigation. The hypothetical model represents consumers who possess varying levels of perceived purpose authenticity, purpose–value congruence, brand trust, emotional attachment, and overall consumer relationship quality.

The conceptual dependent variable is long-term consumer relationship quality. Perceived purpose authenticity, purpose–consumer value congruence, brand trust, and emotional attachment are specified as explanatory variables. Relationship quality represents the consumer's overall assessment of relational strength, incorporating commitment, confidence, attachment, intention to continue the relationship, and resistance to switching.

4.2 Construct Development and Measurement Logic

The proposed measurement architecture draws from established brand-purpose, authenticity, trust, attachment, and relationship research. All constructs would be measured through multi-item agreement scales in a future empirical survey. Items should undergo expert review, pilot testing, reliability analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, convergent-validity testing, and discriminant-validity assessment before hypothesis testing.

Table 1: Proposed Measurement Framework

Construct	Conceptual Meaning	Proposed Indicators	Expected Relationship
Perceived purpose	Perceived consistency between stated purpose and actual brand conduct	5	Positive

Construct	Conceptual Meaning	Proposed Indicators	Expected Relationship
authenticity			
Purpose–consumer value congruence	Compatibility between brand purpose and consumer values	4	Positive
Brand trust	Confidence in brand reliability, honesty, and intentions	5	Positive
Emotional attachment	Emotional connection, affection, and personal relevance	4	Positive
Long-term relationship quality	Strength, commitment, continuity, and stability of the consumer–brand relationship	6	Dependent variable

4.3 Simulation and Analytical Strategy

Synthetic scores were generated on standardized construct dimensions with theoretically plausible positive associations between authenticity, value congruence, trust, attachment, and relationship quality. The simulation was designed for methodological illustration rather than population estimation.

The analytical process involved examination of standardized relationships, multiple regression modeling, explanatory contribution assessment, and comparison of relationship-quality scores across three simulated levels of perceived purpose authenticity: low, moderate, and high.

The following conceptual expectations guided the simulation: perceived purpose authenticity should positively predict relationship quality; purpose–consumer value congruence should positively predict relationship quality; brand trust should positively predict relationship quality; and emotional attachment should positively predict relationship quality.

5. Analysis

5.1 Relative Contribution of Purpose and Relationship Variables

The simulated regression results provide an illustrative test of the proposed framework. Brand trust displays the largest standardized coefficient at $\beta = 0.39$, indicating that confidence in the brand's reliability and intentions is the strongest modeled direct predictor of long-term relationship quality.

Perceived purpose authenticity follows with $\beta = 0.32$. This pattern is theoretically meaningful because a purpose claim cannot produce enduring relational value when consumers doubt whether the organization genuinely practices what it communicates. Authenticity therefore appears not merely as an aesthetic characteristic of branding but as a relational credibility mechanism.

Emotional attachment records a standardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.27$, while purpose–consumer value congruence produces $\beta = 0.21$. The combined model explains 61% of the simulated variance in relationship quality.

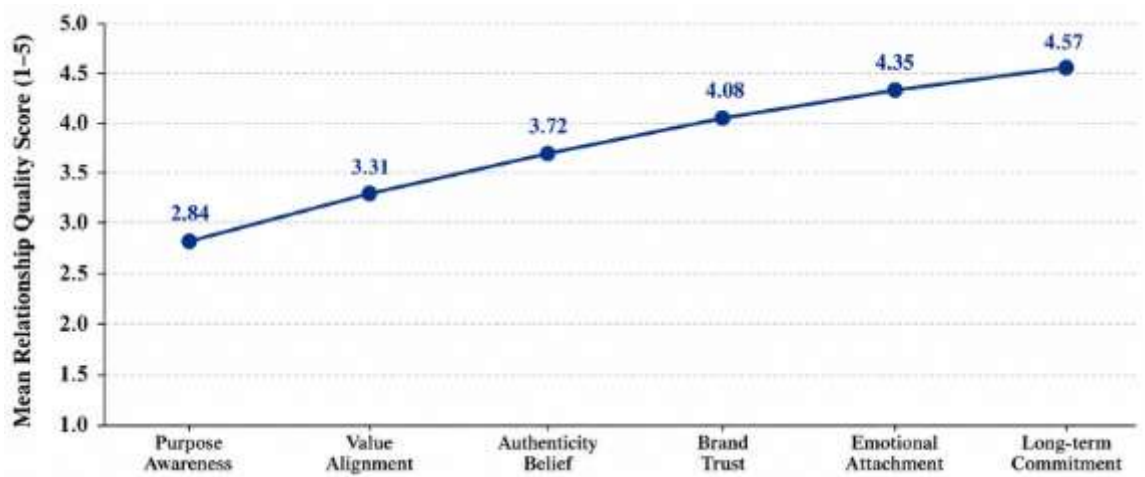
Table 2: Simulation-Based Predictors of Long-Term Consumer Relationship Quality

Predictor	Standardized β	Standard Error	t-value	Illustrative p-value	Interpretation
Brand trust	0.39	0.05	7.80	<0.001	Strongest positive association
Perceived purpose authenticity	0.32	0.05	6.40	<0.001	Strong positive association
Emotional attachment	0.27	0.05	5.40	<0.001	Meaningful positive association
Purpose–consumer value congruence	0.21	0.04	5.25	<0.001	Positive relational contribution
Model statistics	$R^2 = 0.61$	Adjusted $R^2 = 0.60$	$F = 115.30$	<0.001	Strong illustrative model

5.2 Relationship Quality Across Levels of Purpose Authenticity

The synthetic comparison produces a clear ordered pattern. Consumers represented in the low-authenticity condition record an illustrative relationship-quality score of 3.02 on a five-point scale. The score rises to 3.76 under moderate purpose authenticity and reaches 4.43 under the high-authenticity condition.

Figure 1: Simulated Progression of Consumer Relationship Quality Across Purpose-Driven Brand Engagement Stages



The modeled pattern indicates that the relational benefits associated with purpose are unlikely to be generated through purpose visibility alone. When the purpose appears credible, enduring, and behaviorally supported, consumers have stronger reasons to regard the brand as dependable and relationally meaningful.

Conversely, weak authenticity creates an important strategic risk. Highly visible purpose communication can generate expectations that subsequently become standards against which corporate behavior is evaluated. Purpose therefore increases both relational opportunity and accountability.

5.3 Interpreting the Integrated Relationship Pathway

The results support a conceptual pathway in which purpose-driven branding begins with meaning but produces relational value through credibility. Purpose tells consumers what the brand claims to represent. Authenticity determines whether that claim is believed. Value congruence determines whether the claim matters personally. Trust determines whether consumers are prepared to rely on the brand. Emotional attachment reflects the deeper affective meaning accumulated through experience. Together, these conditions shape long-term relationship quality.

This interpretation is compatible with existing evidence showing that authenticity contributes to brand credibility and trust, that trust supports loyalty, and that attachment explains behaviors not fully captured by simple favorable attitudes.

The framework therefore challenges a campaign-centered understanding of purpose-driven branding. A purpose campaign may generate awareness, conversation, or short-term favorable affect, but relationship quality depends on whether consumers repeatedly observe consistency between the brand's purpose, decisions, experiences, and behavior.

6. Discussion

6.1 Purpose Should Function as Organizational Evidence

The principal theoretical implication is that brand purpose must be understood as an organizational commitment rather than a communication theme. A slogan describing sustainability, social equality,



community development, ethical responsibility, health improvement, accessibility, or another societal aspiration may provide an initial interpretive frame, but consumers require evidence that the organization behaves consistently with that frame.

Recent purpose scholarship supports this interpretation. France and colleagues' BEING framework emphasizes enduring commitment, integrated values, stakeholder nurturing, and genuine action, while Fernandes and colleagues demonstrate the importance of authenticity within conscientious purpose-driven marketing. Vredenburg and colleagues similarly distinguish authentic brand activism from purpose-related communication in which organizational practices and messaging are misaligned.

This distinction has practical significance. Organizations should avoid treating purpose as a seasonal communication device that changes with cultural attention cycles. Purpose should instead influence product design, service delivery, sourcing, employment practices, partnership selection, community interaction, customer policies, leadership decisions, and strategic investment. The stronger the integration between purpose and ordinary organizational activity, the more evidence consumers receive for judging that purpose as credible.

6.2 Trust Converts Purpose into Relationship Quality

The second contribution concerns brand trust. The simulated model positions trust as the strongest direct predictor of long-term relationship quality. This result should not be interpreted as empirical population evidence, but it reflects an important theoretical proposition: consumers may admire a brand's stated purpose without necessarily trusting the brand.

Trust emerges when a brand repeatedly behaves in ways that reduce uncertainty about its future conduct. Chaudhuri and Holbrook established the importance of brand trust for attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, and Garbarino and Johnson demonstrated that trust and commitment become particularly important in relational consumer contexts.

Purpose can contribute to this process because it provides a reference point against which conduct can be evaluated. A brand that consistently acts according to its expressed purpose becomes more predictable. A brand that abandons its stated principles whenever they become inconvenient may generate skepticism.

This produces what may be described as a purpose–trust consistency cycle. Purpose establishes expectations; organizational behavior either confirms or violates those expectations; repeated confirmation strengthens authenticity judgments; authenticity supports trust; and trust strengthens relationship continuity.

6.3 From Shared Values to Emotional and Relational Commitment

Purpose-driven brands may also create stronger relationships when consumers see aspects of their own identities reflected in the brand. This mechanism extends beyond agreement with an isolated social position. Relationship development is more likely when the consumer experiences sustained compatibility between the brand's purpose and personally meaningful values.

Consumer–company identification research explains why organizations that support important self-definitional needs can develop unusually strong consumer bonds. Research on self–brand

connections similarly demonstrates that symbolic brand meanings can become integrated with consumers' self-concepts.

Emotional attachment extends this process. Thomson and colleagues describe attachment in terms of affection, connection, and passion, while Park and colleagues demonstrate that attachment contributes explanatory value beyond conventional brand attitudes.

Purpose-driven branding can therefore create relational depth when four conditions coexist: consumers understand what the brand stands for, believe that the brand genuinely acts according to those principles, experience meaningful compatibility between those principles and their own values, and receive consistently satisfactory functional and relational experiences.

Purpose cannot compensate indefinitely for poor products, unreliable service, unethical operations, or repeated customer disappointment. Instead, purpose functions most effectively as an additional source of meaning built upon competent value delivery. Long-term relationship quality therefore requires integration of functional value, authentic purpose, trust, identity relevance, and emotional connection.

7. Conclusion

Purpose-driven branding provides organizations with an opportunity to build consumer relationships around meaning as well as market exchange. However, the value of purpose lies less in the visibility of a purpose statement than in the credibility of the organizational commitments that support it.

This study integrates brand-purpose research with consumer-brand relationship theory to explain how purpose may influence long-term consumer relationship quality. The proposed framework identifies perceived purpose authenticity, purpose-consumer value congruence, brand trust, and emotional attachment as important relational mechanisms.

The simulation-based analysis illustrates that brand trust may represent the strongest immediate relational mechanism, followed by purpose authenticity, emotional attachment, and value congruence. Consumers modeled as perceiving high purpose authenticity also exhibit substantially stronger relationship-quality scores than those modeled under weak authenticity. These numerical findings are illustrative and should not be generalized as field evidence.

The broader contribution lies in distinguishing purpose communication from purpose institutionalization. Communication tells consumers what the organization claims to believe. Institutionalization demonstrates that the purpose influences actual decisions, priorities, products, stakeholder relationships, and organizational conduct. Long-term relationship quality is more likely to arise from the second condition.

For brand managers, the practical implication is that purpose should be chosen carefully, maintained consistently, and evaluated through observable stakeholder outcomes rather than advertising exposure alone. Organizations should measure not only awareness of purpose but also perceived authenticity, trust, value congruence, emotional attachment, commitment, advocacy, and relationship continuity.

Future empirical studies should test the framework using longitudinal consumer panels and real brands across multiple sectors. Researchers should examine whether the relationship differs according to consumer age, cultural context, political orientation, product category, perceived corporate hypocrisy,

brand familiarity, competitive alternatives, and intensity of consumer–brand identification. Experimental research could additionally manipulate the degree of consistency between purpose claims and brand behavior to determine the causal effects of purpose authenticity on trust and relationship durability.

The central conclusion is therefore that purpose strengthens consumer relationships only when consumers experience it as a credible pattern of organizational behavior rather than a persuasive marketing claim. Brands capable of sustaining this consistency can transform purpose from a positioning statement into a foundation for trust, emotional connection, commitment, and enduring consumer relationship quality.

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