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REVIEW ARTICLE

GENERATION Z AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: *BRAND IDENTIFICATION, PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY AND PURCHASE INTENTION*

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Generation Z consumes in a digital environment saturated with campaigns, and brand authenticity and brand identification are seen as relevant bonds, yet they are rarely tested together. **Objective:** to analyze what the literature supports about the effects of brand identification and perceived authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intention. **Methods:** integrative review with Crossref and PubMed queries (10/28/2026; 54 records screened, 5 included) and a directed search of 15 works, totaling 20, with thematic analysis, an evidence map and a documentary analysis of two cases (Calvin Klein and Duolingo). **Results:** the relations between identification and intention and between authenticity and intention have moderate support; those between authenticity and identification and the mediating role of identification, limited. Case indicators show reach and engagement, not identification or intention. **Conclusion:** a conceptual model with four propositions is proposed, still untested, which calls for empirical studies with Generation Z. The study is bibliographic.

1 INTRODUCTION

Few brands today have difficulty reaching young people; the challenge is to be taken seriously by them. Generation Z, made up of individuals born, in general, from the mid-1990s onward, grew up in an environment of mobile internet and social media, in which campaigns compete for attention in a continuous flow and consumers can confront what the brand says with what other users report (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). In this scenario, two ideas have gained ground in the marketing debate: that brands need to appear authentic and that consumers buy with greater conviction from those with which they identify.

The literature offers a basis for both. Brand authenticity is a field with almost three decades of research, whose most recent review distinguishes streams on what is genuine, on the legitimizing function of authenticity and on its emotional and moral dimensions (Södergren, 2021). Consumer identification with the company and with the brand, in turn, was proposed as a bond that goes beyond satisfaction with the product (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) and already has a measurement instrument developed in Brazil (Maffezzolli & Prado, 2013). Less is known about how these two constructs relate to each other and to purchase intention, especially when the

audience is Generation Z. In many studies, each construct is examined in isolation, in different contexts and samples, and professional debate tends to treat likes, views and shares as if they were signs of a bond and of willingness to buy.

This article starts from that gap. The research problem is: what does the scientific literature allow us to claim about how perceived authenticity and brand identification influence the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers? The general objective is to analyze the effects of brand identification and perceived authenticity on this generation's purchase intention, through an integrative review and a documentary analysis of two cases. The specific objectives are:

a) to analyze the relationship between consumer identification with the brand and purchase intention;

b) to examine the influence of the brand's perceived authenticity on identification;

c) to assess the effect of perceived authenticity on purchase intention; and

d) to analyze the role of identification in the relationship between perceived authenticity and purchase intention.

The scope must be made clear. The study is bibliographic and documentary: it did not collect data from consumers, did not measure the constructs and did not statistically test any relationship. For this reason, the four objectives are treated as conceptual propositions (P1 to P4), whose support in the literature is classified into explicit levels, and not as confirmed hypotheses. The contribution is twofold: to organize a scattered literature into an evidence map that shows what is supported and what remains open, and to separate rigorously, in the analysis of public campaigns, reach indicators from the psychological constructs of interest. Section 2 describes the procedures; Section 3, the framework and the conceptual model; Section 4, the results; and Sections 5 and 6, the discussion and final considerations.

2 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

2.1 Research design

This is an integrative review with a qualitative approach, which gathers studies of diverse designs to reach a broad understanding of the phenomenon (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Souza et al., 2010) and which approximates, in the typology of Grant and Booth (2009), a critical review with narrative synthesis and an evidence map (Torraco, 2005). A documentary analysis of two digital campaigns was associated with it, used to illustrate the distinction between reach indicators and psychological constructs. It is not a systematic review: PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021) served only as a transparency guide to describe identification, screening and inclusion. The question was structured according to the population, concept and context scheme: Generation Z consumers (population); perceived authenticity, brand identification and purchase intention (concept); brand communication and consumption in a digital environment (context). Table 1 summarizes the protocol.

Table 1 — Review protocol

Element	Specification
Phase 1: documented queries	On October 28, 2026, four queries: (i) Crossref, title field, "brand authenticity purchase intention"; (ii) Crossref, title field, "brand identification purchase intention," both with a filter for journal articles published since 2015 and the first 20 records by relevance; (iii) PubMed, (brand authenticity OR perceived authenticity) AND (purchase intention OR buying intention) AND (Generation Z OR Gen Z OR young consumers); (iv) PubMed, (brand identification OR brand identity congruence OR self-brand connection) AND (purchase intention OR buying intention).
Phase 2: directed search	Manual search for seminal works on authenticity and identification, studies on Generation Z and texts on purchase intention and consumer behavior, with metadata checked by digital object identifier (DOI) in at least one source besides the initial record.
Inclusion	Works with identifiable authorship, in a peer-reviewed journal or a report from a recognized institution, that address brand authenticity, brand identification or purchase intention, in Portuguese or English, with metadata and abstract confirmed.
Exclusion	Duplicate records or records without retrievable metadata; studies centered on another construct; specific contexts without confirmation in a second source; works in local outlets or with an unverified review policy; topics outside the scope, such as food, health and body image.
Screening and extraction	By title and abstract, by a single reviewer, with the support of an artificial intelligence tool and without independent double-checking. Extraction in a matrix (authorship, year, design, context, constructs, result and limitation), based on abstracts and metadata.

Element	Specification
Evidence weighting	Support for each proposition classified as consistent, moderate or limited (Section 2.4).
Synthesis	Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with a priori axes (consumer behavior and intention, Generation Z, identification, authenticity); documentary analysis of the cases; no meta-analysis.

Source: prepared by the authors (2026).

2.2 Two-phase search

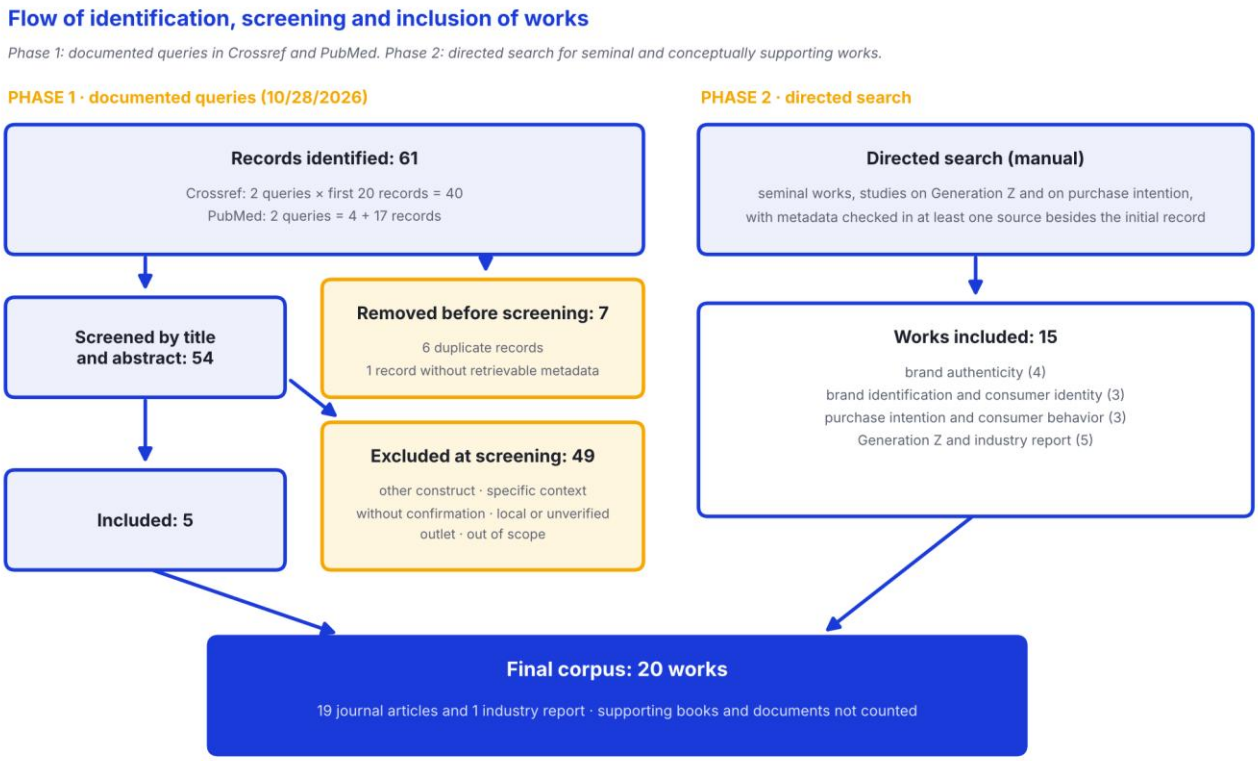
The first phase was fully documented. The four queries in Table 1 retrieved 61 records: 40 in Crossref (two queries of 20 records) and 21 in PubMed (four and 17, respectively). Because title queries and the databases consulted favor precision over breadth, the 61 records are not intended to represent the scientific output on the topic, and the search in a single index is acknowledged as a limitation in Section 5.3. After removing six duplicates and one record whose metadata could not be retrieved, 54 records were screened.

The second phase filled a foreseeable gap in the first. Title queries rarely retrieve seminal works, whose titles do not always contain the terms used in the search, and they reach few Brazilian studies. For this reason, the authors manually selected 15 works in four groups: brand authenticity (4), brand identification and consumer identity (3), purchase intention and consumer behavior (3) and Generation Z, including an industry report (5). The selection was made by theoretical relevance and not by a search protocol, and all works had their metadata checked by DOI.

2.3 Selection

Of the 54 records screened, 49 were excluded and five were included. The exclusions fell on records that examined other constructs, such as loyalty or brand equity unrelated to authenticity or identification; on studies of very specific contexts that could not be confirmed in a second source; on works published in local or conference outlets with an unverified review policy; and on records unrelated to the topic, retrieved by the generic terms of the queries. The five included records deal with authenticity and purchase intention (Zhang et al., 2022; Silva & Almeida, 2024), with Generation Z's consumption intention (Ngo et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024) and with identification as a mediator of behavioral intention (Wu & Zhu, 2021). Added to the 15 works from phase 2, the corpus analyzed comprises 20 works: 19 journal articles and one industry report (Figure 1). The consumer behavior and generations books used as conceptual foundation and the documentary sources of the cases are not part of this count and are referenced separately.

Figure 1 — Flow of identification, screening and inclusion of works



Source: prepared by the authors (2026). The phase 1 figures correspond to the queries of 10/28/2026.

2.4 Extraction, weighting and synthesis

The data were extracted into a comparable matrix. Extraction was based on abstracts and metadata and, in the case of the foundation books, on the passages cited by the authors, so that the full texts were not read systematically. There was no exclusion for methodological quality, but the weighting was explicit: support for each proposition was classified as **consistent** when four or more works, including at least two empirical studies that directly test the relationship, converged in the same direction; **moderate** when two or more empirical works indicated the relationship, but with constructs close to, and not identical with, those of the proposition or in samples outside the Generation Z scope; and **limited** when there was only conceptual inference or no work that tested the relationship.

The synthesis followed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because the works differ in design, scale and context, no aggregate effect was estimated, and the findings are treated as evidence of association, without attribution of causality. In the documentary analysis, the indicators disclosed for each campaign were classified into four categories (reach and engagement; signs of authenticity; signs of identification; evidence of purchase intention), and evidence of a construct was considered to exist only when the source had measured it. The authors' interpretations are flagged as such throughout the text.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSITIONS

3.1 Consumer behavior and purchase intention

Consumer behavior is the field that studies how individuals and groups choose, buy and use products to satisfy needs and desires. Samara and Morsch (2005, p. 1) define the consumer as "any potential buying entity that has a need or desire to be satisfied," which shifts the focus from the act of purchase to the condition of someone who may come to buy. The Consumer Protection Code adopts a different criterion, of a legal nature, by defining as a consumer anyone who acquires or uses a product or service as the final recipient (Brasil, 1990, art. 2).

Kotler and Keller (2019, p. 185) describe the decision process in five stages: "problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and postpurchase behavior." Not all situations require the same involvement, and Samara and Morsch (2005) relate psychological, sociocultural and situational

factors to the degree of involvement and to the way of deciding. Perception, understood as the process by which individuals select, organize and interpret information (Kotler & Keller, 2019), helps explain why the same stimulus produces different responses. The brand, in this perspective, is more than a name: it gathers associations of thoughts, feelings, images, experiences and beliefs (Kotler & Keller, 2019).

Purchase intention is the probability that the consumer intends to carry out a given purchase behavior (Wang et al., 2023). Kotler and Keller (2019) place intention after the formation of preferences among the brands considered, but caution that it is not a fully reliable indicator of behavior, since the consumer may modify, postpone or reject the purchase. Morwitz et al. (2007) show that the ability of intention to predict sales depends on the conditions under which it is measured. Attitude, preference and intention are therefore related but not equivalent concepts: attitude is an enduring evaluation, favorable or not, of an object (Kotler & Keller, 2019), and preference for a product does not, by itself, mean an intention to buy it (Ferreira et al., 2025). Wang et al. (2023) found a positive relationship between attitude and purchase intention, with consumer perception acting together with trust.

Table 2 — Constructs and distinctions adopted in the analysis

Construct	Definition adopted	Necessary distinction
Purchase intention	Probability that the consumer intends to carry out a purchase behavior (Wang et al., 2023).	It is not actual purchase; predictive power varies with conditions (Morwitz et al., 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2019).
Attitude and preference	Enduring evaluation, favorable or not, of an object (attitude); favored choice among alternatives (preference).	Preferring does not imply intending to buy (Ferreira et al., 2025).
Brand identification	Congruence between the consumer's personal image and the image attributed to the brand, with cognitive, affective, evaluative and behavioral dimensions (Maffezzolli & Prado, 2013).	It is neither recognition nor preference; it differs from identification with the brand community (Chan, 2023) and from consumer–company identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).
Perceived authenticity	Assessment of how genuine and coherent the brand is in its characteristics, values and manifestations (Södergren, 2021); operationalized in scales (Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014).	It is a consumer perception, not an attribute of communication; the presence of a celebrity or a narrative does not guarantee it.
Reach and engagement	Views, likes, shares, impressions and proprietary exposure metrics.	They measure exposure and reaction, not identification, perceived authenticity or purchase intention.

Source: prepared by the authors (2026), based on the works cited.

3.2 Generation Z and consumption

Generations are identifiable groups that share birth years, location and significant events at critical stages of development (Kupperschmidt, 2000, as cited in Tolbize, 2008). The notion, therefore, is not reduced to age: Grubb (2018) emphasizes that shared experiences mark individuals in formation, and Limeira (2017) associates with them a "sense of generation." This framing calls for caution, since chronological boundaries vary among authors and the members of a generation are not homogeneous.

Francis and Hoefel (2018) describe Generation Z as made up of digital natives who are hypercognitive, pragmatic and realistic, and organize its consumption behavior around three axes: consumption as access, and not necessarily as possession; consumption as an expression of individual identity; and consumption as a matter of ethical concern. According to the authors, ethics tends to be assessed in an integrated way, encompassing the brand, the responsible company and its network of partners and suppliers, so that proclaimed ideals are expected in actions as well. This is an industry report, and its claims should be read as a description of trends, not as results of statistical testing.

Recent empirical studies with young consumers help situate these traits. Branca et al. (2025), in a mixed-methods study with 392 participants in Italy, observed that hedonic motivations, the search for uniqueness and self-expression weigh more, in vintage fashion purchases, than ideological adherence to sustainability narratives. Ngo et al. (2024), with 641 young Vietnamese people, showed that attitudes mediate the intention to buy sustainable clothing. Fisher and Yoon (2026), with 802 U.S. Instagram users, found higher levels of several engagement motivations and of electronic word of mouth in Generation Z than in Generation Y, noting the cross-sectional design, the self-report and the sample obtained on a recruitment platform. Taken together, the findings suggest that Generation Z values personal expression and coherence, but do not authorize treating it as a uniform block.

3.3 Brand identification

To identify, in the ordinary sense, is to recognize similarity and establish a connection with someone or something (Michaelis, n.d.-b). In consumption, the concept designates more than recognizing or preferring a brand. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) proposed a framework for understanding the bonds between consumers and companies founded on consumer–company identification, and Escalas and Bettman (2003) examined how reference groups influence the connections between consumers and brands, which reinforces the social dimension of the phenomenon.

In Brazil, Maffezzolli and Prado (2013) developed and evaluated, in three studies, a measurement instrument for brand identification: 19 interviews, an online survey (n = 194) and an in-person one (n = 780), with consumers of four automakers. The model distinguishes four dimensions: the cognitive, relating to knowledge of and experiences with the brand; the affective, relating to feelings and emotional connection; the evaluative, relating to personal judgments and the perception of others' judgment; and the behavioral, relating to involvement and actions in favor of the brand. The authors associated greater identification with a greater likelihood of staying with the brand. The sample, however, was predominantly male (about 80%), from a single city and obtained by quotas, which limits generalization, especially to Generation Z.

Two distinctions guide the analysis. The first, interpretive, is that identification is not a synonym of recognition or preference: one may know and prefer a brand without identifying with it. The second is that an isolated behavior, such as recommending a product, does not prove identification. As for the relationship with purchase intention, three studies offer evidence of different natures. Wu and Zhu (2021) found, in a structural equation model with users of Chinese platforms, that consumer–company identification mediates the relationship between engagement in social responsibility and behavioral intention, including purchase intention. Chan (2023), in quantitative research on virtual brand communities with young Generation Z members, highlighted the role of interactions, information quality, community identification and immersion experience. Zhang et al. (2024), with 226 young Taiwanese, found a correlation between community experience and brand identification in an extended theory of planned behavior model. In none of these studies is the construct exactly individual identification with the brand, as defined by Maffezzolli and Prado (2013), which justifies classifying the support as moderate, and not as consistent.

3.4 Brand authenticity

Authenticity is the condition of what is authentic, associated with legitimacy and genuineness (Michaelis, n.d.-a). In marketing research, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) showed, in a qualitative study, that consumers deliberately choose cues of authenticity to achieve goals related to the self, which brings the construct closer to identity. Napoli et al. (2014) proposed a consumer-based authenticity scale, and Morhart et al. (2015) developed an integrative framework and a perceived brand authenticity scale with four dimensions: continuity, credibility, integrity and symbolism.

The review by Södergren (2021), which covers the output from 1994 to 2019 and organizes it into antecedents, decisions and outcomes, identifies three streams: one that distinguishes the genuine from the fake, one that emphasizes the legitimizing function of authenticity and one that highlights its emotional and moral dimensions. From it follows an idea central to this article: authenticity is **perceived**, that is, it results from the consumer's interpretation of the brand's signals, of its history and of the correspondence between what it declares and what it practices. A brand is not authentic merely by claiming to be.

As for purchase intention, there are direct empirical studies, although outside the Generation Z scope. Silva and Almeida (2024), in a Brazilian study on eSports event sponsorship, found that the sponsoring brand's authenticity affects brand equity and purchase intention, with brand equity acting as a mediator. Zhang et al. (2022), with 218 Chinese consumers and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis, identified country-of-origin image, quality, credibility and self-identity as core conditions for the purchase intention of internationalized brands, from the perspective of authenticity. Self-identity among the core conditions is one of the few indications, in the corpus, of a link between authenticity and identification, albeit an indirect one.

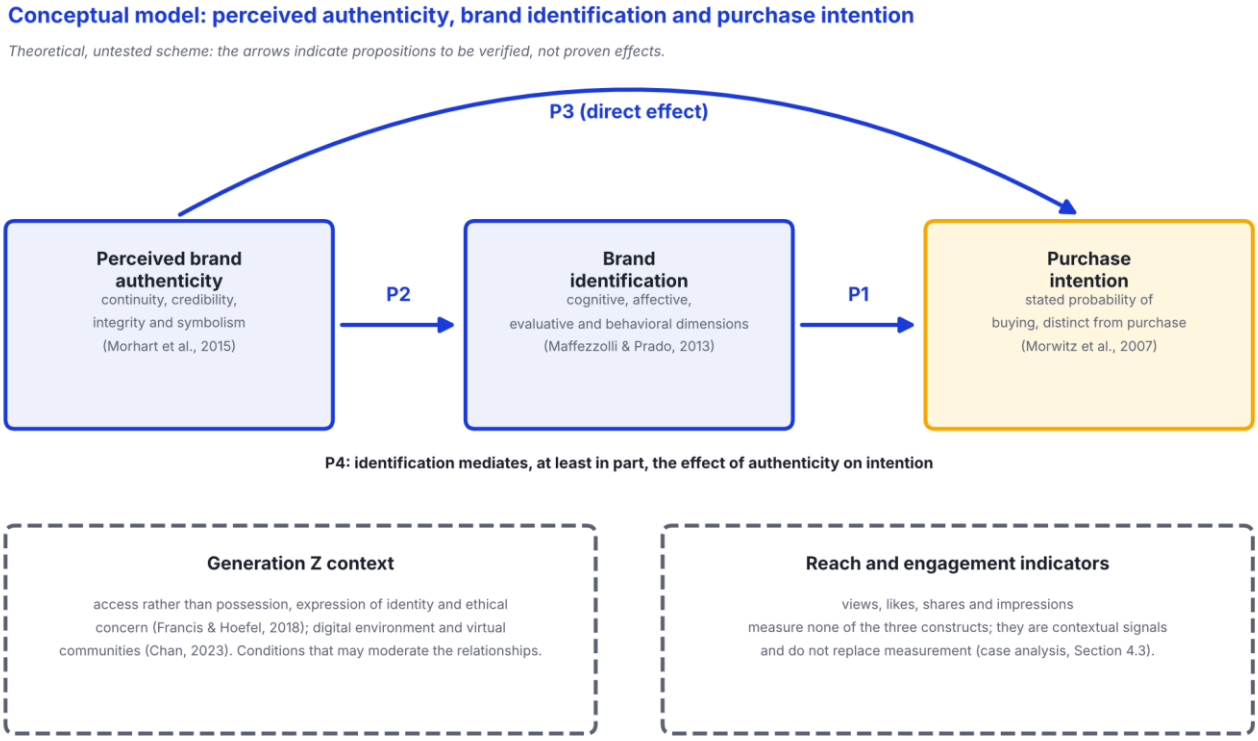
3.5 Conceptual model and propositions

The articulation of the constructs results in four propositions, corresponding to the specific objectives and represented in Figure 2:

- **P1:** the greater the consumer's identification with the brand, the greater the purchase intention;
- **P2:** the greater the brand's perceived authenticity, the greater the consumer's identification with it;
- **P3:** the greater the perceived authenticity, the greater the purchase intention, regardless of identification;
- **P4:** identification mediates, at least in part, the effect of perceived authenticity on purchase intention.

The propositions are **conceptual**, formulated from the literature reviewed and not from the authors' own data. The Generation Z context (consumption as access, expression of identity, ethical concern, digital environment) is treated as a condition that may moderate the relationships, and not as part of them. Reach and engagement indicators appear separately, because they measure none of the three constructs.

Figure 2 — Conceptual model of the relationships among perceived authenticity, brand identification and purchase intention



Source: prepared by the authors (2026). Theoretical scheme, not tested; the propositions derive from the literature reviewed.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Characterization of the corpus

The corpus comprises 20 works: 19 journal articles and one industry report. Seven deal directly with Generation Z or young consumers (Chan, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; Ngo et al., 2024; Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025; Fisher & Yoon, 2026; Branca et al., 2025; Francis & Hoefel, 2018), and seven predate 2016, which combines consolidated foundations and recent output. There are quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods studies, as well as a review and conceptual frameworks. The contexts are mainly Asian, European and North American, with two Brazilian studies (Maffezzolli & Prado, 2013; Silva & Almeida, 2024). No work in the corpus tests, in a single design and with Generation Z, the complete chain of authenticity, identification and purchase intention, which confirms the gap pointed out in the introduction. Table 3 summarizes the works.

Table 3 — Works analyzed: design, context and contribution

Work	Design and context	Central contribution
Bhattacharya and Sen (2003)	Conceptual framework; consumer–company relationships	Proposes a framework for understanding the bonds between consumers and companies, founded on consumer–company identification.
Escalas and Bettman (2003)	Experimental studies	Examines how reference groups influence the connections between consumers and brands.
Maffezzolli and Prado (2013)	Three studies (19 interviews; n = 194; n = 780); automakers, Brazil	Four-dimension instrument; greater identification associated with a greater likelihood of staying with the brand; predominantly male sample from one city.
Beverland and Farrelly (2010)	Qualitative study	Consumers choose cues of authenticity to achieve goals related to the self.
Napoli et al. (2014)	Scale development	Consumer-based measurement of brand authenticity.
Morhart et al. (2015)	Integrative framework and scale	Perceived authenticity with four dimensions: continuity, credibility, integrity and symbolism.
Södergren (2021)	Review, 1994–2019	Organizes the literature into antecedents, decisions and outcomes; three research streams.
Wang et al. (2023)	Structural equation model; cross-border e-commerce	Perception, trust and attitude influence purchase intention.
Ferreira et al. (2025)	Study on a sustainable product	Attitude mediates the relationship between green marketing and purchase intention.
Morwitz et al. (2007)	Analysis of prediction	The power of intention to predict sales varies with conditions.
Wu and Zhu (2021)	Structural equation model; Chinese platforms	Consumer–company identification mediates the effect of social responsibility on behavioral intention.
Zhang et al. (2022)	Fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis; n = 218, China	Country-of-origin image, quality, credibility and self-identity as core conditions; authenticity perspective.
Silva and Almeida (2024)	Structural equation model; eSports, Brazil	Sponsor authenticity affects brand equity and purchase intention; equity mediates.
Zhang et al. (2024)	Survey; Generation Z, Taiwan; n = 226	Community experience correlated with brand identification.
Ngo et al. (2024)	Survey; Generation Z, Vietnam; n = 641	Attitudes mediate the intention to buy sustainable clothing.
Chan (2023)	Quantitative research; Generation Z, China	Interactions, information quality, community identification and immersion associated with purchase intention.
Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos (2025)	Multiple regression; n = 302, ages 18 to 26	Online experience, image, trust and loyalty with the greatest weight; convenience sample, 85.4% students, cross-sectional.
Fisher and Yoon (2026)	Survey; n = 802, Instagram, USA	Generation Z with engagement motivations and electronic word of mouth higher than Generation Y; design and sample limitations.
Branca et al. (2025)	Mixed methods; n = 392, Italy	Hedonic motivations, uniqueness and self-expression outweigh ideology in vintage fashion purchases.
Francis and Hoefel (2018)	Industry report	Access, identity and ethics as axes of Generation Z consumption.

Source: prepared by the authors (2026), from abstracts and metadata.

4.2 Evidence map

Table 4 presents the support for each proposition according to the criteria of Section 2.4. None was classified as consistent, and the reason is the same in all cases: there are no studies that measure the constructs with the appropriate instruments in Generation Z samples.

Table 4 — Evidence map and status of the propositions

Proposition	Supporting works	Direction and caveats	Support
P1: identification → intention	Wu and Zhu (2021); Chan (2023); Zhang et al. (2024); Maffezzolli and Prado (2013); Bhattacharya and Sen (2003)	Convergence on a positive association; the constructs are close (identification with the company or with the community) and the samples are, in part, not from Generation Z.	Moderate
P2: authenticity → identification	Beverland and Farrelly (2010); Morhart et al. (2015); Zhang et al. (2022)	Conceptual link with the self and identity; no study in the corpus tests the relationship directly.	Limited
P3: authenticity → intention	Silva and Almeida (2024); Zhang et al. (2022); Södergren (2021)	Positive effect in direct studies; samples outside the Generation Z scope, in specific contexts (sponsorship, brand internationalization).	Moderate
P4: identification as mediator	Wu and Zhu (2021), by analogy	Mediation was tested for social responsibility, not for authenticity; no study tests the complete chain.	Limited

Source: prepared by the authors (2026), based on Table 3 and on the criteria of Section 2.4.

Two methodological observations complete the map. The first is that purchase intention, even when measured precisely, is not equivalent to purchase (Morwitz et al., 2007; Kotler & Keller, 2019). The second is that the results on Generation Z, coming mostly from convenience samples, students or recruitment platforms, as shown by the caveats of Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos (2025) and Fisher and Yoon (2026), call for caution in generalization.

4.3 Documentary analysis of two cases

Two 2025 campaigns were analyzed as illustrative cases, chosen for their wide repercussion and for the difference in strategy: Calvin Klein's with the singer Bad Bunny and Duolingo's Death of Duo. Because the objective is to verify what public sources allow us to claim about the constructs, and not to assess the companies' performance, the disclosed indicators were separated from effects on audience perception and behavior. Views, likes and shares do not, in isolation, prove brand identification or purchase intention.

4.3.1 Calvin Klein and Bad Bunny

On March 18, 2025, Calvin Klein launched the spring campaign starring Puerto Rican singer Bad Bunny, photographed and directed by Mario Sorrenti and dedicated to the Icon Cotton Stretch underwear line. The film used the song "EoO" by the artist himself and was shot in Puerto Rico, which, in the singer's words, made the experience "more special and genuine" (PVH Corp., 2025). The choice follows the brand's practice of associating its products with highly visible personalities and adds to the product meanings tied to the artist's music, culture and public identity.

As for the repercussion, FashionUnited (Adegeest, 2025), with data from Launchmetrics, reported US$8.4 million in Media Impact Value (MIV) in less than 48 hours, in addition to more than 56 million views and more than 3.7 million likes on Instagram and TikTok. MIV is a proprietary metric that estimates the value of the exposure obtained, including in print and online media; it is not revenue, profit or sales value. The indicators attest to visibility, not to a bond or to willingness to buy.

From the standpoint of identification, the presence of an admired figure may offer the audience symbolic elements with which to identify, and this is compatible with the idea of congruence between the brand's image and the consumer's (Maffezzolli & Prado, 2013). Identification with the artist, however, is not equivalent to identification with the advertised brand, and none of the sources consulted measured it. As for authenticity, the production in Puerto Rico, the use of the artist's own music and the emphasis on his public identity are signals that may favor the perception of coherence (PVH Corp., 2025), but, because authenticity is perceived (Södergren, 2021), it cannot be inferred from the repercussion. It is also relevant to recall that Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory and that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, so that the artist's relevance to this debate is tied to Latin cultural representation and not to immigrant status. The documents consulted do not allow us to claim that Calvin Klein intended to make a political statement.

4.3.2 Duolingo and Death of Duo

In February 2025, Duolingo announced the fictional death of its mascot, the owl Duo, in a campaign built on social media and expanded in response to the public's reaction. According to a Fast Company report, the initiative involved marketing, product and engineering teams, partnerships with other brands, among them McDonald's Brazil, and accumulated about 1.7 billion impressions in approximately two weeks, against an initial target of 70 million (Snelling, 2025). The team itself saw the action as consistent with the mascot's irreverent persona, and not as an isolated initiative, which is a sign of coherence with the brand's earlier communication (Snelling, 2025).

The campaign relies on the everyday mechanics of the product. The consecutive-day feature (*streak*) turns regular practice into a visible goal; in a publication by Duolingo itself (2022), the company reports that learners with a seven-day streak would be 3.6 times more likely to complete the course. This is a figure disclosed by the company, without accessible methodological detail, and should be read as such. In Death of Duo, the

narrative created on social media was connected to completing lessons in the app, and the brand offered the public a concrete action beyond the circulation of posts.

There is an additional reason to consider the campaign from the Generation Z perspective: Fisher and Yoon (2026) observed, among Instagram users, greater engagement by this generation across several motivations. The study, however, did not analyze Duolingo nor evaluate gamified campaigns, and serves only as context. In terms of the constructs, Duo's humor and personality may favor familiarity and closeness, and continuity with the earlier style supports a reading of coherence. None of this, however, is equivalent to deep identification or purchase intention: the public data do not report how many participants began to subscribe to paid plans, resumed their studies or changed their intention.

Table 5 — Case analysis matrix: what public sources allow us to claim

Category	Calvin Klein and Bad Bunny	Duolingo and Death of Duo
Sources	PVH Corp. (2025); Adegeest (2025)	Snelling (2025); Duolingo (2022); Fisher and Yoon (2026), as context
Reach and engagement	MIV of US$8.4 million in less than 48 hours; more than 56 million views and 3.7 million likes (Launchmetrics)	About 1.7 billion impressions in two weeks, against a target of 70 million
Signs of authenticity (not measured)	Production in Puerto Rico; the artist's own music; emphasis on public identity	Continuity with the mascot's irreverent persona, according to the company's team
Signs of identification (not measured)	Admiration for the artist and his cultural identity; not equivalent to identification with the brand	Familiarity with the mascot and participation in a collective narrative; not equivalent to deep identification
Evidence of purchase intention	None in the sources consulted; MIV is not revenue	None; no data on subscriptions or resumed studies
Analytical conclusion	Strong visibility; effects on the constructs not demonstrated	Strong reach and participation; effects on the constructs not demonstrated

Source: prepared by the authors (2026), based on the sources cited; the classification of signals is the authors' interpretation.

The comparison shows distinct strategies: Calvin Klein mobilizes the cultural meaning of a personality, whereas Duolingo articulates humor, narrative, gamification and participation. In both cases there are expressive reach indicators and signals compatible with authenticity and familiarity, but none of the public sources measures identification, perceived authenticity or purchase intention. The cases thus illustrate the central argument of this article: reach and engagement do not replace the measurement of the constructs.

5 DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Interpretation of the findings

The first finding is structural in nature: the four propositions find support in the literature, but none reaches consistent support. The relationship between identification and purchase intention (P1) is the best documented, in studies that show identification mediating the effects of social responsibility (Wu & Zhu, 2021) and associated with interactions in brand communities (Chan, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). This converges with the framework of Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), which treats identification as the basis of more favorable relationships with the company, but the difference between the constructs prevents a firmer conclusion. The relationship between authenticity and intention (P3) has direct studies (Silva & Almeida, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022), but in specific contexts and without a generational focus.

The least documented link is the one connecting authenticity and identification (P2). There are good conceptual reasons to expect it: if consumers resort to cues of authenticity to achieve goals related to the self (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) and if identification stems from the congruence between the personal image and that of the brand (Maffezzolli & Prado, 2013), it is plausible that brands perceived as genuine offer a better basis for identification. Plausibility, however, is not evidence, and this study avoids turning theoretical coherence into a result. The same holds for mediation (P4), whose only empirical analogy in the corpus tested another antecedent.

The second finding concerns Generation Z. The traits attributed to it, such as expression of identity, attention to ethics and familiarity with the digital environment (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), make authenticity and

identification natural candidates as explanatory factors, but the empirical studies on this generation mostly examine other determinants, such as attitudes (Ngo et al., 2024), hedonic motivations (Branca et al., 2025) and brand experience and image (Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). This result is relevant in itself: it shows that the link among authenticity, identification and purchase intention in Generation Z is a plausible and still little-tested hypothesis, and not an established fact.

The third finding comes from the documentary analysis and deserves emphasis for its practical usefulness. In two cases of wide repercussion, the public indicators record reach and engagement, not constructs. Confusion between the two planes is frequent in professional debate, and MIV, a proprietary exposure metric, illustrates the risk: an expressive value in millions of dollars of exposure reports neither revenue nor purchase intention. This caution also applies to academic research, since purchase intention itself is an imperfect indicator of behavior (Morwitz et al., 2007).

5.2 Implications

For theory, the study offers an explicit conceptual model, with testable propositions and levels of support, which allows researchers to identify where the evidence is weakest. For management, it suggests that decisions about communication for Generation Z not be based solely on reach and likes, and that the evaluation of campaigns include, whenever possible, the measurement of perceived authenticity, identification and purchase intention through validated instruments, such as the scales of Morhart et al. (2015) and of Maffezzolli and Prado (2013). It also suggests that authenticity be treated as the result of coherence between what the brand declares and what it does, and not as an attribute produced by communication.

5.3 Limitations

The limitations are relevant and should condition the reading. First, the review is narrative and PRISMA was used only as a transparency guide; the documented search was limited to Crossref and PubMed, which cover the marketing literature unevenly, and the second phase was directed, so that the corpus is not exhaustive and may reflect the authors' selection. Second, screening was done by a single reviewer, with the support of an artificial intelligence tool and without independent double-checking. Third, extraction was based on abstracts and metadata, and the foundation books (Samara & Morsch, 2005; Kotler & Keller, 2019; Limeira, 2017; Grubb, 2018) and the text by Tolbize (2008) were cited with the passages and pages indicated by the authors, without rechecking. Fourth, the case data are secondary and disclosed by the companies themselves or by specialized outlets, and Duolingo's streak figure is self-reported. Fifth, the report by Francis and Hoefel (2018) is an industry and descriptive one. Finally, the study did not collect data and therefore asserts nothing about effects, only about what the literature supports.

5.4 Research agenda

The results indicate four priority directions:

I. surveys with Generation Z samples, preferably not restricted to students, that measure perceived authenticity, identification and purchase intention with validated scales and test the complete chain through structural equation modeling;

II. experimental designs that manipulate cues of authenticity and verify their effect on identification and intention, to advance from association to causality;

III. studies that relate purchase intention to actual behavior, with sales or subscription data, and not only to stated intention;

IV. systematic reviews with searches in Scopus and Web of Science, a registered protocol and full-text extraction, which can expand and verify this map.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article analyzed, through an integrative review of 20 works and a documentary analysis of two cases, what the literature allows us to claim about the effects of perceived authenticity and brand identification on

Generation Z's purchase intention. It was concluded that the association between identification and intention (P1) and between authenticity and intention (P3) has moderate support, whereas the influence of authenticity on identification (P2) and the mediating role of identification (P4) have limited support. No work tests the complete chain with Generation Z.

The main contribution is the conceptual model with its propositions and the evidence map, which delimit what is established and what remains to be studied, in addition to the distinction between reach indicators and psychological constructs, illustrated by the Calvin Klein and Duolingo cases. The conclusions should be read in light of the limitations in Section 5.3, in particular the search in two indexes, extraction at the abstract level and the secondary nature of the case data. The natural follow-up is an empirical study with Generation Z consumers that tests the four propositions with validated instruments and makes it possible to know whether, and under what conditions, brands perceived as authentic and with which young people identify are converted into purchase intention.

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Data availability: no primary data were generated; the sources analyzed are listed in the References, and the criteria, queries and search figures are described in Section 2 and Figure 1.

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