Combined Effects of Brand Co-Creation, Customization on Brand Trust and WOM; Mediating Role of Perceived Brand Authenticity and Moderating Role of Need for Uniqueness (A Study From Islamic Perspective)

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Abstract:

The concept of authenticity in brands is the call of the hour. Despite the recent attempts towards the conceptualization of perceived brand authenticity, researchers seem unwilling to study the predecessors and impact of perceived brand authenticity on other variables and constructs in marketing research. Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, (2015) called for future research on the antecedents and consequences of perceived brand authenticity. Future researchers may study customization and co-creation engagement in relation with perceived brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015; Fritz, Schoenmueller, & Bruhn, 2017). This study is relational/ causal study. There is no researcher interference because of responses of variables within the natural settings of respondents. The survey is filled with customers using different brands and is part of brand fan pages. The study collected data from 200 customers using branded products through an online survey. Respondents were ensured about anonymity and confidentiality of data. From an Islamic perspective, results of the study are completely aligned with the teachings of Islam. Islam as stated earlier that Muslims should not spread the news that has no proof. The study suggests that the participants of customization and co-creation process have the proof and evidence to speak for the truth regarding a Brand/Product. This study

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provides useful implications for researchers and managers. The theoretical gap is answered by this study, further, this study urges managers for co-creation and customization.

Introduction

The research and development process of the companies are now influenced more by the consumers through co-creation by designing and managing an effective communication channel with consumers, (Semane et al., 2010). Unlike the past, the customers and companies are now working as partners, co-designers and co-creators in the innovative practices of companies. Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) conceptualized this advancement as "co-creation: the procedure in which both sides efficiently connect, learn, share data and incorporate assets to together to create value". Brodie et al., (2013) noted that if consumers were part of the creation of the product the attitude of consumers toward a product is more positive. If the company has been shown to empower the consumers, non-participative consumers will also have positive intentions towards their product (Fuchs & Schreier, 2011).

The functional variance among brands are turning out to be of little importance; consequently, the significance of 'soft' and emotional aspects like brand personality is being acknowledged by the marketers and researchers (Demirbag Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010). To be authentic, Holt (2002) states that "brands must be disinterested; they must be perceived as invented and disseminated by parties without an instrumental economic agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value" (p. 83).

An ever-increasing number of companies are offering consumers the possibility to customize their products, exactly as the customer wants. Enabling customers to personalize their good at the moment of purchase build feelings of ownership and product loyalty. However, despite the importance of a customized product as a vehicle to embed one's self-concept, research on factors related to a consumer's motivation to represent his/her identity into the customized product is scarce (Atakan, Bagozzi, & Yoon, 2014). Consumers attempt to signal their sense of self through product consumption (Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993). Levy (1959) first noted symbolic meaning in consumption in which people buy products not only for what they can do but also for what they mean" (p.118). In this context, customization is viewed as a mean of integrating an important aspect of the consumer psychological needs into the products, beyond simply increasing preference fit.

Highly self-authentic consumers uphold their beliefs and believe that they are better off being themselves rather than being popular, and value maintaining self-authenticity in their lives. Consumers who are more self-authentic emphasize sustaining self-authenticity in their lives are prone to engage in more genuine acts via consumption of customized products.

An initial attempt towards conceptualization and operationalization of brand authenticity was made by Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly (2014). Napoli et al., (2014) defined brand authenticity as "a subjective evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a brand by consumers" (p.2). Napoli et al., (2014) further argued that the concept of brand authenticity is multi-dimensional which include the perception of heritage, nostalgia, symbolism, sincerity, craftsmanship, quality commitment and design consistency.

Consumers' requirement for uniqueness is grounded in (Fromkin & Snyder, 1980) uniqueness hypothesis, which shows itself in the person's quest for material merchandise to separate themselves from others (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Customers' requirement for uniqueness is exhibited in three sorts of buyer conduct: innovative decision counter-congruity; disliked decision counter-similarity; and evasion of comparability.

(Blackshaw, 2008) discusses authenticity attributions as influencing factor on a brand's credibility. This finds support by the investigation of Napoli et al., (2014) who demonstrated a positive correlation between brand authenticity and its credibility perception as well as brand trust. Furthermore, (Morhart et al., 2015) verified an influencing effect of brand authenticity on emotional brand attachment. The relevance of authenticity for emotional bonds finds further support within the psychology literature, where authenticity is discussed as a major determinant of relationship well-being and commitment (Wickham, 2013). As behavioral consequences of brand authenticity, brand loyalty (Lu, Gursoy, & Lu, 2015), purchase intention (Lu, Gursoy, & Lu, 2015; Napoli et al., 2014) and the intention to recommend the brand (Morhart et al., 2015; Spiggle, Nguyen, & Caravella, 2012) are analyzed.

Research Gap/Problem Statement:

Although it is recognized that co-creation/interactive experience can produce engagement (Lusch, Vargo, & Tanniru, 2010), however, there are many instances of brand co-creation which shows that the interactive experiences of co-creation tasks do not always produce consumer engagement and foster brand relationships (Gebauer, Füller, & Pezzei, 2013). Hence, the mixed findings require clearer understanding. While many studies have examined co-creation, these studies have focused on the managerial effects of co-creation, such as economic gain (Ostrom,

2010; Zhao & Calantone, 2003), with little attention on the brand relationships building during the co-creation process.

Despite the recent early attempts towards the conceptualization of perceived brand authenticity, researchers seem unwilling to study the predecessors and impact of perceived brand authenticity on other variables and constructs in marketing research. As mentioned above, little work has been done on examination of antecedents and consequences of PBA. Researchers have called for future research on the antecedents and consequences of perceived brand authenticity (e.g. see Fritz et al., 2017; Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2016; Oishi et al., 2009). (Morhart et al., 2015) proposed that future researchers may study customization and co-creation engagement in relation with perceived brand authenticity.

In the light of above-cited literature, there are identified the need to explore the combined effect of co-creation, customization on psychological outcomes with mediating role of PBA and moderating role of need for uniqueness. This study will also explain the impact of psychological outcomes on word of mouth. The present study thereby provides an important contribution and augments our understanding on brand co-creation and customization. This study extends the literature by revealing the crucial psychological causes of brand co-creation engagement. Also, this study advances the understanding of the co-creation effects on psychological outcomes.

The Self-concept theory (Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, & Jordaan, 1963) along with self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986) acts as an overarching theory in this study, as it provides the basis to examine individuals' ability and desire to "know thy self" and expand it by inclusion of others i:e people, objects etc.

The self-concept comprises a cognitive and an affective understanding of who and what we are. Among the forms that it can take are the 'actual self' and the 'ideal self'. The actual self-represents our perceived reality of ourselves (that is, who and what I think I am now). In contrast, the ideal self-represents our construction of what we would like to be or to become. Consumers achieve self-congruence by consuming a brand with traits that we consider to represent either the actual or ideal self.

Self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986) places that individuals have an inalienable inspiration to fuse others (in our specific situation, brands) into their self-idea. In any case, such a fuse of a brand into the self may rely upon the apparent level of a brand's authenticity. This provides justification for the fact that people are inherently motivated and may use co-creation and customization as a mechanism to incorporate the authentic brand into their self-concept.

The significance of the study

This study also carries significance towards practice. Knowing the results of this study, brand managers would be in a better position to make strategies regarding their brands with relevant products/services. Managers can make better customer engagement programs like involving them in making the product look like they want it to be, giving them options to change specifications of the products/services as they like and etc. By doing this, managers can make customers feel the product/service more relevant to them and more original in its making as they themselves were involved in the production design of the product. These feelings of costumer will eventually translate into different positive consumer behaviors and positive attitudes of the person in life like an emotional attachment to the brand, high self-esteem, high loyalty to the brand and likewise. This positivity of costumer will change into the purchase of the very same

product. This means that if these strategies are properly made and executed by the brand managers, brands will become highly profitable and organization's success in the long term will be ensured.

Objectives of the study

Aiming to enhance the body of knowledge by exploring antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity, the study also examined for moderation of need for uniqueness in the relationship of the antecedents of brand authenticity and itself. The specific objective of the study is: To examine the antecedents of perceived brand authenticity by assuming customization and co-creation engagement as predictors of perceived brand authenticity. To examine the impact of perceived brand authenticity on brand trust. To examine the moderating role of need for the uniqueness of the relationship of co-creation, engagement, customization and perceived brand authenticity. Further, the study aims to elaborate and explain the relationship between co-creation, customization, PBA, Brand trust and WoM from an Islamic perspective.

Islam prohibits Muslims from spreading WOM which is not verified.

"O you who believe! If a Faasiq (evil person) comes to you with any news, verify it, lest you should harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful for what you have done" [al-Hujuraat 49:6]. This verse suggests that one cannot say anything about anything by merely listening to a new. This verse can be explained in the context of Brand or product that, without verifying a feature, or characteristics a Muslim cannot spread word of mouth.

In this context, a consumer who has actively participated in co-creation/ customization of a product is the one who will have authentic information or information with proof.

"Say (O Muhammad), Produce your proof if you are truthful" [al-Baqarah:111]

The Quranic word "Al-Amanah" or what can be translated to English as "Trust". The subject of Trust is so important in our daily lives: If people trust one another (consumers and brands) and if they act accordingly, they will live in peace and harmony. If we do not trust one another and we do not act righteously, we will create a state of anarchy, confusion and disturbance in the society by selling and consuming products that do not satisfy the right needs and wants of society.

Allah (SWT) instructed us to put our trust in Him because Allah Himself is the One Who fulfills His promises. He commanded us to fulfil our own promises, too. He says in Surah Al-Nisa' (The Women): "God doth command you to render back your Trusts to those to whom they are due; …" (Noble Qur'an, 4:58).

The brand that is not authentic that is not true to itself and its consumers may not succeed in the long run. Falsehood has nothing to stand on and is exposed when confronted by the truth. The Quran says: "The Truth has come and falsehood vanished. Surely falsehood is ever bound to vanish." — 17: 81.

Literature Review:

Brand Co-creation:

Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2000, 2004) postulated that the market has become a place where active customers request the opportunity to be involved in the value-creation process. Co-creation marks the shifting landscape of consumer–company interactions and it redefines the meaning of value and the process of value creation. (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) defined co-creation as the dynamic interaction and involvement of customers with their suppliers in every phase of

the value-creation process. In general, there are two types of co-creation: co-creation initiated by consumers, such as consumer participation in knowledge co-creation in blogs (Seraj, 2012) and firm-sponsored co-creation, where co-creation is conducted on behalf of a firm. This research focuses on firm-sponsored co-creation, which is usually established to enhance firm innovation. A prevailing method for encouraging co-creation is to establish innovation contests that invite consumers to team up and generate new product ideas (Füller, 2010).

Prior research shows several key topics in consumer co-creation concerning the new product development process: consumer-level motivators, firm-level factors and outcomes of co-creation (Hoyer et al., 2010). Past studies on consumer-level motivators have focused on differing motivators and psychological reasons that drive consumers to participate in co-creation such as increased status, social esteem, self-efficacy (Nambisan & Baron, 2009), recognition (Hennig-Thurau, 2004), altruism (Füller, Hutter, & Fries, 2012), and delayed rewards such as future job offers (Lerner & Tirole, 2002).

The literature on the outcomes of co-creation has mainly focused on the advantages and effectiveness that are brought by a closer fit of co-created product such as increased commercial value (Fang, Palmatier, & Evans, 2008) and psychological ownership, which may increase purchase demand (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003; Fuchs, Prandelli, & Schreier, 2010). However, these studies seldom examined brand relationships as an outcome of co-creation. The brand relationship, despite its importance, has seldom been discussed in the contexts of co-creation, innovation and new product development. Our research aims to bridge this important research gap in co-creation outcome.

Perceived Brand Authenticity:

Authenticity or being authentic means "genuine" in English literature which means that something is unique and original. Word authenticity has been used in managerial and consumer behaviour research in different meanings (Beverland, 2005; Napoli et al., 2014). It has been used to refer sincerity, innocence and originality (Fine, 2003). Authenticity has also been used to refer something as being natural, honest, and simple (Boyle, 2003). Authenticity for consumers is something they evaluate in products or services.

Since the seminal work of (Napoli et al., 2014) the area of perceived brand authenticity is gaining importance in consumer behaviour research. (Morhart et al., 2015) noted that a definition of perceived brand authenticity acceptable to all is still a question. (Beverland, 2006) noted that such brands are assumed by consumers to be made by artists. (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000) noted that such brands are natural and are composed of natural ingredients.

On conceptual side, different authors have operationalized the concept of PBA in different ways. Eggers et al., (2013) proposed that PBA as perceived by chief executive officers of Small and medium enterprises to be composed of three elements which are brand consistency, brand customer orientation, and brand congruency. Another possible operationalization of the variable has been done by Morhart et al., (2015). Morhart et al., (2015) have tried to develop a definition of PBA acceptable to all. They have conceptualized PBA from three perspectives: Objectivist perspective i.e., evaluation of authenticity of brand from "an evidence-based reality that can be assessed using verifiable information about the brand, such as labels of origin" (p.7), constructivist perspective i.e. evaluation of authenticity of brand based on perceptions of

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consumers regarding abstract impressions and lastly externalist perspective which evaluates authenticity of brand based on brand's ability to be a source of identity for consumer.

Despite the newness of the area, few different studies have examined the antecedents and consequences of PBA. Eggers et al., (2013) studied PBA in relation to brand trust. Using data from CEO's of 285 SME's from Germany, Eggers et al., (2013) found that brand authenticity significantly relates to brand trust and thus can be helpful in the growth of the firm. At the same time, Similarly, Morhart et al., (2015) studied PBA in relation with emotional brand attachment and word of mouth and found support for the proposed relations. This thus provides an opportunity to explore more antecedents and consequences of PBA.

Co-creation engagement and perceived brand authenticity

Brand co-creation is gaining huge importance in the current world. Co-creation is a type of consumer collaboration where consumer collaborates with a producer in the production of the product (Hsieh & Chang, 2016). (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003) noted that central idea behind the concept of co-creation is the competitiveness of the product.

Previous research on co-creation has shown that co-creation can play an important role in building brand relationships (Füller, 2010). Previous research has also examined the relationship between co-creation engagement and certain types of consumer's behaviours. Central to co-creation engagement is the idea of brand-self connection. Co-creation engagement promotes the connection of oneself with the brand and consumer at times can feel the brand as a part of themselves. Brand co-creation will enhance the feelings of recognition of costumers as they feel enlightened to be a part of manufacturing of the the products. This means that costumers will perceive brand as a part of their self-identity. This feeling of self-identity at the same time will

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lead to the consumer to see brand as a symbol i.e. will perceive brand authentic (as symbolism is a dimension of PBA).

Consider this thing from perspective of self-determination theory; SDT argues that motivation comes from the satisfaction individual needs. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-esteem/ self-actualization needs are the most top-ranked needs of individuals. Co-creation as previously argued enhances the self-esteem of consumers. This means that co-creation is a source of fulfilment of needs and thus a source of motivation which will lead the consumer to think off a brand as credible.

Take the perspective of self-esteem theory. Self-esteem is a spontaneous, natural, and unconscious evaluation of the self that affects unprompted responses to self-relevant stimuli (Bosson, Swann Jr, & Pennebaker, 2000). Because people generally assess self-related stimuli more favourably than stimuli not associated with self, it is likely that positive self-evaluation is transferred to the object (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Co-creation engagement makes people think off as a producer of the product and make the product appear more relevant to the individual. Individuals would thus translate this positivity associated from relevance of brand with self to the brand and this will lead them to perceive the brand as relevant to them and thus authentic. This study thus proposes that:

H1: Brand co-creation engagement has a significant positive impact on perceived brand authenticity.

Customization and Perceived brand Authenticity:

Customization is the answer to the needs of today's costumer (Fiore, Lee, & Kunz, 2004). Customization allows individuals to experience what they want to have i.e. be unique and tap up

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their individual need (Lee & Moon, 2015). Customization has usually been seen as mass customization. Mass customization refers to delivering a product or service which meets individual consumer's needs (Tseng, Jiao, & Merchant, 1996). (Tseng & Hu, 2014) argued that customization is based on the concept of making costumer as co-designer. The concept of co-designer is one in which the customer is able to get access to the design process, such as concept design and product development, by expressing the requirements or even co-designing the product with the configuration toolkit (Tseng & Piller, 2003).

When consumer has a customized product or brand his/her feelings of having a unique product will arise. When consumer realizes that he has what he actually wants, he will feel delighted because of the perceptions of uniqueness. Customization will allow an individual to experience feelings of relatedness of brands. Costumer will feel product to be more related and relevant to his or herself which will cause him/her to perceive the product as more genuine and hence authentic.

Customization will allow an individual to design the brand the way he/she wants it to be. This will make the product part of individual's self-concept and the individual will feel the brand to be his part and himself to be a part of the brand family. This feeling of the brand as part of self at the same time will allow individual to perceive the brand as a symbolic icon. These perceptions of symbolism will also cause the brand to be perceived as authentic by costumers.

Customization specifically personalization involves proactive participation by costumers. Product's relevance to the person is enhanced in personalization (Tseng & Hu, 2014). When a consumer himself is involved in making the product, his cognitive patterns would allow him to perceive the product as genuine. The product will be perceived as more credible, having high

integrity and symbol by the consumer i.e. customized brand will be perceived as an authentic brand. Thus, this study proposes that:

H2: Brand customization has a significant positive impact on perceived brand authenticity.

Perceived brand authenticity and brand trust:

Marketing aims to generating a bond between brand and costumer (consumer) and brand trust is required to make this bond existent (Hiscock, 2002). (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003) defined brand trust as: "Feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that it is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer" (p.11)

Recent past decade has seen fall in trust of consumers towards brands. Researchers have also documented such a decrease in trust towards the brand (Gerzema & Lebar, 2008). As such this downfall in trust was the main reason behind the rise of the phenomenon of brand authenticity. Researchers have also started to note this phenomenon that authenticity leads to brand trust (Balmer, 2011; Eggers et al., 2013). Authentic brands are credible, have integrity and serve as a symbol (Morhart et al., 2015). Credibility and integrity builds trust on the brands. This means that more a person perceives the brand as authentic the more he/she will trust that brand.

On the empirical side, Eggers et al., (2013) examined the relationship between perceived brand authenticity and brand trust. Using data from 285 CEO's of German small and medium-sized enterprises and applying SEM their results showed that perceptions of the authenticity of brand positively influence the feelings of trust towards that brand.

From another perspective, as they call it "Person-organization fit" (Ostroff & Judge, 2007) in managerial literature. P-O fit represents the congruence between the values of employees and

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his/her organization. Extending this notion of P-O fit into a consumer-brand relationship, congruent values of individual consumer and brand result incongruency between employee behaviours and organization's values (Eggers et al., 2013). Congruency itself is implicitly an important component of PBA. From organization's point of view, it is important to exhibit same values continuously rather than changing values with changing trends (Faust & Householder, 2009), as continuity of values is a dimension of PBA (Morhart et al., 2015). This continuity in values would thus not only be a source of PBA but will also yield trust in that brand. Keeping in line with the above discussion, this study proposes that:

H3: Perceived brand authenticity has a significant positive impact on brand trust.

Brand Trust and Word of mouth

WOM refers to sharing opinion from one consumer to another, and the conclusive stage in the consumer decision that convinces people to use the products or services and enter deep into the target audience, delivering reliable messages that are proven to change behaviors and attitudes, in offices, homes, schools, on blogs and social networking sites (SNSs), wherever consumers naturally talk (Shah, Schmierbach, Hawkins, Espino, & Donavan, 2002). According to Baloglu & McCleary, (1999), WOM has the most positive impact on customer's perceived image rather than three others including professional advice, advertisements, and book/movies/news. Research indicated that 76 per cent of all purchase decisions is impacted by WOM. It has been estimated that there are 3.4 billion WOM conversations each day and 2.3 billion of those are about brands (Balter, 2008). Previous researchers attempted to understand the effects of WOM on customer's behaviours.

Trust has been defined as one person believing that the other person will satisfy his or her needs. In terms of services, trust is the opinion held by a customer that the service provider will provide the service that meets consumer needs. A more general definition of trust is that a party has confidence in the reliability and honesty of his partner (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This definition can be used in different contexts, including exchanges of products and services. According to (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007), at one level, the consumer trusts one specific sales representative while at another level, the consumer trusts the institution.

From a theoretical perspective, trust work has an information surrogate if no information about the quality of products or services is available. Therefore, trust can be viewed as an indicator for the general reliability of the supplier and as an information substitute for all kinds of information which would otherwise need to be used to assess a product's or service's quality (Adler & Barnett, 1998). In fact, the trust of a consumer is a valuable and significant asset for a company. An unsatisfied customer can spread the word about the bad quality in the market and thus keep other consumers from buying this specific brand. Accordingly, a consumer can assume that a trusted company is motivated to offer high-quality products. Finally, existing studies show that trust affects relationship commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and customer loyalty (Aydin & Özer, 2005) in a positive way. Thus, if a consumer trusts a corporate brand he/she is likely to form a positive behavioural intention towards the brand and spread positive word of mouth.

H4: Brand Trust has a significant positive impact on word of mouth.

Moderating role of Consumers' need for uniqueness on Co-creation and PBA

(Tian et al., 2001) noted that the need of consumer to differentiate from the products other are using lies in the motivation to appear different from others and the need gets stronger when consumer feel

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any threat to his personal identity (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). More formally need for the uniqueness of consumers' can be defined as: "the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image and social image" (Tian et al., 2001).

In a world of 'fake' brands, consumers' with a high need for uniqueness would require the brand they use to be original. Need for uniqueness by consumers would cause them to be more tilted towards the brand they feel are closer i.e. relevant to them. Researchers have also noted that psychological traits are linked with a symbolic view of brands. Psychological traits like conformity and need for uniqueness have been associated with a symbolic view of the brand (Nunes, 2009; Simonson & Nowlis, 2000). Symbolism is also a dimension of perceived brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015). This means that consumers' need for uniqueness is actually linked with PBA.

When consumers' unique needs combine with the opportunity to fulfil those needs, the combined effect would definitely create more worth of the end product. When making a purchase decision that perceived worth of the brand will come into play and consumer will be more prone to make a purchase decision in favour the brand he/she had co-created keeping in view his/her need for uniqueness in that brand. The consumer will take this decision because now he/she will feel that product to be more relevant to him/her, more genuine, more reliable and will see that brand as having better quality. All of these attributes are what is called as PBA according to Morhart et al., (2015).

Further, when consumers' need for uniqueness interacts with opportunity to make those needs part of a product will cause individual to see that brand as a part of his/her self; because now the

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consumer sees brand as what they want it to be, they will see it as something which is a reflection of them or their needs. They will the brand as part of their selves and self-concept. This will lead an individual to perceive the brand as more authentic. Thus, this study proposes that:

H5a: Consumers' need for uniqueness will moderate the relation between co-creation engagement and PBA in such a way that will be stronger when the consumers' need for uniqueness will be higher.

Moderating role of Consumers' need for uniqueness on customization and PBA:

Previously, it was developed in the study that consumers' need for uniqueness effects PBA and customization also does so. When consumers need to have a unique brand for himself/herself interacts with an avenue to customize the brand by themselves, they would feel more delighted as they can actually do what they want to do.

This combination of need and chance to fulfil it, i.e. to actually design a brand as you like will foster the feelings of the relevance of that particular brand with the individual. Costumer will feel the brand to be more like what he wants to have. These feelings of the relevance of brand with individual will enhance the perceptions of the individual regarding the brand to be credible and indeed authentic.

Consider the relationship with the same concept of brand as a part of self. When a customer has a brand which is according to his needs and he has designed the product by himself i.e. his need has been met by customizing the product by himself in a way he wants to have it, the customer will feel that product to be a part of himself more than a product which hasn't been designed by him and doesn't meet his needs. These feelings of the brand to be part of a person's self and self-

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concept will generate the feelings of credibility, continuity and integrity. At the same time, as the customer perceives the product as part of his self-concept, he will see the product as a symbol. All of these things show that the perceptions of the authenticity of the brand will increase in this way i.e. when the need for uniqueness interacts with a chance to customize the brand according to costumer's will. This discussion points out that:

H5b: Consumers' need for uniqueness will moderate the relation between customization and PBA in such a way that will be stronger when consumers' need for uniqueness will be higher

The mediating role of PBA

The mediating role of PBA in the relationship between co-creation engagement and brand trust

The downfall in trust was the main reason behind the rise of the phenomenon of brand authenticity. Practitioners were calling for authenticity in brands from a long time to counter the downfall in brand trust (Eggers et al., 2013). Researchers have also started to note this phenomenon that authenticity leads to brand trust (Balmer, 2011; Eggers et al., 2013).

Congruency is implicitly an important component of PBA. The more a person feels brand's values to be in line with his personal values, the more trust he exhibits on the brand. From organization's point of view, it is important to exhibit same values continuously rather than changing values with changing trends (Faust & Householder, 2009), as continuity of values is a dimension of PBA (Morhart et al., 2015). This continuity in values would thus not only be a source of PBA but will also yield trust in that brand. Keeping in line with the above discussion, this study proposes that:

H6: PBA will mediate in the relationship between co-creation engagement and brand trust:

The mediating role of PBA in the relationship between customization and brand trust

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Through customization apparatuses, we purchaser may have upgraded brand mindfulness which in-turn may lead towards mark trust and devotion. Among few examinations expecting to fill this hole, (Kim et al., 2008) contend that the blend of brand affiliation and brand mindfulness positively affects clients' behavioural devotion which originates from behavioural affiliations. Romaniuk & Nenycz-Thiel (2013) additionally contend that there is minimal exact proof supporting the connection between a purchaser's image affiliations and his/her future buying behaviour. Their investigation reports that behavioural brand devotion is decidedly identified with buyer mark affiliation. Comparable findings are accounted for by (Alexandris et al., 2008).

Perceived authenticity has been contended to expand the level of trust. Believe itself is a hazard oriented construct, which is critical in circumstances where the trusting party is uncertain of future activities of the trust-taker (Buil et al., 2013; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). The apparent hazard comes about out of the vulnerability that the trust-taker will fulfill an errand in light of a legitimate concern for the trusting party already guaranteed unequivocally or certainly (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Rotter, 1980). The conjectured constructive influence of authenticity on trust can be hypothetically clarified as the future activities of valid individuals or dependable individuals are probably going to be steady with their past conduct and consequently, appreciate the extensively higher consistency of full filled guarantees. As their conduct is essentially driven by their personality, authentic individuals/brands take after directing standards. Subsequently, associations with authentic individuals/brands are accordingly more sensible and live longer (Chan, 2005).

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) characterized brand trust as the conviction that the brand will fulfill its brand promise. There is an unanimity in the writing that the view of brand capacities and brand expectations are important for anybody to put stock in a brand (Delgado-Ballester et

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al., 2003). Brand capacities are specialized in nature which is tried and true on the ability of organization/brand and henceforth in light of customers' convictions that the brand has the fitness to fulfill its brand promise. Brand goals are motivational basically and they are established on the conviction that the brand will act to the greatest advantage of its clients to satisfy brand guarantee. Brand credibility is speculated as positively affecting these two basic confide in segments: consistency and congruity serve in a more extensive sense as verification of brand capacities which in turn increment the level of trust.

H7: PBA will mediate in the relationship between customization and brand trust.

Research Model
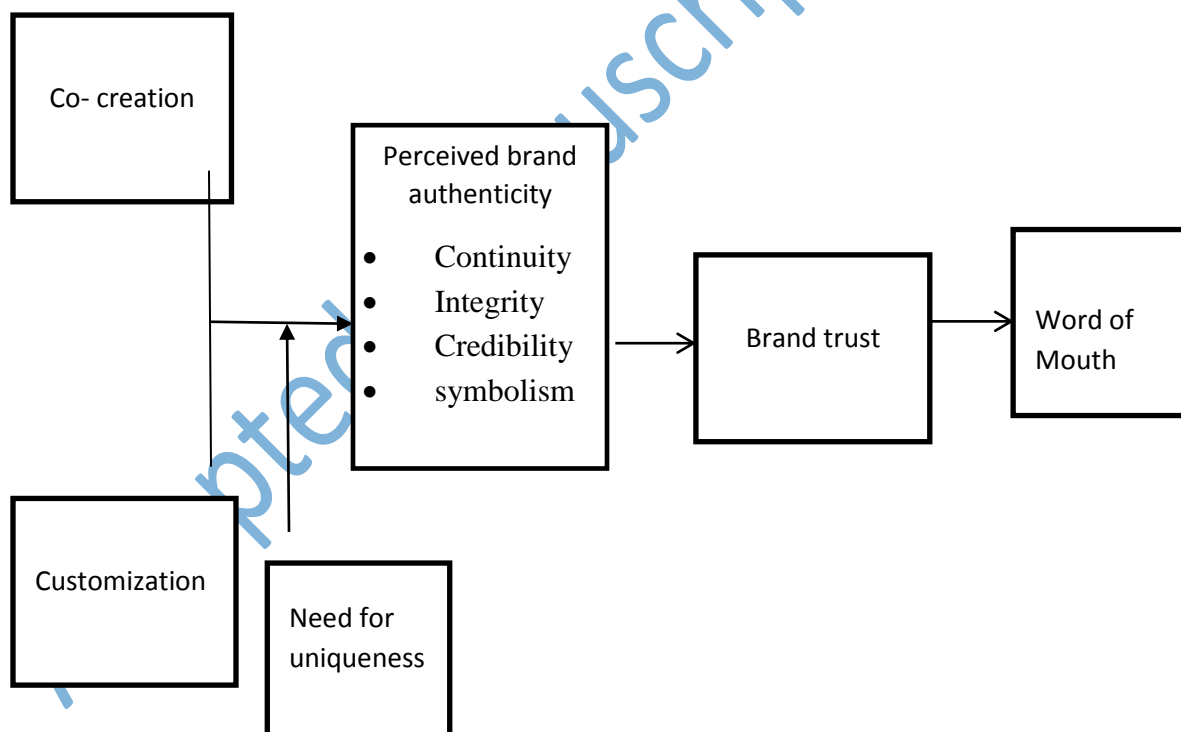
METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedures

There are several procedures used for the survey as per desire and convenience of researchers like in-person interviews, telephone interviews, mailed questionnaires and online questionnaires. For any method survey group is targeted as population, size is determined as sample size; sampling techniques are decided and measurement instruments are selected. All these procedures are discussed as follows:

Sekaran & Bougie (2016) stated that sampling is the process of selecting the unit from a population of interest for impartial simplification of results of our study. There are many cases where it is not possible to cover the whole population. In this situation, sampling delivers better choice and makes valid results because in a short period of time it is covering a research population. A popular form of non-probability sampling convenient so that data sampling collected by members of the population who are readily available. This research used convenience sampling technique 200 responses were generated. At the general level, current study measured the different construct from previous studies and responses are to be given on a 5-point scale. These items, the sources from where the items are adapted are summarized below.

Measures

Brand co-creation engagement was measured by 12 item scale developed by Hsieh & Chang (2016). Hsieh & Chang (2016) developed scale on co-creation engagement using a scale of (Schaufeli & Salanova, n.d.) engagement. The scale is further divided into three parts which are vigour, dedication and absorption. A sample item from all three parts is "when I work on the task for the brand contest, I feel bursting with energy", "To me, my task in the brand contest is

challenging", "When I work on the task for the brand contest, I forget everything else around me". Study deployed 39 item scale of Lee and Moon (2015) to measure customization. The scale was originally made for online customization. The scale is adopted with minor modifications. The study used an 8-item scale of Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Aleman, and Yague-Guillen (2003). The scale consists of two parts i.e. viability and intentionality. One Sample item for both is "Brand [X] gives me confidence and certainty in the consumption of a [product]" and "Brand [X] would make any effort to make me satisfied". Word-of-mouth is usually defined as an exchange, flow of information, communication, or conversation between two individuals (Goyette, Ricard, Bergeron, & Marticotte, 2010). The study used 14 item scale of Morhart et al., (2015). Scale covers four dimensions of PBA which are continuity, credibility, integrity and symbolism. A sample item for each dimension is: "I will prefer a brand with a history", "I will prefer a brand that will not betray you", "I will prefer a brand that gives back to its consumers", "I will prefer a brand that adds meaning to people's lives". The study used 31 item scale of Tian, Bearden, & Hunter (2001). One sample item is "Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image"

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM):

Study deployed SEM for analyzing data. In case of multiple IV's and DV's, it is better to go for SEM. SEM is a comprehensive approach towards analysis of primary data. Results are easier to interpret and are clear in visual form. SEM allows to conduct and combine a vast variety of statistical procedures, it can be seen as a speedy sports car (Nachtigall, Kroehne, Funke, & Steyer, 2003).

Point of concern in SEM is goodness fit of the model and direct and indirect effects. For goodness fit, different criteria are used which include goodness fit index, adjusted goodness fit index, RMSEA and chi sq/ d.f. For all of these criteria, it is the value of factor on which these criteria depend which decides that whether the model is a good fit or poor fit. In case of direct and indirect effect, (i.e. regression) point of concern is an estimate and its p-value. The hypothesis is accepted if the p-value is less than 0.05.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS:

Structural equation modelling is used to analyze data (Amos). Table 1 represents the results of correlation and reliability of measures. Table 3 contains the results of structural equation modelling.

For the overall evaluation of the causal model, multiple model fit indices were analyzed. The model fit indices include chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio, GFI (goodness-fit index), AGFI (adjusted goodness-fit index), CFI (comparative fit index), NFI (normed fit index) and RMSEA (root mean squared error of approximation). Model is a good fit if the value of GFI, AGFI, CFI, and NFI are above or equal to 0.9 and RMSEA is below or equal to 0.8 (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). As per (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) the value of chi-sq/Df should be less than 5. The test statistics of the model provide following results: 2 /df 2.391, GFI 0.930, AGFI 0.911, CFI 0.956, NFI 0.927, and RMSEA 0.044.

Table 01: Correlation Analysis & Reliability of Measures.

|	CC	C	NfU	PBA	BT	WoM
CC	1(.76)					
C	.423**	1(.71)				
NfU	.429**	.465**	1(.70)			
PBA	.505**	.570**	.568**	1(.74)		
BT	.455**	.509**	.497**	.599**	1(.77)	
WoM	.575**	.480**	.539**	.619**	.498**	1(.72)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

n= 202, reliability in parenthesis.

Table 2: Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

Hypotheses		Estimates	P	Accepted/Rejected
Co-creation	<--- Perceived brand authenticity	.196	.005	Supported
Customization	<--- Perceived brand authenticity	.119	.000	Supported
Perceived brand authenticity	<--- Brand trust	.023	.021	Supported
Brand trust	<---Word-of-mouth	.181	.000	Supported
Need for Uniqueness	<---Word-of-mouth	.174	.000	Supported
CCxNfU	<--- Perceived brand authenticity	.009	.041	Supported
CxNfU	<--- Perceived brand authenticity	.178	.013	Supported
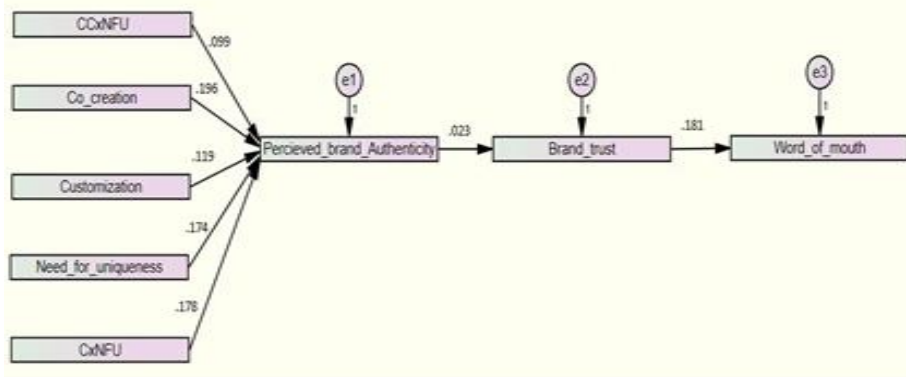
Discussion

The hypothesis of the study was based on the literature and are supported by the results. When customers are involved in the creation of brand and view brand as more relate-able to them, the brand is perceived as more authentic, and the brands that are authentic are more trustworthy than those which are not. Trustworthiness of brand eventually leads to positive word of mouth.

Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2000, 2004) suggested that the market has become a place where active customers request the opportunity to be involved in the value-creation process which makes the perception of the brand as authentic. Also, authentic brands are credible, have integrity and serve as a symbol. Credibility and integrity build trust in the brand. This means that more a person perceives the brand as authentic the more he/she will trust that brand (Morhart et al., 2015).

The findings of this research are completely endorsing this fact and supporting the existing body of knowledge which has been used in this research.

From an Islamic perspective, results of the study are completely aligned with the teachings of Islam. Islam as stated earlier that Muslims should not spread the news that has no proof. The study suggests that the participants of customization and co-creation process have the proof and evidence to speak for the truth regarding a Brand/product.

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In Surah-Al-Baqarah (The Cow), Allah says, "Thus have we made of you an Ummah justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Apostle a witness over yourselves,"(2:143). Islam urges Muslims to be a witness over the nation and oneself and speaks truth whenever asked about it. Importance of truth and authenticity is further depicted in following verses pertaining to Day of Judgment.

"Say: Our Lord will gather us together, then He will judge between us with the truth." —34: 26

Limitations and Directions for Future Research:

Some limitations related to the research design need to be acknowledged. First, data were collected at the single time. The longitudinal or experimental design may enhance the generalizability of the study. Different product categories were used across the studies. Although this product category was selected based on the literature, future research on the generalizability of the current results to other more products and services in a category would be beneficial.

In addition, future research concerning the long-term consequences of brand authenticity would be interesting. While we show that brand authenticity impacts behavioral intentions, it is still questionable whether brand authenticity impacts customer lifetime value, for example, and therefore builds customer equity. Future research might also consider a comparison of the determinants and consequences of brand authenticity across cultures, as certain antecedents, such as actual self-congruence, are assumed to be weighted differently in different cultures.

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