

RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Does Fit Always Fit? The Paradox of Brand–Cause Misfit and Authenticity

Christina Papadopoulou¹  | Magnus Hultman²  | Pejvak Oghazi^{3,4,5} 

¹Leeds University Business School, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK | ²Goodman School of Business, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada | ³School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden | ⁴School of Management, University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland | ⁵University of Economics and Human Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

Correspondence: Magnus Hultman (mhultman@brocku.ca)

Received: 22 June 2026 | **Revised:** 25 August 2026 | **Accepted:** 27 August 2026

Keywords: brand authenticity | brand–cause misfit | discovery-oriented approach | paradoxical thinking | perceived risk

ABSTRACT

Brand–cause research generally treats coherence between a brand and a social cause as a prerequisite for authenticity, leaving unexplained why some moderately misfitting initiatives are judged more authentic than expected. We develop a paradox-based process account in which authenticity arises not only from coherence but also from consumers' both-and accommodation of an interpretable contradiction. Using femvertising as the empirical context, we follow a discovery-oriented sequence. A literature synthesis and semi-structured interviews generated the proposed mechanism. Study 1, using six real campaigns, tested whether moderate brand–cause misfit influences authenticity through paradoxical thinking and perceived brand risk. Study 2, a controlled experiment with a fictitious brand, tested campaign orientation and promise type as boundary conditions. The qualitative findings show that interpretable misfit leads consumers to acknowledge commercial motives and social value simultaneously and to consider what the campaign places at stake for the brand. Study 1 supports a serial indirect path from misfit through paradoxical thinking and perceived risk to authenticity. Study 2 shows that misfit enhances authenticity under activism-oriented framing and substantive promises, whereas fit is favored under brand-focused, symbolic conditions. The findings revise the coherence-centered view of brand authenticity and specify when perceived brand exposure functions as a credibility cue rather than a liability.

1 | Introduction

Brands increasingly engage with social and cultural issues as a way to express values and connect with audiences beyond product attributes, and industry evidence suggests that empowerment messaging is commercially consequential: consumers reward brands they perceive as acting with authentic intent and withdraw support when campaigns appear performative (Ipsos 2025). As empowerment advertising becomes ubiquitous, authenticity becomes both more valuable and harder to signal, precisely because similar claims are now widely expected.

Dominant thinking treats brand–cause fit as the main route to authenticity: campaigns are assumed to be more credible when

empowerment messages align with the brand's category, history and associations (Aaker and Keller 1990; Becker-Olsen et al. 2006). Applied to femvertising, this implies that beauty, hygiene and fashion brands should enjoy an authenticity advantage when speaking about women's lives, while brands in more distant categories should face skepticism. Existing research nonetheless offers a fragmented account of how audiences actually form authenticity judgments in this domain, particularly where fit is ambiguous or contested.

Empirical findings point to a persistent tension. On the one hand, highly expected empowerment campaigns are frequently scrutinized for “femwashing” and dismissed as routine or

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

© 2026 The Author(s). *Psychology & Marketing* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC.

opportunistic (Sterbenk et al. 2022). On the other hand, less obvious brand–cause pairings are sometimes judged as credible, indeed, even more authentic, when they appear deliberate, thoughtful, or meaningful (Vredenburg et al. 2020; DeMotta et al. 2024). Taken together, these patterns raise a fundamental question for femvertising research: if brand–cause fit is central to authenticity, why can moderate, intelligible misfit sometimes elicit stronger authenticity judgments than campaigns that appear perfectly “on brand”?

We argue that resolving this tension requires moving beyond linear “more fit is better” assumptions and toward a process account of how consumers construct authenticity judgments from empowerment messaging under conditions of fit and misfit. Drawing on paradox theory, which treats tensions as persistent and interdependent rather than permanently resolvable (Smith and Lewis 2011; Schad et al. 2016), we propose that moderate, interpretable brand–cause misfit can activate paradoxical thinking. This both-and mode of reasoning allows consumers to accommodate simultaneous, seemingly opposing interpretations (Miron-Spektor et al. 2018). In femvertising, misfit can invite consumers to hold together the idea that a campaign may be commercially motivated and still potentially meaningful. This paradoxical stance can heighten attention to what the campaign might cost the brand, including reputational vulnerability or stakeholder backlash, thereby increasing perceived risk exposure (Blais and Weber 2006; Weber et al. 2002). Because willingness to incur risk has been identified as a cue of commitment in adjacent work on brand activism and authenticity (Beverland 2005; Morhart et al. 2015; Vredenburg et al. 2020), perceived risk can, in turn, function as a signal of authentic intent. In this way, misfit need not undermine authenticity; under identifiable conditions, it may strengthen it. Accordingly, this research addresses two questions: When can moderate, interpretable brand–cause misfit enhance rather than undermine perceived brand authenticity, and through what psychological process does this effect occur? We further examine whether campaign orientation and promise type condition the effect of misfit on authenticity.

This research makes three contributions. First, it reframes brand–cause fit as an interpretive cue rather than a structural property of the brand–cause pairing, and shows that its meaning depends on the dimension against which it is evaluated: misfit relative to category or normative scripts operates differently from misfit relative to a brand’s observable conduct. Second, it specifies the process through which misfit becomes authenticity. Existing accounts explain either why incongruity is processed or why costly acts are credible, but not how an audience arrives at the judgment that a campaign is costly when no cost has been declared. We show that moderate, interpretable misfit activates paradoxical thinking, and that this both-and stance is what makes the brand’s exposure salient, so that the credibility signal is constructed by the consumer rather than sent by the firm. Third, it identifies the conditions under which each route to authenticity operates, showing that coherence sustains authenticity under brand-focused, symbolic conditions whereas contradiction does so under activism-oriented, substantive conditions. Taken together, the findings qualify the coherence-based view of brand authenticity rather than replacing it, and explain why some of the most authentic-seeming empowerment

campaigns emerge not from where audiences expect them most, but from where they least expect them.

2 | Discovery-Oriented Approach Overview

To investigate these dynamics we adopt a four-stage discovery-oriented approach (DOA) integrating theory synthesis, qualitative discovery and experimental testing (Menon et al. 1999). Consistent with abductive theorizing in under-specified domains (Edmondson and McManus 2007), Stage 1 synthesizes the fragmented literature on authenticity and brand–cause (mis)fit in femvertising; Stage 2 uses qualitative inquiry to surface how consumers interpret fit and misfit (Spiggle 1994); Stage 3 integrates the two into a process model and its boundary conditions; and Stage 4 tests the mechanism and moderators experimentally. Figure 1 summarizes the DOA.

2.1 | Stage 1: Literature Review

Stage 1 synthesizes existing research on brand authenticity in femvertising. A detailed overview of the studies reviewed, including contexts, antecedents, mechanisms, moderators, methods and authenticity-related findings, is provided in Web Appendix E (Supporting Information S1: Table E1).

2.1.1 | Brand Authenticity in Femvertising: The Role of Fit

Across the femvertising literature, perceived brand authenticity is most commonly understood as a function of fit between empowerment messaging and the brand’s identity, category, history or corporate conduct (Sobande 2019; Sterbenk et al. 2022; Hainneville et al. 2023; Carvalho and Duarte 2024). In this dominant view, campaigns are authentic when they align with what the brand is, has done and stands for, while misalignment signals opportunism or “femwashing.” Conceptual and critical accounts equate authenticity with coherence between feminist claims and organizational realities (Becker-Herby 2016; Varghese and Kumar 2022), and audience-centered studies show that consumers routinely compare empowerment messages with perceived brand history and CSR records, treating consistency as a marker of authenticity (Lima and Casais 2021; Hernández Rodríguez and Sepúlveda Ríos 2022).

2.1.2 | The Potential Value of Misfit

Two features of this literature complicate the alignment logic. First, fit is rarely theorized as multi-dimensional, even though apparent fit on one dimension, such as category proximity, can be undermined by misfit on another, such as corporate portfolio or past behavior (Sobande 2019; Carvalho and Duarte 2024); empirical studies nonetheless tend to operationalize fit as a single global perception. Second, femvertising often relies on purposeful departures from established norms, placing women in non-traditional roles, addressing stigmatized topics, or rejecting idealized portrayals. Such departures create misfit relative to dominant gender scripts and category conventions, and several studies indicate that this kind of misfit can enhance authenticity when it is intelligible rather than incoherent or opportunistic (Papadopoulou et al. 2024; Park et al. 2023; Hainneville et al. 2023). Misfit therefore does not have a single

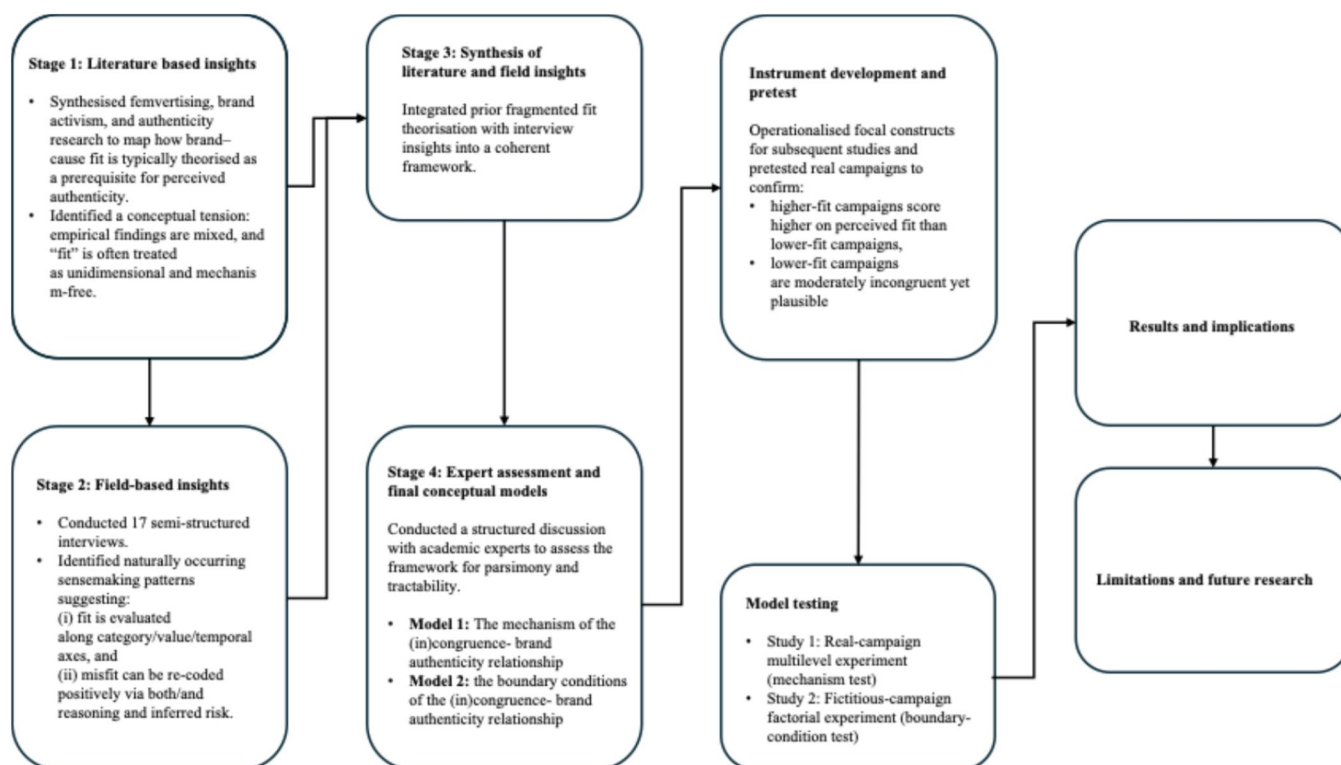


FIGURE 1 | Overview of the discovery-oriented research approach.

meaning: misfit relative to organizational reality tends to undermine authenticity, whereas misfit relative to norms or category scripts can, under certain conditions, strengthen it.

2.1.3 | Missing Mechanisms and Fragmented Boundary Conditions

Research also rarely specifies the psychological processes through which fit and misfit become authenticity. In many models authenticity is itself the mechanism linking message features to outcomes, leaving its formation a black box, and the limited work introducing variables beneath authenticity models it as a predictor of motive attributions rather than as an outcome to be explained (Amir and Usman 2024). Moderators such as ideology, cultural values, knowledge, involvement and gender are examined in isolation, without a framework predicting when misfit is penalized and when it is re-coded as meaningful (Negm 2023; Park et al. 2023; Papadopoulou et al. 2026; Martínez-Aguirre et al. 2025). Stage 1 therefore establishes two gaps: fit is not consistently modeled as an antecedent of authenticity and may operate differently across dimensions, and the literature lacks a process account of when moderate, interpretable misfit is read as credible rather than opportunistic.

2.1.4 | What Existing Explanations Leave Unexplained

Four bodies of work bear on the pattern described above, and each accounts for part of it. Schema congruity research establishes that moderate, resolvable incongruity attracts elaboration and is evaluated more favorably than either congruity or extreme incongruity (Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). It therefore explains why a misfitting campaign is processed rather

than dismissed. It does not explain the content of the resulting inference, because it is a theory of processing depth and evaluative valence rather than of motive attribution. Elaboration can terminate as easily in the judgment that a campaign is novel, or clumsy, as in the judgment that a brand is sincere.

Signaling accounts explain why costly and difficult-to-fake actions are read as credible (Spence 1973; Vredenburg et al. 2020). They presuppose, however, that a cost exists and has been incurred or announced. In femvertising the brand rarely declares a sacrifice, so the question of how audiences come to perceive exposure where none is stated remains open. In this setting cost is inferred rather than observed.

Brand activism research distinguishes authentic activism from woke washing by reference to alignment between purpose, practice and message (Vredenburg et al. 2020). These conditions are specified at the level of firm conduct. They describe what makes activism authentic; they do not describe how an audience decides that it is.

What is missing across these accounts is a mechanism that allows a contradiction to remain open. Each assumes that incongruity is either resolved and assimilated or unresolved and rejected. Paradox theory supplies the missing option: tensions between competing demands are persistent and interdependent rather than permanently resolvable, and actors can engage them productively through both-and reasoning (Smith and Lewis 2011; Schad et al. 2016; Miron-Spektor et al. 2018). Transposed from organizational actors to consumers, this yields the possibility that an audience sustains the commercial and the value-driven reading simultaneously, and that the sustained

tension, rather than its resolution, directs attention to what the campaign places at stake. This is the increment the present research supplies: not a new ingredient, but the link that converts an interpretive difficulty into evidence of intent.

2.2 | Stage 2: Interview Insights

We conducted semi-structured interviews ($N = 17$; mixed gender) in which each participant viewed one focal femvertising campaign from a set of six real, widely recognized campaigns. Campaigns were selected through a three-step procedure. We first identified recent femvertising campaigns from established industry sources. Advertising and consumer-research academics then independently classified the shortlisted campaigns according to category, value, and temporal congruence, and we retained only campaigns for which their assessments converged. Extreme, implausible, and widely criticized pairings were excluded so that the qualitative inquiry examined interpretable variation in fit rather than obvious instances of incoherence or femwashing. Full selection criteria and campaign details are reported in Web Appendix A. Interviews probed participants' perceptions of fit/misfit, authenticity, inferred motives, and the cues used to support these inferences, while allowing participants to articulate their own evaluative criteria. Transcripts were analyzed through iterative open and axial coding, supported by constant comparison, memos, and independent coding of a subset of interviews to refine the coding structure and identify negative cases. Methodological details and materials appear in Web Appendix A.

2.3 | Stage 3: Synthesis of Prior Research and Qualitative Findings

Stage 3 integrates the qualitative findings with prior research, and three insights structure the resulting model. First, participants did not evaluate congruence as a single global judgment. They distinguished whether empowerment messaging made sense for the product category, whether it aligned with what they believed the brand stood for, and whether it was consistent with the brand's past behavior, and these dimensions often pulled in different directions, so that high category fit did not secure authenticity once value or temporal misfit was introduced. Second, moderate misfit consistently elicited positive and negative interpretations held simultaneously. Participants acknowledged commercial motives while also recognizing potential social value, and treated the tension itself as informative rather than as grounds for skepticism, a pattern consistent with paradox theory (Smith and Lewis 2011). Third, once both readings had been articulated, attention shifted to what the campaign might cost the brand. Participants spontaneously invoked backlash, alienation of core audiences and disruption of established positioning, and read that exposure as evidence of genuine values; highly fitting campaigns, by contrast, were described as safe and easily assimilated into routine marketing practice.

The interviews further suggested that these effects are conditional. Misfit was more likely to be interpreted as value-driven risk-taking when embedded in an activism-oriented narrative

and less so when framed as brand self-expression, and symbolic promises were judged insufficient in low-fit contexts where concrete commitments framed misalignment as evidence of genuine change. The synthesis was further validated through a structured discussion with three scholars in consumer psychology, branding and social marketing, which supported the multidimensional treatment of (mis)fit, the centrality of perceived risk as a mediator, and the decision to prioritize campaign orientation and promise type over a broader set of less discriminating moderators. The full synthesis, with the supporting interview extracts, is reported in Web Appendix A.

3 | Hypotheses Development

Building on the synthesis of prior research and qualitative insights, we next formalize predictions about how brand-cause misfit relates to perceived authenticity. Research on femvertising and cause-related marketing has long assumed that higher brand-cause fit enhances perceived sincerity and authenticity (Aaker and Keller 1990; Becker-Olsen et al. 2006). However, growing evidence suggests that this linear assumption is incomplete. Highly expected empowerment campaigns can be perceived as scripted or opportunistic, while moderate and interpretable misfit can enhance distinctiveness and signal non-obvious commitment (Vredenburg et al. 2020; Hainneville et al. 2023).

Because the distinction between interpretable and extreme misfit carries substantial weight in what follows, we state it explicitly. We define brand-cause misfit as interpretable when three conditions hold: a rationale connecting the brand to the cause is available to the audience, even where the campaign does not supply it; the departure is from category conventions or normative scripts rather than from the brand's observable conduct; and the incongruity can be resolved through elaboration rather than terminating in rejection. Misfit is extreme when any of the three fails, that is, when no rationale can be constructed, when the message contradicts what the brand is known to do, or when the pairing is sufficiently implausible that elaboration ceases. This tracks the inverted-U logic of schema congruity research, in which moderate incongruity resolves favorably while extreme incongruity does not (Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989), and it fixes the scope of the hypotheses that follow. All predictions below concern interpretable misfit. We make no claim about extreme misfit, and our stimuli were selected accordingly.

H1 follows from three premises. The first is that moderate and resolvable incongruity is processed rather than dismissed (Mandler 1982; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Heckler and Childers 1992). This is necessary but not sufficient, because elaboration alone does not determine what is concluded from it. The second premise concerns the object of the judgment. Authenticity in brand-cause settings is a motive inference rather than a general evaluation: audiences ask why the brand is doing this and answer by weighing self-serving against cause-serving explanations (Ellen et al. 2000; Yoon et al. 2006). Attribution theory specifies how that weighing responds to context. Under the augmentation principle, an action taken in the presence of an inhibitory factor is attributed more strongly

to the actor's dispositions, whereas a readily available external explanation is discounted (Kelley 1973). A high-fit empowerment campaign supplies an obvious commercial rationale and therefore invites discounting. A low-fit campaign supplies a weaker one, and the inference shifts toward intrinsic commitment. The third premise is that commitment inferences track perceived cost rather than message content (Spence 1973; Vredenburg et al. 2020), which is what makes this shift consequential rather than merely a change in the ease of explanation.

These premises jointly predict a positive relationship, and they distinguish it from the alternative that misfit simply produces attention or surprise. Attention is a precondition for elaboration under the first premise, but the direction of the resulting judgment is fixed by the second and third. A campaign that is merely surprising, and for which a commercial rationale remains readily available, should not gain in perceived authenticity. The qualitative material reported in Section 2.3 is consistent with this derivation but is not its source.

H1. *Greater brand-cause misfit will be associated with higher perceived brand authenticity in femvertising.*

Having established the expected direction of the misfit-authenticity relationship, we next theorize the psychological processes through which this effect unfolds. When audiences encounter empowerment campaigns that deviate from brand expectations, they are often confronted with mixed motives, simultaneously recognizing commercial intent and potential social value (Ellen et al. 2000; Yoon et al. 2006). Paradox theory suggests that such tensions can elicit paradoxical thinking, defined as a mode of sensemaking in which individuals actively engage with and hold together contradictory interpretations rather than resolving them in an either-or fashion (Smith and Lewis 2011; Miron-Spektor et al. 2018). Importantly, paradoxical thinking in this context reflects a situational cognitive response to tension, not a stable individual disposition.

Moderate brand-cause misfit is a natural trigger for paradoxical thinking because it disrupts established brand schemas while remaining intelligible. Rather than inviting immediate rejection or uncritical acceptance, misfit prompts audiences to consider how empowerment claims can be both commercially motivated and potentially value-driven at the same time. This form of both-and reasoning was consistently observed in participants' interpretations of misfitting femvertising campaigns and underpins deeper evaluation of brand intent.

H2. *Greater brand-cause misfit will increase paradoxical thinking about the campaign.*

Paradoxical thinking, in turn, heightens attention to trade-offs and potential downsides (Weber et al. 2002; Blais and Weber 2006). When viewers simultaneously acknowledge both benefits and self-interest, they become more attuned to what the campaign might cost the brand, leading to higher perceived risk.

H3. *Higher levels of paradoxical thinking will increase perceived risk for the brand.*

Perceived willingness to incur risk has been identified as a key cue of authenticity in research on brand activism and corporate social engagement (Beverland 2005; Vredenburg et al. 2020). When a campaign appears to expose the brand to reputational or commercial downside, audiences are more likely to infer that it reflects genuine values rather than purely instrumental positioning.

H4. *Greater perceived risk will increase perceived brand authenticity.*

Because paradoxical thinking and perceived risk occupy adjacent positions in the proposed sequence, we state how they differ. Paradoxical thinking is a mode of reasoning and its referent is the consumer's own processing: it describes the simultaneous entertainment of a commercial and a value-driven reading of the campaign without resolution in either direction. Perceived risk is a belief about a state of the world and its referent is the brand: it describes the extent to which the campaign is judged to expose the brand to reputational, commercial or stakeholder consequences. The two are therefore distinguished by referent, by content, and by their position in the sequence. That ordering is not arbitrary. A consumer who has resolved the tension, in either direction, has no reason to ask what the campaign costs the brand, since either the campaign is straightforwardly commercial and the question does not arise, or it is straightforwardly sincere and the answer is already assumed. It is the unresolved both-and stance that makes the cost question live. The two are empirically related but distinct: in Study 1 they correlate at $r = 0.37$, sharing approximately 14% of their variance, well below the reliability of either scale ($\alpha = 0.91$ and 0.81 respectively; Supporting Information S1: Table F3).

Together, these arguments imply a serial mediation process:

H5. *Brand-cause misfit will have a positive indirect effect on perceived brand authenticity through paradoxical thinking and perceived risk.*

Campaign orientation conditions the attributional premise developed above. The augmentation inference requires that a cause-serving explanation be available to the audience; where it is not, discounting operates instead. Activism-oriented framing, which positions the initiative as a contribution to social change beyond the brand's own interests, supplies exactly such an explanation, and therefore allows the reduced sufficiency of the commercial account under misfit to translate into an attribution of genuine commitment (Moorman 2020; Vredenburg et al. 2020). Brand-focused framing does the opposite. By presenting the initiative as an expression or renewal of the brand, it restores a self-serving explanation that is available regardless of fit, so the same misfit is read as an unusual route to a familiar end. Persuasion knowledge research adds that once persuasive intent becomes salient, cues that would otherwise be diagnostic are discounted as tactics (Friestad and Wright 1994; Campbell and Kirmani 2000). Misfit under brand-focused framing is therefore not merely uninformative but liable to be read as contrivance.

H6. *Campaign orientation will moderate the relationship between brand-cause misfit and perceived brand authenticity, such that the positive effect of misfit will be stronger for activism-oriented than for brand-focused campaigns.*

Promise type conditions the signaling premise. Signals are informative to the extent that they are costly to send and difficult to send falsely (Spence 1973). Substantive commitments, such as verifiable targets, allocated resources, or public reporting against stated goals, satisfy both conditions: they constrain future conduct and expose the brand to the cost of visible failure. Symbolic expressions of support satisfy neither, since they can be issued at negligible cost by a brand with no intention of acting, and are correspondingly uninformative (Wagner et al. 2009; Delmas and Burbano 2011). The implication under misfit is asymmetric. Where fit already supplies a plausible account of the brand's involvement, the marginal informational value of a substantive commitment is limited. Where fit does not, the commitment carries the inference, because it is the only element of the campaign that cannot be produced cheaply.

H7. *Promise type will moderate the relationship between brand-cause misfit and perceived brand authenticity, such that the positive effect of misfit will be stronger when campaigns include substantive rather than symbolic promises.*

3.1 | Proposed Models and Overall Research Design

Drawing on these arguments we advance two complementary models. Model 1 (Figure 2) specifies the serial mediation process whereby brand-cause misfit enhances authenticity through paradoxical thinking and perceived risk (H1–H5). Model 2 (Figure 3) specifies a double-moderation structure in which that effect is conditioned by campaign orientation (H6) and promise type (H7). Study 1 maximizes ecological validity by testing the

mechanism with actual marketplace stimuli, while Study 2 maximizes control by manipulating misfit and the two message-level moderators orthogonally.

4 | Study 1: Testing the Serial Mediation Model

Study 1 tests the proposed process through which brand-cause misfit shapes perceived brand authenticity. Using real femvertising campaigns, it examines whether moderate brand-cause misfit increases authenticity through the sequential operation of paradoxical thinking and perceived risk, thereby testing H1–H5 in an ecologically realistic setting.

4.1 | Design and Stimuli

We employed a between-subjects experimental design in which participants were randomly assigned to one of six real femvertising campaigns, with campaign treated as a replication factor rather than as a modeled level of analysis. At the campaign level, six femvertising campaigns were selected through a separate pretest of 12 candidate campaigns involving 191 participants and 1146 campaign evaluations. The final stimuli comprised three campaigns that consistently received high fit ratings and three that exhibited moderately lower, rather than extreme, fit while remaining clearly recognizable as femvertising. This procedure preserved meaningful variation in category, temporal, and overall brand-cause fit while ensuring that the lower-fit campaigns remained plausible and interpretable. Full campaign-level results and selection criteria are reported in Web Appendix B. The final stimulus set consisted of three

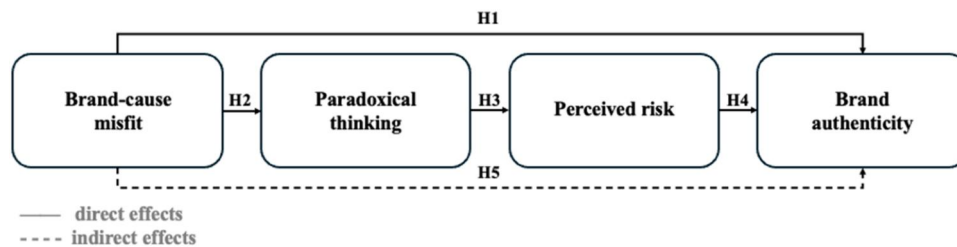


FIGURE 2 | Model 1: Serial mediation of the effect of brand-cause misfit on brand authenticity.

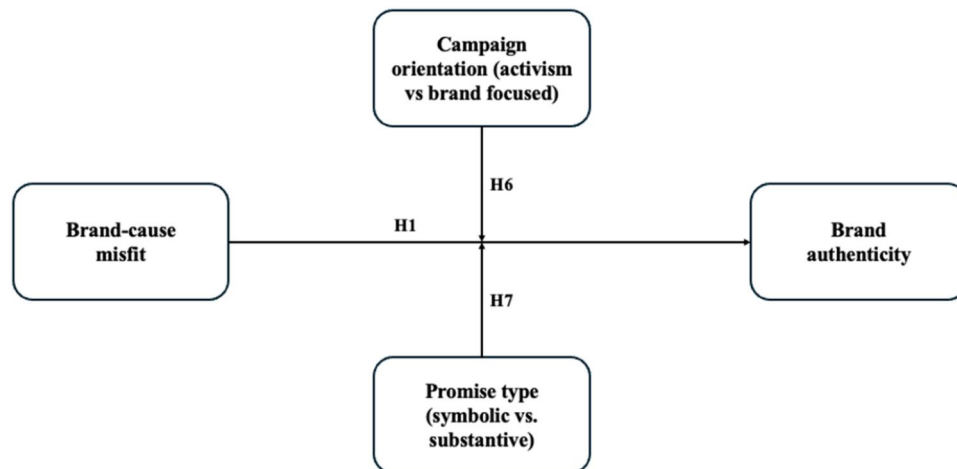


FIGURE 3 | Model 2: Moderation of the effect of brand-cause misfit on brand authenticity.

higher-fit campaigns: Sport England (“This Girl Can”), Barbie (“Limitless Possibilities”), and Bodyform (“Viva La Vulva”), and three moderately lower-fit campaigns: Audi (“Daughter”), Holland & Barrett (“Me.No.Pause”), and Microsoft (“Make What’s Next”). At the participant level, respondents were randomly assigned to evaluate one campaign.

Consistent with the definition set out in Section 3, the lower-fit campaigns were moderately rather than extremely incongruent: pretest fit means ranged from 3.46 to 3.59 on a seven-point scale, and in the main study the lower-fit set returned a mean of 4.07 on the overall fit index, close to the scale midpoint. All six campaigns were consistently recognized as femvertising.

4.2 | Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited from Prolific. Eligibility criteria required respondents to be at least 18 years old and resident in the United Kingdom. We aimed to recruit approximately 380 participants (60–65 per campaign), which provides adequate statistical power to detect small-to-medium indirect effects in mediation models (Hayes 2018). The final usable sample, after excluding respondents who failed attention checks ($N = 16$) or provided incomplete responses ($N = 4$), was 360 (49.7% females; $M_{\text{age}} = 29.9$, $SD = 7.41$). Demographic information is presented in Table F1, Web Appendix F.

A sensitivity analysis indicates that, with $N = 360$ and 12 covariates in the equation predicting authenticity, the design provides 80% power at $\alpha = 0.05$ to detect an effect of $f^2 = 0.023$, corresponding to a partial correlation of 0.15.

After providing informed consent, participants were told that the study examined reactions to contemporary advertising, assured of anonymity and informed that they could withdraw at any point. They were randomly assigned to one of the six campaigns and viewed the full campaign video within the survey platform, then completed the questionnaire and were debriefed.

4.3 | Measures

Perceived brand–cause fit was measured with three items ($\alpha = 0.86$; Aaker and Keller 1990): “This brand is a natural fit with this campaign’s message,” “The topic of this campaign fits well with what I associate with this brand,” and “For this brand, talking about this topic makes sense.” The index was reverse-scored to form the brand–cause misfit variable used in all analyses, so that higher values denote greater misfit; the same items also served as the manipulation check reported in Web Appendix C. Two additional diagnostic items captured category congruence and temporal congruence.

Paradoxical thinking ($\alpha = 0.91$) was measured using items adapted from Miron-Spektor et al. (2018). Perceived risk ($\alpha = 0.81$), the extent to which the campaign was viewed as a bold or uncertain strategic move by the brand, was measured with three items adapted from prior risk-perception research (Blais and Weber 2006; Wolff et al. 2019). Perceived brand

authenticity ($\alpha = 0.93$), the dependent variable, was measured using items adapted from Morhart et al. (2015). Covariates were included to improve estimation precision: brand familiarity, prior brand attitude ($\alpha = 0.83$), involvement with female empowerment ($\alpha = 0.89$), feminist identification, feminist knowledge, political ideology, advertising skepticism ($\alpha = 0.87$) and demographics. All responses used seven-point scales and referred to the specific campaign and brand viewed. Item wordings, sources and descriptive statistics are reported in Web Appendix F.

4.4 | Results and Discussion

A pretest confirmed that the selected campaigns reflected the intended variation in brand–cause fit, with higher-fit campaigns perceived as significantly more congruent than lower-fit campaigns across category-based, temporal, and overall fit measures. Full analyses are reported in Web Appendices B and C.

To test the hypothesized serial mediation model, we estimated PROCESS Model 6 (Hayes 2022) with brand–cause misfit as the independent variable, paradoxical thinking and perceived risk as sequential mediators, and perceived brand authenticity as the dependent variable. Covariates and demographics were included in all equations, and all effects were estimated using 10,000 bootstrap samples. Results revealed that the direct effect of brand–cause misfit on perceived brand authenticity was positive and statistically significant at the 10% level ($b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 1.73$, $p = 0.084$, 95% CI $[-0.01, 0.19]$). The direction of the effect was therefore consistent with H1, although the evidence was weaker than the conventional 5% significance threshold.

Indirect effects were examined using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals. The total indirect effect of misfit on authenticity was positive and significant (Effect = 0.13, BootSE = 0.03, 95% CI $[0.08, 0.19]$). Decomposition revealed significant simple indirect paths through paradoxical thinking alone (Effect = 0.05, 95% CI $[0.02, 0.10]$) and through perceived risk alone (Effect = 0.05, 95% CI $[0.02, 0.09]$) and, crucially, a significant serial path from misfit through paradoxical thinking to perceived risk to authenticity (Effect = 0.03, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.04]$). Participants exposed to misfitting campaigns engaged in more paradoxical thinking, which led them to regard the campaign as a riskier strategic move, and that perceived risk-taking in turn raised authenticity judgments. All paths are reported in Table 1.

Overall, Tables 1 and 2 support the proposed serial process and provide qualified support for H1. The direct effect is positive and significant only at the 10% level, whereas the total indirect effect and the hypothesized serial pathway through paradoxical thinking and perceived risk are both significant, indicating that the relationship operates primarily through the proposed interpretive process.

5 | Study 2: Testing Moderation

Study 2 examines the boundary conditions of the misfit–authenticity relationship. Specifically, it tests whether the effect

TABLE 1 | Study 1 bootstrapped indirect effects of brand–cause misfit on brand authenticity.

Indirect Path	Effect	BootSE	95% CI
Total indirect effect	0.13	0.03	[0.08, 0.19]
Brand–cause misfit → Paradoxical Thinking → Brand Authenticity	0.05	0.02	[0.02, 0.10]
Brand–cause misfit → Perceived Risk → Brand Authenticity	0.05	0.02	[0.02, 0.09]
Brand–cause misfit → Paradoxical Thinking → Perceived Risk → Brand Authenticity	0.03	0.01	[0.01, 0.04]

TABLE 2 | Study 1 regression analysis predicting perceived brand authenticity.

Predictor	b	SE	t	p	95% CI
Brand–cause misfit	0.09	0.05	1.73	0.084	[−0.01, 0.19]
Paradoxical thinking	0.13	0.03	4.04	< 0.001	[0.07, 0.19]
Perceived risk	0.17	0.03	5.92	< 0.001	[0.11, 0.23]
Prior brand attitude	0.01	0.03	0.45	0.654	[−0.04, 0.07]
Involvement with female empowerment	−0.01	0.02	−0.42	0.678	[−0.05, 0.03]
Advertising skepticism	−0.02	0.02	−1.06	0.289	[−0.07, 0.02]
Political ideology	0.00	0.02	0.25	0.800	[−0.03, 0.04]
Feminist identity	−0.00	0.02	−0.01	0.994	[−0.05, 0.05]
Feminist knowledge	0.00	0.03	0.10	0.922	[−0.05, 0.05]
Age	−0.00	0.00	−0.12	0.907	[−0.01, 0.01]
Gender	0.03	0.04	0.82	0.414	[−0.05, 0.11]
Education	−0.01	0.02	−0.32	0.752	[−0.05, 0.03]

of brand–cause misfit on perceived authenticity depends on campaign orientation and promise type, thereby testing H6 and H7. By manipulating these factors orthogonally using a fictitious brand, Study 2 complements the marketplace realism of Study 1 with greater experimental control.

5.1 | Design and Stimuli

We employed a 2 (brand–cause fit: fit vs. misfit) × 2 (campaign orientation: activism-oriented vs. brand-focused) × 2 (promise type: substantive vs. symbolic) between-subjects factorial design. Participants read a brief, text-only vignette describing a fictitious company (NOVO) launching an initiative to support girls' futures in STEM and leadership. All vignettes were closely matched in length, tone, and structure; full materials are reported in Web Appendix G.

Brand–cause misfit was manipulated through differences in the alignment between the brand's category, positioning, and temporal engagement with the focal cause, following established treatments of congruence (e.g., Becker-Olsen et al. 2006). Campaign orientation was manipulated by varying the stated rationale for the initiative, framing it either as contributing to broader social change or as primarily expressing and strengthening the brand, consistent with prior work (Becker-Olsen et al. 2006; Ellen et al. 2006). Promise type was manipulated by varying whether the campaign emphasized concrete, verifiable commitments or primarily symbolic expressions of support, in line with prior research (e.g., Wagner et al. 2009; Groza et al. 2011).

5.2 | Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited via Prolific using the same inclusion criteria as in Study 1. The final sample was 480 (55.6% female; Mage = 33.27, SD = 8.76) after removing 17 respondents who failed the attention check, giving 60 participants per cell across the eight conditions. After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to a condition, read the full vignette, were required to remain on the vignette page for a minimum duration to reduce skimming, then completed the questionnaire and were debriefed.

A sensitivity analysis indicates that, with $N = 480$ and 13 predictors, the joint test of the two interaction terms has 80% power at $\alpha = 0.05$ to detect $f^2 = 0.021$, against an observed value of $f^2 = 0.046$.

5.3 | Measures

Perceived brand–cause misfit ($\alpha = 0.89$) was measured using the same three-item scale as in Study 1. Perceived campaign orientation ($\alpha = 0.88$) captured the extent to which the initiative was viewed as activism-oriented versus brand-focused and was measured with three items informed by the brand activism literature (e.g., Moorman 2020; Vredenburg et al. 2020). Perceived promise type ($\alpha = 0.89$) was assessed using three items adapted from prior relevant work (e.g., Kim and Bae 2016), capturing the extent to which the campaign's commitments were perceived as concrete and verifiable rather than vague or symbolic.

Perceived brand authenticity ($\alpha = 0.93$) was measured using the same scale as in Study 1, adapted to the fictitious brand. The questionnaire included the same control measures (involvement with female empowerment, $\alpha = 0.87$; advertising skepticism, $\alpha = 0.87$) and demographic items. Because the brand was fictitious, brand familiarity and prior brand attitude were not assessed. Item wordings, sources and descriptives are reported in Web Appendix F.

5.4 | Results and Discussion

Manipulation checks indicated that the experimental manipulations of promise type, campaign orientation, and brand–cause fit were successful. Full manipulation-check analyses are reported in Web Appendix D.

To examine whether the effect of misfit on authenticity depended on campaign orientation and promise type, we estimated PROCESS Model 2 (Hayes 2022) with the fit contrast (0 = misfit, 1 = fit) as the focal predictor, campaign orientation as the first moderator and promise type as the second, including demographics and covariates. The overall model was significant ($R^2 = 0.13$, $F(13, 466) = 5.58$, $p < 0.001$). At the reference levels of both moderators, fit reduced perceived authenticity ($b = -0.37$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = -3.18$, $p = 0.002$, 95% CI $[-0.60, -0.14]$). No individual-difference covariate was uniquely associated with authenticity (all $ps \geq 0.44$). Both two-way interactions involving misfit were significant, and a joint test confirmed that including them improved model fit over a main-effects model, $\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $F(2, 466) = 9.52$, $p < 0.001$. Table 3 reports the full model, and indicates that the relationship between misfit and authenticity is contingent on how the campaign is framed and on whether its promises are substantive or symbolic.

Because the model contains two interaction terms, the coefficient for the fit contrast is the conditional effect of fit at the reference levels of campaign orientation and promise type, not an unconditional main effect.

Examining the conditional effects across combinations of the two moderators, misfit significantly increased perceived authenticity when the campaign was activism-oriented and made substantive promises. The pattern reversed when a brand-focused framing was combined with symbolic promises, where fit increased authenticity ($b = 0.45$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 3.88$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI $[0.22, 0.68]$); that is, participants judged the high-fit hygiene brand as more authentic than the misfitting automotive brand making the same gestures. Under brand-focused, symbolic conditions congruence functioned as an authenticity asset and misfit as a liability. Figure 4 plots the conditional effects with 95% confidence intervals.

Study 2 therefore shows that the authenticity gains from misfit are conditional. They arise where the campaign is activism-oriented and substantively committed, and reverse where it is brand-focused and symbolic.

6 | Conclusion

6.1 | Theoretical Implications

This research advances theory in femvertising and brand authenticity in four interrelated ways. First, brand–cause fit should be modeled as an interpretive cue rather than as a structural property of the brand–cause pairing. The prevailing treatment specifies fit as a fixed relation between a brand's category, history and associations and the cause it addresses, and predicts that credibility rises with it (Aaker and Keller 1990; Becker-Olsen et al. 2006). Our results are not consistent with that specification, because the same nominal degree of misfit produced opposite authenticity judgments depending on the dimension on which it was evaluated and the frame in which it was placed. Moderate and intelligible misfit can therefore function not as a deficit, but as a signal that invites deeper sensemaking. This perspective extends emerging critiques in femvertising that highlight how highly expected empowerment messaging can be perceived as routinized or instrumental rather than authentic (Sobande 2019).

TABLE 3 | Study 2 moderation analysis predicting perceived brand authenticity.

Predictor	b	SE	t	p	95% CI
Fit (vs. misfit)	−0.37	0.12	−3.18	0.002	[−0.60, −0.14]
Campaign orientation	0.24	0.09	2.59	0.010	[0.06, 0.43]
Promise type	−0.01	0.10	−0.14	0.892	[−0.20, 0.17]
Fit × Campaign orientation	0.36	0.13	2.71	0.007	[0.10, 0.62]
Fit × Promise type	0.46	0.13	3.44	< 0.001	[0.20, 0.72]
Gender	0.05	0.06	0.78	0.436	[−0.07, 0.16]
Age	0.00	0.00	0.21	0.831	[−0.01, 0.01]
Education	−0.02	0.03	−0.71	0.479	[−0.09, 0.04]
Advertising skepticism	0.02	0.03	0.68	0.497	[−0.04, 0.09]
Involvement with female empowerment	0.01	0.03	0.29	0.775	[−0.05, 0.07]
Feminist knowledge	0.02	0.04	0.54	0.587	[−0.05, 0.09]
Feminist identity	−0.01	0.04	−0.32	0.750	[−0.08, 0.06]
Political ideology	0.02	0.03	0.67	0.505	[−0.04, 0.07]

Note: Fit contrast coded 0 = misfit, 1 = fit. Campaign orientation coded 0 = activism-oriented, 1 = brand-focused. Promise type coded 0 = substantive, 1 = symbolic. The coefficient for the fit contrast is the conditional effect at the reference levels of both moderators. $N = 480$.

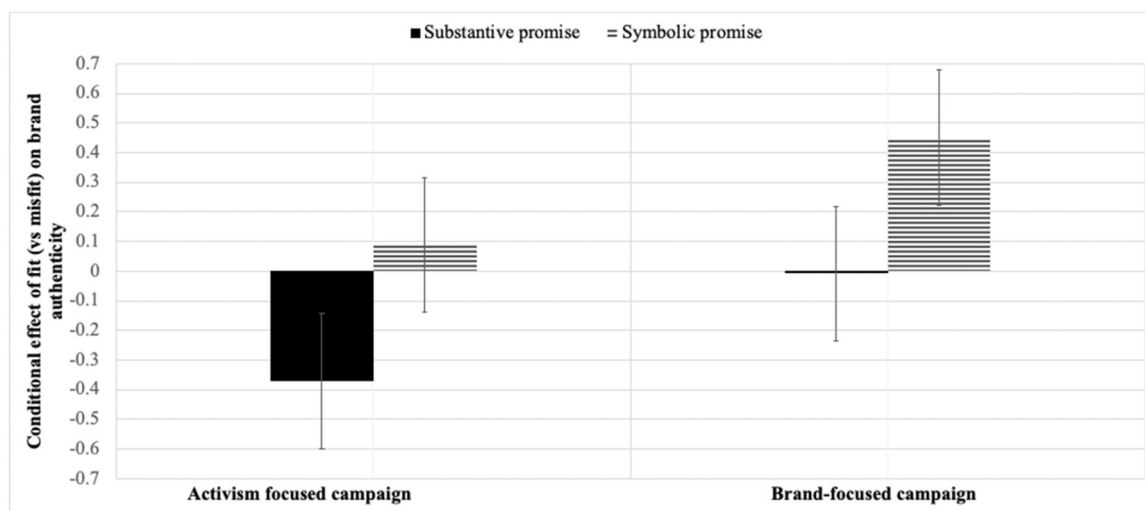


FIGURE 4 | Conditional effect of campaign fit (vs. misfit) on perceived authenticity as a function of campaign orientation and promise type.

Second, brand authenticity should be defined so as to admit two routes rather than one. The dominant definition treats authenticity as coherence between what a brand claims and what it is (Beverland 2005; Morhart et al. 2015), and in femvertising this has hardened into the expectation that alignment produces credibility and misalignment destroys it (Sobande 2019; Sterbenk et al. 2022). Our findings bound that account rather than overturn it. Coherence remains one route, and Study 2 identifies when it operates; but authenticity can also be an interpretive accomplishment reached under contradiction, which the coherence definition cannot represent because it treats contradiction as disqualifying by construction.

Third, in brand activism research the credibility of a stance depends on consumer-inferred exposure rather than on firm-declared sacrifice. Existing accounts specify the conditions for authentic activism at the level of firm conduct (Vredenburg et al. 2020); our results locate the operative variable one step downstream, in the audience's judgment about what the brand stands to lose, which can form in the absence of any declared cost and which is what the misfit cue supplies.

Fourth, the findings extend paradox theory to a class of actors for which it has not been developed. Paradox research has concentrated on organizational actors confronting tensions they must manage, and treats both-and reasoning as a competence exercised in the service of a decision (Smith and Lewis 2011; Miron-Spektor et al. 2018). Consumers occupy a different position. They neither create the tension nor bear responsibility for resolving it, and they face no decision that requires resolution. What we observe is therefore paradoxical thinking without a managerial function: an interpretive stance adopted toward someone else's contradiction. That it nonetheless has systematic consequences, in the form of inferences about what the contradiction costs its author, suggests that both-and reasoning is diagnostically as well as instrumentally useful, and that paradox theory has application to audience sensemaking more broadly.

The scope of these claims should be stated plainly. They concern moderate and interpretable misfit as defined in Section 3, not misfit in general. They rest on evidence from a single

national context in which femvertising is an established genre and corporate engagement with social causes is widely expected. And they concern authenticity as a perceptual outcome rather than the behavior that may follow from it. Within these limits the account is supported by convergent evidence from a real-campaign and a fictitious-brand design; beyond them it is a conjecture.

6.2 | Managerial Implications

Although this research is not prescriptive, it invites managers to rethink how authenticity is signaled in empowerment communication. A central implication is that predictability itself may undermine credibility: initiatives that closely mirror category norms or long-standing brand narratives are assimilated into familiar marketing scripts, so alignment functions less as reassurance than as a cue that the brand is doing what is expected.

Authenticity is more likely to emerge when empowerment communication introduces interpretable tension. Campaigns that stretch a brand's established category, historical focus or communicative style prompt audiences to engage more actively with the brand's motives, but their credibility depends on whether audiences can construct a plausible rationale for the involvement and perceive that something meaningful is at stake. The same degree of misfit can therefore produce very different judgments depending on framing: presented as a contribution to social change it reads as principled risk-taking, presented as brand expression it is dismissed as opportunistic. Activism-oriented framing and concrete commitments help convert misfit into an authenticity signal, whereas brand-focused framing and symbolic gestures neutralize or reverse the effect, so low-fit brands cannot rely on surface-level messaging alone.

These implications are subject to an important practical boundary. Brands should not deliberately manufacture misfit merely to appear courageous or unconventional. Low-fit CSR initiatives can weaken consumer beliefs, attitudes, and

behavioral intentions when audiences cannot identify a credible rationale for the pairing (Becker-Olsen et al. 2006), whereas low-fit initiatives are evaluated more favorably when consumers attribute them to cause-serving rather than purely self-serving motives (DeMotta et al. 2024). Misalignment between activist messaging and a brand's purpose, values, or observable practices can instead produce perceptions of woke washing or corporate hypocrisy and damage brand evaluations (Vredenburg et al. 2020; Wagner et al. 2009). These risks become particularly salient when the position conflicts with stakeholder values. Consumers who oppose a brand's sociopolitical stance may penalize the brand, while incongruence with stakeholder values or the established brand image may also have adverse firm-value consequences (Bhagwat et al. 2020; Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020). The benefits identified in the present research should therefore not be generalized to extreme, incoherent, or unsupported brand-cause pairings. They are most likely to arise from moderate, interpretable misfit that can be connected to a credible rationale and reinforced by substantive organizational commitments (DeMotta et al. 2024; Vredenburg et al. 2020).

6.3 | Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

This research has several limitations that suggest focused avenues for future work. First, the studies examined moderate and interpretable forms of brand-cause misfit. Future research could explore whether the proposed mechanisms generalize to more extreme or implausible misfit, where sensemaking may give way to outright rejection rather than paradoxical reasoning. Second, both experiments relied on UK adults recruited through Prolific. Prolific provides access to comparatively diverse online participants and has demonstrated satisfactory data quality for behavioral research, but it remains a non-probability panel and should not be treated as representative of either the UK population or consumers more broadly (Peer et al. 2017). More importantly, the meanings attached to femvertising, feminism, and brand involvement in social issues are culturally embedded. The proposed process may therefore operate differently in contexts where gender roles, expectations of corporate activism, or tolerance for commercial engagement with social causes differ from those found in Western markets. Replication across non-Western markets and more varied political and institutional environments is needed to establish which elements of the mechanism generalize and which are culturally contingent (Henrich et al. 2010).

Third, the two experiments make complementary trade-offs between marketplace realism and experimental control. Study 1 used real brands and campaigns, which increased ecological realism but introduced campaign-specific associations and prior brand knowledge that could not be fully isolated, while Study 2 used a fictitious brand and controlled vignettes, which strengthened internal validity but reduced the richness of natural exposure. Convergence across the two designs strengthens confidence in the relationships without establishing that the effects will be identical for actual marketplace behavior or consequential decisions (Morales et al. 2017).

Two further limitations concern estimation and measurement. Study 1 treats campaign as a replication factor rather than

modeling campaign-level variance directly, and we report scale reliabilities and inter-construct correlations rather than a full measurement model, so the empirical separation of paradoxical thinking and perceived risk rests on their conceptual distinction and their moderate correlation. Replication with a measurement model estimated across a larger and more varied set of campaigns would place both the mechanism and its measurement on firmer ground.

Finally, while the present research conceptualizes authenticity as an audience-level perceptual outcome, future studies could examine how perceived risk and paradoxical thinking translate into longer-term consequences, such as sustained trust, brand resilience, or changes in organizational practices.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

References

- Aaker, D. A., and K. L. Keller. 1990. "Consumer Evaluations of Brand Extensions." *Journal of Marketing* 54, no. 1: 27–41.
- Amir, A., and M. Usman. 2024. "Understanding the Influence of Perceived Authenticity of Femvertising on Consumer Boycott Intentions: A Moderated Mediation Model of Consumers' Extrinsic Attributions and Power Distance." *Bulletin of Business and Economics* 13, no. 3: 273–281.
- Becker-Herby, E. 2016. *The Rise of Femvertising: Authentically Reaching Female Consumers [Master's Thesis, University of Minnesota]*. University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy.
- Becker-Olsen, K. L., B. A. Cudmore, and R. P. Hill. 2006. "The Impact of Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility on Consumer Behavior." *Journal of Business Research* 59, no. 1: 46–53.
- Beverland, M. B. 2005. "Crafting Brand Authenticity: The Case of Luxury Wines." *Journal of Management Studies* 42, no. 5: 1003–1029.
- Bhagwat, Y., N. L. Warren, J. T. Beck, and G. F. Watson. 2020. "Corporate Sociopolitical Activism and Firm Value." *Journal of Marketing* 84, no. 5: 1–21.
- Blais, A.-R., and E. U. Weber. 2006. "A Domain-Specific Risk-Taking (DOSPERT) Scale for Adult Populations." *Judgment and Decision Making* 1, no. 1: 33–47.
- Campbell, M. C., and A. Kirmani. 2000. "Consumers' Use of Persuasion Knowledge: The Effects of Accessibility and Cognitive Capacity on Perceptions of An Influence Agent." *Journal of Consumer Research* 27, no. 1: 69–83.
- Carvalho, F., and A. Duarte. 2024. "Determinants of Successful Femvertising in the Lingerie Industry: A Case Study on VS Collective and Aerie Real." *Journal of Media Research* 17, no. 3: 57–69.
- Delmas, M. A., and V. C. Burbano. 2011. "The Drivers of Greenwashing." *California Management Review* 54, no. 1: 64–87.
- DeMotta, Y., C. Janssen, and S. Sen. 2024. "Low-Fit Cause-Related Marketing: When and Why Do Consumers Respond Positively?" *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 34, no. 2: 281–298.
- Edmondson, A. C., and S. E. McManus. 2007. "Methodological Fit in Management Field Research." *Academy of Management Review* 32, no. 4: 1246–1264.
- Ellen, P. S., D. J. Webb, and L. A. Mohr. 2006. "Building Corporate Associations: Consumer Attributions for Corporate Socially Responsible Programs." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 34, no. 2: 147–157.

- Ellen, P. S., L. A. Mohr, and D. J. Webb. 2000. "Charitable Programs and the Retailer: Do They Mix?" *Journal of Retailing* 76, no. 3: 393–406.
- Friestad, M., and P. Wright. 1994. "The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How People Cope With Persuasion Attempts." *Journal of Consumer Research* 21, no. 1: 1–31.
- Groza, M. D., M. R. Pronschinske, and M. Walker. 2011. "Perceived Organizational Motives and Consumer Responses to Proactive and Reactive CSR." *Journal of Business Ethics* 102, no. 4: 639–652.
- Hainneville, V., A. Guèvremont, and É. Robinot. 2023. "Femvertising or Femwashing? Women's Perceptions of Authenticity." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 22, no. 4: 933–941.
- Hayes, A. F. 2018. *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach* (2nd ed., Guilford Press).
- Hayes, A. F. 2022. *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach* (3rd ed., Guilford Press).
- Heckler, S. E., and T. L. Childers. 1992. "The Role of Expectancy and Relevancy in Memory for Verbal and Visual Information: What Is Incongruity?" *Journal of Consumer Research* 18, no. 4: 475–492.
- Henrich, J., S. J. Heine, and A. Norenzayan. 2010. "The Weirdest People in the World?" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 33, no. 2–3: 61–83.
- Hernández Rodríguez, T. M., and I. J. Sepúlveda Ríos. 2022. "Empowerment Through Femvertising: Reality or Myth?" *Mercados y negocios* 23, no. 46: 83–100.
- Ipsos. 2025. *Shoppers Want to "Do Good" But Brands Are Missing the Mark*. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/shoppers-want-do-good-brands-are-missing-mark>.
- Kelley, H. H. 1973. "The Processes of Causal Attribution." *American Psychologist* 28, no. 2: 107–128.
- Kim, S., and J. Bae. 2016. "Cross-Cultural Differences in Concrete and Abstract Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Campaigns: Perceived Message Clarity and Perceived CSR as Mediators." *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility* 1, no. 1: 6.
- Lima, A. M., and B. Casais. 2021. "Consumer Reactions Towards Femvertising: A Netnographic Study." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 26, no. 3: 605–621.
- Mandler, G. 1982. "The Structure of Value: Accounting for Taste." In *Affect and Cognition: The 17th Annual Carnegie Symposium on Cognition*, edited by M. S. Clark and S. T. Fiske, 3–36. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Martínez-Aguirre, A., J. Cavazos-Arroyo, and M. V. Carrillo-Durán. 2025. "How Feminist Knowledge Affects Attitude Towards Brand Femvertising: The Mediating Effects of Authenticity and Credibility." *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 11: 101501.
- Menon, A., S. G. Bharadwaj, P. T. Adidam, and S. W. Edison. 1999. "Antecedents and Consequences of Marketing Strategy Making: A Model and a Test." *Journal of Marketing* 63, no. 2: 18–40.
- Meyers-Levy, J., and A. M. Tybout. 1989. "Schema Congruity as a Basis for Product Evaluation." *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 1: 39–54.
- Miron-Spektor, E., A. Ingram, J. Keller, W. K. Smith, and M. W. Lewis. 2018. "Microfoundations of Organizational Paradox: The Problem Is How We Think About the Problem." *Academy of Management Journal* 61, no. 1: 26–45.
- Moorman, C. 2020. "Commentary: Brand Activism in a Political World." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 39, no. 4: 388–392.
- Morales, A. C., O. Amir, and L. Lee. 2017. "Keeping It Real in Experimental Research: Understanding When, Where, and How to Enhance Realism and Measure Consumer Behavior." *Journal of Consumer Research* 44, no. 2: 465–476.
- Morhart, F., L. Malär, A. Guèvremont, F. Girardin, and B. Grohmann. 2015. "Brand Authenticity: An Integrative Framework and Measurement Scale." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 25, no. 2: 200–218.
- Mukherjee, S., and N. Althuizen. 2020. "Brand Activism: Does Courting Controversy Help or Hurt a Brand?" *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 37, no. 4: 772–788.
- Negm, E. M. 2023. "Femvertising Social Marketing: A Focus on Perceived Authenticity and Perceived Congruence of the Advertising and Consumers' Attitudes Toward Female Portrayal." *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences* 5, no. 5: 435–449.
- Papadopoulou, C., M. Hultman, and P. Oghazi. 2024. "Authenticity Perceptions of Informational and Transformational Advertising: Decoding the Role of Construal Level Mindset." *Psychology & Marketing* 42, no. 3: 817–841.
- Papadopoulou, C., M. Hultman, and P. Oghazi. 2026. "Diversity in Femvertising: An Experimental Investigation." *Psychology & Marketing* 43, no. 3: 518–537.
- Park, M., J. Koo, and D. Y. Kim. 2023. "Femvertising of Luxury Brands: Message Concreteness, Authenticity, and Involvement." *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing* 14, no. 3: 243–262.
- Peer, E., L. Brandimarte, S. Samat, and A. Acquisti. 2017. "Beyond the Turk: Alternative Platforms for Crowdsourcing Behavioral Research." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 70: 153–163.
- Schad, J., M. W. Lewis, S. Raisch, and W. K. Smith. 2016. "Paradox Research in Management Science: Looking Back to Move Forward." *Academy of Management Annals* 10, no. 1: 5–64.
- Smith, W. K., and M. W. Lewis. 2011. "Toward a Theory of Paradox: A Dynamic Equilibrium Model of Organizing." *Academy of Management Review* 36, no. 2: 381–403.
- Sobande, F. 2019. "Woke-Washing: 'Intersectional' Femvertising and Branding 'Woke' Bravery." *European Journal of Marketing* 54, no. 11: 2723–2745.
- Spence, M. 1973. "Job Market Signaling." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 87, no. 3: 355–374.
- Spiggle, S. 1994. "Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research." *Journal of Consumer Research* 21, no. 3: 491–503.
- Sterbenk, Y., S. Champlin, K. Windels, and S. Shelton. 2022. "Is Femvertising the New Greenwashing? Examining Corporate Commitment to Gender Equality." *Journal of Business Ethics* 177, no. 3: 491–505.
- Varghese, N., and N. Kumar. 2022. "Feminism in Advertising: Irony or Revolution? A Critical Review of Femvertising." *Feminist Media Studies* 22, no. 2: 441–459.
- Vredenburg, J., S. Kapitan, A. Spry, and J. A. Kemper. 2020. "Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing?" *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 39, no. 4: 444–460.
- Wagner, T., R. J. Lutz, and B. A. Weitz. 2009. "Corporate Hypocrisy: Overcoming the Threat of Inconsistent Corporate Social Responsibility Perceptions." *Journal of Marketing* 73, no. 6: 77–91.
- Weber, E. U., A.-R. Blais, and N. E. Betz. 2002. "A Domain-Specific Risk-Attitude Scale: Measuring Risk Perceptions and Risk Behaviors." *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making* 15, no. 4: 263–290.
- Wolff, K., S. Larsen, and T. Øgaard. 2019. "How to Define and Measure Risk Perceptions." *Annals of Tourism Research* 79: 102759.
- Yoon, Y., Z. Gürhan-Canli, and N. Schwarz. 2006. "The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Activities on Companies With Bad Reputations." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 16, no. 4: 377–390.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.

Supporting File: mar70265-sup-0001-Web_Appendix.docx.