

# PERSONALIZATION, BRAND STORYTELLING, AND PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY IN COLLECTIVIST MARKETS: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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## Abstract

Personalization and brand storytelling have long been recognized as effective marketing strategies for building consumer relationships. However, how these two strategies interact with perceived brand authenticity in collectivist-oriented markets remains inadequately understood. This review aims to integrate fragmented literature on personalization, brand storytelling, and perceived authenticity within collectivist cultural contexts. Through systematic searches across three databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect), 742 raw entries were obtained. After deduplication based on DOI and title, 330 unique articles remained. Screening based on inclusion and exclusion criteria yielded 54 articles for in-depth analysis. Findings reveal that existing literature is divided into three main clusters: (1) brand storytelling and authenticity, (2) personalization and authenticity, and (3) authenticity in collectivist cultural contexts. A significant gap was identified: no single article simultaneously examined personalization, brand storytelling, and authenticity in collectivist contexts. This review proposes an integrative conceptual framework that considers collectivist cultural dimensions as a key moderator. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

## Keywords:

personalization, brand storytelling, brand authenticity, collectivism, conceptual review

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## INTRODUCTION

Modern marketing finds itself caught in a fundamental paradox. On one hand, consumers increasingly demand personalized experiences; they expect brands to understand their preferences, needs, and life contexts (Wu et al., 2026). On the other hand, the same consumers have become deeply

skeptical of brand claims. They detect insincerity with remarkable ease, and they punish brands perceived as "merely profit-seeking" or "pretending to care" (Pera et al., 2016). This tension has given rise to what the literature calls an authenticity crisis. Consumers no longer ask only "what does this brand offer?" but also "is this brand truly what it claims to be?" Brand authenticity — the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as sincere, genuine, and not fabricated — has thus become one of the most consequential constructs in contemporary marketing (Kusumasondjaja, 2022; Shi, 2026). Within this context, two strategies have emerged as brands' primary efforts to build authenticity: personalization and brand storytelling.

Personalization refers to a brand's deliberate effort to tailor content, offers, or experiences to individual consumer preferences (Mangoch, 2026). Advances in digital technology — particularly artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data analytics — have enabled personalization at a scale that was unimaginable only a decade ago (Westerbeek, 2025). The promise is seductive: by knowing consumers individually, brands can deliver messages that are more relevant, timely, and meaningful than any mass-market communication could hope to be (Zeitoun et al., 2020). Marketing literature broadly supports this promise, documenting personalization's effectiveness in enhancing engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty. Yet personalization also carries risks that are often underestimated. When consumers feel "watched" or "manipulated," personalization can trigger reactions that are not merely negative but actively corrosive to brand relationships (Haastrup, 2022). Wu et al. (2026) captured this tension in what they termed the personalization paradox: when personalization becomes too precise, consumers feel uncomfortable and begin to suspect the brand's motives. The very precision that was meant to demonstrate care instead signals intrusion. Personalization, in other words, is not a straightforward good; its effects are contingent, curvilinear, and deeply shaped by context.

Brand storytelling operates through a different logic. It refers to a brand's effort to convey messages through narratives that possess plot, character, and emotional meaning (Shimp, 2025). Unlike conventional advertising, which conveys factual claims and appeals to cognition, brand storytelling touches the emotional and identity dimensions of consumer experience (Yin et al., 2023). The literature identifies at least three reasons for storytelling's effectiveness. First, stories are more memorable than facts; they are encoded in memory through narrative structures that survive the erosion of detail (Green & Brock, 2000). Second, stories enable consumers to become emotionally "transported," temporarily suspending their skepticism and becoming immersed in the narrative world (Green & Brock, 2000). Third, stories help consumers understand who a brand is — its identity, its values, and its place in the world (Pera et al., 2016). In the specific context of

authenticity, storytelling plays a particularly crucial role. Stories that are personal, transparent, and consistent with brand identity are believed to enhance perceived authenticity (Eng & Jarvis, 2020; Pera et al., 2016). Conversely, stories that feel "fabricated" or "too perfect" actually reduce authenticity, because they signal that the brand is performing rather than being (Shi, 2026). Authenticity, in this sense, is not something a brand can simply claim; it must be narratively earned.

Yet both personalization and storytelling have been studied predominantly in individualist Western markets (Pera et al., 2016; Yin et al., 2023). This is a significant limitation, because most consumers worldwide live in collectivist markets — including Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Japan, Korea, and other Southeast Asian countries (Hofstede, 2001). The cultural distinction between individualism and collectivism carries profound implications for marketing (Hofstede, 2001). In individualist cultures, consumers tend to evaluate brands based on personal benefits, self-expression, and autonomy. In collectivist cultures, by contrast, consumers tend to evaluate brands based on social harmony, relationships, and community contribution (Hoang & Nguyen, 2025). These differences extend to how consumers assess authenticity. In individualist cultures, authenticity is often associated with consistency with oneself — "being true to yourself." In collectivist cultures, authenticity is more closely associated with consistency with group values and contribution to social harmony (Hati et al., 2026). In other words, what is considered "authentic" in the West may not be considered "authentic" in Asia. The cultural lens through which authenticity is judged is not a peripheral variable; it is constitutive of the judgment itself.

Despite these insights, the existing literature on personalization, brand storytelling, and authenticity remains fragmented in ways that limit theoretical progress. Four gaps are particularly consequential. First, research on brand storytelling and authenticity has largely focused on Western contexts (Pera et al., 2016; Yin et al., 2023). These studies provide valuable insights, but their generalizability is bounded by the individualist assumptions embedded in their samples and stimuli. Second, research on personalization and authenticity rarely considers cultural dimensions (Wu et al., 2026; Zeitoun et al., 2020). Yet consumer reactions to personalization are strongly influenced by cultural norms regarding privacy, trust, and relational distance (Hofstede, 2001). A personalization strategy that feels respectful in one culture may feel intrusive in another. Third, research in collectivist contexts often examines only one concept — storytelling alone, or authenticity alone — without integrating personalization (Hati et al., 2026; Thao, 2025). Consequently, we lack a comprehensive understanding of how these two strategies simultaneously influence perceived authenticity. Fourth, no systematic review has specifically integrated these three concepts —

personalization, brand storytelling, and authenticity — within collectivist cultural contexts. The field, in short, has the pieces but not the picture.

Based on these research problems, this review poses four research questions. RQ1 asks how personalization and brand storytelling respectively influence perceived authenticity in collectivist markets, and what mechanisms and boundary conditions have been identified in the literature. RQ2 asks whether there is an interaction effect between personalization and brand storytelling on perceived authenticity in collectivist contexts, and if so, what the direction and strength of that effect might be. RQ3 asks how collectivist cultural dimensions — such as group orientation, high-context communication, and social harmony — moderate the relationship between personalization, brand storytelling, and perceived authenticity. RQ4 asks what the existing research gaps are, and what integrative conceptual framework can be proposed to guide future research.

This review aims to accomplish four things: (1) map existing literature on personalization, brand storytelling, and authenticity in collectivist contexts; (2) identify significant research gaps; (3) propose an integrative conceptual framework that considers collectivist cultural dimensions; and (4) provide a research agenda for future studies. The expected contributions are threefold. Theoretically, this review integrates three streams of literature that have remained separate, and it enriches authenticity theory with collectivist cultural perspectives. Practically, it provides guidance for marketers in collectivist markets on how to combine personalization and brand storytelling in ways that build rather than erode authenticity. Methodologically, it offers a framework for future research that treats cultural context not as a control variable but as a constitutive dimension of the phenomenon itself.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Review Design**

This review employs an integrative conceptual review approach. This approach was chosen because the review's purpose is not merely to summarize empirical findings, but to integrate fragmented literature streams and propose a new conceptual framework (Torraco, 2005). Unlike conventional systematic reviews focused on causal effects, integrative conceptual reviews allow researchers to map literature across disciplines, identify theoretical gaps, and propose relationships between constructs that have not yet been examined. This review follows PRISMA guidelines modified for conceptual reviews (Page et al., 2021).

### **Search Strategy**

Literature searches were conducted across three databases: Google Scholar (via Publish or Perish), Scopus (via Publish or Perish with API Key), and ScienceDirect (web interface). Search date: October 11, 2026.

Keywords were structured around four core concepts:

- (1) Personalization: personaliz OR customiz OR tailor;
- (2) Brand storytelling: storytelling OR brand story OR narrative OR brand narrative;
- (3) Authenticity: authentic OR perceived authenticity OR brand authenticity;
- (4) Collectivism: collectivist OR collectivism OR interdependent OR high-context OR Eastern culture OR Confucian.

**Boolean string for Scopus:**

TITLE-ABS-KEY(("personaliz" OR "customiz" OR "tailor") AND ("storytelling" OR "brand story" OR "narrative" OR "brand narrative") AND ("authentic" OR "perceived authenticity" OR "brand authenticity") AND ("collectivist" OR "collectivism" OR "interdependent" OR "group-oriented" OR "high-context" OR "Eastern culture" OR "Confucian")) AND (LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE, "ar") OR LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE, "re")) AND (LIMIT-TO(LANGUAGE, "English"))

**Boolean string for ScienceDirect:**

("storytelling" OR "brand story" OR "brand narrative" OR "narrative") AND ("authentic" OR "perceived authenticity" OR "brand authenticity")

**Boolean string for Google Scholar (via PoP):**

"personaliz" | "customiz" "storytelling" | "brand story" "authentic" | "brand authenticity" -review -"book chapter" -thesis -dissertation -handbook

Search limits: year range 2016–2026, language English and Indonesian, document types Article, Review, Journal.

**Screening Process**

Screening was conducted in five stages:

Stage 1: Deduplication. All raw entries from the three databases were combined. Deduplication was based on DOI as the primary key, and title (lowercase, trimmed) as a secondary key if DOI was unavailable. Result: from 742 raw entries, 412 were duplicates, leaving 330 unique articles.

Stage 2: Document Type Screening (E1). Articles that were not peer-reviewed journal articles were removed: books, book chapters, conference papers, citations, PDF/HTML. Result: 179 removed, 151 remaining.

Stage 3: Year Screening (E2). Articles outside 2016–2026 were removed. Result: 0 removed, 151 remaining.

Stage 4: Topic Relevance Screening (E3 + I4). Articles were screened for topic relevance. Inclusion criterion: article must address at least 2 of 3 core concepts (personalization, brand storytelling, authenticity). Result: 81 removed, 70 remaining.

Stage 5: Quality Screening (E4). Articles without DOI or clear journal name were removed to ensure quality and verifiability. Result: 16 removed, 54 final articles remaining.

#### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Inclusion Criteria: (I1) Peer-reviewed journal article; (I2) Publication year 2016–2026; (I3) English or Indonesian language; (I4) Addresses at least 2 of 3 core concepts; (I5) Has DOI and clear journal name.

Exclusion Criteria: (E1) Books, book chapters, conference papers; (E2) Year < 2016; (E3) Irrelevant topics; (E4) No DOI or unclear journal.

#### **Data Extraction**

Data from 54 final articles were extracted using an extraction sheet covering: code, author, year, journal, country/context, sample, method, theory, independent variables, dependent variables, mediator, moderator, main findings, research gaps, and relevance to RQs.

#### **Data Analysis**

Analysis was conducted in three steps: (1) Thematic analysis—54 articles were grouped by core concept combinations into three clusters: A (Personalization + Authenticity, 11 unique articles), B (Brand Storytelling + Authenticity, 36 articles), C (Brand Storytelling + Authenticity + Collectivism, 17 articles); (2) Thematic synthesis—each cluster was analyzed to identify main themes, dominant theories, dominant methods, and gaps; (3) Conceptual framework development—based on synthesis, an integrative conceptual framework was developed connecting personalization, brand storytelling, authenticity, and collectivist cultural dimensions.

#### **Methodological Limitations**

This review has several limitations: (1) database coverage limited to three databases; (2) language limited to English and Indonesian; (3) Scopus access limitations via Publish or Perish with a 200-result limit per query; (4) incomplete metadata quality from Google Scholar; (5) subjectivity in topic relevance screening.

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Overview**

The fifty-four articles that survived the screening process cluster into three broad streams of inquiry, each defined by the combination of concepts it addresses. Cluster A, the smallest, comprises eleven unique articles (20.4%) examining the relationship between personalization and authenticity. Cluster B, by far the largest, comprises thirty-six articles (66.7%) examining the relationship between brand storytelling and authenticity. Cluster C comprises seventeen articles (31.5%) examining brand storytelling and authenticity within collectivist cultural contexts. Because several articles address more than two concepts, they appear in more than one cluster; the unique total nevertheless remains fifty-four. This uneven distribution is itself a finding. It

reveals that the field has invested far more attention in storytelling than in personalization, and that the intersection of personalization and storytelling—the very intersection this review seeks to illuminate—remains almost entirely unexplored.

The temporal distribution offers a second layer of insight. Articles published between 2016 and 2018 account for only eight of the fifty-four, while the period 2019–2021 contributes twelve, the period 2022–2024 contributes sixteen, and the most recent period, 2025–2026, contributes eighteen. The trend is unmistakable: scholarly interest has grown steadily, and the most recent two-year window has produced more articles than any comparable period. This acceleration coincides with the rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence, the rise of short-form video platforms such as TikTok, and the growing visibility of authenticity as a marketing concern. The field is not merely expanding; it is responding to a shifting technological and cultural landscape.

The geographic distribution reveals a third pattern, and one that is central to this review's motivation. Twenty-eight articles—more than half of the corpus—are situated in Western contexts, including the United States, Europe, and Australia. Seventeen articles are situated in Asian contexts, including Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan. Five adopt a global or cross-national perspective, and four do not specify their geographic context with sufficient clarity to permit classification. This distribution confirms the concern articulated in the introduction: the study of personalization, storytelling, and authenticity has been, and remains, a predominantly Western enterprise. The Asian context is not absent, but it is underrepresented relative to the proportion of the world's consumers who live in collectivist markets. More importantly, the Asian articles that do exist tend to cluster in Cluster C, where they examine storytelling and authenticity without integrating personalization. The result is a literature that knows a great deal about how storytelling builds authenticity in Asia, but very little about how personalization interacts with that process.

The methodological distribution offers a fourth perspective. Quantitative methods dominate, with twenty-two articles employing surveys, experiments, or other quantitative designs. Qualitative methods account for fourteen, mixed methods for eight, and conceptual or review articles for ten. This distribution reflects the broader conventions of marketing scholarship, but it also carries implications for the questions this review seeks to answer. Quantitative studies are well suited to testing causal relationships and measuring effect sizes, but less well suited to exploring the cultural meanings and interpretive processes that shape authenticity perceptions in collectivist contexts. Qualitative studies are better equipped to capture the nuance and context-dependence of authenticity judgments, but they are less numerous.

The relative scarcity of mixed-methods designs is particularly noteworthy, since the research questions posed in this review—questions about mechanisms, interactions, and cultural moderation—call for designs that integrate quantitative rigor with qualitative depth.

Taken together, these four distributions—conceptual, temporal, geographic, and methodological—paint a portrait of a field that is growing, diversifying, and yet still fragmented. The growth is real and accelerating. The geographic diversification is underway but incomplete. The methodological repertoire is broad but unevenly distributed. And the conceptual integration that this review advocates—the integration of personalization, storytelling, authenticity, and culture into a single framework—has not yet been achieved. It is this gap that the following sections seek to address.

### **Cluster A: Personalization and Authenticity (11 Articles)**

This cluster examines how personalization influences perceived authenticity.

Finding 1: Personalization does not always enhance authenticity—there is a paradox. Wu et al. (2026) identified a "personalization paradox": when personalization is too precise, consumers feel uncomfortable and suspicious of brand motives. In the context of ocean conservation education, AI-based personalization actually reduced emotional resonance and cognitive engagement. Conversely, authentic and universal content was more effective.

Finding 2: Transparency is key. Zeitoun et al. (2020) found that when brands use CEOs or employees as spokespersons, personalization succeeds only if there is transparency about internal relationships. When consumers feel something is "hidden," perceived authenticity decreases.

Finding 3: AI poses new challenges. Westerbeek (2025) examined AI-based personalization in athlete branding. He found that "augmented authenticity"—authenticity generated from human-AI co-production—raises new questions: can authenticity be "produced" artificially?

Finding 4: Political context differs from commercial context. Hernández-Santaolalla (2020, 2022) examined personalization in politics. He found that in political contexts, personalization is more tolerated than in commercial contexts, because consumers (voters) expect personal relationships with leaders.

Dominant theories: Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) (4 articles), Privacy Calculus Theory (3 articles), Affordance Theory (3 articles), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) (2 articles). Dominant methods: Experiment (5 articles), Survey (4 articles), Qualitative (2 articles), Conceptual (1 article). Cluster A Gaps: (1) Western context dominant (10 of 11 articles); (2) No study examines personalization + brand storytelling simultaneously; (3) Cultural dimensions not considered.

**Cluster B: Brand Storytelling and Authenticity (36 Articles)**

This cluster examines how brand storytelling influences perceived authenticity.

Finding 1: Personal narratives are more effective than professional narratives. Eng and Jarvis (2020) found that narratives about celebrities' personal lives (not just professional lives) produce stronger brand attachment. This is because personal narratives trigger communal relationship norms—the feeling that the brand is a "friend" rather than a "seller."

Finding 2: Narratives consistent with brand identity enhance authenticity. Pera et al. (2016) found that narratives consistent with core brand values enhance perceived authenticity. Conversely, narratives that go "off-brand" actually reduce authenticity—even if the narrative is negative.

Finding 3: Transparent narratives about weaknesses enhance authenticity. Shi (2026) found that founder narratives that disclose vulnerability enhance brand attachment. However, there is an optimal point: too much vulnerability disclosure reduces authenticity (inverted U-shaped relationship).

Finding 4: Narratives must align with product type and price. Yin et al. (2023) found that the effectiveness of authenticity narratives depends on product type (search vs. experience) and price level (high vs. low). Indexical authenticity narratives (fact-based) are more effective for low-priced search products, while iconic authenticity narratives (symbol-based) are more effective for high-priced experience products.

Finding 5: AI-generated narratives pose new challenges. Soliman (2026), Fadel (2026), and Peng (2026) examined AI-generated narratives. They found that consumers detect AI narratives and reduce perceived authenticity—unless AI narratives are clearly labeled and combined with human elements.

Finding 6: Visual and multimodal narratives are increasingly important. Chen and Eriksson (2019) and Broască et al. (2026) found that visual narratives (images, video) and multimodal narratives (text-image-sound combinations) are more effective than text-only narratives in building authenticity. Dominant theories: Narrative Transportation Theory (Green & Brock, 2000) (9 articles), Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) (7 articles), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) (5 articles), Brand Relationship Theory (4 articles), Narrative Persuasion Theory (3 articles). Dominant methods:

Experiment (13 articles), Survey (9 articles), Qualitative (8 articles), Conceptual/Review (6 articles).

Cluster B Gaps: (1) Western context dominant (22 of 36 articles); (2) No study examines storytelling + personalization simultaneously; (3) Cultural dimensions rarely considered (only 5 articles); (4) Collective narratives unexplored.

### **Cluster C: Brand Storytelling, Authenticity, and Collectivism (17 Articles)**

This cluster examines how collectivist culture alters the relationship between brand storytelling and perceived authenticity.

Finding 1: Authenticity in collectivist contexts is relational, not individual. Hoang and Nguyen (2025) found that in Vietnam, destination authenticity is not only about individual experience but also about community contribution. Consumers feel a brand is "authentic" if it benefits the group, not just the self.

Finding 2: Local values and cultural heritage are strong sources of authenticity. Hati et al. (2026) examined Indonesian organic brand Javara. They found that authenticity is built through global certification, heritage narratives, and packaging reflecting local culture. Indonesian consumers feel a brand is "authentic" if it respects tradition and supports local farmers.

Finding 3: Collective narratives are more effective than personal narratives in collectivist contexts. Hoang and Nguyen (2025) found that in Vietnam, destination authenticity is relational rather than individual — consumers feel a brand is "authentic" when it contributes to the community, not just to the self. Hati et al. (2026) similarly found that Indonesian consumers evaluate authenticity through a brand's respect for tradition and support for local farmers. These findings suggest that in collectivist contexts, narratives that emphasize community, heritage, and collective benefit resonate more strongly than narratives that emphasize individual experience. This differs from Western findings, where personal narratives are more effective (Eng & Jarvis, 2020).

Finding 4: Culturally-based storytelling enhances authenticity. Thao (2025) examined Vietnamese green food brands. He found that green food brand stories elevating local values and tradition were more effective in building consumer trust than generic global narratives.

Finding 5: Social media accelerates the spread of collective narratives. Kautsar and Aqilah (2026), Alim et al. (2025), and Astuti and Kristiyono (2025) found that in Indonesia, TikTok and Instagram are the primary platforms for disseminating community-based brand

narratives. Narratives created by consumers (user-generated content) are more trusted than brand-created narratives.

Finding 6: Personalization in collectivist contexts is more complex. Lazuardi et al. (2025) examined Mang Ucup's personal branding on TikTok. They found that personalization succeeds only if the figure represents community values, not just individual personality.

Dominant theories: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 2001) (6 articles), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) (4 articles), Consumer Culture Theory (3 articles), Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) (2 articles). Dominant methods: Qualitative (9 articles), Quantitative (5 articles), Mixed Methods (3 articles).

Cluster C Gaps: (1) No study examines personalization + brand storytelling + authenticity simultaneously; (2) The concept of collectivism remains vague (many use "Asian context" as proxy); (3) No integrative conceptual framework exists.

### Cross-Cluster Synthesis

Table 1 compares the three literature clusters along five dimensions: focus, key finding, dominant theory, geographic context, and principal gap. The comparison reveals a clear asymmetry. Cluster A, which examines personalization and authenticity, is the smallest and the most recent in its formation; its central finding is the personalization paradox, and its dominant theoretical lens is signaling theory. Cluster B, which examines brand storytelling and authenticity, is the largest and most theoretically mature; its central finding is the superiority of personal narratives, and its dominant lens is narrative transportation theory. Cluster C, which examines storytelling and authenticity within collectivist contexts, occupies a middle position in size but a distinctive position in substance; its central finding is the superiority of collective narratives, and its dominant lens is Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Across all three clusters, the geographic context remains predominantly Western, with the exception of Cluster C. More importantly, the gap column reveals a pattern of mutual neglect: Cluster A does not consider culture, and Clusters B and C do not integrate personalization. No cluster integrates all three concepts.

**Table 1**

Comparison of Findings Across the Three Literature Clusters

| Aspect      | Cluster A (P+A)                 | Cluster B (S+A)                    | Cluster C (S+A+C)                                    |
|-------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Focus       | Personalization<br>Authenticity | Storytelling<br>Authenticity       | Storytelling<br>Authenticity in collectivist context |
| Key Finding | Personalization paradox         | Personal narratives more effective | Collective narratives more effective                 |

|                 |                    |     |                            |     |                            |     |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----|----------------------------|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| Dominant Theory | Signaling Theory   |     | Narrative Transportation   |     | Hofstede                   |     |
| Context         | West               |     | West                       |     | Asia                       |     |
| Gap             | Culture considered | not | Personalization integrated | not | Personalization integrated | not |

Source: Author's synthesis of 54 reviewed articles.

When the findings of the three clusters are read together rather than in isolation, three patterns emerge. These patterns are not stated explicitly in any single article; they are inferences drawn from the cross-cluster comparison. Table 2 summarizes these patterns.

**Table 2**

Emerging Patterns Across the Three Literature Clusters

| Pattern   | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pattern 1 | Authenticity is contextual. What is considered "authentic" depends on cultural context. In Western contexts, authenticity is primarily associated with self-consistency and individual transparency; in Asian contexts, it is associated with group harmony and community contribution.                      |
| Pattern 2 | Personalization and storytelling work through different mechanisms. Personalization works primarily through relevance and efficiency; storytelling works primarily through emotional transportation and identification. The two can reinforce each other or undermine each other depending on context.       |
| Pattern 3 | There is a trade-off between personalization and authenticity. Beyond a certain threshold, personalization can trigger feelings of manipulation rather than feelings of care. This trade-off is proposed to be stronger in collectivist contexts, where privacy and social harmony are more heavily guarded. |

Source: Author's synthesis of 54 reviewed articles.

Pattern 1 concerns the contextual nature of authenticity. The literature reviewed in this study suggests that authenticity is not a universal construct with fixed criteria; rather, it is a culturally situated judgment. In Western contexts, authenticity is primarily associated with self-consistency and individual transparency, whereas in Asian contexts it is associated with group harmony and community contribution. This pattern has significant implications for the framework proposed in Section 4, because it suggests that the same brand strategy may produce different authenticity judgments depending on the cultural context in which it is deployed.

Pattern 2 concerns the mechanisms through which personalization and storytelling operate. The two strategies are not interchangeable; they work through different psychological pathways. Personalization works primarily through relevance and efficiency—it reduces cognitive effort and signals that the brand has invested in understanding the consumer. Storytelling works primarily through emotional transportation and identification—it immerses the consumer in a narrative world and allows them to experience the brand's values vicariously. The two mechanisms can reinforce each other, as when a personalized narrative produces both relevance and transportation, or they can

undermine each other, as when excessive personalization disrupts the immersive quality of a story.

Pattern 3 concerns the trade-off between personalization and authenticity. The literature reviewed in this study suggests that personalization is not a straightforward good. Beyond a certain threshold, personalization can trigger feelings of manipulation rather than feelings of care. This trade-off is present in all cultural contexts, but it is proposed to be stronger in collectivist contexts, where privacy and social harmony are more heavily guarded. In such contexts, the risk that personalization will be interpreted as intrusion rather than as attentiveness is heightened.

Beyond these three patterns, the cross-cluster comparison also reveals a set of research gaps that no single cluster has been able to address. Table 3 consolidates these gaps.

**Table 3**

**Main Research Gaps Identified in the Literature**

| Gap   | Description                                                                                             |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gap 1 | No article examines personalization, brand storytelling, and authenticity simultaneously.               |
| Gap 2 | No article examines personalization, brand storytelling, authenticity, and collectivism simultaneously. |
| Gap 3 | Collectivism dimensions are often measured vaguely, using "Asia" as a proxy.                            |
| Gap 4 | No integrative conceptual framework connecting the three concepts exists.                               |
| Gap 5 | No research in Indonesia explicitly examines all three concepts simultaneously.                         |

Source: Author's synthesis of 54 reviewed articles.

Gap 1 is the most fundamental: no article in the reviewed corpus examines personalization, brand storytelling, and authenticity simultaneously. This means that the interaction between the two strategies—the very interaction this review seeks to illuminate—remains empirically unexplored. Gap 2 extends Gap 1 by adding collectivism as a fourth construct; no article examines all four constructs together, which means that the moderating role of culture remains theoretically asserted but empirically untested. Gap 3 concerns measurement: many studies in collectivist contexts use "Asia" as a proxy for collectivism without measuring the construct explicitly, which limits the precision of their conclusions. Gap 4 concerns theory: no integrative conceptual framework connects the three concepts, which means that the field lacks a shared map for cumulative research. Gap 5 is context-specific: no research in Indonesia—the largest collectivist market in Southeast Asia—explicitly examines all three concepts simultaneously, despite the country's theoretical importance for the framework proposed in this review. Together, these five gaps define the research agenda that Section 4 develops.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **From Fragmentation to Integration**

Findings in Section 3 show that literature on personalization, brand storytelling, and authenticity remains fragmented into three clusters operating independently. No single article examines all three concepts simultaneously. This is the main gap this review aims to fill. This discussion proposes an integrative conceptual framework connecting four constructs: Personalization (P), Brand Storytelling (S), Authenticity (A), and Collectivism (C).

### **Integrative Conceptual Framework**

The integrative conceptual framework proposed in this review is organized into three sequential layers, with a cultural moderator operating across all layers. The first layer comprises the two strategic antecedents that brands deploy in their pursuit of authenticity: personalization (P), which refers to a brand's deliberate effort to tailor content, offerings, or experiences to individual consumer preferences and operates through the logic of relevance (Mangoch, 2026), and brand storytelling (S), which refers to a brand's effort to convey meaning through narratives with plot, character, and emotional resonance and operates through the logic of emotional transportation and identification (Shimp, 2025; Green & Brock, 2000). These two antecedents are positioned as co-equal inputs, a deliberate theoretical choice that departs from prior literature's tendency to examine them in isolation (Pera et al., 2016; Zeitoun et al., 2020). The second layer comprises three psychological mechanisms that mediate the effects of the antecedents: perceived relevance, which is most closely associated with personalization and signals that a brand has invested effort in understanding the consumer (Spence, 1973); narrative transportation, which is most closely associated with storytelling and refers to the cognitive and emotional immersion that reduces counter-arguing and deepens engagement with the brand's values (Green & Brock, 2000); and social identification, which draws on social identity theory and refers to consumers' tendency to define themselves in terms of group membership, a mechanism particularly important in collectivist contexts where group membership is central to self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hoang & Nguyen, 2025). These three mechanisms are not mutually exclusive; a single brand experience may activate all three simultaneously. The third layer comprises the primary outcome of interest, perceived authenticity, which refers to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as sincere, genuine, and not fabricated and which is positioned as a perception constructed by consumers rather than as a fixed attribute of the brand (Pera et al., 2016; Kusumasondjaja, 2022), along with its downstream consequences of trust, loyalty, and engagement, which reflect the literature's consensus that authenticity functions as an antecedent of relational outcomes (Kaur & Rana, 2022; Shi, 2026). Operating across all three layers is a single cultural moderator, collectivism (C), conceptualized as a multidimensional cultural orientation comprising group orientation, social

harmony, and high-context communication (Hofstede, 2001), which shapes the strength and direction of the relationships in the model rather than directly causing authenticity perceptions; specifically, collectivism is proposed to strengthen the social identification pathway while potentially weakening the personal relevance pathway, consistent with findings in Vietnam (Hoang & Nguyen, 2025), and Indonesia (Hati et al., 2026). Together, the three layers and the cultural moderator form a coherent model that begins with strategic inputs, traces psychological mechanisms, and culminates in authenticity perceptions and relational outcomes, with collectivism shaping the strength and direction of these relationships across all layers; this integrative structure addresses the fragmentation identified in the literature review by positioning personalization, storytelling, and culture as interconnected components of a single explanatory system, and it is this integration that constitutes the primary theoretical contribution of the present review.

### **Theoretical Propositions**

Based on literature synthesis, this review proposes six propositions for future research.

**Proposition 1:** Direct Effect of Personalization. Personalization has a curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) effect on perceived authenticity. At low levels, personalization enhances authenticity through relevance. However, at high levels, personalization reduces authenticity by triggering feelings of "manipulation" (Wu et al., 2026; Zeitoun et al., 2020; Westerbeek, 2025).

**Proposition 2:** Direct Effect of Brand Storytelling. Brand storytelling has a positive effect on perceived authenticity, and this effect is stronger for narratives that are personal, transparent, and consistent with brand identity (Pera et al., 2016; Shi, 2026; Eng & Jarvis, 2020).

**Proposition 3:** Interaction Effect of Personalization  $\times$  Brand Storytelling. Personalization and brand storytelling have a synergistic interaction effect on authenticity. When combined, their effect is greater than the sum of their separate effects (Yin et al., 2023; Liu, 2026).

**Proposition 4:** Mediating Role of Process Mechanisms. The relationship between (P  $\times$  S) and authenticity is mediated by three mechanisms: Perceived Relevance, Narrative Transportation, and Social Identification (Green & Brock, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Spence, 1973).

**Proposition 5:** Moderation of Collectivism. Collectivism moderates the relationship between (P  $\times$  S) and authenticity: in high collectivist contexts, the social identification pathway is stronger; in high individualist contexts, the personal relevance pathway is stronger (Hoang & Nguyen, 2025; Hati et al., 2026).

**Proposition 6:** Personalization-Authenticity Trade-off. There is a trade-off between personalization and authenticity that is stronger in collectivist contexts. The more personal, the greater the risk consumers feel

"manipulated"—and this risk is greater in collectivist cultures because privacy and social harmony are more guarded (Wu et al., 2026; Hofstede, 2001).

### **Theoretical Contributions**

This review offers four theoretical contributions: (1) Integration of three literature streams—this review is the first to integrate three literature streams that have been separate; (2) Integrative conceptual framework—connecting four constructs (P, S, A, C) with three mechanisms (relevance, transportation, identification); (3) Propositions on cultural moderation—separating which pathways are stronger in collectivist vs. individualist cultures; (4) Propositions on trade-off—predicting that the personalization paradox is stronger in Asia.

### **Practical Contributions**

For Marketers in Collectivist Markets: (1) Don't be too personal—excessive personalization can trigger suspicion; (2) Use collective narratives—narratives about community and cultural heritage are more effective; (3) Transparency is key—explain why and how data is used; (4) Involve the community—consumer-created narratives are more trusted; (5) Respect local values—authenticity is built through community contribution. For Researchers: (1) Test propositions empirically; (2) Use cross-cultural designs; (3) Measure collectivism explicitly; (4) Explore collective narratives; (5) Consider the role of AI.

### **Discussion Limitations**

(1) Propositions have not been empirically tested; (2) Framework remains conceptual; (3) Cultural context not measured explicitly; (4) Focus on Asian context.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Conclusions**

This review set out to answer four research questions on personalization, brand storytelling, and perceived authenticity in collectivist markets. On the first question, the two strategies operate through different mechanisms. Personalization works through relevance and efficiency, while storytelling works through emotional transportation and identification. Personalization's effect is curvilinear: it enhances authenticity at low levels but reduces it beyond a threshold by triggering feelings of manipulation. Storytelling has a more consistent positive effect, especially when narratives are personal, transparent, and consistent with brand identity. On the second question, no empirical study has directly tested the interaction between personalization and storytelling. Theoretically, the two could reinforce or undermine each other, but the direction and strength of this interaction remain unexplored. On the third question, culture is not peripheral but constitutive. In collectivist contexts, authenticity is relational rather than individual:

consumers evaluate brands by their contribution to the community. Narratives emphasizing community and heritage resonate more strongly than personal narratives, contrasting with Western findings. The trade-off between personalization and authenticity is also likely stronger in collectivist contexts. On the fourth question, this review proposed a three-layer framework linking personalization and storytelling as antecedents, three mechanisms as mediators, and authenticity along with trust, loyalty, and engagement as outcomes, with collectivism as a cross-cutting moderator. Six propositions were generated for empirical testing. Taken together, the field has the pieces but not the picture: it knows much about storytelling and authenticity, growing amounts about personalization and authenticity, but little about how the two interact in collectivist contexts.

### **Suggestions**

For marketers in collectivist markets, five suggestions follow. First, avoid excessive personalization, which can trigger suspicion rather than trust. Second, prioritize collective narratives emphasizing community, heritage, and collective benefit. Third, be transparent about how consumer data is used. Fourth, involve the community in narrative creation, since user-generated content is more trusted. Fifth, respect local values, as authenticity in collectivist contexts is built through community contribution and respect for tradition. For researchers, five suggestions follow. First, test the six propositions empirically using experimental and survey designs. Second, use cross-cultural designs comparing collectivist and individualist markets directly. Third, measure collectivism explicitly rather than using "Asia" as a proxy. Fourth, explore collective narratives as a distinct construct. Fifth, examine how AI-generated content affects authenticity perceptions in collectivist contexts.

### **Limitations**

This review has six limitations. First, database coverage was limited to Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect. Second, the language was limited to English and Indonesian, excluding other Asian languages. Third, Scopus access was limited by the 200-result cap in Publish or Perish. Fourth, metadata from Google Scholar was inconsistent, with many entries lacking DOI. Fifth, topic relevance screening involved subjective judgment. Sixth, the framework remains conceptual and has not been empirically tested.

### **Further Research**

Several avenues for further research emerge. First, the six propositions should be tested empirically, for instance through a 2×2 experiment manipulating personalization and storytelling in Indonesia. Second, a cross-national survey comparing Indonesia and the United States would test

the moderating role of collectivism. Third, a cross-cultural experiment could test whether the personalization paradox is stronger in collectivist contexts. Fourth, a qualitative study of collective narratives on Indonesian social media would provide rich insight. Fifth, an experiment comparing AI-generated and human-generated content would clarify AI's effects on authenticity. Sixth, longitudinal studies could examine how these relationships evolve as consumers become more familiar with AI-driven marketing. Finally, future research could extend the framework to other collectivist contexts beyond Asia, such as Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

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