



Purpose Sells, Product Tells?

The Impact of Storytelling Strategies on Brand Perception
among Young Beauty Consumers

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Abstract

Title:

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Keywords:

Storytelling, Purpose, Brand Perception, Customer-based-brand-equity, Purchase Intention, Beauty-Industry

The following study examines how product- and purpose-driven storytelling affects Brand Perception and purchasing behavior among young beauty consumers. In light of the growing importance of value-based communication, this study analyzes whether purpose narratives actually generate stronger emotional and behavioral effects than product-centered communication.

A mixed-methods approach was used. First, a quantitative online survey ($n = 275$) was conducted in which the two storytelling approaches were compared experimentally based on adapted campaigns from The Body Shop and Nivea. Brand Perception was measured along the dimensions of the customer-based brand equity model and supplemented by the factors of authenticity and purchase intention. In order to interpret the quantitative results in greater depth, qualitative interviews were then conducted with consumers, industry experts, and a consumer psychologist.

The results show that purpose-driven storytelling strengthens symbolic brand perception (Imagery) but does not trigger immediate emotional reactions. Product-driven storytelling, on the other hand, is perceived as helpful and leads to stronger emotional reactions and higher Purchase Intentions. Feelings prove to be the only significant predictor of purchase intention. Furthermore, authenticity is shown to be a necessary prerequisite for emotional impact.

This study contributes to storytelling and brand research by identifying purpose as a primarily semantic mechanism and emotions as a central determinant of behavior in the beauty sector. In practical terms, it underscores the importance of clear, credible, and reassuring communication in a saturated market environment.

Resumo

Título:

O propósito vende, o produto informa?

O impacto das estratégias de storytelling na percepção da marca entre jovens consumidoras de produtos de beleza

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Palavras-chave:

Storytelling, propósito, percepção da marca, valor da marca baseado no cliente, intenção de compra, indústria da beleza

Este estudo analisa como a narrativa orientada para o produto e para o propósito influencia a percepção da marca e o comportamento de compra de jovens consumidores de produtos de beleza. Tendo em conta a crescente relevância da comunicação baseada em valores, a investigação examina se as narrativas orientadas para o propósito geram efeitos emocionais e comportamentais mais fortes do que a comunicação centrada no produto.

Foi adotada uma abordagem de métodos mistos. Numa primeira fase, realizou-se um inquérito quantitativo online ($n = 275$), no qual as duas abordagens de storytelling foram comparadas experimentalmente com base em campanhas adaptadas da The Body Shop e da Nivea. A percepção da marca foi medida através das dimensões do modelo de customer-based brand equity, complementadas pelos construtos de autenticidade e intenção de compra. Para aprofundar a interpretação dos resultados, foram conduzidas entrevistas qualitativas com consumidores, especialistas do setor e uma psicóloga do consumidor.

Os resultados mostram que a narrativa orientada para o propósito reforça a percepção simbólica da marca, mas não desencadeia reações emocionais imediatas. Em contraste, a narrativa orientada para o produto é percebida como mais útil, conduzindo a respostas emocionais mais fortes e a intenções de compra mais elevadas. Os sentimentos revelam-se o único preditor significativo da intenção de compra, sendo a autenticidade um pré-requisito essencial para o impacto emocional.

Este estudo contribui para a investigação em storytelling e branding ao evidenciar o papel semântico do propósito e a centralidade das emoções no comportamento de compra no setor da beleza.

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1. Introduction

“Marketing is no longer about the stuff you make but the stories you tell.” - Seth Godin

This quote highlights a fundamental shift in marketing. In an increasingly dynamic and digital brand landscape, consumers are exposed to a flood of advertising every day, with peak values measured at over 16,000 contacts per day (Simms & Murray, 2024). Such a high advertising density leads to “ad fatigue,” causing consumers to lose interest and even ignore or reject brand messages (Gunter, 2025). This phenomenon is also reflected in the rising “cost of attention.” Within two decades, the economic value of consumer attention has increased seven to ninefold. As a result, brands must find new ways to capture consumer attention more efficiently (Teixeira, 2014).

This development has transformed the interaction between brands and consumers at its core. Instead of traditional product advertising, which tends to focus on conveying functional product information, consumers today expect more meaningful, emotionally engaging brand relationships (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). To meet this demand, brands are increasingly turning to narrative communication, or storytelling, to deliver narrative values, social identity, and emotional connection, which also builds credibility and brand loyalty (Fog et al., 2010).

This development is particularly evident in marketing in the beauty industry, which is considered a reflection of social and cultural changes and is one of the most dynamic and competitive industries in the world. With constantly new trends and products, often influenced by social media, the industry is very fast-moving (McKinsey, 2024). The global beauty market is currently estimated at around US\$677 billion, with annual growth of approximately 7.7%. Skin care dominates the market with a share of around 40% (Saini, 2025). Young consumers between the ages of 18 and 35, who make up about 60% of beauty consumers and have a strong purchasing power of about US\$450 billion, place great value on authenticity, sustainability, and social responsibility, which has a lasting impact on brands' communication strategies (McKinsey, 2025; Saini, 2025). Therefore, they not only pay attention to whether a product works, but also to what the brand stands for. To meet the demands of these critical and informed consumers, brands must credibly live their values and create emotional connections through storytelling.

In this context, the question arises as to how different storytelling approaches in the rapidly changing beauty industry affect young, critical consumers. This paper focuses on comparing

product-driven versus purpose-driven storytelling in order to identify differences in brand perception and purchase intent. Brand perception is examined using Kevin Lane Keller's (2001) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, which measures functional and symbolic aspects as well as cognitive judgments and emotional responses (Keller, 2001). Using this model, the effects of the two storytelling approaches on consumers between the ages of 18 and 35 are analyzed. It should be noted that brands never pursue one approach or the other 100%, but usually apply hybrid communication strategies that combine the two narrative styles in varying proportions (Frieman, 2023).

Although both the CBBE model and storytelling have been extensively researched, there is currently no study that compares product-driven and purpose-driven storytelling and analyzes their effectiveness across CBBE levels in the beauty industry. Furthermore, there is a lack of research examining the effects of both storytelling approaches on purchase intention.

This thesis aims to address this gap using a mixed-methods approach. This involves conducting an online survey using a single-factor, between-subjects experimental design on the exemplary brands Nivea and The Body Shop, which will then be supplemented by qualitative interviews. The aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding on both an empirical and practical level.

The following section begins by presenting the theoretical framework that will serve as the basis for the empirical study. This is followed by the methodology, then the results, and finally a discussion and conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Fundamentals of storytelling in marketing

2.1.1 Definition and origin of storytelling

As the name suggests, storytelling is the art of telling stories in which information is conveyed through narrative structures. The primary aim is to tell stories in such a way that they evoke emotions and captivate the target audience (Miller, 2017; Signorelli, 2014).

In the words of McKee and Gerace (2018), “data tells what happened, and stories explain why it happened.” This means that storytelling transforms raw facts into meaningful narratives. According to ethnologists, the origins of storytelling date back over 200,000 years and have their roots in the campfires of our ancestors (Fog et al., 2010). Typically, a story combines a character, a predicament, and a desired liberation or solution to the problem, structured into a beginning, middle, and end, known as the three-act-structure (McKee & Gerace, 2018).

This structure is also used in modern marketing communication. Storytelling is used to bring products and brands to life and make them emotionally tangible through stories. Individually relevant experiences and values are addressed in order to create a lasting connection and identification of the recipients with the brand (Jiwa, 2018; Walter & Gioglio, 2018).

2.1.2 From traditional advertising to narrative branding

Nowadays, traditional advertising is increasingly met with rejection or ignorance, as it tends to be perceived as disruptive. The high density of advertising and the resulting “ad fatigue” cause consumers to feel overwhelmed and suffocated by the mass of advertising (Gunter, 2025; Simms & Murray, 2024). This form of oversaturation triggers rejection of traditional advertising. McKee and Gerace (2018) describe this phenomenon as a “marketing crisis”, as the impact of tried-and-tested marketing activations is waning and they are perceived as intrusive and dishonest. Storytelling offers a modern alternative that works through emotional engagement rather than advertising pressure (Frieman, 2023).

Traditional advertising is based on a “push-approach” that imposes advertising messages or promises but is becoming increasingly ineffective (McKee & Gerace, 2018). Traditional advertising relies on functional benefits and one-sided product communication (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). In contrast, storytelling functions as a “pull-approach.” Consumers are attracted by stories, and the emotional resonance enables a deeper connection (McKee & Gerace, 2018).

In view of the constantly rising costs that brands have to bear in order to attract consumers' attention, it is becoming evident that traditional forms of advertising are becoming increasingly inefficient. Attention has become a “scarce commodity” whose cost is rising dramatically in the modern advertising landscape. This is why innovative and emotionally engaging communication strategies, such as storytelling, are becoming increasingly relevant (Teixeira, 2014).

The two approaches also differ greatly in terms of content. While “advertising brags,” “stories prove” (McKee & Gerace, 2018), meaning that traditional advertising tends to exaggerate, while storytelling uses concrete experiences and values and lets the stories speak for themselves (Fog et al., 2010). Communication is thus shifting from purely functional product features to value-based experiences that strengthen identification with the brand (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

In summary, it can be said that there is a clear trend towards relationship marketing. The shift is away from purely persuasive, information-oriented communication and towards emotionally appealing storytelling (Frieman, 2023; Jiwa, 2018). Brands no longer want to simply send messages, but rather build genuine, trusting relationships (Miller, 2017).

2.1.3 Cognitive and Emotional Functions of Storytelling

By embedding complex experiences and values in memorable stories, storytelling creates a deeper emotional connection to a brand's values. As a result, consumers grasp the meaning of a brand and develop an emotional bond that goes beyond purely rational considerations (Jiwa, 2018; Miller, 2017). It is important that the stories told create social belonging and identity, which is achieved by conveying group values and opportunities for individual identification. In this way, brands become symbols or convictions, which is particularly important for young consumers (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Miller, 2017).

Therefore, storytelling connects rational and emotional processes, creating meaningful connections instead of simply conveying information. This means storytelling is a cognitive structure that helps to take in and process information without getting overwhelmed by organizing events into cause-and-effect chains (Miller, 2017). Through its narrative structure, which integrates experiences, values, and brand messages, storytelling offers the opportunity to address consumers holistically. This combines cognitive processing with emotional identification, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and engagement (Frieman, 2023; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

In addition, the ability to attract and retain attention has become a decisive competitive factor. In light of this, storytelling is particularly effective because its narrative elements enable cognitive and emotional engagement, which promotes the attention of young consumers (Teixeira, 2014).

Aided by storytelling, brands shift the focus from themselves to the consumer as the main character in the narrative. The audience is more interested in seeing themselves as the heroes of the story than in the story of the brand (Miller, 2017). Seen in this light, the goal is an emotional transformation so that brand values are experienced and internalized. This creates a strong sense of identity and loyalty (Duarte, 2013; McKee & Gerace, 2018). Brands that integrate their customers into a meaningful, empowering narrative will achieve long-term growth, while those that fail to do so are likely to lose relevance for consumers (Miller, 2017).

In conclusion, the cognitive and emotional functions of storytelling work synergistically: emotional engagement creates relevance and connection, while in the background, the cognitive structure helps to make what is received easier to understand and supports memory. This interaction makes storytelling a very effective tool in modern marketing (Fog et al., 2010; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

2.1.4 Psychological Foundations: Narrative Transportation Theory

Besides, according to narrative transport theory, stories activate the same areas of the brain as real experiences. This allows recipients to immerse themselves emotionally in stories (Green & Brock, 2000). This form of engagement promotes the effectiveness of marketing activities because it creates strong emotional bonds and, as a result, increased persuasiveness (McKee & Gerace, 2018; Miller, 2017).

2.2 Product- vs. Purpose-Oriented Storytelling in the Beauty Industry

For the purpose of this study, two well-known brands from the beauty industry were selected to serve as examples of different approaches in storytelling. In this study, Nivea is classified as product-driven. Nivea uses science-based innovation to build consumer trust. The brand's core values are communicated as technical expertise and dermatological competence (Smith, 2018).

In contrast, The Body Shop is classified in this paper as a purpose-driven brand. Since its founding, the brand identity has been shaped by animal welfare, fair trade, and social responsibility. Purpose-driven communication is fundamental to the brand's positioning, with stores and campaigns explicitly referred to as "activist hubs" (Fleming, 2019).

However, the classification used within this paper is not an absolute truth, but serves solely as an analytical operationalization. Therefore, a clear basis for comparison is created. In general, both brands combine elements of product- and purpose-driven storytelling. Since the classification used here is based on historical and recurring communication patterns, it may therefore involve potential biases.

2.2.1 Product-oriented storytelling (Nivea)

Product-oriented storytelling emphasizes the functionality, quality, and benefits of the product. The story of the product is told in such a way that it acts as a tool to help consumers achieve their goals. The brand tends to take on the role of a mentor, while consumers themselves play the leading role in the story (Miller, 2017). This form of storytelling is particularly suitable for established brands with a strong product identity that primarily want to communicate reliability (McKee & Gerace, 2018). The focus is less on emotional depth and more on clearly communicating the product's advantages and functionality.

Nivea clearly pursues this approach. Scientific research and quality assurance serve as central narrative elements, and campaigns communicate the benefits of the products in a comprehensible way (Beiersdorf, 2024; Kotler et al., 2025). This is done, for example, by communicating skin care formulas that address specific skin needs. Such storytelling creates trust and consolidates the brand's position as a reliable skin care specialist (McKinsey, 2024).

However, product-oriented storytelling also faces challenges. Functional differentiation is becoming increasingly difficult in a saturated market. As a result, brands are trying to emotionally charge even simple products in order to continue to stand out. The risk here is so-called storywashing (Choi, 2024; Yin et al., 2023). This means that the stories overshadow the actual product performance. Consumers are particularly sensitive to such over-the-top staging when the emotional appeal does not match the actual user experience (Kolbl et al., 2020). For brands such as Nivea, whose strength lies in trust, proximity, and haptic credibility, it means that authenticity must be conveyed primarily through the material experience of the product and not through exaggerated narratives (Winnenburg, 2022).

2.2.2 Purpose-oriented storytelling (The Body Shop)

In contrast, value-oriented or purpose-oriented storytelling focuses on stories about sustainability, social justice, diversity, and ethnic responsibility. According to Kotler et al. (2023), we are currently experiencing a shift in which consumers expect brands to take a stand and claim social relevance. Marketing 3.0 shows a development that shifts the focus from the

product to the customer to the person. With the help of such purpose stories, emotional identification is created through values and meaning rather than through the product itself (McKee & Gerace, 2018).

The Body Shop exemplifies this form of storytelling. In its communications, the brand consistently positions itself as a pioneer in areas such as ethical trade, animal welfare, and environmental protection (The Body Shop, 2022). The communication strategy emphasizes missions related to fair trade and social responsibility, creating a close emotional connection with consumers. By actively living out its purpose strategy, the brand appeals to and retains particularly value-oriented and committed consumers (Leong & Tan, 2025; Mackman Group, 2024).

However, there is also a downside to purpose-driven storytelling. Instead of creating an emotional connection, narratives around sustainability, inclusion, or activism increasingly raise questions about authenticity and integrity. If the brand does not consistently support this form of communication through its behavior as a company, it runs the risk of being seen as a mere communication strategy. This phenomenon, also known as greenwashing or woke-washing, describes the purely strategic use of ethical narratives without implementing any changes within the company. This triggers skepticism and a loss of trust among consumers. In the beauty sector, promises such as “clean,” “vegan,” and “cruelty-free” are becoming increasingly visible. According to Forbes (2022), 79% of consumers doubt the credibility of sustainability claims, and Mintel (2025) also shows that over 65% find it difficult to distinguish between genuine commitment and pure marketing. Authenticity is therefore a basic requirement for purpose-driven storytelling in order to ensure credibility and long-term trust.

The two different approaches vary not only in their thematic focus but also in the type of relationship they build with their consumers. Product-oriented storytelling relies on functional trust and brand competence, while value-oriented storytelling relies on emotional identification and moral agreement (McKee & Gerace, 2018; Miller, 2017). In practice, hybrid forms that combine both strategies are more commonly used to promote both rational and emotional brand loyalty (Frieman, 2023).

2.2.3 The beauty industry as a storytelling context

The beauty industry is considered one of the fastest-moving and most trend-driven industries, which is also heavily influenced by social media. That's why storytelling plays such a central role in this sector (Kotler et al., 2025; McKinsey, 2024). Social media platforms such as TikTok

and Instagram in particular showcase storytelling visually and offer the opportunity to create immersive brand experiences that blur the boundaries between the physical and digital worlds (Kotler et al., 2025).

Moreover, the beauty industry is a highly emotional one. The products are closely linked to consumers' self-image, identity, and social perception (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Kotler et al., 2025). Authenticity, sustainability, and social values are basic requirements for appearing credible to young consumers (Kotler et al., 2025; McKinsey, 2025; Saini, 2025).

Cosmetics are used to express identity, belonging, and self-efficacy. This is supported by storytelling through an offer of values and meaning, thereby enhancing emotional connections (McKee & Gerace, 2018). Given the rising cost of attention and the high level of competition in the industry, storytelling in the beauty industry is more than just a communication tool (Teixeira, 2014). It serves as an essential strategy for remaining relevant in the attention economy and building long-term customer relationships.

2.3 The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model

From a consumer perspective, brand value is a key success factor in modern brand management. Kevin Lane Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model (hereinafter referred to as CBBE) has established an international benchmark for brand values that is widely used in both academia and practice (Keller, 2001).

2.3.1 Theoretical Foundations and Structure

In CBBE, brand equity is understood not as an objective variable but as a psychological construct based on brand knowledge, personal experiences, and the associated associations of consumers. This is illustrated in a pyramid-shaped model consisting of four levels:

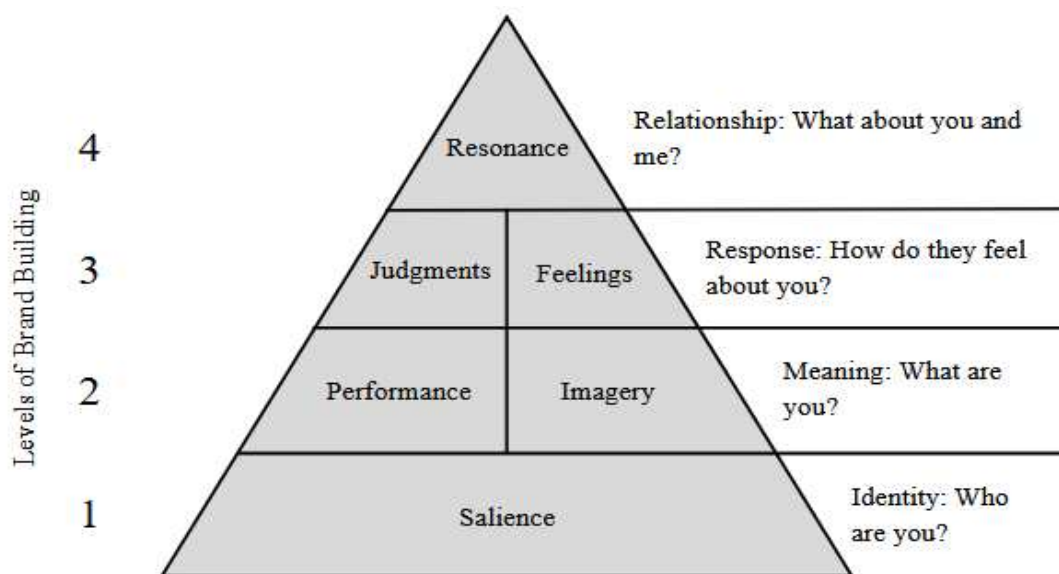


Figure 1: Levels of Brand Building in CBBE. Adapted from Keller (2001).

1. Identity (Brand Salience)

This level represents the foundation of CBBE and, accordingly, brand relationships. It means that the brand must be recognized and remembered.

2. Meaning (Performance and Imagery)

This level considers functional characteristics such as quality and reliability, but also symbolic values such as the brand's image.

3. Response (Judgments and Feelings)

At this level, the focus is on subjective judgments and emotional reactions based on credibility, among other things, but also on emotional reactions such as warmth, security, or social recognition.

4. Relationship (Resonance)

The final and highest level of the pyramid focuses on customer relationships and the loyalty that comes with them, as well as active brand communication and recommendation.

2.3.2 Brand perception in the context of Generation Z

Generation Z, also known as “phygital natives,” moves naturally between the physical and digital worlds, setting new standards for brand communication (Kotler et al., 2025). For them, values such as sustainability and diversity are fundamental requirements for credible brand communication. This means that brands are no longer measured solely by the quality of their products, but also by their stance on social issues (Deloitte, 2025).

With reference to CBBE, these expectations are particularly reflected in levels 2 and 3. Value orientation and emotional authenticity must match the identity of consumers (Keller, 2001).

Even beyond Generation Z, namely among younger millennials, there is an increasing demand for transparency and purpose-driven communication (Deloitte, 2025). According to Miller (2017), consumers must see themselves as part of a brand story in order to develop brand loyalty. This is achieved through emotional identification, which represents level 4 in CBBE (Keller, 2001). When brands use narrative communication to evoke these emotional associations in consumers, long-term customer loyalty and retention are promoted. This makes it clear that storytelling and CBBE work together like gears (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Miller, 2017).

2.3.3 Connection between storytelling and CBBE

Storytelling can be used at all four levels of CBBE. At level 1, it conveys functional usage aspects, and at the higher levels, emotional resonance experiences are utilized. For example, brand identification is promoted through narrative imagery (McKee & Gerace, 2018). Brands that tell stories create cognitive and emotional connections, thereby strengthening loyalty and engagement (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

This is already very clearly evident in the cosmetics industry. L'Oréal, for example, combines individuality, empowerment, and first-class product development in one brand (L'Oréal, 2024). Consequently, the company not only appeals to Level 1, but also builds a strong emotional community and therefore serves the higher levels. Estée Lauder, on the other hand, focuses on elegant luxury and emotional brand loyalty. This is clearly reflected in the trust and brand resonance (Caldwell, 2018).

2.3.4 Critical reflection

Despite the application of CBBE in theory and practice, the model also has weaknesses. One weak point is the understanding of brand relationships. CBBE understands these primarily as reaction patterns to brand stimuli and therefore only captures the effect of narrative communication to a limited extent (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2019). Narrative communication, in contrast, is based on meaning attribution and co-creation, meaning a process where consumers actively participate in creating meaning for the brand (Koerich da Silveira, 2024). Such complex interactions can only be considered to a limited extent in CBBE. The linear logic of the model seems too one-dimensional, especially for consumers who actively shape their brand relationships (Steriopoulos et al., 2024).

Furthermore, CBBE is strongly focused on the consumer side and pays less attention to external factors such as economic changes in the market (Gutiérrez et al., 2024). Influences from digital media and their effects on consumer behavior are not considered either (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2019). For use in different countries, the model would also have to be adapted to different cultures. Accordingly, the model is not suitable and applicable in every situation, and these aspects should not be ignored.

In addition to functional and ethical brand communication, storytelling also has a strong symbolic effect. People not only absorb brand messages, but also see them as stories that they incorporate into their own lives. This makes brands fixed points of personal identity, known as self-brand connections (Edson Escalas, 2004). Miller (2017) emphasizes that consumers seek out and prefer brands that reflect their ideal image. Storytelling uses motifs such as heroes, mentors, or change to fulfill the need for meaning, recognition, and self-efficacy (McKee & Gerace, 2018). Accordingly, brands become cultural reference points that convey values and a sense of belonging. In this context, there is talk of “modern myths” that brands use to create collective meaning. Thus, brand loyalty is not based solely on trust, but also on the extent to which one's own identity is reflected in the symbolic history of a brand (Holt, 2004).

2.3.5 Conclusion and relevance for the present research

Although the CBBE has theoretical limitations, it provides a valid basis for analyzing the effect of different storytelling approaches on brand perception in the cosmetics industry. The structure allows for the investigation of how narrative brand communication affects different dimensions (levels 1-4).

Criticisms, such as the limited consideration of co-creation, digital or cultural influences, underscore the need for context-specific application (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2019; Gutiérrez et al., 2024). In this paper, the CBBE is not used as a rigid hierarchy, but rather functions as an "analytical lens". Through this lens, the cognitive and emotional effects of both product- and value-oriented storytelling are examined and then compared.

While CBBE provides the structure for measuring brand-related responses, critical analysis complements this and helps to correctly understand and apply the results in a modern marketing context. In a nutshell, CBBE bridges the gap between theory and practice-oriented implications for brands in the "attention market" (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Keller, 2001).

3. Methodology

3.1 Statement of Research Methodology

This thesis aims to identify and analyze the effects of different storytelling strategies on young consumers' perception of beauty brands. The CBBE serves as the theoretical basis, enabling both cognitive and emotional brand responses to be systematically recorded. On this basis, a sequential mixed-methods approach was developed that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach first identifies measurable correlations between storytelling strategy and brand perception and then explains, based on qualitative data, which mechanisms underlie these effects. This allows the research question to be examined from different perspectives, resulting in as comprehensive an overall picture as possible.

3.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1 How do young beauty consumers perceive product-oriented storytelling strategies?

RQ2 How do young beauty consumers perceive purpose-oriented storytelling strategies?

RQ3 Which dimensions of brand perception, as defined in Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model (e.g., Brand Performance, Brand Imagery, Brand Judgments, and Brand Feelings), are most influenced by product- versus purpose-oriented storytelling strategies?

RQ4 To what extent do differences in storytelling strategies affect young consumers' Purchase Intention?

H1: Storytelling type significantly influences young consumers' brand perception.

H1a: Purpose-oriented storytelling increases perceived authenticity and emotional appeal.

H1b: Product-oriented storytelling increases perceived competence and trustworthiness.

H2: Storytelling type differentially affects the dimensions of customer-based brand equity.

H2a: Purpose-oriented storytelling strengthens Brand Imagery and Feelings.

H2b: Product-oriented storytelling strengthens Brand Performance and Judgments.

H3: The purchasing intentions of young consumers are primarily influenced by emotional brand reactions, as emotional factors play an increasingly important role in brand evaluation and purchasing decisions for them.

3.3 Research Design and Data Collection

The study comprises two phases that are coordinated in terms of content and timing.

3.3.1 Phase 1: Quantitative research (Online Survey)

The survey uses a single-factor, between-subjects experimental design. Participants are randomly assigned to one of two groups. Each group sees a stimulus, either from Nivea (product-driven storytelling) or The Body Shop (purpose-driven storytelling). Although these stimuli are based on real campaigns by the two brands, they have been standardized to avoid bias due to personal preferences as much as possible. The stimuli are followed by a manipulation check to ensure that the intended narrative orientation has been correctly recognized. Although the survey link was distributed internationally, only German-speaking participants were retained in the final sample in order to avoid cultural variation.

A total of 275 responses was recorded. The sample comprises 178 German consumers between the ages of 18 and 35. Recruitment takes place via social networks (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook). This target group is considered particularly sensitive to brand values and authenticity and represents a large proportion of beauty consumers.

3.3.2 Phase 2: Qualitative research (Consumer and Expert Interviews)

The quantitative survey will be followed by semi-structured interviews. The qualitative research was deliberately conducted after the quantitative results had been evaluated in order to expand on them interpretatively rather than to validate them. Interviews were conducted with two

industry experts and a consumer psychologist, at the same time as with consumers. Experts were selected based on their relevance in the fields of consumer psychology and the cosmetics industry. These interviews are intended to add depth to the empirical results and reflect on them from a professional perspective. Additionally, seven German consumers aged 18-35 are interviewed in order to provide a better understanding of the insights gained from quantitative research. Consumers were selected using purposive sampling in order to examine relevant and contrasting perspectives. To keep the sample as diverse as possible, different genders and levels of beauty engagement were deliberately chosen. Four women and four men were interviewed to counteract potential gender bias. Within the chosen mixed-methods approach, the interviews are intended solely to provide deeper contextualization and interpretative supplementation of the quantitative results. Therefore, the sample size of eleven interviews (eight consumers, two industry experts, and one psychologist) is appropriate.

The semi-structured interview format was chosen to ensure comparability between interviews while also offering sufficient flexibility to address individual experiences and spontaneous thematic explorations. After conducting these interviews, they will be transcribed and then analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021). The reflexive thematic analysis facilitates the identification and interpretation of patterns of meaning in the statements. This approach is particularly suitable for this research project, as both explicit content (semantic level) and underlying meanings and mechanisms (latent level) are examined. In doing so, it provides rich insights into how Authenticity, Purchase Intention, and the different CBBE dimensions are constructed by consumers and experts.

3.4 Operationalization and analysis

The dimensions of the CBBE (see Figure 1) are used to measure brand perception in concrete terms. These were implemented directly in the questionnaire, and the items are based on validated measurement instruments from market research (Keller, 2001; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Napoli et al., 2014).

The perceptions of the two brands examined were recorded using statements on all CBBE dimensions, namely Brand Awareness, Brand Performance, Brand Imagery, Brand Judgments, Brand Feelings, and Brand Resonance. These dimensions are used to illustrate both cognitive and emotional responses. In addition, the model was expanded in the present study to include perceived authenticity and purchase intention.

The data was collected using statement-based items. Each statement was rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

All CBBE dimensions were considered, but this study focuses on the second to fourth levels of the model (see Figure 1). Salience, which merely represents recognition, was not taken into account, as both brands are already well established. Brand performance was assessed, for example, based on perceived product quality and reliability, using statements such as “[BRAND] products deliver consistent quality and performance.” Imagery, on the other hand, was measured using symbolic and value-related associations, such as how well the brand fits with the consumer's own lifestyle and personal values. Emotional responses to the respective brand were operationalized using statements about positive feelings and emotional attachment, before finally testing resonance through willingness to recommend. The two additional constructs of purchase intention and perceived authenticity were also assessed using statements such as “[BRAND]’s communication appears genuine and authentic” and “I can imagine buying a product from [BRAND].”

The internal consistency of all constructs with multiple items was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Based on this, composite scale scores were created in SPSS by averaging the corresponding items. The evaluation is then carried out using descriptive and inferential statistical methods via SPSS. A descriptive analysis firstly describes the sample and the general distribution. Based on this, independent-samples t-tests are used to check for significant differences between the two storytelling approaches. In addition, Pearson correlations and multiple regression analyses capture the relationships between authenticity, the CBBE dimensions, and purchase intention.

As already described, the qualitative data from the interviews will be analyzed using the reflexive thematic analysis method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021). The analysis will proceed in six steps:

- (1) familiarization with the data,
- (2) generating initial codes,
- (3) searching for themes,
- (4) reviewing themes,
- (5) defining and naming themes, and

(6) writing report.

The individual steps were carried out as follows. After transcribing the interviews, they were read several times in order to gain a deep understanding of the material and to make initial analytical notes. The statements of the interviewees were then manually coded line by line and initial semantic codes were formed. These were based explicitly on what was said and, if a deeper pattern was discernible from the context, latent meanings were also coded. These codes were created in the form of a table and merged into clusters. Overarching themes were derived from these clusters. These themes were repeatedly reviewed in several review loops before being finally defined and named precisely. The appendix F contains the coding tables for the three different strands in order to make the analytical process transparent and comprehensible.

Since the interviews with consumers, experts, and the psychologist pursue different objectives, the qualitative data is evaluated in different strands of analysis. The groups are coded and discussed independently of each other to ensure the different perspectives can be considered. This separation is intended to remain specific patterns of meaning within the groups before they are compared and merged in the later analysis phase. An overarching synthesis is carried out only after the individual analyses have been completed in order to identify common core patterns and classify them thematically.

This method helps to deepen the quantitative results in a targeted manner and to identify possible underlying mechanisms of individual aspects. The fact that this method is both structured and flexible enables a differentiated interpretation of the data. In addition, the method supports the integration of the interview results with the quantitative data.

It should be noted that, in the context of reflexive thematic analysis, themes are not obviously present in the data material. They are developed through the researcher's interpretation. Due to the fact that the researcher is personally specialized in the field of marketing and also has experience in beauty communication, this had to be consistently reflected throughout the entire process. Decisions such as merging, splitting, or renaming themes were deliberately made in line with the research questions in order to ensure transparency.

To ensure that the methodology is valid and reliable, a back-translation procedure was implemented for bilingual items, a standardized presentation of the stimuli was used, and the participants were anonymized. These controls are intended to minimize response bias and increase the comparability of the results.

4. Results

This chapter presents only the empirical results of the study. The theoretical classifications follow afterwards (Chapter 5).

4.1 Data cleaning and sample

A total of 275 survey responses were collected. These were cleaned according to predefined criteria. First, participants who were not residing in Germany and are outside the specified age range of 18-35 were excluded. Subsequently, participants who did not pass the manipulation check were eliminated. Consequently, 178 valid results remained, which were included in the analysis. The two experimental groups were perfectly balanced, with 89 participants assigned to the product-driven group (= Nivea) and 89 to the purpose-driven group (= The Body Shop).

The largest age group consisted of participants between 23 and 26 years of age (approx. 49%). In addition, the majority of the sample identified as female (67%), followed by male participants (31%). The adjusted data set had no missing values, so all variables were fully analyzable.

4.2 Manipulation check

The manipulation check was used to verify whether participants could correctly recognize the central message of the stimulus shown. Based on this, all participants who did not correctly identify the message were excluded.

Among the remaining 178 participants, a completely clear separation of the experimental conditions can be seen. All participants in the purpose-driven condition correctly interpreted the stimulus as conveying a sustainability message, while the participants in the product-driven group correctly perceived their stimulus as conveying a product performance message.

This ensures that only individuals who understood the manipulation are included in the further analyses. It also ensures high internal validity and enables robust group comparisons.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of the CBBE Dimensions

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables of brand perception according to Keller and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for brand-related constructs

Construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Brand Performance	178	10.33	100.00	65.68	16.89
Brand Imagery	178	10.00	100.00	65.85	17.48
Brand Judgments	177	23.50	100.00	71.48	16.92
Brand Authenticity	177	6.00	100.00	64.81	20.86
Brand Feelings	177	6.67	100.00	64.70	20.24
Purchase Intention	176	3.50	100.00	62.77	25.72
Brand Resonance	88	21.00	100.00	67.14	17.60

Note: Brand Resonance includes only participants who completed all items of this scale.

The mean values of the different CBBE dimensions were in the medium to positive range. Brand Judgments ($M = 71.48$, $SD = 16.92$) were the most pronounced, followed by Brand Resonance ($M = 67.14$, $SD = 17.60$) and Brand Imagery ($M = 65.85$, $SD = 17.48$). Brand Performance, Brand Authenticity, Brand Feelings, and Purchase Intention were also above the midpoint of the scale.

The standard deviations ranged from moderate to high, depending on the variable. This indicates a certain degree of variance in the participants' assessments. For Brand Resonance, only 88 complete responses were available, as not all participants completed all items on the scale. All other variables were answered in full and could be included in further analyses without restriction.

4.4 Group Comparisons

In order to test the hypotheses from 3.2, independent sample t-tests were conducted. The aim was to identify and analyze possible differences between product-driven storytelling (Nivea) and purpose-driven storytelling (The Body Shop). Table 2 provides the findings of all t-tests for the brand-related variables. The results of the individual hypotheses are reported in the following sections.

Table 2: Independent samples t-tests comparing product-driven and purpose-driven storytelling across brand-related variables

Measure	M ₁	SD ₁	M ₂	SD ₂	t	df	p	95% CI (LL–UL)	Cohen's d
Brand Performance	67.10	16.81	64.26	16.94	1.12	176	.263	−2.15, 7.83	0.17
Brand Imagery	63.06	19.13	68.64	15.26	−2.15	176	.033*	−10.69, −0.45	−0.32
Brand Judgments	70.35	16.46	72.63	17.39	−0.89	175	.372	−7.30, 2.75	−0.13
Brand Authenticity	63.93	20.90	65.70	20.89	−0.56	175	.573	−7.97, 4.43	−0.09
Brand Feelings	67.31	20.05	62.05	20.20	1.74	175	.084	−0.71, 11.23	0.26
Purchase Intent	67.06	24.44	58.48	26.38	2.24	174	.027*	1.01, 16.15	0.34
Brand Resonance	—	—	67.14	17.60	—	—	—	—	—

Note: Sample sizes differ across variables because some participants did not complete all scale items.

4.4.1 Testing H1a and H1b

A comparison of the mean values of the Brand Authenticity and Brand Feelings scales between the two experimental groups was conducted to test H1a (s. Table 2). No significant difference was found for Brand Authenticity between the purpose-oriented condition ($M = 65.38$, $SD = 20.23$) and the product-oriented condition ($M = 64.25$, $SD = 21.49$), $t(175) = -0.34$, $p = .735$.

Similarly, for Brand Feelings, there was no significant difference between the purpose condition ($M = 65.39$, $SD = 20.69$) and the product condition ($M = 63.98$, $SD = 19.79$), $t(175) = -0.45$, $p = .656$.

H1a is therefore not supported.

To test H1b, the variables Brand Performance and Brand Judgments were examined (s. Table 2). Again, there were no significant differences between the groups. The values for Brand Performance were ($M = 65.70$, $SD = 17.32$) in the product-driven condition and ($M = 65.66$, $SD = 16.50$) in the purpose-driven condition, $t(176) = -0.01$, $p = .991$.

There was also no significant difference in Brand Judgments between the product-driven condition ($M = 71.84$, $SD = 16.68$) and the purpose-driven condition ($M = 71.13$, $SD = 17.22$), $t(175) = -0.25$, $p = .804$.

H1b is therefore not supported either. Since neither H1a nor H1b is supported, the overarching hypothesis H1 is likewise not supported.

4.4.2 Testing H2a and H2b

The comparison of Brand Imagery and Brand Feelings values was used to test H2a. There is a significant difference between the experimental groups in terms of Brand Imagery. Participants in the purpose-oriented condition rated Brand Imagery significantly higher ($M = 68.64$, $SD = 17.41$) than participants in the product-oriented condition ($M = 63.06$, $SD = 17.26$), $t(176) = -2.15$, $p = .033$.

As already found in the testing of H1a, there was no significant difference between the groups in terms of Brand Feelings.

Accordingly, H2a is partially supported.

To test H2b, the variables Brand Performance and Brand Judgments were compared between the two storytelling conditions. Consistent with the results for H1b, there were no significant differences for either construct.

Therefore, H2b is not supported. Overall, the overarching H2 is only partially supported. Purpose-driven storytelling does strengthen Brand Imagery, but no significant effects were found for the other CBBE dimensions.

4.4.3 Additional CBBE dimension: Brand Resonance

In order to cover all dimensions, Brand Resonance between the two conditions was also compared. Again, there was no significant difference between the product-oriented ($M = 67.53$, $SD = 16.56$) and purpose-oriented conditions ($M = 66.73$, $SD = 18.72$), $t(86) = -0.25$, $p = .804$.

Additional exploratory analysis of individual items was conducted to reveal possible fine structures within the CBBE dimensions. The patterns of the items corresponded to the scale findings. Performance items tended to be higher in the product-driven condition. In the purpose-driven condition, however, Imagery and Judgment items were higher. In the dimension of Feelings, no consistent pattern could be identified. Although these descriptive trends do not change the previous results, they do provide additional nuances for later discussion.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

The fundamental relationships between the brand-related constructs surveyed were determined using a Pearson correlation matrix. All CBBE dimensions showed moderate to strong positive

correlations with each other. The values typically ranged from $r \approx .50-.74$. On average, higher ratings on one dimension were accompanied by higher ratings on other dimensions. Additional variables collected, such as sustainable packaging, price orientation, and skincare importance, showed positive but weaker correlations with the CBBE dimensions. Therefore, these variables were only considered complementary and were not included in the hypothesis tests.

The complete correlation matrix with all coefficients and significance values can be found in the appendix (see Appendix D1).

4.6 Regression Analyses

Several regression analyses were conducted to test H3 and to complement the analysis of further correlations between the CBBE dimensions. The primary focus was on determining which aspects of brand perception had the strongest influence on the participants' purchase intention.

4.6.1 Testing H3

H3 assumes that the purchase intention of young consumers is primarily influenced by emotional brand reactions.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Predicting Purchase Intention from CBBE Dimensions

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	-9.451	9.330	—	-1.01	.314
Brand Performance	0.476	0.278	.306	1.72	.090
Brand Imagery	0.121	0.258	.068	0.47	.641
Brand Judgments	-0.093	0.163	-.062	-0.57	.569
Brand Authenticity	-0.031	0.129	-.024	-0.24	.813
Brand Feelings	0.827	0.159	.634	5.22	< .001
Brand Resonance	-0.201	0.206	-.134	-0.98	.330

Note: DV = Purchase Intention. Standardized coefficients (β) are reported. The analysis was based on N = 88 complete cases. Model fit: $R^2 = .637$.

The regression model showed that Brand Feelings is the only significant predictor of purchase intention. Higher emotional reactions were associated with a higher Purchase Intention. All other CBBE dimensions showed no significant effects. The model explained a total of 63.7% of the variance in Purchase Intention ($R^2 = .637$).

This supports H3.

4.6.2 Complementary models

Additional correlations within the CBBE dimensions were also examined. This was intended to provide a better understanding of the structure of Brand Perceptions. It became clear that Brand Performance has a strong correlation with Brand Resonance. Participants who perceived a brand as high-performing also tended to have greater loyalty and stronger Brand Resonance. Brand Imagery and Brand Feelings, on the other hand, showed smaller negative correlations. In addition, the factors most strongly associated with emotional responses to the brand were examined. Here, it became clear that the more authentic a brand was perceived to be, the stronger the emotional responses were. Accordingly, there is a strong correlation between Brand Authenticity and Brand Feelings. Positive correlations between Brand Judgments and Brand Performance with Brand Feelings were also found. Brand Imagery did not play a role in this case.

The complete regression coefficients of the models used can be found in the appendix (see Appendix E).

4.7 Qualitative Findings

4.7.1 Results of the consumer interviews

Five recurring themes emerged from the evaluation of the eight consumer interviews (see Appendix F2).

1. Authenticity & skepticism

The topic of authenticity is a constant element throughout all interviews. Credible, genuine, or comprehensible communication tends to be described more positively. At the same time, the majority of respondents express skepticism toward staged, trend-oriented brand messages or those that do not fit the brand. Several participants report that they do not believe brands whose communication appears inauthentic.

2. Emotional Reactions

The emotional reactions to brand communication vary among the respondents. Some consumers report that if they can identify with the people or messages portrayed, they feel positive emotions toward the brand. Others, however, stated that advertising formats elicit little emotion. It is generally described that functional communication evokes rather factual

reactions, while authentic or interpersonal content is experienced as touching. Emotional reactions are therefore described as situation-dependent and varying in intensity.

3. Drivers of Trust & Purchase Intent

The interviewees describe various factors that influence trust and Purchase Intent. Brands that are perceived as trustworthy communicate consistently, clearly, and comprehensibly. In addition, social proof is mentioned several times. Consumers say that recommendations or testimonials from other people are important. Statements such as “If others say it works, I trust the product more” illustrate this pattern. Personal relevance, for example due to skin problems, and comprehensible product benefits are also frequently mentioned topics.

4. Product vs. purpose communication

A clear distinction is made between the two different communication approaches. Product-related messages are primarily mentioned when they address specific problems and explain their effectiveness in a comprehensible manner. Purpose communication is also perceived by most, but is increasingly questioned critically. Some interviewees report that communicated values are only relevant if they are comprehensible and fit the brand and product. It is also striking that some find the communication of values less tangible and therefore less important to them.

5. Information overload & decision stress

Several consumers describe feeling overwhelmed by the multitude of products, claims, or information in drugstores or online. Keywords such as “too much,” “overloaded,” or “stressful” are increasingly used in this context. Some report that this makes them more likely to choose familiar brands or those with easily understandable product promises. Others state that complex, extensive information makes their decision more difficult.

4.7.2 Results of the expert interviews

The two experts also describe five recurring themes and offer insights into the industry based on their expertise (see Appendix F4).

1. Industry dynamics

Both experts describe the current market environment as highly saturated and characterized by rapid trend cycles and changing consumer demands. The communication landscape has changed significantly in recent years. Social media in particular has increased the speed of

product development and communication due to fast-moving trends. The experts agree that consumers nowadays are significantly better educated and that brands are therefore under greater scrutiny. Both describe how this dynamic has made decisions about positioning and campaigns much more complex.

2. Trust logic

The importance of product-oriented communication in building trust is emphasized. The experts describe how consumers expect clarity about effectiveness and performance, but also concrete solutions for problems. It is mentioned several times that Gen Z in particular prefers explanatory communication and perceives it as more transparent and honest. Product-driven storytelling is described by the experts as the basis for providing consumers with guidance and security.

3. Credibility & risk

The experts emphasize that credible communication has become increasingly important on the one hand, but also more risky on the other. Purpose-oriented statements in particular are described as vulnerable to criticism. Both interviewees report that consumers react with skepticism when brands communicate values that do not fit with their existing brand image. According to both experts, greenwashing or contradictory messages represent key risks. One expert describes how purpose-driven storytelling has increased the “fall height” because consumers punish non-plausible purpose statements much more severely than they reward or appreciate comprehensible ones.

4. Trust formation

Both experts emphasize that trust is not built through individual campaigns, but through long-term consistency coupled with transparent information and positive experiences with the product and brand. Both experts also describe social proof as an important factor. Reviews from creators and community experiences are essential for building and reinforcing trust. According to the experts, these confirmations are weighted more heavily than traditional advertising statements.

5. Future

Regarding the future development of brand communication, both agree. They expect that a combination of product and purpose will be the key to meeting consumer expectations. At the same time, they describe a shift toward more realistic representations and less idealistic images.

They also assume that transparency will become even more important, meaning that all messages must be linked to verifiable measures.

4.7.3 Results of the interview with the psychologist

The final interview was conducted with a consumer psychologist and provides a professional perspective on information processing, factors influencing perception, and purchasing decisions. Four topics were identified in the analysis (see Appendix F5).

1. Elaboration

The psychologist explains that consumers process information with varying intensity. This depends on motivation, personal relevance, and cognitive capacity. She distinguishes between superficial, emotionally driven, and deeper, information-oriented processing. According to her description, functional product information only reaches a person if there is sufficient attention and motivation. She also points out that information overload reduces the ability to absorb new content. She uses this to explain why consumers tend to rely on simplified emotional impressions.

2. Value communication

According to the psychologist, the effect of value-related messages depends heavily on the personal attitudes of consumers. She describes that value communication is cognitively absorbed but does not automatically trigger an emotional response. Whether values trigger emotions depends on how important the respective topic is to the person. She also emphasizes that values can change the brand image, but do not necessarily evoke feelings or impulses to act.

3. Authenticity

The psychologist describes authenticity as a key factor in the evaluation of brand messages. She emphasizes that consistency over time, comprehensible corporate goals, and visible actions are crucial in determining whether brands are perceived as credible. In this context, she highlights that inconsistent or trend-driven value communication tends to be interpreted as inauthentic. In addition, consumers are very sensitive to contradictions. She describes a positive side effect of authenticity is that this reduces uncertainty and thereby facilitates the processing of messages.

4. Decision-making

The psychologist emphasizes that in the beauty context, factors such as emotional reactions, previous experiences, social influences, and personal values influence purchasing decisions. She describes two different consumer types. Some take a highly analytical approach and examine all product information closely, while others are guided by feelings or simplification strategies. She also mentions that people with little expertise in skin care rely on heuristics such as price, packaging, or expert figures. Both social comparison processes and recommendations are cited as further relevant decision drivers.

4.7.4 Integrative summary of qualitative results

The three strands of qualitative data reveal several overarching patterns in the perception of brand communication. All groups emphasize the central importance of authenticity, both in terms of the brand's general behavior and communicative consistency. Consumers describe specific experiences of skepticism toward messages that appear inauthentic. They also highlight social confirmation and clear problem solving as their main influencing factors. The experts supplemented this perspective with their industry knowledge and pointed to a dynamic market environment. In this environment, transparent product communication and social proof are becoming increasingly important and are driving forces for building and maintaining trust. Finally, the psychologist describes basic mechanisms of information processing and decision-making. In doing so, she highlights conditions under which functional and value-based messages can be effective. Overall, the qualitative results show that trust, authenticity, and comprehensibility are the central reference points for evaluating different communication measures.

5. Discussion

The study examined how different forms of storytelling influence the perception and behavior of young beauty consumers in Germany. The combination of experimental and qualitative data collection provides a comprehensive overview of both statistical effects and subjective interpretation patterns. This perspective shows that the effect of storytelling in the beauty context is much more complex than the literature suggests in some cases. The results point to mechanisms that, on the one hand, support theoretical assumptions and, on the other hand, require important restrictions or clarifications.

The focus is on the question of how stories are processed and how they work, and under which conditions they generate emotional or behavioral effects. The data shows that the type of story, in this case product- or purpose-driven, plays a smaller role than expected for most brand-related outcomes. According to the data, what matters is the way in which the stories are experienced. This finding echoes McKee and Gerace (2018), who state that stories are effective not because of their subject matter, but because of their ability to create tension and meaning. Especially in the beauty sector, which is characterized by functional uncertainty and emotional self-reference, this means that stories only have an effect when they give consumers security and reduce complexity.

5.1 Storytelling types and brand perception: semantic vs. affective impact

The quantitative data shows that the storytelling type has only a limited influence on Brand Perception. Only Brand Imagery was significantly higher in purpose-driven storytelling. All other dimensions of the CBBE model showed no significant differences. This partially refutes hypotheses H1 and H2. In particular, sub-hypotheses H1a and H2a, which state that purpose strengthens emotional responses, are not supported by the data collected. The qualitative data provides a conclusive explanation for this. Although purpose is generally rated positively, it hardly elicits any immediate emotional responses.

The interview with the psychologist reveals that, within the framework of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), values and normative content initially follow a cognitive route. This shapes knowledge and attitudes but does not directly trigger feelings. Accordingly, in this study purpose functioned primarily as a semantic stimulus rather than an immediate affective trigger. This nuance challenges the common assumptions in the literature, which often assume that value-oriented communication automatically creates an emotional bond.

This finding suggests that purpose-driven communication does not automatically create emotional attachment. According to the data collected, purpose only has an emotional effect if there is a personal connection or a high level of involvement with the topic. If there is no such personal relevance, value messages remain largely cognitive rather than affective in their initial impact.

In contrast, product-driven storytelling creates concrete and tangible relevance. All consumers describe product stories as “understandable” and “helpful.” From their perspective, this form of communication answers questions such as “Does it work?”, “Is it good for my skin?”, and

“Can I rely on it?”, which are central to the beauty sector. Consumers describe this communicated clarity as emotionally relieving because it reduces uncertainty.

Just because product-driven storytelling does not show significantly higher values in Brand Performance or Brand Judgments does not mean that it is ineffective. Rather, it indicates that, superficially, both forms of communication are evaluated similarly, but the effect is different. In combination with the qualitative data, it becomes clear that product-driven stories contribute strongly to emotional security and are therefore more behavior-oriented. This results in the theoretical insight that purpose influences the symbolic meaning of a brand, while product stories activate emotional and action-relevant mechanisms. These findings indicate that semantic and affective processing can diverge, at least in initial exposure contexts.

The absence of significant differences between purpose-driven and product-driven storytelling does not represent a weakness in the context of this study, but rather indicates a convergence of current trends in brand communication. Both approaches are perceived as standard consumer expectations in the beauty sector, with the focus being more on the clarity of the stories and less on the type of narrative.

5.2 Emotional mechanisms and their central role in purchase intentions

The results reveal that Purchase Intentions arise not from arguments but from feelings. Although other dimensions correlate with Purchase Intention on a bivariate level, they do not explain additional variance once feelings are accounted for. This finding supports hypothesis H3 and highlights that decisions in the beauty sector are primarily driven by emotions.

This finding thus confirms key concepts of emotion research in the literature. Miller (2017) and McGee and Gerace (2018) emphasize that stories are effective when they have both an emotional and cognitive impact on the brain. Such dual activation is particularly memorable. In addition, Kotler et al. (2025) argue that brand loyalty arises when brand values are emotionally anchored. In this theoretical context, the result of this study appears to be that emotions have the strongest behavioral effect. At the same time, this result contradicts the widespread assumption that purpose communication automatically triggers emotional responses (e.g., Frieman, 2023; Signorelli, 2014). Rather, the data show that purpose-driven messages must first be processed cognitively and do not generate an immediate affective response. The interview with the psychologist reveals what exactly happens in the brain. Values first pass through the cognitive route and change attitudes without triggering emotions (ELM). The emotional experience only occurs once the necessary trust has been established or the topic

is personally relevant. Accordingly, purpose generates meaning, but not spontaneous affective activation.

Given this background, it becomes clear why product-driven storytelling elicited a higher purchase intention than purpose-driven storytelling in the experiment. The qualitative data reveal four interrelated mechanisms:

1. Complexity reduction as emotional relief

Consumers often perceive beauty products as overwhelming. There is an excessive range of products with too many claims, blurring the idea of “what is actually good.” This leads to uncertainty. This stress is reduced when problem-solution relationships are communicated clearly. The ease of processing leads to a feeling of calm. Psychological fluency research shows that such feelings are themselves interpreted as positive information.

2. Sense of control

Furthermore, specific product statements give consumers a sense of structure and predictability. They can better understand what exactly the product does. Experts also emphasize that consumers are equally better informed but also more skeptical. Clear communication creates a sense of security, which is relevant to the purchase decision.

3. Relevance through problem-solution fit

Many product stories address specific problems such as acne. The psychologist emphasizes that such personal relevance is central to deeper processing. Purpose messages, on the other hand, vary much more in their meaning for different people, which is why they are experienced as less consistent than relevant.

4. Social proof as an emotional amplifier

Both consumers and experts emphasize the importance of reviews, testimonials, and genuine experience reports as essential factors for trust. Purpose, on the other hand, tends to be less experience-related and less verifiable, which means it cannot fulfill this function.

These four mechanisms make it clear that purchasing decisions in the beauty sector are based on emotional security, ease of processing, and personal relevance. The decisive factor is therefore not the subject of the story, but the perceived clarity and credibility of the message. This study therefore highlights a distinction that is often overlooked in the literature. Emotional

reactions are driven by subjective feelings of security in the decision-making process, rather than semantic meaning.

5.3 Authenticity as a boundary condition

Another key finding relates to the role of authenticity. Although the type of storytelling had no influence on perceived authenticity, the results clearly show that authenticity is an essential prerequisite for emotional responses.

The quantitative analysis shows that authenticity is strongly linked to Brand Feelings. The qualitative data provide insight into why this relationship emerges. Consumers stated that they only accept purpose if it really fits the brand. In addition, this fit must be consistent over a longer period of time and supported by concrete actions on the part of the brand. In this context, one of the experts spoke of a greater “fall height” that arises when the values communicated do not match the brand's behavior. This is also supported by industry analyses that show a pronounced skepticism toward sustainability claims (Forbes, 2022). Purpose becomes an effective yet highly sensitive strategic element whose impact depends strongly on credibility.

The psychologist explains this by saying that authenticity reduces ambiguity and facilitates the processing of information. The literature also confirms that clearly structured, credible messages are easier to process and thus generate positive emotional responses (McKee & Gerace, 2018; Miller, 2017). Unclear or even contradictory messages, on the other hand, trigger cognitive dissonance and reluctance. Accordingly, authenticity is not only an evaluation category, but also a relevant factor in the processing of information.

This means that authenticity acts as a boundary condition and influences whether storytelling, in whatever form, can have any emotional impact at all. Although prior research acknowledges authenticity as important, its moderating function is rarely made explicit.

In summary, this study shows that authenticity:

1. determines whether purpose can develop any emotional resonance at all
2. is decisive in determining whether product stories appear credible or reliable
3. influences how much cognitive effort consumers are willing to invest

Accordingly, these findings expand the application of the CBBE model. This study positions authenticity as a prerequisite for the emergence of Brand Feelings. Emotional responses depend

not only on what is communicated, but on whether these messages are perceived as credible, consistent, and aligned with brand behavior.

5.4 Generation Z: Value-oriented but skeptical

The study reveals a nuanced understanding of Gen Z, which is often described in the literature as particularly value-oriented. However, the data shows that values such as sustainability and social responsibility are viewed positively but do not automatically lead to a higher Purchase Intention. This is consistent with international studies that document a strong awareness of values but at the same time a strong distrust of brand communication (Deloitte, 2025). Several consumers describe purpose as “nice to have,” but at the same time expressed clear skepticism about morally charged marketing. Only one consumer pays high attention to values such as fair trade, sustainability, and vegan labels (C7). Nevertheless, she also reports growing skepticism about such labels. This skepticism is also addressed in industry-specific surveys and shows that the majority of consumers critically question sustainability promises and more often perceive them as untrustworthy (Forbes, 2022). The experts add that the purpose factor in the beauty industry has lost much of its differentiating power and is increasingly perceived as a baseline expectation rather than a competitive advantage. The data therefore shows that Gen Z is less fundamentally “purpose-driven” and more critical, well-informed, and sensitive to such messages and possible inconsistencies.

In the examined beauty context, purpose tends to function more as a hygiene factor. It is expected but not rewarded. Only when the messages are perceived as credible, relevant, and consistent does an emotional effect arise and does it have an impact on behavior.

5.5 Information overload and the role of simplicity

The qualitative data clearly shows that consumers often make their beauty decisions under high cognitive stress. They tend to rely on simple heuristics. The psychologist attributes this behavior to reduced processing capacity and limited attention. Industry analyses also support this observation and show that the high fragmentation of the market and the excessive supply of product variants complicate decision-making even further (McKinsey, 2024; 2025).

In light of this, the quantitative results become comprehensible. Product stories lead to higher Purchase Intentions because they offer guidance and formulate clear usage promises. In doing so, they reduce cognitive load. They also facilitate processing (fluency) and convey a sense of security. This aligns with research showing that messages are more effective when they are easy to process and clearly structured (Miller, 2017). Experts emphasize that this form of relief is

more important today than narrative complexity. Incidentally, this also explains the high value placed on social proof. Such content translates overloaded information into recommendations that are understandable in everyday life.

In the same environment, purpose communication has a completely a distinct effect. It adds an interpretative layer that initially requires additional cognitive processing rather than fostering immediate comprehensibility and emotional security. This shifts the understanding of storytelling in the beauty industry. The effectiveness of a story comes less from rich value communication and more from reducing complexity and providing clear orientation.

This insight complements classic storytelling theories by showing that, when it comes to beauty, relief rather than drama is a central emotional mechanism. The interpretation presented is based on the qualitative interviews. Although it has not been directly measured empirically, it offers a consistent explanatory model for the observed results.

5.6 Synthesis: How storytelling actually works in a saturated beauty market

The results of this study can be combined into an overarching conceptual model that describes the core mechanisms of storytelling in the current beauty market:

1. Purpose shapes meaning, but does not immediately evoke emotions.

It strengthens Brand Imagery, meaning the symbolic level, and therefore has a primarily semantic rather than affective effect.

2. Product-driven storytelling conveys emotional security.

Product stories reduce uncertainty and thereby facilitate decisions. In doing so, they activate positive emotions.

3. Emotions have the greatest influence on behavior.

In terms of Purchase Intent, Brand Feelings proved to be the only significant predictor.

4. Authenticity is a necessary prerequisite for effectiveness.

Authenticity determines whether purpose or product narratives can generate emotional resonance at all.

5. Market overload changes the processing logic.

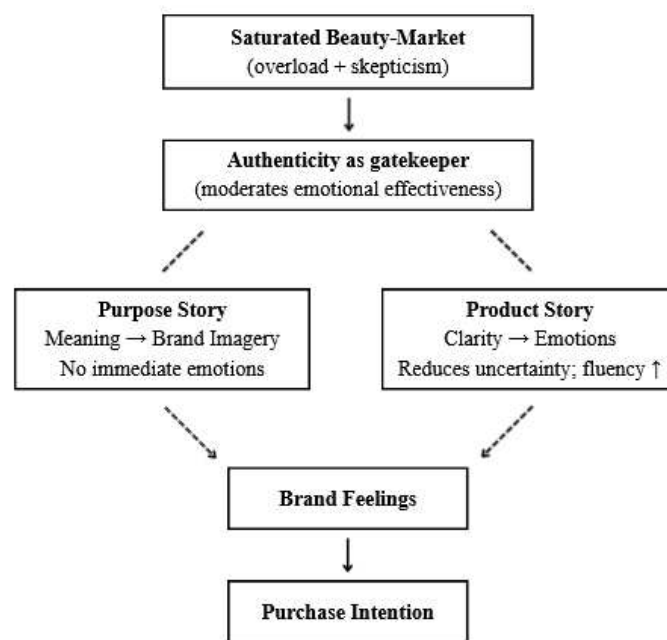
In a saturated and overloaded market, simplicity, clarity, and social orientation are becoming more important than dramatic complexity.

6. Gen Z is value-oriented yet discerning.

Purpose is expected. However, it only works if it is consistently demonstrated and perceived as credible.

In summary, these findings illustrate that communicative effectiveness in the beauty industry depends less on the type of storytelling itself and more on overarching mechanisms such as authenticity, affective processing, cognitive relief, personal relevance, and social confirmation. Overall, the study makes it clear that linear storytelling logic has only limited explanatory power in the beauty segment.

Figure 2 summarizes the core mechanisms identified in this study and illustrates how storytelling exerts its influence in a saturated beauty market.



Modifiers: fluency, personal relevance, processing capacity, social proof, Gen Z expectations.

Figure 2: Conceptual model of the impact of storytelling in the beauty market.

5.7 Implications

5.7.1 Theoretical implications

The results presented contribute to the theoretical advancement of storytelling and brand equity research. First, the findings show that purpose primarily has a semantic effect in the short term. Although it strengthens the symbolic meaning of a brand, it does not automatically lead to affective reactions. This work therefore puts into perspective the widespread assumption that value-oriented communication can immediately create emotional bonds and makes clear that, in the context examined, purpose primarily serves as a framework of meaning. At the same time, the CBBE model is refined. Brand feelings prove to be a central behavioral variable in this study, while authenticity emerges as a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of such emotions. The importance of authenticity also emerges as a moderating mechanism. Without credibility, neither purpose nor product stories have an affective effect. This study identified a boundary condition that is implicitly addressed in existing models but rarely explicitly addressed. Furthermore, the study integrates narrative approaches with psychological processing models such as ELM, fluency, and heuristics. It demonstrates that effectiveness in the beauty context arises less from dramatic complexity and more from cognitive relief and emotional clarity. The study also provides a differentiated perspective on Gen Z, which is value-oriented on the one hand and critical and scrutinizing on the other. In their eyes, purpose is less of a differentiating factor and more of an expected foundation that only becomes relevant when proven consistency is demonstrated.

5.7.2 Practical implications

There are also several key implications for practice. The realization that product stories reduce uncertainty and can thus trigger immediate positive feelings means that this type of communication should be prioritized, especially in situations close to the point of purchase. Purpose strengthens the symbolic evaluation of a brand, but must be credible and consistent in order to be effective. Accordingly, brands are faced with the task of supporting their communicated values with concrete actions. This makes authenticity a basic requirement. The study also shows that social proof is a key point of trust and orientation. It facilitates processing in information-overloaded environments. Consequently, brands should focus more on communication that reduces complexity, for example through clear benefit arguments, thereby facilitating decision-making. Finally, the study suggests that a combination strategy of functional clarity and credible purpose is most effective. Product-driven storytelling addresses

immediate decisions, while purpose-driven storytelling supports long-term identity. The moral magnitude of the story is not decisive, but rather the degree of orientation, consistency, and emotional security that is conveyed.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Despite methodological rigor, there are some limitations that will be clarified and reflected upon during this study. First, the analytical classification of Nivea and The Body Shop as product-driven and purpose-driven brands, respectively, represents a key limitation. This simplification was necessary in order to operationalize the study methodologically, but it does not reflect the absolute truth. Both brands use hybrid storytelling strategies in their communications. Accordingly, consumers may perceive the brands differently than assumed in the classification, which can lead to potential classification bias. Therefore, it would be useful to include other brands that use clearer or more distinct purpose- or product- driven narratives in future research. In this way, additional conclusions could be drawn as to whether the impact of the two storytelling approaches varies depending on the industry or brand.

Furthermore, the use of only one product- and purpose-driven storytelling stimulus per brand represents a limitation. Despite the careful selection and adaptation of the stimuli, it cannot be ruled out that specific narrative designs may have influenced individual effects. Therefore, future research could use several different stimuli within the same brand context to separate the narrative effects even more clearly from brand-specific associations. In this way, it would be possible to examine in more detail whether effects are primarily attributable to the storytelling type itself or to specific narrative characteristics.

Second, the focus on German consumers limits the generalizability of the results and provides narrow scope for interpretation. Nevertheless, this restriction ensures higher internal validity within a culturally consistent sample. Moreover, recruiting participants via social media represents a potential self-selection bias. This means that people who are digitally savvy and interested in beauty are more likely to participate. This can systematically distort the perception of storytelling strategies and limit the representativeness of the sample. For future research, it would therefore be interesting to include more international samples, thereby taking cultural differences into account and ensuring broader representativeness. It could be particularly interesting to create a comparison between cultures in which purpose is rooted differently.

Third, although the sample size of 178 participants is large enough to produce valid results, it only covers subgroups in an exploratory manner. Since the study only measures a single moment in time, it does not reveal how brand perception or Purchase Intent changes over time. Such developments usually only arise through repeated exposure or genuine product experience. It would therefore be useful for future studies to adopt longitudinal designs and to systematically compare different consumer segments, such as consumers with high or low beauty involvement.

Finally, the presentation of the stimuli in static form is a reduction of complex marketing campaigns, so that only limited narrative depth and contextual information is depicted. This represents a further limitation, as normally many more elements, such as music, movement, or comments on social media, have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the advertising. However, this simplification was deliberately chosen in order to ensure experimental control and comparability. Future research should therefore use more realistic stimuli, such as videos or multi-asset campaigns, to better reflect the impact of different forms of communication under real-life conditions.

There were also some limitations in the qualitative research. Although the sample should be as diverse as possible, eight consumers allow for in-depth understanding but are not representative. In addition, three expert interviews provide valuable insights but cannot cover the entire industry expertise. Furthermore, reflexive thematic analysis is an interpretative method. Accordingly, the researcher's perspective can influence the construction of patterns of meaning. In addition, the participants' varying levels of beauty involvement may influence the way in which the storytelling elements are evaluated. A possible influence by the interviewer, for example through wording or dynamics, cannot be completely ruled out either. For future research, it would be worthwhile to use larger and more diverse qualitative samples in order to better reflect different perspectives. In addition, the specific involvement of several purpose-oriented consumers would be particularly helpful. Furthermore, methods such as diary studies could provide deeper insights into everyday experiences and consumption processes by capturing how narrative impressions evolve in real-life contexts.

Nevertheless, these limitations ensure that the results are presented transparently. Furthermore, valuable impetus can be provided for further empirical research in the field of beauty marketing.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine how product- and purpose-driven storytelling influence brand perception and the behavior of young beauty consumers. The results enable a differentiated answer to the research questions.

RQ1-RQ3 focused on how the two storytelling approaches examined influence consumer perception within the CBBE model. The study shows that while purpose strengthens the symbolic meaning of a brand and thus addresses Brand Imagery, it does not elicit any immediate emotional responses. Product-driven storytelling, on the other hand, is perceived by consumers as more relevant and helpful, but it also does not lead to higher ratings in Brand Performance or Brand Judgments. Overall, the data shows that the storytelling approach has only a limited impact on Keller's dimensions of Brand Equity. Purpose primarily has a semantic effect, while product stories have a situational and emotional effect. In summary, it is clear that brand perception is influenced less by the type of story and more by its credibility, simplicity, and personal relevance.

RQ4 addressed the question of the extent to which storytelling influences Purchase Intent and the role emotions play in this. According to the quantitative data, Brand Feelings are the only significant predictor of Purchase Intent. The effects of the other CBBE dimensions are thus lost their explanatory power in the multivariate model. The study therefore confirms that purchasing decisions in the beauty market are strongly influenced by emotions and that factors such as emotional security, cognitive relief, and personal relevance are key behavioral mechanisms. Product stories generate stronger emotional responses and thereby higher Purchase Intentions through clear problem solving and reduced complexity.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative results shows that storytelling in the beauty context is less determined by the content of the narrative. Rather, overarching mechanisms such as authenticity as a necessary foundation, fluency and simplicity as processing factors, social proof as a source of trust, and the critical attitude of Gen Z as a framework condition are more important. In this sense, the guiding question of this study “Purpose sells, product tells?” can be answered in a differentiated manner.

This work makes a theoretical contribution by identifying purpose as a semantic mechanism, authenticity as a boundary condition, and brand feelings as a central behavioral variable. In terms of practical implications, this work emphasizes the importance of clear, credible, and reassuring communication in a saturated market.

In summary, this study shows that effective storytelling depends less on the moral grandeur of a message and more on its ability to provide orientation, reduce complexity, and credibly trigger positive emotions.

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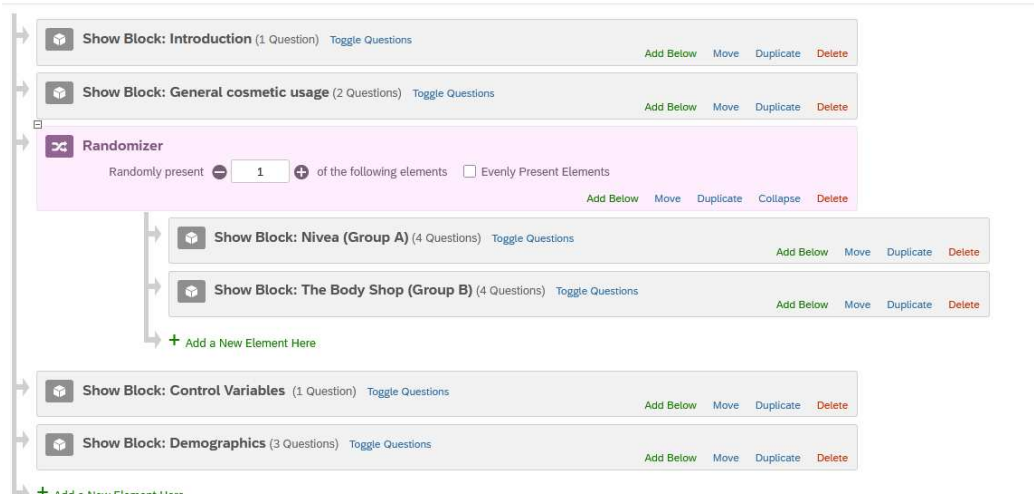
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Appendix

A Survey

A1 Survey Flow

Survey flow Published



A2 Survey

Welcome!

I'm conducting a short survey about how people perceive brand communication in the beauty sector.

In the survey, I will show you one advertisement and then ask a few questions about it, as well as some general questions about your attitudes and habits. There are no right or wrong answers. The survey will take about 5–6 minutes.

Your participation is voluntary, anonymous, and all answers will be used for research purposes only.

Thank you very much for your time and support!

How would you describe your overall use of skincare or cosmetic products?

- ☐ Very intensive (several products daily)
- ☐ Rather intensive (1–2 products daily)
- ☐ Occasional (some products per week)
- ☐ Very rare (only when needed, e.g., sunscreen)

Which types of skincare or cosmetic products do you use regularly? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Face cream
- ☐ Body care (lotion, shower gel, deodorant)
- ☐ Sun protection
- ☐ Make-up
- ☐ Hair care products
- ☐ Other (e.g., shaving products, perfume)

You will now see a picture. Please take a moment to look at it carefully, as I will ask you a few short questions about it afterwards.



What was the main message of the ad?

- ☐ Ingredients
- ☐ Heritage
- ☐ Product performance / care / moisture
- ☐ Sustainability
- ☐ Other / none of these

The following statements refer to the brand you just saw in the advertisement. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

Nivea products deliver consistent quality and performance.

☐

Nivea offers products of high and reliable quality.

☐

Nivea products meet my expectations of effectiveness.

☐

Nivea fits my self-image and lifestyle.

☐

Nivea represents values that are important to me.

☐

The following statements refer to the brand you just saw in the advertisement. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

The Body Shop products deliver consistent quality and performance.

☐

The Body Shop offers products of high and reliable quality.

☐

The Body Shop products meet my expectations of effectiveness.

☐

The Body Shop fits my self-image and lifestyle.

☐

The Body Shop represents values that are important to me.

☐

Nivea has a contemporary and appealing image. ☐	The Body Shop has a contemporary and appealing image. ☐
I trust Nivea to be honest in its communication. ☐	I trust The Body Shop to be honest in its communication. ☐
Nivea is a brand I consider competent and trustworthy. ☐	The Body Shop is a brand I consider competent and trustworthy. ☐
The brand's communication appears genuine and authentic. ☐	The brand's communication appears genuine and authentic. ☐
Nivea makes me feel good and positive. ☐	The Body Shop makes me feel good and positive. ☐
Nivea creates a positive emotional connection with me. ☐	The Body Shop creates a positive emotional connection with me. ☐
I feel a sense of warmth and closeness toward Nivea. ☐	I feel a sense of warmth and closeness toward The Body Shop. ☐
I can imagine buying a product from Nivea. ☐	I can imagine buying a product from The Body Shop. ☐
I would recommend Nivea to friends. ☐	I would recommend The Body Shop to friends. ☐
I intend to consider Nivea for future beauty purchases. ☐	Next time I shop for beauty products, I would consider The Body Shop. ☐

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about shopping and advertising in general.

Strongly disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Strongly agree

I am generally skeptical towards advertising.

When shopping, I pay attention to sustainable packaging or refill options.

Price is more important to me than brand values.

Skincare is personally important to me.

→

Which gender do you identify with?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Non-binary / third gender

☐ Prefer not to say

How old are you?

☐ < 18

☐ 18-22

☐ 23-26

☐ 27-30

☐ 31-35

☐ > 35

Where are you from?

☐ Germany

☐ Portugal

☐ different country inside EU

☐ outside EU

→

B Manipulation Check

Table B1- *Crosstabulation for Storytelling Condition × Manipulation Check*

Condition	Failed Check (0)	Passed Check (1)	Total
Product-Driven (Nivea)	89 (100%)	0 (0%)	89 (50%)
Purpose-Driven (Body Shop)	0 (0%)	89 (100%)	89 (50%)
Total	89 (50%)	89 (50%)	178 (100%)

Note. Expected counts for each cell = 44.5. No missing cases.

Table B2- *Chi-Square Test for Manipulation Check*

Test Statistic	Value	df	p
Pearson Chi-Square	178.00	1	< .001
Continuity Correction	174.02	1	< .001
Likelihood Ratio	246.76	1	< .001
Fisher's Exact Test (2-sided)	—	—	< .001
Linear-by-Linear Association	177.00	1	< .001
N of Valid Cases	178	—	—

C Sample

Table C1- *Participant Demographics*

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Age Group	18–22	11	6.2
	23–26	87	48.9
	27–30	61	34.3
	31–35	19	10.7
Gender	Female	120	67.4
	Male	56	31.5
	Non-binary / Third gender	1	0.6
	Prefer not to say	1	0.6
Country	Germany	178	100.0
Manipulation Check	Failed (0)	89	50.0
	Passed (1)	89	50.0
	Total	178	100.0

Note. All variables had complete responses with no missing data.

D Correlations

Table D1- *Pearson Correlations Among Advertising Values and Brand Outcome Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Sustainable Packaging Importance	—	-.08	.13	.22**	.31**	.09	.18*	.24**	.19*	.17
2. Price > Values	-.08	—	-.11	.19*	.11	.27**	.31**	.21**	.28**	.02
3. Skincare Importance	.13	-.11	—	.11	.27**	.24**	.16*	.28**	.09	.00
4. Brand Performance	.22**	.19*	.11	—	.68**	.56**	.53**	.58**	.62**	.84**
5. Brand Imagery	.31**	.11	.27**	.68**	—	.71**	.59**	.62**	.58**	.51**
6. Brand Judgments	.09	.27**	.24**	.56**	.71**	—	.66**	.66**	.51**	.42**
7. Brand Authenticity	.18*	.31**	.16*	.53**	.59**	.66**	—	.73**	.57**	.43**
8. Brand Feelings	.24**	.21**	.28**	.58**	.62**	.66**	.73**	—	.74**	.43**
9. Purchase Intent	.19*	.28**	.09	.62**	.58**	.51**	.57**	.74**	—	.40**
10. Brand Resonance	.17	.02	.00	.84**	.51**	.42**	.43**	.43**	.40**	—

Note. N ranges from 88 to 178 depending on variable.

E Regression Analysis

Table E1- *Regression Predicting Brand Resonance*

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	13.84	4.77	—	2.90	.005
Brand Performance	1.11	0.09	1.07	13.06	< .001
Brand Imagery	-0.27	0.14	-0.23	-2.03	.046
Brand Feelings	-0.22	0.08	-0.25	-2.67	.009
Brand Judgments	0.14	0.09	0.14	1.62	.108
Brand Authenticity	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.88	.384

Statistic	Value
R	.873
R ²	.762
Adjusted R ²	.748
F (5, 82)	52.57
p	< .001

Table E2- *Regression Predicting Brand Feelings*

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	-1.015	4.524	—	-0.224	.823
Brand Performance	0.198	0.081	.165	2.427	.016
Brand Imagery	0.122	0.093	.105	1.312	.191
Brand Judgments	0.226	0.089	.189	2.539	.012
Brand Authenticity	0.440	0.064	.453	6.898	< .001

Note : N = 177. Dependent variable = **Brand Feelings**. Model summary: R = .784, R² = .615, Adjusted R² = .606. ANOVA: F(4, 172) = 68.72, p < .001.

F Qualitative Insights

Table F1- *Description of Consumer Interview Sample*

Consumer #1 (C1) Male, 25, Beauty Involvement: medium	Consumer #2 (C2) Male, 24, Beauty Involvement: low
Consumer #3 (C3) Female, 27, Beauty Involvement: high	Consumer #4 (C4) Male, 24, Beauty Involvement: high
Consumer #5 (C5) Female, 23, Beauty Involvement: medium-high	Consumer #6 (C6) Female, 24, Beauty Involvement: medium
Consumer #7 (C7) Male, 26, Beauty Involvement: low-medium	Consumer #8 (C8) Female, 28, Beauty Involvement: medium

Table F2- *Insights of consumer Interviews*

AUTHENTICITY & SKEPTICISM	Baseline Skepticism & Distrust	"I'm usually very suspicious when it comes to communication." (C1); "I'm fundamentally very suspicious about what the company is trying to achieve with it." (C1); "I can't really classify it, so it's not that important to me per se." (C2); "It actually comes across more as marketing to me." (C4); "If it's credible, then good, and if it's some kind of fairy tale utopia, then not so good." (C5); "I'm always skeptical about advertising." (C7); "I wouldn't say that I'm very influenced by advertising." (C8)
	Transparency & Evidence	"I think transparency is extremely important; the more transparent, the better." (C1); "If the ingredients are explained, it definitely strengthens trust." (C1); "Studies you can look up yourself make it more trustworthy." (C1); "Dermatologically tested is good." (C2); "There are a few buzzwords that trigger something in me." (C2); "I place a very high value on transparency about ingredients, and that also creates trust for me." (C3); "That kind of information definitely inspires long-term trust in me." (C3); "If there's real science behind it, that tends to pique my interest in buying it." (C3); "I find it more authentic when the product itself is at the forefront of advertising." (C4); "I need proof and reasoning for everything." (C4); "They show layered skin, skin layers, and then they put a serum on it and show what happens in the skin layer, whether it somehow removes dark pigment spots or protects the skin barrier, and then they show it in this cross-section, and I find that very appealing." (C5); "If you just test the functionality of the promises in the ad and show it, that's what I would like best." (C5); "I always think it's good to know what the product does, of course." (C6); "So if it says what ingredients are in it, then you might think, okay, this doesn't have any perfume or anything like that, which is why it's particularly good." (C6); "They work a lot with facts, and that definitely convinced me." (C6); "If they also prove to me why it helps against that and give me examples of what's in the product, then I trust them more, because I believe that it's true and that it actually works." (C6); "On their website, you can see exactly where everything comes from." (C6); "They would have to write the true facts about the ingredients and what they do on the product." (C6); "A before-and-

		after comparison, which must not be fake and must be backed up by studies and consumer surveys." (C6); "The packaging and the product could be a little more subtle, but a little more fact-based." (C6); "I think there should be a little description included. Or I just have to do my own research." (C7); "It has to be a good, good mix of, oh, we really want this, but also to have some kind of backup to explain that we're really doing it, here, this is some kind of certificate or something." (C7); "No, definitely helpful, because I'm not very knowledgeable about it myself, and it helps me when the advertising tells me something about how the products work or what they do." (C8); "If, for example, it says that 98 out of 100 consumers have noticed an improvement in their skin or scalp, and if that is reflected in the reviews, then I assume that it's true." (C8); "If the website simply displays reviews, and if there are a few negative ones as well, then you know, okay, this is authentic." (C8); "Maybe there are independent studies available somewhere, where you can assume that the study is not biased." (C8); "Mainly always related to the product, how the product works, maybe also explaining exactly how it works, so that I understand the product, and backed up with statistical evidence that in most cases the effect is what I need." (C8)
	Purpose Skepticism	"I'm always skeptical as to whether it's just done to make everything sound nicer." (C1); "Environmental claims can sometimes come across as a bit of greenwashing." (C2); "When superficial brands suddenly start communicating strongly about sustainability, even though they're not really known for it, I find that very questionable." (C3); "Brands usually jump on whatever the majority is into at the moment." (C4); "Hardly at all. I try to ignore it." (C5); "It annoys me. I don't need values in my products." (C5); "Because I simply believe that the values of a large company that makes huge profits from sales are simply aimed at selling a lot." (C5); "Anything beyond that is just a selling factor to somehow reach more people or convince more people that they should prefer it over another company that probably produces in the exact same country in the warehouse next door." (C5); "If it's just about something that can't really be proven, like how it somehow makes things nicer and more positive, then I don't find it very credible." (C6); "There's so much greenwashing going on." (C7); "Many people say, okay, this is sustainable or this is all natural, but when you take a closer look, it's not 100% true." (C7); "I'm a bit more critical because I always feel like there's a bit of greenwashing going on when advertising focuses heavily on values instead of product details." (C8); "I've often heard that a lot of things are simply presented in a more attractive way than they really are." (C8)
	Marketing Signals as (In)Authentic	"It seems inauthentic when brands have 70 different products that all claim to do the same thing." (C1); "I think less is more. I don't want them to tell me how great they are; just put the brand name there." (C2); "Brands in the low-cost segment still use slogans like 'high quality', which isn't very authentic." (C2); "It was definitely not authentic, because far too many people advertised it without long-term studies or long-term effects." (C3); "Before and after pictures sometimes seem too extreme or show no real difference." (C4); "Especially when lots of influencers are promoting the brand at the

		same time, or when it's never available in any stores, but only online. I always find that strange." (C5); "It still extremely damaged their authenticity, in my opinion." (C6)
EMOTIONAL REACTIONS	Positive Emotions	"Such a positive emotional feeling mainly comes from trust." (C1); "Beauty brands typically trigger a feeling of purity, cleanliness, and well-being." (C2); "Beauty products definitely trigger a sense of well-being because I'm doing something for myself." (C3); "I feel good about things I've been using for a long time." (C3); "You associate a positive feeling with a brand when its products alleviate a burden." (C4); "A party mood." (C5); "Because I like to make myself look pretty when I go out. And then skin care is especially important afterwards." (C5); "Most of the time, effects like that have a very positive impact on me. They make me feel very positive about the product." (C6); "Since I really enjoy wearing makeup and using beauty products, it's always something very positive." (C6); "I find it very positive when you have a new product and can try it out and test different things with it." (C6); "I find Rituals very appealing; it triggers very, very positive feelings." (C6); "I always feel like my hair is better after using Kerastase." (C6); "It makes me feel like I've been to the hairdresser." (C6); "Whenever I think about the brand, I trust it more than others." (C7); "I definitely feel a sense of security when I feel that the advertising or the brand is authentic, when the expected effect is achieved, just as it was sold in the advertising." (C8)
	Negative Emotions	"When I look at the products, I'm usually extremely overwhelmed." (C1); "I feel neglected as a consumer with my requirements." (C1); "Inauthenticity can trigger mistrust." (C4); "And inauthenticity is usually half-hearted and oh, I have to have this now. And then after a week, you think, yeah, OK, that was extremely unnecessary, and you feel regret." (C5); "In general, when it comes to products that I put on my skin, it stresses me out a little bit." (C7); "Sometimes I feel bad because I think, oh shit, now you've only paid attention to whether the products are made naturally, but now you haven't paid any attention to whether the company is also sustainable or not." (C7); "It sometimes stresses me out to buy products." (C7); "Typically, beauty brands always trigger the feeling in me that a lot is based on marketing, that a lot is exaggerated." (C8); "A lot of greenwashing, when they talk about how much more environmentally friendly their brand is than others." (C8)
	Emotional Attachment & Loyalty	"Once I've built up this image of a brand I can trust, I'm very loyal." (C1); "Once you've convinced me with the brand message, then I'm very loyal." (C1); "I feel a connection because the brand was somehow part of my life." (C2); "It definitely worked, I've remained loyal to the brand." (C3); "It's been used in our family for generations." (C3); "You associate positive emotions with brands that helped reduce acne." (C4); "When I want nail polish, I go straight to Essie." (C5); "A one-time purchase happens when it just works and doesn't work particularly well, and loyalty develops when I feel that it's better than the products I've tried before in that category." (C5); "Yes, Rituals is really top notch." (C6); "Yes, definitely Kerastase too, because I always feel like my hair is better after using it." (C6); "Whenever I think about the

DRIVERS OF TRUST & PURCHASE INTENT		brand, I trust it more than others." (C7); "Nivea is something that I know will help my skin when I use it." (C8)
	Emotions Driving Purchases	"If it doesn't give me the same emotional feeling as the one I already use, then it's out of the question for me." (C1); "These feelings influence my purchasing decisions." (C2); "Probably not, unless someone tells me to buy it." (C2); "It definitely lifts my mood, and I never leave DM with less than 50 dollars worth of purchases." (C3); "Authenticity, I would say, makes me calm and doesn't lead me to make any impulse purchases." (C5); "If I know that a product like that will make me happy, I'm definitely very influenced by emotions." (C6); "A three-dollar shampoo makes me less happy than a twenty-five-dollar shampoo because I think it makes my hair look better." (C6)
	Transparency & Information	"Explaining what ingredients do helps me to trust the product." (C1); "If someone in the store explains to me why it's good, maybe I'll let them talk me into it." (C2); "Yes, the product-related features need to be communicated for me to be interested." (C2); "I think ingredients are very, very important. I want to know exactly what I'm using." (C3); "Definitely science-backed, I like it to be fact-based and transparent." (C3); "Educational content influences my purchasing decisions." (C4); "They show layered skin, skin layers, and then they put a serum on it and show what happens in the skin layer, and I find that very appealing." (C5); "If you just test the functionality of the promises in the ad and show it, that's what I would like best." (C5); "I find it helpful because then I can think rationally about whether I need it or not, whether it simply meets my needs at the moment." (C6); "I think there should be a little description included. Or I just have to do my own research." (C7); "Their website should show that they are very concerned about sustainability and naturalness." (C7); "No, definitely helpful, because I'm not very knowledgeable about it myself, and it helps me when the advertising tells me something about how the products work or what they do." (C8); "Mainly always related to the product, how the product works, maybe also explaining exactly how it works, so that I understand the product, and backed up with statistical evidence that in most cases the effect is what I need." (C8)
	Social Proof & Recommendations	"I rely on recommendations from friends who already have experience with certain brands." (C1); "It can come from recommendations from friends I trust." (C1); "My grandmother reads through it and then tells me if it's good, or I send it to a friend." (C2); "Most likely a recommendation from friends." (C2); "Influencers, my family, and friends definitely influence my purchasing decisions." (C3); "Social proof that the community responds well to it." (C3); "I trust individuals who evaluate products independently." (C4); "If several people independently say the same thing, I'm more willing to try it." (C4); "When it works, when I've seen good experiences, either for myself or for others." (C5); "I've seen some influencers using the products and now I want to use them too." (C6); "If I see several influencers promoting a product on the same day, then that's what sticks in my mind the most." (C6); "I would say 99 percent recommendation, actually." (C6); "Also from influencers." (C6); "I prefer to ask friends or someone I trust, what do you think of the brand, and then I do my own research." (C7); "Otherwise, yes, reviews from other people." (C8); "If I hear from other people, for example from friends, when I

		hear, oh, I've used this product and it's really great, that would be the most likely reason for me to try a new brand." (C8)
	Brand Signals & Quality Cues	"It's very important to me that the products are dermatologically tested." (C1); "I feel that it has been tested, I can trust the whole thing." (C1); "If it looks high-quality, then I trust that it contains the right things." (C2); "Sustainability makes me think the product contains fewer harmful substances and is better for humans." (C2); "I definitely rely on pharmacy products because I have very sensitive skin." (C3); "I look for scientifically sound presentation." (C4); "I would say if it's not sold in drugstores but has its own stores with very clear guidelines that embody all kinds of purpose messages in terms of content, attitude, and everything related to manufacturing. For me, that would mean that a brand is really serious." (C5); "When several components come together to form the whole, then I believe them, because then it's not just saying we are sustainable, but the packaging fits, the marketing fits, and the way you communicate fits." (C6); "I find it all so appealing; it triggers very positive feelings and they are also sustainable, that makes me feel good." (C6); "It has to fit in a little bit with the niche they're in." (C6); "I pay a lot of attention to colors." (C7); "When there are too many colors, my brain correlates that with, oh, there are more ingredients in there." (C7); "When they focus more on naturalness, their marketing is also more geared toward sustainability or naturalness, and that's why I would trust that more than wild colors or wild things." (C7); "In terms of appearance, I would say glass over plastic, purely from a recycling perspective." (C7); "Because for me it's just the most basic, I know that most people use it, so I imagine that it works best and that you can rely on it to do the job." (C8); "Brand isn't that important to me, even though I am influenced a little by the brands I know, which simply give me the feeling that they are brands that probably sell very good products." (C8)
	Price, Effectiveness & Risk Minimisation	"Price definitely plays a role." (C1); "Price and quality are very closely linked." (C1); "A 30-day trial period inspires trust because they stand behind their product." (C1); "Price shouldn't be too expensive, but also not too cheap." (C2); "Price-performance, definitely. I don't buy things that are way overpriced." (C3); "I've definitely fallen for packaging that claimed to have a certain effect." (C3); "Effectiveness and price are really the deal breakers." (C4); "I look for a product that combines a reasonable price with high effectiveness." (C4); "You have to pay a certain price for higher doses of active ingredients." (C4); "Price and effectiveness." (C5); "Durability in terms of how long it lasts on my nails." (C5); "Essie could say that their values are remigration and I would say, okay, give me the nail polish." (C5); "That's crazy, because I would actually be more likely to buy the non-sustainable ones." (C5); "Only if it's a product that's not super expensive, because then the loss wouldn't be so high." (C6); "If the product ticks all those boxes, I don't really care about the price. It can even be more expensive." (C7); "Sometimes you're just buying the brand name and not so much what's inside." (C7); "I'd rather see if Sephora has its own brand that does what I want and is good value for money." (C7); "Do I really need it? That would be the first factor." (C8); "Price does play a certain role, unless I need something because I have really serious skin problems,

		then the price wouldn't be so important to me." (C8); "If it's just basic products that I need for everyday use, then I tend to buy the cheaper products." (C8); "Quality is more important; I think that also has its price to some extent." (C8); "Values, as I said, are secondary, if at all." (C8)
PRODUCT VS. PURPOSE COMM.	Preference for Product Information	"What matters most to me is whether the ingredients can solve a problem for me." (C1); "High quality is important to me if it gives me the impression that the product is high quality." (C2); "Ingredients are very, very important; that's what makes the product so unique." (C3); "I find it more authentic when the product itself is at the forefront of advertising." (C4); "Because that's why I buy it, ultimately just so that it helps me." (C5); "I trust product-related advertising very much." (C5); "I really like those skin layer ads. I think they're great." (C5); "Product-oriented is definitely interesting to me, because I'm mainly concerned with how the product works and not whether the advertising is ultra-beautiful or ultra-entertaining." (C8); "Mainly always related to the product, how the product works, maybe also explaining exactly how it works, so that I understand the product." (C8)
	Skepticism Toward Purpose Messaging	"I'm skeptical as to whether it's just done to make everything sound nicer." (C1); "Environmental claims can come across as a bit of greenwashing." (C2); "You have to look into the brand and see if you can trust it." (C3); "Purpose messaging comes across more as marketing to me." (C4); "I try to ignore it. It annoys me. I don't need values in my products." (C5); "Anything beyond that is just a selling factor to somehow reach more people." (C5); "If it's just about something that can't really be proven, like how it somehow makes things nicer and more positive, then I don't find it very credible." (C6); "There's so much greenwashing going on." (C7); "Many people say, okay, this is sustainable or this is all natural, but when you take a closer look, it's not 100% true." (C7); "Basically, I'm a bit more critical because I always feel like there's a bit of greenwashing going on when advertising focuses heavily on values instead of product details." (C8); "I would definitely classify it as marketing." (C8)
	When Purpose Becomes Relevant	"If two products do the same thing, I'd choose the one with sustainability certification." (C1); "When they pay attention to sustainability, I assume they also pay attention to harmfulness and effectiveness for humans." (C2); "I think refills are very important or a great option." (C3); "Purpose might tip the scales when two products are otherwise equal." (C4); "If advertising were to captivate me, it would be something related to vegan or nature-based products." (C7); "The company has a sustainable concept or at least thinks about sustainability." (C7); "The products are natural and there aren't too many chemicals in them." (C7); "That the company is sustainable and that the products are somehow natural would motivate me to try a new brand." (C7); "Of course, it's nice when brands represent certain values that I also represent, but I try not to let that influence my purchasing decisions too much." (C8)
	Purpose as a Modernity Signal	"I expect a product or brand to refrain from animal testing and to use recycled materials whenever possible." (C1); "Yes, purpose messages make a brand seem more attractive and modern." (C2); "It's almost a must for a company to communicate something like that." (C3); "For

		the degenerate Gen Z, definitely yes." (C5); "I would say that twenty years ago, that wasn't such a big deal." (C6); "They come across as extremely modern with this whole sustainability aspect, and I also trust them more because of the way they show this sustainability aspect." (C6); "I think that many brands are just going with the flow and doing what everyone else is doing. That doesn't really make them more attractive." (C8)
INFORMATION OVERLOAD & DECISION STRESS	Product Abundance	"I find that brands seem inauthentic when they have 70 different products that all claim to do the same thing." (C1)
	Cognitive Overload	"You can quickly become overwhelmed by the list of ingredients." (C1); "If there's too much information, I don't read it anyway." (C2); "In general, beauty products stress me out a bit because I feel like you never know exactly what's in them." (C7); "She named ingredients that I've never heard of in my life, and I have no idea whether that's good or bad." (C7)
	Simplicity & Minimalism	"I think it's good when products are dedicated to a specific problem so I immediately see what it's for." (C1); "Most high-quality products are very simple; simple advertising influences me more." (C2); "Less is more." (C2); "Super simplistic, without faces, i.e., without models." (C5); "When they disclose to me in a simple way what is actually in the products." (C6); "When they don't just throw around terms that I can't understand anyway, but clearly explain what something is." (C6)
	Uncertainty	"Then I don't know which product is different from the others." (C1); "I can't really classify whether that's good or bad." (C2); "I have no idea whether that's good or bad." (C7)
	Reduced Decision Confidence	"When the range is so large that I'm overwhelmed, I can't make a decision at all." (C1)

Table F3- Description of Expert Interview Sample

Expert #1 (E1)

Social Media and Influencer Manager, Experience in different Cosmetic-Companies

Expert #2 (E2)

Communications Consultant, Experience in PR for Beauty- and Lifestyle Brands

Table F4- *Insights of expert interviews*

INDUSTRY	Acceleration & Platform Shift	"Beauty communications has completely reorganized itself." (E1); "TikTok has increased the pace massively." (E1); "Narratives change within hours." (E1); "Everything you communicate is evaluated live." (E2); "Storylines belong to the community, not the brands." (E2); "In the past, you could hide behind campaign aesthetics, but not anymore." (E1)
	Decline of Purpose Hype	"Purpose has become much riskier." (E1); "Consumers demand proof-first communication." (E1); "People are tired of big promises." (E2); "Storytelling has become more sober and concrete." (E2); "Over-staged purpose is punished." (E1)

	Luxury vs. Mass Market Split	"Luxury remains mystical." (E1); "Mass market is hyper-transparent." (E1)
TRUST LOGIC	Strengths of Product-Focused Narratives	"Product-first communication is rationally sound." (E1); "It feels less manipulative." (E1); "It brings calm into an emotionally overheated industry." (E2); "Consumers want to know why something works." (E1); "Product stories give people a sense of control again." (E2)
	Gen Z Fact Orientation	"Gen Z loves product storytelling because it feels emotional." (E1); "They research ingredients and expect educational content." (E1); "They trust verifiable mechanisms more than emotional promises." (E2); "Gen Z is extremely critical and well-informed." (E1)
	Risks of Functional Overload	"If every brand uses the same actives, differences disappear." (E1); "Brands can come across as interchangeable." (E2); "Too much science becomes sterile." (E2); "Product-only communication can feel unsexy." (E1); "Brands must not become technical databases." (E2)
CREDIBILITY & RISK	Credible Purpose	"Purpose is credible only when you can prove it." (E1); "Supply chain, partners, decisions, everything must fit." (E1); "Today, purpose is no longer a pure communication discipline, but an organizational principle." (E2)
	Backlash, Greenwashing & Fall Height	"Purpose can destroy trust massively." (E1); "Purpose increases the fall height." (E2); "Greenwashing and wokewashing destroy trust." (E1); "Contradictions are punished harshly." (E2)
	Purpose as Hygiene Factor	"These issues are hygiene factors." (E2); "Risk is greater than benefit if poorly implemented." (E2)
TRUST FORMATION	Radical Transparency	"Transparency is no longer optional." (E1); "If you don't deliver transparency, you become suspicious." (E1); "Claims must be substantiated." (E2); "Transparency is a prerequisite." (E2)
	Authenticity as Differentiator	"Artificial staging no longer works." (E1); "AI will make authenticity a luxury good." (E2)
	Social Proof as Trust Driver	"Social proof influences decisions more than advertising." (E1); "Reviews and creator content carry more weight than press releases." (E2)
FUTURE	Hybrid Storytelling	"Hybrid forms will become dominant." (E1); "Less telling, more showing." (E1); "Credible aesthetics replace perfect aesthetics." (E1); "A brand needs a clear narrative line to sustain itself in the long term." (E1)
	Human-Centered	"Storytelling becomes more dialogue-oriented and human." (E2); "Consumers want dialogue, not messages." (E2); "Brands must become more human." (E1)

Table F5- *Insights of consumer psychologist interview*

ELABORA	When Product Information Works	"It depends a lot on what state people are in and what their motives are." (P); "If it is important to them or they are looking for information, then information about quality, promises of effectiveness, or ingredients can reach people in a completely different way." (P); "On this route, we process the information much more critically, which means that the
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		information is more likely to influence the intention to buy." (P); "Individual involvement strongly influences the effect of information because the higher the involvement, the more deeply we process the information." (P)
	Why Product Information Often Fails	"On the peripheral route, attention is focused less on product-related information and more on emotions." (P); "People react very little to product-related information because it doesn't reach them in the first place." (P); "When we are overwhelmed with information, we naturally have difficulty absorbing new information." (P); "If information does not seem relevant or there is too much information, then the information is simply not elaborated in depth." (P); "Beauty is very affective and self-centered, and emotions often dominate there." (P)
	Fluency & Cognitive Ease	"When there is cognitive ease, which we call fluency, that generates positive information." (P); "If I'm looking for information about active ingredients but it is easy to understand, then I simply perceive this ease as positive information." (P); "That can also contribute to my conviction." (P)
VALUE COMMUNICATION	Individual Differences in Response	"It depends entirely on the consumers' attitude to the issue." (P); "There are significant interindividual differences." (P); "There are also intra-individual differences in assessment." (P)
	Cognition Changes Before Emotion	"When we are strongly focused on information, it can influence our thoughts without influencing our emotional response." (P); "It simply changes our thoughts at first, because emotions are often built up over a much longer period of time." (P); "I can change my knowledge but my emotions do not change because I may still have a fundamentally positive attitude toward a brand." (P)
	Credible Purpose	"One is something called signaling... it is convincing if it was either difficult to signal or particularly expensive." (P); "It only makes sense to talk about sustainability if the brand is also associated with sustainability in some way." (P); "A 180-degree rebranding from extremely negative or indifferent actions to very conscious and responsible actions is always difficult for consumers to believe." (P); "Trending messages make people think the company is just jumping on a bandwagon." (P); "Many consumers no longer believe that brands are launching a sustainable product line just because they change their packaging to beige." (P)
AUTHENTICITY	Why Authenticity Creates Emotional Impact	"Authenticity reduces ambiguity." (P); "If I think the company has a straight line, that increases my confidence and trust." (P); "If I trust the company, then I'm less critical and work less on the cognitive route and more on the emotional route." (P); "If something is easy for me to process, then I use it as information and it seems more positive." (P)
	Consistency Over Time	"Consistency over time plays a very important role." (P); "Long-term thinking is one of the most important factors in building credibility." (P); "People remember scandals, it's always something that sticks in the back of their minds." (P)
DECISION-	Emotional Drivers	"Emotions initially have a stronger effect than cognition, especially when it comes to quick decisions." (P); "With fast-moving consumer goods, they are not processed very deeply, which is why emotions dominate." (P); "We simply use emotions as information because we don't process it very deeply." (P); "Anticipated emotions are often stronger than rational considerations of utility." (P)

	Social Proof	"Social factors play a major role in beauty." (P); "I would strongly emphasize the issue of social proof." (P); "These are usually people who are conventionally attractive or have certain ideals that one would like to have." (P)
	Heuristics	"Heuristics are particularly effective when it comes to skin." (P); "The less expertise consumers have, the more important heuristics become." (P); "There are expert heuristics, such as the white coat heuristic." (P); "There is the naturalness heuristic, where people believe a product is more natural because the packaging is simpler." (P)
	Loyalty	"Customer satisfaction after the purchase leads to confirmation or disconfirmation and then to brand trust." (P); "Brand trust results from consistent performance." (P); "If my social identity is tied to something, people would buy it even if they are not that satisfied with the product." (P)

G Consumer Interview Guide

Interview guide for consumers

1. General introduction and warm-up

- (1) "How would you describe your interest in beauty products in general?"
- (2) "Which brands do you currently use and why?"
- (3) "Where do you encounter beauty brands most often? Social media, advertising, influencers ...?"
- (4) "What kind of advertising content do you tend to remember?"

2. Perception of product-oriented storytelling approaches (RQ1)

- (1) "When brands mainly talk about the product itself—i.e., quality, effectiveness, features—how does that affect you?"
- (2) "Do you find such information helpful or rather interchangeable? Why?"
- (3) "Are there any examples of product communication that particularly convinced you?"
- (4) "How much does such information influence your trust in a brand?"

3. Perception of purpose-oriented storytelling approaches (RQ2)

- (1) "How do you perceive brands that convey a social or value-oriented message?"
- (2) "Does such a purpose-driven approach seem more authentic or more like marketing? What determines this?"

- (3) “What kind of purpose messages appeal to you personally?”
- (4) “Can purpose messages make a brand appear more attractive or modern?”
- (5) “Have you ever bought a product *because of* a purpose message – despite your skepticism?”

4. Authenticity & credibility

- (1) “What makes a brand authentic to you?”
- (2) “How can you tell that a brand ‘means business’?”
- (3) “Have there been situations where you felt that a brand was not authentic?”
- (4) “How does authenticity relate to your emotional responses?”

5. Emotional responses to brands (H3)

- (1) “What feelings do beauty brands typically trigger in you?”
- (2) “Are there any brands with which you have a positive emotional connection? Why?”
- (3) “To what extent do such feelings influence your purchasing decisions?”

6. Purchase intention & decision-making logic (RQ4)

- (1) “What factors are decisive for you before you buy a beauty product?”
- (2) “How important are price, quality, brand, design, values, etc.?”
- (3) “What makes you try a new brand?”
- (4) “When does it remain a one-time purchase and when does loyalty develop?”
- (5) “If you had to describe a brand that you would buy immediately, what should its communication look like?”

H Expert Interview Guide

1. Warm-up and context

(1) “Can you briefly describe your role and experience in branding/marketing in the beauty or lifestyle industry?”

2. Perception of the current market and communications landscape

(1) “How would you describe the current communications landscape in the beauty industry?”

(2) “In your opinion, what role do storytelling formats play in brand management and positioning?”

3. Product-oriented storytelling

(1) “What strengths and weaknesses do you see in product-oriented storytelling—i.e., communication about effectiveness, ingredients, functionality?”

(2) “Which target groups are particularly receptive to these messages? Why?”

(3) “To what extent are scientific evidence, transparency, or technical expertise important differentiating factors?”

(4) “What are the risks if brands focus too strongly on functional arguments? (Example: interchangeability, information overload)”

4. Purpose-oriented storytelling

(1) “What developments do you see in the trend toward purpose- or value-driven storytelling?”

(2) “From an expert's perspective, what makes such purpose narratives credible or implausible?”

(3) “How strongly do issues such as sustainability, fair trade, and inclusion influence brand perception?”

(4) “What are the risks associated with purpose storytelling?”

5. Reactions of young consumers

(1) “How do you perceive the expectations and demands of younger consumers with regard to brand communication?”

(2) “How important are transparency, authenticity, and social proof?”

6. Interpretation of quantitative results (theory-driven in-depth analysis)

(1) “If younger consumers perceive product-oriented communication as more trustworthy, does this match your experience? Why might this be the case?”

(2) “In your opinion, what explains the skeptical reactions to purpose claims?”

(3) “How do you interpret the role of feelings and emotional engagement in purchasing and loyalty?”

(4) “Which storytelling elements create long-term brand resonance?”

7. Future prospects & strategic recommendations

(1) “How will storytelling in the beauty industry develop in the coming years?”

(2) “Will product communication become more important, or purpose? Or hybrid forms?”

(3) “What do brands need to do to remain credible with a young, critical target group?”

(4) “What role does AI play in authenticity?”

8. Final questions

(1) “Is there anything you consider particularly important that we haven't addressed yet?”

(2) “If you had to give a brand one piece of advice, what would be the most important point for building trust and loyalty?”

I Psychologist Interview Guide

1. How people react to product information

(1) “From a psychological perspective, how do people react to purely product-related information such as quality, efficacy claims, or ingredients?”

(2) “When is such information convincing and when is it not?”

(3) “Why do many people find it difficult to respond emotionally to factual product data?”

(4) “What role does personal experience play (e.g., own skin problems or previous brand experiences)?”

(5) “What role does information overload play?”

(6) “How strongly does individual involvement influence the effect of such information?”

2. Effect of value-oriented communication/purpose

(1) “How does it affect people when brands communicate social concerns, values, or attitudes?”

(2) “What makes such value communication credible or not credible?”

(3) “Why do such messages sometimes change the image people have of a brand, but not automatically their emotional response?”

(4) “What factors determine whether purpose is perceived as sincere or as pure marketing?”

3. Psychology of authenticity

(1) “What makes a message or brand authentic from a psychological perspective?”

(2) “What signals do people use to assess whether a brand ‘means business’?”

(3) “Why does authenticity often lead to stronger positive feelings than pure information?”

(4) “What role does consistency over time play in building credibility?”

4. Emotional reactions to brands

(1) “What are typical emotional reactions that brands can trigger?”

(2) “Why do such feelings have such a strong influence on whether someone wants to buy a product?”

(3) “Why do emotions only arise in some people after trust has been established?”

(4) “How do people differ in terms of whether they react to brands more rationally or emotionally?”

5. Decision-making logic & purchasing behavior

(1) “What factors typically influence the decision to try a new beauty product?”

(2) “What role do heuristics (i.e., simple decision-making shortcuts such as price, design, and brand awareness) play?”

(3) “How do rational (e.g., ingredients, quality) and emotional factors interact?”

(4) “Under what conditions do loyalty or repeat purchases arise?”

6. Interpretation of quantitative results

(1) “My study showed that factual product messages (effectiveness, features, ingredients) hardly create any differences in perception. Why might that be?”

(2) “Value communication had an influence on how people assessed the brand as a whole, but not necessarily on how they felt about it. How would you interpret this?”

(3) “The strongest emotional reactions occurred where the brand was perceived as credible and genuine. Why does authenticity play such a big role in feelings?”

(4) “More positive feelings were strongly linked to purchase intentions. How would you explain this mechanism psychologically?”

7. Conclusion

(1) “From a psychological perspective, is there anything that companies in the beauty sector should pay particular attention to if they want to communicate credibly?”