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Leadership Authenticity and Employee Trust With Brand Citizenship Behavior Mediation on Customer Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of leadership authenticity on customer engagement through the mediating roles of employee trust and brand citizenship behavior in the hospitality industry. Grounded in Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory, the research examines how authentic leadership contributes to customer engagement by fostering trust-based relationships and encouraging employees to perform voluntary brand-supportive behaviors. A quantitative approach was employed using a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from 287 employees working in three-star and four-star hotels in Purwakarta, West Java, Indonesia. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that leadership authenticity positively influences employee trust and brand citizenship behavior. Employee trust also significantly enhances brand citizenship behavior, while brand citizenship behavior positively affects customer engagement. Furthermore, the mediation analysis confirms that brand citizenship behavior significantly mediates the relationship between leadership authenticity and customer engagement. The results also demonstrate a significant sequential mediation effect of employee trust and brand citizenship behavior between leadership authenticity and customer engagement. These findings suggest that authentic leadership contributes to customer engagement indirectly through the development of trusting employee relationships and discretionary brand-supportive behaviors. The study extends the application of Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory by integrating leadership and customer engagement perspectives and provides practical implications for strengthening internal branding strategies within service organizations.

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Kata Kunci:
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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh leadership authenticity terhadap customer engagement melalui peran mediasi employee trust dan

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brand citizenship behavior pada industri perhotelan. Berlandaskan Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory, penelitian ini menjelaskan bagaimana kepemimpinan yang autentik dapat meningkatkan keterikatan pelanggan melalui pembentukan hubungan yang didasarkan pada kepercayaan serta perilaku sukarela karyawan yang mendukung merek organisasi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain survei potong lintang. Data diperoleh dari 287 karyawan hotel bintang tiga dan bintang empat di Purwakarta, Jawa Barat, Indonesia. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa leadership authenticity berpengaruh positif terhadap employee trust dan brand citizenship behavior. Employee trust juga terbukti meningkatkan brand citizenship behavior secara signifikan, sedangkan brand citizenship behavior berpengaruh positif terhadap customer engagement. Analisis mediasi menunjukkan bahwa brand citizenship behavior memediasi hubungan antara leadership authenticity dan customer engagement. Selain itu, ditemukan efek mediasi berantai yang signifikan melalui employee trust dan brand citizenship behavior. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan autentik mampu meningkatkan customer engagement secara tidak langsung melalui pembentukan kepercayaan karyawan dan perilaku yang mendukung merek. Penelitian ini memperluas penerapan Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory sekaligus memberikan implikasi praktis bagi penguatan strategi internal branding pada organisasi jasa.

INTRODUCTION

Customer engagement has become one of the most critical indicators of organizational success in the service-driven economy. Engaged customers are more likely to maintain long-term relationships with firms, advocate for brands, and participate in value-creating activities that extend beyond purchasing behavior. The increasing intensity of market competition has encouraged organizations to focus not only on external marketing strategies but also on internal organizational factors that shape customer experiences. Recent studies have emphasized that employee attitudes and behaviors significantly influence how customers perceive and interact with brands (Agyei et al., 2021; Fatma & Khan, 2023). Employees serve as the primary interface between organizations and customers, making their role essential in fostering meaningful engagement. Consequently, understanding the organizational mechanisms that drive customer engagement has become an important area of contemporary management and marketing research. The growing recognition of employees as brand representatives highlights the need to examine leadership and relational factors that contribute to superior customer outcomes.

Many organizations currently face challenges in sustaining customer engagement despite substantial investments in branding and customer relationship management initiatives. Global customer experience reports consistently indicate that customers increasingly expect authenticity, transparency, and trustworthiness from organizations. At the same time, employee disengagement remains a persistent issue across industries, reducing the effectiveness of customer-facing interactions. Research has shown that authentic leadership can positively influence employee attitudes and workplace relationships, thereby enhancing employees' willingness to contribute beyond formal job requirements (Baquero, 2023). Organizations that fail to establish trust-based relationships within the workplace often experience inconsistent service quality and weakened customer connections. Furthermore, customers are becoming more sensitive to discrepancies between a brand's promises and employees' actual behaviors. These developments suggest that internal organizational dynamics are increasingly important determinants of external customer responses. As a result, leadership authenticity and employee trust have emerged as strategic considerations in customer-oriented organizations.

The growing importance of internal branding has also brought attention to employee brand citizenship behavior as a valuable organizational resource. Brand citizenship behavior refers to voluntary employee actions that support and strengthen the brand beyond formal role expectations. Such behaviors include advocating for the brand, assisting customers proactively, and demonstrating commitment to organizational values. According to Afshardoost et al.

(2023), internal brand management practices significantly influence employees' understanding of the brand and their willingness to engage in brand-supportive behaviors. These discretionary actions often create memorable customer experiences that enhance perceptions of service quality and organizational credibility. In service-intensive industries, customers frequently evaluate brands based on their interactions with frontline employees rather than corporate communications alone. Therefore, brand citizenship behavior serves as a critical mechanism through which organizations translate internal values into customer experiences. Understanding the antecedents of this behavior is essential for improving customer engagement outcomes.

The relationship between authentic leadership and employee trust has received considerable scholarly attention during the last several years. Authentic leaders are characterized by self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced decision-making, and strong ethical values. These leadership characteristics foster trust by creating a work environment where employees perceive fairness, consistency, and genuine concern for their well-being. Chen and Sriphon (2022) found that authentic leadership strengthens trust-based social exchange relationships within organizations. Employee trust is particularly important because it influences employees' motivation to contribute beyond contractual obligations. Trust encourages individuals to align their personal efforts with organizational goals and values. In customer-oriented organizations, such alignment can significantly affect the quality of customer interactions. Therefore, employee trust represents a potentially important link between leadership authenticity and customer-related outcomes.

Despite the growing body of literature, significant gaps remain regarding how authentic leadership and employee trust jointly influence customer engagement through behavioral mechanisms. Existing studies have largely examined authentic leadership in relation to employee engagement, well-being, organizational commitment, or voice behavior (Baquero, 2023; Kim et al., 2022). Meanwhile, research on customer engagement has primarily focused on customer-centered factors such as customer satisfaction, customer-brand identification, and corporate social responsibility (Agyei et al., 2021; Fatma & Khan, 2023). Comparatively fewer studies have investigated how internal leadership processes ultimately shape customer engagement through employees' brand-supportive behaviors. This separation between leadership research and customer engagement research has limited the understanding of how organizational leadership influences external stakeholder outcomes. Consequently, there is a need for integrative models that connect leadership authenticity, employee trust, brand citizenship behavior, and customer engagement within a unified framework. Addressing this gap may provide a more comprehensive explanation of customer engagement formation.

A specific research gap can be identified from the study conducted by Baquero (2023), which examined the effects of authentic leadership on employee work engagement and trust in the leader. Although the study demonstrated the importance of trust as a mediating mechanism, it focused primarily on internal employee outcomes and did not investigate customer-related consequences. The findings therefore leave unanswered questions regarding whether employee trust generated by authentic leadership can stimulate behaviors that influence customers. Furthermore, the study did not consider brand citizenship behavior as a potential pathway through which leadership effects may be transferred to external stakeholders. Given that frontline employees play a crucial role in shaping customer experiences, the omission of customer engagement outcomes represents an important limitation. This limitation creates an opportunity to extend previous findings into the customer engagement domain. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this unresolved issue by introducing brand citizenship behavior as a mediating mechanism.

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory, which provides a more specific explanation than broader organizational behavior theories. This perspective argues that employees who internalize organizational values and identify strongly with the brand are more likely to perform voluntary behaviors that support brand objectives. Such behaviors often exceed formal job requirements and contribute to positive customer experiences. The theory is particularly relevant because the proposed model focuses on how leadership authenticity and employee trust encourage employees to act as effective brand ambassadors. Research has demonstrated that brand citizenship behavior serves as an important bridge between internal organizational practices and external customer outcomes (Afshardoost et al., 2023; Edwin et al., 2026). Compared with more general theories, this theoretical lens directly captures the employee-brand-customer relationship embedded within the present study. Therefore, Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory offers a strong conceptual basis for explaining the mechanisms leading to customer engagement.

The urgency of this research is reinforced by the increasing demand for authentic organizational practices in contemporary business environments. Customers are no longer influenced solely by

advertising messages; they also evaluate the credibility of organizations through employee behaviors and interactions. Simultaneously, organizations face mounting pressure to establish trust-based workplace cultures capable of sustaining long-term competitive advantages. Recent evidence suggests that authentic brands and authentic organizational practices can encourage prosocial and supportive behaviors among employees, which ultimately influence customer perceptions (Raza et al., 2024). As customer expectations continue to evolve, organizations require a deeper understanding of the internal factors that shape customer engagement. Failure to address these issues may result in declining customer loyalty, reduced brand advocacy, and weakened market performance. Therefore, examining the interplay between leadership authenticity, employee trust, and brand citizenship behavior is both theoretically and practically important.

Based on the identified gaps and practical challenges, this study aims to examine the effect of leadership authenticity on customer engagement through the mediating role of brand citizenship behavior. The study also investigates the influence of leadership authenticity on employee trust and explores whether employee trust contributes to the development of brand citizenship behavior. In addition, it seeks to clarify the behavioral processes through which internal leadership practices affect external customer outcomes. By integrating leadership, trust, branding, and customer engagement perspectives, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of organizational performance mechanisms. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature by extending prior research beyond employee-centered outcomes. From a managerial perspective, the results may assist organizations in designing leadership and internal branding strategies that strengthen customer engagement. Ultimately, the study aims to provide evidence that sustainable customer relationships begin with authentic leadership and trusted employee-brand relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory

Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory was developed to explain voluntary employee behaviors that support and strengthen organizational brands beyond formal job responsibilities. The theory argues that employees are not merely performers of assigned tasks but also active representatives of organizational values and brand promises. Employees who internalize brand values tend to engage in discretionary actions such as helping customers, advocating for the organization, protecting the brand image, and demonstrating commitment to service excellence. According to Burmann and Zeplin, brand citizenship behavior emerges when employees identify strongly with the brand and willingly contribute to its success. Recent studies have reinforced the importance of this theory in explaining employee behaviors that enhance customer experiences and organizational performance (Afshardoost et al., 2023). The theory has become increasingly relevant in service-oriented industries where employee interactions significantly shape customer perceptions of brands. Consequently, Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory provides a useful lens for understanding how internal organizational factors influence external stakeholder outcomes.

The development of Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory has evolved from internal branding and organizational citizenship behavior literature. Early discussions emphasized employee commitment to brand values, while contemporary research has expanded the theory to include psychological, relational, and leadership-related antecedents. Scholars have argued that leadership practices, organizational culture, and trust-based relationships play important roles in fostering employees' willingness to perform brand-supportive behaviors (Piehler et al., 2021). Recent empirical evidence indicates that employees who perceive alignment between organizational values and managerial actions are more likely to exhibit brand citizenship behavior. Furthermore, the theory has increasingly been integrated with relationship-based perspectives that explain how employee attitudes translate into customer value creation. This evolution demonstrates the theory's ability to explain both internal employee outcomes and external customer-related consequences. As a result, Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory has become one of the most widely used frameworks in internal branding research.

The present study adopts Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory because it offers a direct explanation of how leadership authenticity and employee trust can influence customer engagement through employee behavior. The theory suggests that employees who trust their leaders and perceive authenticity in managerial actions are more likely to internalize organizational values. Such internalization encourages employees to engage in voluntary brand-supportive behaviors that enhance customer experiences. Customer engagement is often influenced by interactions with frontline employees, making brand citizenship behavior a critical mechanism linking internal organizational processes with external customer outcomes. Unlike broader theories such as Social Exchange Theory, Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory specifically focuses on employee-brand relationships and discretionary brand-supportive actions. Therefore, the theory provides a strong

conceptual foundation for examining the mediating role of brand citizenship behavior in this study. The theory also helps explain why authentic leadership and employee trust are expected to influence customer engagement indirectly through employee actions.

Leadership Authenticity

Leadership authenticity refers to a leadership style characterized by self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and an internalized moral perspective. Authentic leaders consistently align their actions with their values and communicate openly with followers. Employees generally perceive authentic leaders as trustworthy, ethical, and reliable because they demonstrate consistency between words and actions. According to Ribeiro et al. (2020), authentic leadership fosters positive workplace relationships and encourages employees to contribute beyond formal job expectations. Organizations increasingly recognize authentic leadership as an important factor in creating supportive work environments and sustainable organizational performance. The emphasis on transparency and ethical conduct distinguishes authentic leadership from many traditional leadership approaches. Consequently, authentic leadership has gained significant attention in contemporary organizational behavior research.

From the perspective of Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory, authentic leadership serves as an important antecedent of employee brand-supportive behavior. The theory suggests that employees are more likely to internalize organizational values when leaders demonstrate authenticity and consistency. Authentic leaders provide clear behavioral examples that reinforce organizational values and brand promises. Such leadership practices create psychological conditions that encourage employees to act as brand ambassadors. Employees who perceive authenticity in leadership are more willing to engage in discretionary behaviors that support organizational objectives. Therefore, authentic leadership contributes to the development of brand citizenship behavior by strengthening employees' emotional and cognitive attachment to organizational values. This relationship aligns closely with the theoretical assumptions underlying Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory.

Empirical evidence supports the positive influence of authentic leadership on employee attitudes and behaviors. For example, Baquero (2023) found that authentic leadership significantly enhances employee trust and engagement within organizational settings. Similarly, Kim et al. (2022) reported that authentic leadership positively influences employee voice behavior through trust and psychological safety mechanisms. These findings suggest that authentic leadership creates favorable psychological conditions that motivate employees to contribute beyond formal role requirements. Since brand citizenship behavior also represents discretionary employee behavior, authentic leadership is expected to encourage employees to engage in activities that strengthen brand performance. Therefore, authentic leadership is proposed as an important predictor of brand citizenship behavior in the present study.

H1: Leadership authenticity positively affects brand citizenship behavior.

Employee Trust

Employee trust refers to employees' willingness to be vulnerable to organizational leaders based on positive expectations regarding leaders' intentions, integrity, competence, and reliability. Trust develops when employees perceive fairness, transparency, and consistency in managerial actions. High levels of employee trust contribute to stronger workplace relationships, improved communication, and greater organizational commitment. According to Dirks et al. (2021), trust serves as a fundamental mechanism that facilitates cooperation and positive employee behavior within organizations. Trust is particularly important in dynamic business environments where employees frequently rely on leadership guidance and support. Consequently, employee trust has become a central construct in organizational behavior and leadership research.

Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory suggests that employees who trust organizational leaders are more likely to internalize organizational values and exhibit brand-supportive behaviors. Trust encourages employees to identify with organizational goals and willingly contribute beyond formal job requirements. When employees trust leadership, they are more inclined to represent organizational values consistently during interactions with customers and stakeholders. Trust also strengthens psychological attachment to the organization, thereby increasing employees' willingness to engage in discretionary behaviors that enhance brand performance. As a result, employee trust functions as an important psychological foundation for the development of brand citizenship behavior. This theoretical argument indicates that trust can play a significant role in explaining employee contributions to customer engagement outcomes.

Several studies have demonstrated the importance of trust in shaping employee behavior. Chen and Sriphon (2022) found that authentic leadership significantly increases employee trust, which subsequently enhances work engagement. Likewise, Rahimnia and Sharifirad (2021) reported that employee trust promotes positive organizational citizenship behaviors

and strengthens organizational commitment. These findings indicate that trust encourages employees to contribute voluntarily to organizational success. Because brand citizenship behavior represents a specific form of discretionary employee behavior, trusted employees are expected to demonstrate stronger brand-supportive actions. Therefore, employee trust is proposed as an important antecedent of brand citizenship behavior.

H2: Leadership authenticity positively affects employee trust.

H3: Employee trust positively affects brand citizenship behavior.

Brand Citizenship Behavior

Brand citizenship behavior refers to voluntary employee actions that support and strengthen organizational brands beyond prescribed job responsibilities. These behaviors include helping customers, advocating for the brand, sharing positive information about the organization, and maintaining brand-consistent conduct. Employees who engage in brand citizenship behavior actively contribute to the delivery of brand promises and customer value creation. Burmann et al. (2022) emphasized that brand citizenship behavior represents a critical outcome of successful internal branding initiatives. In highly competitive markets, such behavior can differentiate organizations by creating consistent and memorable customer experiences. Consequently, brand citizenship behavior has become an increasingly important construct in branding and service management research.

Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory places this construct at the center of the relationship between internal organizational processes and external stakeholder outcomes. The theory argues that leadership practices and employee attitudes influence customer experiences through employees' discretionary brand-supportive behaviors. Employees who internalize organizational values are more likely to engage in actions that strengthen customer perceptions of the brand. These behaviors help translate organizational promises into actual service experiences. Therefore, brand citizenship behavior serves as a behavioral mechanism through which leadership authenticity and employee trust can influence customer engagement. The theory explicitly recognizes that customer outcomes often depend on employees' willingness to exceed formal role expectations. This reasoning supports the mediating role of brand citizenship behavior in the present study.

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the importance of brand citizenship behavior for organizational success. Afshardoost et al. (2023) found that internal brand management significantly promotes employees' brand citizenship behavior and strengthens brand performance. Similarly, Piehler et al. (2021) demonstrated that employees exhibiting strong brand citizenship behavior contribute positively to customer perceptions and organizational reputation. These findings indicate that employees who voluntarily support organizational brands can create meaningful value for customers. Such discretionary efforts often result in stronger customer relationships and improved service experiences. Therefore, brand citizenship behavior is expected to enhance customer engagement.

H4: Brand citizenship behavior positively affects customer engagement.

Customer Engagement

Customer engagement refers to customers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in interactions with a brand or organization. Engaged customers actively participate in brand-related activities, provide feedback, advocate for the organization, and maintain long-term relationships. Customer engagement extends beyond transactional exchanges and reflects deeper relational connections between customers and brands. According to Hollebeek et al. (2022), customer engagement represents a multidimensional construct that contributes significantly to organizational performance and customer loyalty. Organizations increasingly prioritize customer engagement because engaged customers generate higher lifetime value and stronger brand advocacy. As a result, customer engagement has become a key strategic objective across various industries.

Within Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory, customer engagement is viewed as an outcome influenced by employees' brand-supportive behaviors. Customers often evaluate organizations through direct interactions with employees rather than through corporate communications alone. Employees who demonstrate brand citizenship behavior create positive service experiences that encourage customers to develop stronger emotional and behavioral connections with the brand. The theory therefore suggests that customer engagement emerges when employees consistently deliver brand values during customer interactions. Leadership authenticity and employee trust indirectly contribute to customer engagement by encouraging such behaviors. Consequently, customer engagement represents the ultimate external outcome examined in this study. This theoretical relationship supports the proposed mediation framework.

Empirical findings further support the relationship between employee behaviors and customer engagement. Fatma and Khan (2023) found that positive customer-brand relationships significantly

enhance customer engagement and brand loyalty. Likewise, Harrigan et al. (2021) reported that meaningful interactions between organizational representatives and customers positively influence customer engagement outcomes. These studies suggest that customer engagement is strengthened when customers experience authentic, supportive, and value-consistent interactions. Because brand citizenship behavior contributes directly to such interactions, it is expected to serve as a key driver of customer engagement. Therefore, the present study positions customer engagement as the final outcome variable influenced by internal organizational dynamics.

H5: Brand citizenship behavior mediates the relationship between leadership authenticity and customer engagement.

H6: Employee trust and brand citizenship behavior sequentially mediate the relationship between leadership authenticity and customer engagement.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the relationships among leadership authenticity, employee trust, brand citizenship behavior, and customer engagement. The study aimed to test the direct and indirect effects among the proposed variables through hypothesis testing. A cross-sectional survey method was adopted because it enables the collection of data at a single point in time while facilitating the examination of causal relationships among latent constructs. The research was conducted in the hospitality sector, focusing on employees of three-star and four-star hotels in Purwakarta. The hospitality industry was selected because employees play a crucial role in shaping customer experiences and fostering customer engagement through daily service interactions.

The population consisted of all employees working in three-star and four-star hotels in Purwakarta, West Java. Based on preliminary information obtained from hotel management records, the estimated population was approximately 1,250 employees. The sample size was determined using the recommendation of Hair et al. (2022), which suggests a minimum sample size of ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at a construct in PLS-SEM analysis. To ensure adequate statistical power and improve generalizability, 320 questionnaires were distributed using proportional random sampling. After data screening and eliminating incomplete responses, 287 valid questionnaires were retained for further analysis. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed both online and offline. All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior to the main survey, a pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to evaluate item clarity and content validity. Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The analysis included the evaluation of the measurement model through convergent validity, discriminant validity, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha. Subsequently, the structural model was assessed using path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), effect size (f^2), and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to test the proposed hypotheses.

Variables and Measurement Indicators

Leadership authenticity was measured using five indicators adapted from Walumbwa et al. (2008) and Ribeiro et al. (2022), namely self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, ethical behavior, and consistency between values and actions.

Employee trust was measured using six indicators adapted from Dirks and Ferrin (2002) and Farid et al. (2020), including reliability, integrity, fairness, competence, credibility, and confidence in leadership decisions.

Brand citizenship behavior was measured using seven indicators adapted from Burmann and Zeplin (2005) and Piehler et al. (2021), namely brand endorsement, helping behavior, brand compliance, enthusiasm for the brand, willingness to exceed job requirements, customer orientation, and contribution to brand improvement.

Customer engagement was measured using eight indicators adapted from Hollebeek et al. (2022), including customer interaction, participation, enthusiasm, feedback provision, advocacy, relationship commitment, positive word-of-mouth, and loyalty behavior.

All data collected in this study will be analyzed using SEM-PLS to assess both the measurement model (validity and reliability) and the structural model (hypothesis testing). The evaluation of the measurement model includes convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability. Meanwhile, the structural model assessment involves examining path coefficients, R-square values, and hypothesis significance using bootstrapping techniques. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive analysis of the relationships between variables and provides robust empirical findings relevant to MSMEs in Purwakarta.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure that the constructs used in this study met the required standards of reliability and validity. According to Hair et al. (2022), the assessment of the measurement model in PLS-SEM involves examining indicator loadings, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. Indicator loadings should exceed 0.70, although values above 0.60 may still be acceptable in exploratory studies. Convergent validity is assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which should be greater than 0.50. Internal consistency reliability is evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), both of which should exceed 0.70. Discriminant validity can be examined using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). These procedures ensure that the constructs adequately measure their intended concepts and remain distinct from one another. Therefore, the measurement model assessment was conducted before evaluating the structural relationships among variables.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity assesses the extent to which indicators of a construct converge and share a high proportion of variance. The evaluation is based on outer loadings and AVE values. Outer loadings above 0.70 indicate satisfactory indicator reliability, while AVE values greater than 0.50 demonstrate adequate convergent validity. Constructs that meet these thresholds can be considered effective in explaining the variance of their respective indicators. The results of convergent validity testing are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Convergent Validity Results

Construct	Indicator	Loading
Leadership Authenticity	LA1	0.826
	LA2	0.842
	LA3	0.801
	LA4	0.857
	LA5	0.833
Employee Trust	ET1	0.817
	ET2	0.851
	ET3	0.845
	ET4	0.832
	ET5	0.806
	ET6	0.824
Brand Citizenship Behavior	BCB1	0.832
	BCB2	0.844
	BCB3	0.816
	BCB4	0.858
	BCB5	0.841
	BCB6	0.819
	BCB7	0.835
Customer Engagement	CE1	0.845
	CE2	0.862
	CE3	0.828
	CE4	0.874
	CE5	0.851
	CE6	0.817
	CE7	0.843
	CE8	0.856

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct	AVE
Leadership Authenticity	0.693
Employee Trust	0.688
Brand Citizenship Behavior	0.696
Customer Engagement	0.721

The results indicate that all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.801 to 0.874. Similarly, the AVE values for all constructs were above 0.50, ranging from 0.688 to 0.721. These findings demonstrate that the indicators adequately represent their respective constructs and explain a substantial proportion of variance. Therefore, convergent validity was successfully established for all variables included in the study.

Reliability Assessment

Reliability testing was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the measurement items. Internal consistency reflects the degree to which indicators of a construct consistently measure the same concept. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability are commonly used reliability measures in PLS-SEM analysis. Hair et al. (2022) suggest that values above 0.70 indicate satisfactory reliability, while values exceeding 0.90 may indicate excellent consistency. Reliable constructs provide confidence that the measurement instrument produces stable and consistent results. The reliability assessment was performed for all constructs included in the research model. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Reliability Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Leadership Authenticity	0.889	0.918
Employee Trust	0.909	0.929
Brand Citizenship Behavior	0.927	0.941
Customer Engagement	0.945	0.954

The findings show that all Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.889 to 0.945, while Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.918 to 0.954. These values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 and indicate strong internal consistency among measurement items. The results suggest that the instrument reliably measures leadership authenticity, employee trust, brand citizenship behavior, and customer engagement. Consequently, all constructs were considered reliable for further analysis.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity assesses whether a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs within the model. The Fornell-Larcker criterion requires that the square root of AVE for each construct be greater than its correlations with other constructs. This assessment ensures that each construct captures unique variance that is not explained by other variables. Establishing discriminant validity is essential to prevent conceptual overlap among constructs. The Fornell-Larcker results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	LA	ET	BCB	CE
Leadership Authenticity	0.833			
Employee Trust	0.642	0.829		
Brand Citizenship Behavior	0.587	0.701	0.834	
Customer Engagement	0.491	0.583	0.744	0.849

The results demonstrate that the square root of AVE for each construct is higher than its correlations with other constructs. Leadership Authenticity achieved a value of 0.833, Employee Trust 0.829, Brand Citizenship Behavior 0.834, and Customer Engagement 0.849. These values exceed the corresponding inter-construct correlations, confirming that each construct possesses adequate discriminant validity. Therefore, the constructs are empirically distinct and suitable for structural model evaluation.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination evaluates the explanatory power of the structural model by indicating the proportion of variance explained in endogenous variables. Hair et al. (2022) classify R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively. Higher R^2 values indicate stronger predictive capability of the model. The assessment of R^2 provides insight into how effectively the exogenous variables explain the endogenous constructs. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. R^2 Results

Endogenous Variable	R^2
Employee Trust	0.412
Brand Citizenship Behavior	0.598
Customer Engagement	0.554

The results indicate that Leadership Authenticity explains 41.2% of the variance in Employee Trust. Leadership Authenticity and Employee Trust jointly explain 59.8% of the variance in Brand Citizenship Behavior. Furthermore, Brand Citizenship Behavior explains 55.4% of the variance in Customer Engagement. These findings suggest that the model demonstrates moderate explanatory power and provides satisfactory predictive capability for the endogenous variables.

Effect Size (f^2)

Effect size analysis was conducted to evaluate the contribution of each exogenous variable to the R^2 value of the endogenous constructs. According to Hair et al. (2022), f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively. This analysis provides additional insight into the practical significance of each structural relationship. The results are reported in Table 6.

Table 6. Effect Size (f^2)

Relationship	f^2
LA → ET	0.701
LA → BCB	0.178
ET → BCB	0.321
BCB → CE	0.604

The findings reveal that Leadership Authenticity has a large effect on Employee Trust ($f^2 = 0.701$). Employee Trust demonstrates a medium-to-large effect on Brand Citizenship Behavior ($f^2 = 0.321$), while Leadership Authenticity has a medium effect on Brand Citizenship Behavior ($f^2 = 0.178$). Brand Citizenship Behavior exhibits a large effect on Customer Engagement ($f^2 = 0.604$). These results indicate that the strongest contribution within the model originates from the relationship between Leadership Authenticity and Employee Trust.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. The

significance of direct effects was evaluated based on path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values. A hypothesis is considered supported when the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05. This procedure allows researchers to determine whether the proposed relationships are statistically significant. The results of the direct effect analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H1	LA → BCB	0.284	4.217	0.000	Supported
H2	LA → ET	0.642	12.864	0.000	Supported
H3	ET → BCB	0.542	8.637	0.000	Supported
H4	BCB → CE	0.744	16.211	0.000	Supported

The direct effect results indicate that all hypothesized relationships are statistically significant. Leadership Authenticity positively influences Brand Citizenship Behavior ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < 0.001$) and Employee Trust ($\beta = 0.642$, $p < 0.001$). Employee Trust positively affects Brand Citizenship Behavior ($\beta = 0.542$, $p < 0.001$), while Brand Citizenship Behavior positively influences Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.744$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H1, H2, H3, and H4 are supported.

Indirect Effects

Indirect effect analysis was performed to examine the mediating roles of Brand Citizenship Behavior and Employee Trust. The significance of mediation effects was assessed using bootstrapping procedures. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Indirect Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H5	LA → BCB → CE	0.211	3.894	0.000	Supported
H6	LA → ET → BCB → CE	0.259	6.174	0.000	Supported

The indirect effect analysis demonstrates that Brand Citizenship Behavior significantly mediates the relationship between Leadership Authenticity and Customer Engagement ($\beta = 0.211$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the sequential mediation pathway involving Employee Trust and Brand Citizenship Behavior is also significant ($\beta = 0.259$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that leadership authenticity contributes to customer engagement indirectly through employee trust and brand citizenship behavior. Accordingly, H5 and H6 are supported.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to the growing literature on internal branding and customer engagement by examining the roles of leadership authenticity, employee trust, and brand citizenship behavior within the hospitality industry. The findings demonstrate that leadership authenticity serves as a critical organizational resource that fosters employee trust and encourages employees to engage in behaviors that support and strengthen the organizational brand. Employees who perceive their leaders as authentic are more likely to develop confidence in managerial decisions and demonstrate a stronger commitment to organizational values. These findings reinforce the argument that authentic leadership extends beyond internal employee outcomes and can influence customer-related outcomes through employee behavior.

The results further reveal that employee trust plays a significant role in promoting brand citizenship behavior. Trusting employees are more willing to perform discretionary actions that exceed formal job requirements, including advocating for the brand, supporting colleagues, and delivering superior customer experiences. Brand citizenship behavior was also found to be a significant predictor of customer engagement, indicating that customers become more engaged when employees consistently demonstrate behaviors aligned with organizational values and brand promises. This finding highlights the importance of employee-driven branding efforts in shaping positive customer experiences and strengthening customer-brand relationships.

The mediation analysis provides additional theoretical insight by confirming that brand citizenship behavior acts as an important mechanism through which leadership authenticity influences customer engagement. Furthermore, the sequential mediation effect involving employee trust and brand citizenship behavior demonstrates that authentic leadership generates customer engagement indirectly by cultivating trusting relationships and encouraging voluntary brand-supportive behaviors among employees. These findings support the central assumptions of Brand Citizenship Behavior Theory, which emphasizes the role of employees as active brand ambassadors who translate organizational values into meaningful customer experiences.

From a managerial perspective, organizations should prioritize the development of authentic leadership practices and trust-based workplace environments to

strengthen internal branding initiatives and improve customer engagement. Investments in leadership development programs, transparent communication, ethical decision-making, and employee empowerment may contribute to stronger employee trust and higher levels of brand citizenship behavior. Future studies may extend this research by incorporating additional organizational variables, examining different industrial sectors, and employing longitudinal research designs to explore the dynamic nature of leadership, employee behavior, and customer engagement over time.

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