



SYNERGIES BETWEEN AGILITY AND AUTHENTICITY IN BRAND STRATEGY

Tijana Dedić* 

Phd student
Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Republic of Serbia

Abstract:

Today's brands operate in a content-saturated world, where consumer attention is increasingly short and fragmented. In this environment, brands are expected to be agile - that is, able to quickly adapt to new trends, platforms, and communication styles. However, the constant demand for agility challenges maintaining authenticity and recognizability, which are among the key factors of brand success. This paper examines how a brand can be both flexible and grounded, adapting to change without losing its core identity. By reviewing existing literature - where agility and authenticity are often explored separately - it creates space for considering these concepts together and gaining a deeper understanding of their interdependence in today's digital landscape. The paper argues that clearly defining a brand's identity and essence is a key prerequisite for effective adaptability. Only a brand that understands its foundation can successfully strike a balance between innovation and consistency, thereby ensuring lasting relevance and consumer trust.

Keywords:

attention economy, agility, recognizability, authenticity, brand identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary digital environment is shaped by the dynamics of content hyperproduction and the constant growth of information distributed across various media channels and platforms. In this context, the communication space becomes oversaturated with messages, images, and video materials, whose volume far exceeds the cognitive capacity of individuals to process, filter, and remember them. User attention thus transforms into a rare and valuable resource, while its direction and retention become the central focus of modern communication practices. As early as the 1970s, Herbert Simon (1971) pointed out that an abundance of information inevitably produces a scarcity of attention. Although digital infrastructure was only in its infancy when he formulated this claim, in today's context it has been fully confirmed: the very abundance of available content results in competition for this limited resource, thereby changing the nature of communication and its fundamental principles.

Correspondence:
Tijana Dedić

e-mail:
tijana.dedic.24@singimail.rs





Attention, however, is not only a limited resource but also an unstable category whose value is measured in time intervals of only a few seconds. Social networks and digital platforms operate under the logic of accelerated content consumption, which leads to fragmented attention, shallow engagement, and a faster loss of audience interest. Under such conditions, brands face constant pressure to refresh their communication practices, introduce new formats, and respond to the growing expectations of audiences who demand innovation and diversity. Yet, adaptation to the dynamics of the digital market is not a neutral process: it opens a dilemma between agility, understood as the ability to react quickly and adapt flexibly, and authenticity, understood as consistency, stability, and the building of trust through a recognizable identity.

At the very intersection of agility and authenticity lies the starting point of this research. The assumption is that a brand can achieve true adaptability only if its identity is clearly defined and consistently developed. A brand that understands its core values and communicates them firmly is the one capable of evolving and innovating without undermining its authenticity. In this way, it secures not only immediate relevance but also long-term consumer trust, which represents one of the key criteria of sustainable branding in the context of the attention economy.

In line with this, the paper will first consider the theoretical foundations of the attention economy and its implications in the contemporary digital context. It will then analyze the concepts of agility and authenticity within branding strategies, and finally examine their interconnection and potential synergy as factors of differentiation and long-term brand sustainability.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most striking features of contemporary society is the accelerated pace of adopting new technologies and communication forms. Historical comparisons clearly illustrate the scale of this change: while it took centuries for writing to establish itself as the dominant form of communication, and more than a century for the printed book to replace manuscripts and take a central place in the cultural landscape of its era, today's shifts from one media sphere to another occur almost instantaneously. Debray (2000), through the concept of "media genealogy," emphasizes that the acceleration of innovation has become a defining characteristic of the modern world and a key dimension through which communication and cultural transformations should be observed.

Unlike earlier periods, when societies had enough time to develop adaptation strategies, today we face simultaneous and almost continuous shifts in technologies and communication practices. The internet spread globally within just a few years, while digital tools such as ChatGPT became part of the everyday life of millions of users in only a few months. This process reflects not only the power and speed of technological innovations but also the transformed habits of users themselves, who no longer passively encounter novelties but actively expect and demand them. Rosa (2015) explains this dynamic through the concept of social acceleration, stressing that audiences develop an expectation of constant updates in content and formats. In such an environment, any slowdown in the pace of communication is perceived as a sign of obsolescence, often leading to a rapid loss of interest and marginalization of brands that fail to keep up.

The consequences of these changes are far-reaching. In a world where the amount of information seems infinite and choices are nearly unlimited; forgetfulness becomes a constant threat. This means that mere presence is no longer sufficient: the key survival skill is the ability to adapt to accelerated changes. New technologies, business models, and social trends are constantly emerging, and actors are expected to respond quickly, flexibly, and with continuous learning. It is precisely in this context that the notion of agility develops, which is not limited to simple speed of reaction but also includes the ability to continuously acquire new knowledge and adapt to environmental demands. Sharifi and Zhang (1999) define agility as an organizational capability to respond to rapid changes and thus maintain a competitive advantage. In the domain of communication, this means that brands can no longer rely on established patterns but must constantly listen to their audiences, test new formats, and reshape strategies in real time. In the era of the attention economy, where millions of messages compete daily for space in our minds, agility becomes the line between visibility and invisibility.

Theoretical support for this understanding is also provided by Zygmunt Bauman through the concept of "liquid modernity" (2000), in which fluidity becomes the key metaphor of contemporary life. Just as liquids continuously change shape and volume, social structures today are characterized by instability and unpredictability. This metaphor captures the logic of a world in which permanence is rare, and change is the only constant. Similarly, Valery points out that fragmentation, disconnection, and surprise have become almost natural states of modern individuals, making flexibility an essential survival skill. However, emphasizing agility as a dominant value also introduces serious risks. If brands constantly reshape their expression in line with fleeting trends, they risk losing consistency, recognizability, and audience trust. In other words, agility, if absolutized, can lead to the dilution of identity.



It is precisely here that the notion of authenticity comes into play, providing a stable anchor in a fluid and accelerated world. Etymologically rooted in the Latin word *authenticus* and the Greek *authentikos*, authenticity signifies truthfulness and genuineness (Cappannelli & Cappannelli, 2004). However, in branding literature this concept does not have a single meaning (Leigh *et al.*, 2006) but is instead understood through multiple dimensions. Authenticity encompasses individuality and originality (Akbar & Wymer, 2016), naturalness and spontaneity, credibility and reliability (Morhart *et al.*, 2015), as well as continuity and consistency over time (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Schallehn *et al.*, 2014). It is not exhausted in mere consistency but implies the brand's ability to remain recognizable and true to its values even in an environment of constant change (Kenjić, 2023). In this way, authenticity enables the building of trust, which in contemporary society is as valuable as attention itself.

On a deeper level, Grayson and Martinec (2004) distinguish between indexical authenticity, related to origin and continuity, and iconic authenticity, which concerns symbolism and cultural meanings. This confirms that authenticity is not only a matter of the brand's internal characteristics but also of how it is perceived, interpreted, and valued by society. Its importance lies in the ability to secure long-term consumer trust and loyalty, even in conditions of constantly shifting trends. Thus, authenticity functions as a counterbalance to the speed and fragmentation brought by agility.

Previous studies, however, show that agility and authenticity are most often treated as separate concepts. Some authors emphasize the importance of agility, pointing out that it enables brands to cope with the dynamics of the market (Sharifi & Zhang, 1999), while others highlight authenticity as a source of trust and long-term loyalty (Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). This dualistic approach limits the understanding of the complexity of contemporary communication processes. To view agility and authenticity as mutually exclusive categories means to overlook their potential complementarity.

Here lies the research gap: how can a brand be both flexible and open to change while at the same time remaining stable, consistent, and recognizable? Can agility, instead of undermining authenticity, be seen as its extension under new circumstances? If the attention economy has shaped a communication space where it is necessary to constantly renew audience interest, then a sustainable strategy cannot rely on a single principle. Only in their synergy - agility ensuring adaptability and authenticity ensuring consistency - can we find the foundation for long-term relevant and differentiated branding.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a qualitative research approach aimed at understanding the concepts of agility and authenticity in the context of contemporary brand strategies. The research relies on the analysis of secondary sources, with systematic collection and examination of relevant literature from the fields of communication studies, marketing, sociology, and media studies. Theoretical works of both classical and contemporary authors who significantly contributed to the development of these concepts were considered, including Simon, Debray, Bauman, Sharifi and Zhang, Grayson and Martinec, as well as recent researchers in the areas of brand management and digital communication. In this way, a broad theoretical framework has been established, allowing the topic to be observed from multiple perspectives and connected with current processes in the digital environment.

The analytical framework of the paper combines comparative and critical approaches. The comparative dimension enabled the comparison of different definitions and theoretical interpretations of agility and authenticity, highlighting their similarities, differences, and tensions. The critical dimension made it possible to identify gaps in the existing literature, particularly the fact that these concepts are usually analyzed in isolation, even though contemporary practice suggests their interconnection. This creates the basis for considering their possible synergy as a condition for sustainable differentiation and long-term brand relevance in the digital environment.

The methodological framework is directed toward the synthesis of existing theoretical insights, with the aim of offering a deeper understanding of the central question: how can a brand be both agile - capable of adaptation and innovation - and authentic - consistent with its identity and values - at the same time? Such an approach allows for a dual function: on the one hand, it provides a theoretical foundation for deeper reflection on contemporary processes in brand communication, while on the other hand, it opens space for future empirical research that could further test and validate the proposed assumptions in practice.

It is important to emphasize that the research relies entirely on secondary sources and theoretical analysis, which represents a certain limitation in terms of direct empirical verification. The absence of primary data prevents definitive conclusions from being drawn about consumer behavior or the effects of specific strategies in real market conditions.



Nevertheless, the value of the paper lies in its critical examination of existing theoretical models and its effort to articulate a new perspective that connects agility and authenticity within a unified analytical framework. Such a perspective not only contributes to academic debate but also offers a practical foundation for brands striving to remain relevant and differentiated in the attention economy.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the theoretical analysis, based on the study of relevant literature and conceptual frameworks, indicate that agility and authenticity in contemporary branding should not be understood as opposing but as interdependent principles. Their combination allows a brand to preserve its identity and consumer trust while simultaneously adapting to the constantly changing digital environment.

This interconnection becomes particularly evident when analyzing how audiences respond to content in conditions of hyperproduction and information overload. The phenomenon of desensitization, explained by Potter (2011), shows that when the human organism is repeatedly exposed to the same stimuli, it becomes less sensitive, requiring increasingly stronger stimuli to evoke the same physiological response. While the first encounter with a horror film may provoke an intense reaction, subsequent exposure diminishes the emotional intensity, turning shock or fear into indifference. This mechanism is not limited to the domain of entertainment but serves as an analogy for the current state of communication: oversaturated with content, users develop resistance to messages that once produced strong impressions. Fear, excitement, or sadness often remain muted, while communicative signals pass almost unnoticed. As a result, attention - already a limited resource - becomes even more demanding and difficult to capture.

The consequences of this process are multifaceted. Audiences filter content more quickly, reject repetitive and predictable messages, while even original ideas soon lose their impact if they are not refreshed and adapted. Campaigns that were once distinctive due to an innovative slogan or a striking visual code now easily blend into a stream of similar attempts, erasing their differentiating advantage. In such an environment, formulaic approaches signify not only a lack of creativity but also the risk of complete loss of visibility. Only content capable of surprising, disrupting routine, and offering new interpretations has the potential to remain memorable.

The analysis shows that in this context agility emerges as a necessary dimension of contemporary branding. Agility implies the ability to respond quickly to changes, a readiness to test new formats, and openness to learning through experimentation. A brand that demonstrates agility is able to break monotony and capture moments of attention within a fragmented communication space. However, if such agility is not grounded in a stable identity, it is quickly revealed as superficial and opportunistic. Audiences recognize the lack of consistency and respond with a loss of trust, showing that innovation alone is not enough. This is why authenticity is just as important as flexibility. While agility provides dynamism, authenticity gives deeper meaning, ensures continuity, and allows change to be perceived not as mere adaptation to a trend but as a logical expression of brand values.

Further analysis highlights the complexity of the digital ecosystem in which contemporary communication takes place. Each platform functions as a distinct language with its own grammar and semantic expectations. TikTok privileges spontaneity, humor, and short forms; LinkedIn relies on professionalism and expertise; Instagram builds narrative through aesthetics and visual experience; while X demands speed, brevity, and witty insight. A message communicated identically across all these channels not only loses its strength but also reveals a lack of contextual understanding. The findings therefore confirm that authenticity does not lie in uniformity of expression but in the consistency of identity that is translated into different codes of expression. The essence remains the same, but the style of communication must follow the logic and expectations of each platform.

It is crucial, therefore, to distinguish between identity and image. As Kapferer (2012) emphasizes, identity encompasses the values, differentiating elements, and symbolic meanings that a brand deliberately shapes and communicates, including its visual system, tone of communication, promise to consumers, and the emotions it seeks to evoke. By contrast, image is the result of audience perception - an interpretation of what has been communicated. The analysis shows that a clearly defined identity enables elasticity of expression: the same set of values can be conveyed through humor and informality on TikTok, through expertise and formality on LinkedIn, through aesthetic appeal on Instagram, or through timeliness and sharp insight on X. Authenticity, therefore, is not undermined by adapting the form but is confirmed through it - provided that all variations are rooted in the same core of meaning.



These findings make it possible to theoretically explain the dynamics of the relationship between authenticity and agility through the fusion of strategic consistency and tactical adaptability. Strategic consistency ensures that a brand's values, vision, and mission remain stable and coherent, while tactical adaptability allows flexibility in the choice of formats, tones, and communication styles. Only the combination of these dimensions enables what can be called dynamic stability - a state in which the brand remains open to change without abandoning its essence.

Within this dynamic, the concept of transmedia storytelling holds a special place. Jenkins (2006) points out that a narrative does not need to be identically repeated across every platform but can expand so that each channel contributes a new fragment to the story. The audience then does not receive duplicated messages but instead pieces together a layered image that remains true to the brand's identity. The results show that such an approach not only increases engagement but also reinforces the perception of authenticity: the brand is not seen as artificially multiplied but as narratively rich and consistent. In this way, TikTok can attract people through humor, LinkedIn can build trust through expertise, Instagram can evoke emotion and aesthetics, and X can confirm relevance through brevity and timeliness. All platforms together form a unified storytelling ecosystem, in which a stable narrative core is expressed in different forms but remains consistent with itself.

An additional dimension is brought by audience participation. Jenkins (2013) emphasizes that contemporary users are not passive recipients but active participants who reinterpret, remix, and redistribute content. This means that brands no longer manage communication in a linear way but act as curators of the story - they set the framework that enables user creativity while simultaneously preserving the integrity of the identity. The results indicate that it is precisely this dynamic, in which the audience plays an active role, that is key to maintaining relevance: authenticity is affirmed through brand consistency, while agility is expressed through the willingness to let the story evolve and adapt together with the audience.

Taken together, the results of the theoretical analysis show that contemporary branding cannot survive on mere agility or rigid authenticity. Their combination forms the basis for sustainable differentiation and long-term trust in the conditions of the attention economy. Agility enables a brand to respond to fragmented focus and hyperproduction of content, while authenticity ensures that all changes remain aligned with a stable identity and values. Only in their synergy does what can be described as dynamic stability emerge - the ability to be changeable in form yet steadfast in essence.

An illustrative example of the connection between agility and authenticity can be seen in the case of the Duolingo app, whose presence on social media confirms theoretical findings. On TikTok, Duolingo reached high visibility through a specific form of communication where the brand's mascot became an actor of digital culture. Instead of classic promotion of the app's functions, the content is shaped through humor, irony, and references to popular trends typical for TikTok. This strategy relies on the concept of "platform literacy" (Meikle, 2016), as it shows the ability of the brand to understand the language and codes of each platform and to use them effectively. At the same time, authenticity is not lost, because even in these seemingly peripheral forms the core mission of the brand is communicated.

On LinkedIn, the brand uses the same basis - humor - but adapts it to the context of a professional audience. Instead of memes and absurd jokes typical for TikTok, LinkedIn communication focuses on situational comments about the work environment, productivity challenges, or everyday business habits. On Instagram, humor is combined with visual aesthetics - through illustrations, reels, and visually appealing posts that connect fun and education. On X, Duolingo uses short, sharp, and often witty comments on current events, relying on the speed and virality of the platform. Despite differences in form, the brand identity remains consistent: humor and the recognizable mascot connect all channels into a single communication whole. This shows that authenticity does not mean uniformity, but the flexible translation of brand identity into different communication codes. This supports Kapferer's (2012) claim that the strength of a brand lies in a stable core of meaning, which stays unchanged even when the form constantly changes.

Unlike global brands such as Duolingo, which build communication on humor and experiments with different formats, the Serbian company Metalac shows how traditional industrial brands can also stay relevant in the digital environment. Founded in the mid-20th century and known for the production of kitchen cookware, Metalac has in modern times managed to reinterpret its identity through social media. Instead of focusing on business platforms such as LinkedIn, which are not in line with its consumer profile, the company directed its communication toward networks with strong visual and cultural potential, such as X, Instagram, and Facebook. On X, the brand stands out with short and witty posts that connect products with everyday life and popular culture, while on Instagram it emphasizes aesthetic values and links cookware to lifestyle. At the same time, its presence on Facebook allows more direct communication with older consumers, for whom this network is still the primary channel for information and brand interaction. This strategy shows that authenticity in digital communication does not depend on being present on all platforms, but on



the ability of a brand to selectively choose channels and develop content that reflects its identity. In this way, Metalac demonstrates how brands from smaller and more traditional markets can apply the principles of agility and authenticity in a way comparable to global practices, even though they operate from a very different context.

5. CONCLUSION

The contemporary communication landscape, shaped by content overproduction and fragmented attention, brings to brands the challenge not only of gaining short-term audience interest, but also of keeping long-term relevance. As consumer desensitization reduces the effect of strong stimuli and speeds up the process of saturation, it becomes clear that presence alone is not enough anymore; there is a need for constant renewal of expression, but without losing identity in a series of temporary experiments. In this tension between the need for constant adaptation and the demand for consistency, the complementarity of agility and authenticity becomes visible. Agility helps the brand to follow the rhythm of digital platforms and stay visible, while authenticity secures a stable core of meaning that prevents dilution of identity. Seen together, they are not opposites but a dynamic balance that gives the brand the ability to change in form while staying stable in essence. This perspective shows that authenticity is not uniformity but consistency of identity translated into different platform languages and expressed through transmedia storytelling. Each communication form adds its own tone, creating a layered narrative, while the audience stays engaged and active in shaping it further. In this way, the brand becomes a curator of the story, where innovation does not conflict with credibility but extends and strengthens it.

It becomes clear that brand sustainability does not come from only fast reactions or from rigid consistency, but from their carefully built synergy. To reach this balance, brands must first understand their own essence: to define clearly who they are, what they represent, and which values they want to communicate. Only from that stable core is it possible to shape communication that changes in form but not in identity. When the identity is clearly defined, it can be translated into different communication codes. On networks that value humor, the brand can use irony and memes; on visually oriented platforms, aesthetics can become the main tool; in more formal contexts, the narrative can use a serious tone. Despite these differences, recognition remains the same because all forms are connected to the same core of meaning.

In other words, flexibility is not the result of constant change of identity, but of deep self-understanding. Only when a brand knows its values and the emotions it wants to create can it speak in different ways on different platforms and still remain unique and recognizable. This shows that long-term relevance in the attention economy depends on the ability to translate identity without ever diluting it.

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