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MAINTAINING NARRATIVE CONSISTENCY AND BRAND IDENTITY ON WEBSITES, SOCIAL MEDIA, EMAIL, AND MARKETPLACES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW FOR BUILDING TRUST AND BRAND RECOGNITION

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the importance of narrative consistency and brand identity across various digital channels, particularly websites, social media, email, and marketplaces, in building consumer trust and increasing brand recognition. Through a systematic literature review approach, this study analyses the relationship between brand communication consistency and two strategic elements, namely *consumer trust* and *brand recognition*. The results show that consistent narratives prevent message contradictions, strengthen perceptions of brand authenticity and credibility, and increase consumer loyalty. Meanwhile, consistent visual and verbal identities have been proven to accelerate brand recognition, build strong associations, and create sustainable differentiation in a competitive market. In practical terms, this study emphasises the importance of developing comprehensive *brand guidelines* and implementing integrated cross-channel communication strategies to deliver a harmonious brand experience. These findings not only enrich the academic literature on branding in the digital context but also have real implications for companies seeking to build sustainable competitive advantage in the digital age.

Keywords: brand consistency, brand narrative, brand identity, consumer trust, brand recognition, digital communication, systematic literature review

Introduction

In the digital era, characterised by the development of communication technology and the expansion of online platforms, a brand's presence across various digital channels is no longer merely an option but a strategic necessity. Consumers now interact with brands through increasingly diverse channels, ranging from official company websites, social media, email marketing, to marketplaces that facilitate transactions. This situation creates a great opportunity for brands to expand their market reach, but at the same time presents a major challenge in maintaining narrative consistency (Fan, 2005) . Different narratives across channels can cause confusion, reduce brand credibility, and weaken emotional connections with consumers.

Consistency in narrative and brand identity are important elements in building *brand integrity*. A consistent narrative creates a strong impression of who the brand is, what values it holds, and how it wants to be perceived by the public. This is closely related to the theory *of brand storytelling*, which states that consumers tend to remember messages framed with a complete and consistent narrative more easily (Naik & Raman, 2003) . When a brand communicates consistent messages across various channels, trust and cohesion are formed between customer experiences in both the digital and physical spheres (Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013) .

On the other hand, inconsistency can undermine a brand's credibility. For example, the official website displays formal language with elegant visuals, but social media accounts emphasise a casual style that does not match the previous image. Such differences can raise doubts about the authenticity of the brand identity. In the long run, narrative inconsistency weakens *brand recognition,* disrupts the effectiveness of marketing communications, and even reduces consumer loyalty. Therefore, a deep understanding of the consequences of inconsistency is crucial for modern communication strategies (Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013) .

The concept of *Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)* has long emphasised the importance of coordinated messages across channels. IMC encourages companies to convey harmonious messages, both verbally and visually, so that every interaction with consumers becomes part of an inseparable experience. However, in the digital context, the challenges become more complex. Each digital channel has different audience characteristics, interaction styles, and distribution algorithms, requiring strategic adjustments without losing the common thread of brand identity (Mandung, 2025) .

Websites are often seen as the official information hub of a brand, where consumers seek product details, services, and the company's core values. Social media, on the other hand, emphasises personalisation, engagement, and quick interaction. Email marketing serves as a more direct personal communication channel, while marketplaces are pragmatic arenas for commercial transactions. These differences in function and audience make maintaining brand narrative consistency a complex methodological challenge, as each channel requires contextual adaptation of communication style while remaining faithful to the core identity of .

In academic research, narrative consistency and brand identity have been closely linked to the formation of *consumer trust*. Consumer trust is one of the main foundations in facilitating purchasing decisions, creating loyalty, and building long-term relationships. This trust cannot be built if consumers find inconsistencies in messages or experiences across different digital channels. Through consistent narratives and visuals, consumers tend to feel secure and confident that the brand can deliver on its marketing promises (Bharti & Park, 2023) . In addition to trust, identity consistency also plays a vital role in enhancing *brand recognition.* Brand recognition encompasses consumers' ability to recognise a brand in various contexts, even when only presented with simple visual symbols or specific communication styles. Marketing studies show that strong brand recognition reduces communication costs because consumers automatically associate symbols, colours, or language styles with specific brands. Cross-channel digital consistency accelerates this internalisation process in consumers' minds (Reid & et al., 2005) .

Thus, this research is important to clarify the relationship between narrative consistency and brand identity with two key strategic outcomes: consumer trust and brand recognition. Given the increasingly competitive digital market, any gaps in the narrative can be exploited by competitors to offer more convincing alternatives in the eyes of consumers. Therefore, identifying the principles of cross-channel consistency is the foundation for building sustainable competitive advantage.

Research Method

This study uses a literature review method by examining various relevant literature related to narrative consistency and brand identity on digital channels, such as websites, social media, email, and marketplaces. This study was conducted through the collection, critical reading, and analysis of sources in the form of scientific journals, books, research reports, and academic articles published between 2015 and 2025 to ensure that the data used remained contextual and up-to-date (Eliyah & Aslan, 2025) . Each piece of literature was evaluated based on its theme, relevance to the topic, and contribution to understanding the relationship between brand narrative consistency and the formation of trust and brand recognition. The results of the study were then systematically synthesised to formulate a conceptual framework and identify research gaps, thereby contributing both theoretically and practically to branding studies in the digital age (Ferrari, 2020) .

Results and Discussion

Brand Narrative Consistency for Building Trust

Consumer trust is the main foundation in long-term relationships between brands and audiences. Without trust, consumers will hesitate to buy products, use services, or even recommend brands to others. In an increasingly competitive context, strategies to build trust cannot only be achieved through product quality alone, but also through consistent and reliable communication. A consistent brand narrative is one of the most important instruments because it signals to consumers that the brand has a clear and convincing identity (Dahl & Mortimer, 2015) .

Brand narrative refers to the story or tale that a brand wants to convey to its audience. This story encompasses the values, vision, mission, and promises offered by the company. Consistency in narrative means that the same story, or at least one that is not contradictory, is present across various brand communication channels. With this consistency, consumers will easily understand what the brand represents and feel a sense of stability that fosters trust. Conversely, an inconsistent narrative will raise doubts about the authenticity of the brand (Rawlins, 2008) .

A consistent narrative has a psychological impact on consumers. Consumers tend to trust brands that are able to provide clarity and consistency across all communication channels. This clarity reflects the professionalism, consistency, and good intentions of the company to deliver on its promises (Kusuma Winata & Adiwaty, 2024) . This is consistent with the theory *of trust building,* which states that consistency is one of the keys to forming perceptions *of reliability* in a relationship. In addition, narrative consistency also prevents message contradictions that can damage reputation. For example, a brand that emphasises sustainability values on its official website but displays excessive consumption practices on social media will find it difficult to build trust. Such narrative inconsistencies show that the brand lacks moral integration or strategy, causing consumers to doubt its true commitment (Kusumawati, 2024) .

In the digital media era, consumers often do not rely on just one channel to understand a brand. They may first see an advertisement on social media, then search for more details on the website, receive promotional emails, and finally make a transaction on the marketplace. If all four sources convey a consistent brand story, consumers will have a complete experience. This situation enhances trust because each step *of the customer journey* reinforces the same brand identity (Tafesse & Korneliussen, 2013) .

Consumer trust is not only created through verbal messages but also through visual elements and communication style. Consistent logos, colours, language tone, and taglines strengthen the narrative. Visual consistency is part of the brand narrative that wraps the story in symbols easily remembered by consumers. When all these communication elements come together harmoniously, consumers will feel more confident that the brand is professional and reliable (Pfeuffer, 2024) .

From a marketing theory perspective, brand narrative consistency can be seen as part of *Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)* practices. In IMC, cross-channel message coordination is key to creating a seamless communication experience. IMC states that message consistency minimises confusion, strengthens perception, and enhances *brand credibility*. Thus, an integrated brand narrative becomes an empirical instrument in strengthening trust. Brand narrative consistency also contributes to *perceived authenticity* or the perception of authenticity of the brand's core values (Sung & Jeon, 2024) . Modern consumers are highly sensitive to brands that are perceived as fake or merely following trends without a clear foundation of values. A consistent narrative, both year after year and across channels, shows that a brand has real values and is based on principles. This perception of authenticity is the main fuel for the emergence of trust from the audience (Golden Ratio Journal, 2024) .

Beyond strengthening trust, narrative consistency also fosters a sense of security in transactions. When consumers find a consistent narrative across various digital channels, they are more confident that the brand is not a scam or an untrustworthy entity. This is particularly important in marketplaces, where many brands compete and consumers may find it difficult to distinguish between official sellers and unverified third parties. Narrative consistency provides additional validation of a brand's integrity (Rehman, 2022) .

Trust built through narrative consistency is also closely linked to customer retention. Trusting consumers tend to have higher loyalty, make repeat purchases, and even become brand advocates through word-of-mouth recommendations. In the long run, this effect is far more valuable than large promotional strategies that are not aligned with the brand identity. Consistency, in this case, extends the cycle of good relations between the brand and its consumers (Shams, 2024) .

Evidence from academic literature also shows that narrative consistency is not only beneficial for consumers but also for internal company employees. A consistent narrative provides clear guidelines on how employees should convey brand messages to the public. As a result, consumer trust is strengthened not only by messages displayed on digital channels but also through direct interactions with brand representatives (Mang et al., 2024) .

However, building narrative consistency is not an easy task. The main challenge lies in the different characteristics of each digital channel, which require message adaptation. Social media, for example, emphasises casual and interactive language, while websites tend to be more formal and informative. Communication styles need to be adjusted, but with a common thread that does not detract from the core narrative identity. This balance between adaptation and consistency is a determining factor in effectiveness. To maintain consistency, companies need to develop detailed guidelines in the form of *brand guidelines* or *brand books* (Voorveld & et al., 2011) . These documents cover communication standards, visual styles, and even the main narrative that must be maintained across all channels. With these guidelines, every communication unit in the company will have the same reference, making it easier to enforce consistency. These guidelines also facilitate adaptation across global markets, where the narrative remains uniform even when translated into different languages and cultures (Grove & et al., 2007) .

Overall, brand narrative consistency has proven to be one of the most effective instruments in building consumer trust. A strong, clear, and consistent narrative across various channels builds perceptions of reliability, professionalism, authenticity, and emotional attachment. Trust born from consistency not only increases consumer loyalty but also positions the brand at a high level of credibility in an increasingly crowded digital market. Therefore, future brand management research and practices need to pay greater attention to the aspect of brand narrative consistency in every digital communication strategy.

Brand Identity Consistency for Recognition and Differentiation

Brand identity is a collection of visual, verbal, and emotional elements that a brand uses to differentiate itself from competitors and create a consistent perception in the eyes of consumers (Grove & et al., 2007) . These elements include logos, colours, typography, slogans, communication tone, and visual style used in every communication material. Consistency in applying brand identity is an important foundation for consumers to easily recognise and remember a brand, without having to be repeatedly introduced through different messages (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014) .

Brand recognition is the first step in the process of building strong brand equity. Consumers essentially remember brands through visual cues and consistent, repeated experiences. For example, specific colours such as blue for Facebook or red for Coca-Cola immediately evoke instant associations in consumers' minds. Consistent use of this identity creates cognitive patterns, allowing consumers to recognise a brand even without explicitly mentioning its name (Ali, 2025) .

From a differentiation perspective, identity consistency plays a crucial role in establishing a brand's unique position in the market. With thousands of brands competing in the same industry, consumers are often exposed to information overload. In this situation, visual and verbal identity consistency can set a brand apart from the crowd, resulting in sustainable differentiation. The more consistent a brand's identity is, the easier it is for consumers to distinguish that brand from its competitors, which may have inconsistent messages (Ati & et al., 2023) .

Brand identity consistency is also closely related to *cognitive fluency*, which is the ease with which the brain recognises and processes familiar information. A consistent identity makes a brand easier to process cognitively because consumers are already familiar with certain shapes, colours, or communication styles. This familiarity creates psychological comfort, which then strengthens recognition and indirectly increases the chances of differentiation. Conversely, a varied and inconsistent identity hinders the recognition process (Brilliant International Journal of Management and Tourism, 2025) .

A consistent identity strategy enables brands to create stronger *brand recall*. *Brand recall* is not just about recognising a logo when consumers see it, but also about consumers' ability to remember the brand when they think of a particular product category. For example, when consumers think of "fresh red fizzy drinks", Coca-Cola easily comes to mind. This is reinforced by decades of consistency in colour identity, logo, and communication style that has not changed much (Dewhirst & Davis, 2005) .

Differentiation also gains added value from brand identity consistency. The differentiation that emerges is not merely because the product is different from competitors, but because its identity forms unique associations that cannot be easily replicated. Apple's logo, with its consistent minimalist design, for example, communicates not only technology but also an image of exclusivity and innovation. Continuity in maintaining this symbol reinforces a differentiation that is difficult for competing brands to match, even if they sell similar products (Becker, 2023) .

A key element of brand identity consistency is *internal alignment*. Every stakeholder within the company, from the marketing team to frontline employees, must understand and apply the principles of identity uniformly. Without strong internal alignment, the messages and symbols received by consumers can vary, reducing the clarity of the identity and obscuring recognition and differentiation efforts. Therefore, successful organisations usually have detailed and binding *brand guidelines* (Utama & Ambarwati, 2022) .

Digital media expands both the challenges and potential for implementing consistent identity. Websites, social media, email marketing, and marketplaces each have their own unique communication formats and visual styles. However, if a brand can consistently display its identity elements across all these channels, recognition will be built more quickly. Consumers not only see the same logo and colours but also experience consistency, from language interactions to the visual forms presented (Ravsanjani, 2024) .

Consistency in visual identity, such as the consistent use of colours, logos, and typography, provides visual stimuli for consumers to form long-term associations. This is supported by neuromarketing research which found that consistent visual symbols strengthen neuronal connections in consumers' brains, thereby accelerating the process of brand recall. A consistent identity acts as a "mental anchor" that embeds the brand more deeply in consumers' consciousness (Veloutsou & et al., 2025) . In addition to visual aspects, verbal communication style also plays an important role in strengthening identity recognition. A consistent tone of voice, whether formal or casual depending on the brand identity, helps consumers understand the personality conveyed by the brand. An inconsistent tone of communication will only cause confusion. Therefore, verbal consistency is no less important than visual consistency in creating differentiation rooted in brand personality (Fan, 2005) .

Brand identity consistency is also closely related to *brand equity*. This equity is formed from the accumulation of positive consumer experiences with the brand over the long term. Identity consistency reinforces this value because each consumer experience is consistent with the others, forming a stronger brand perception than competitors. A stable identity also increases brand value in the long term because it helps create the perception that the brand is reliable (Naik & Raman, 2003) .

From a competitive differentiation perspective, identity consistency provides strategic value in an increasingly homogeneous market. When products and services have similar qualities, branding elements become one of the last differentiators that set one brand apart from another. In this context, identity consistency is not only a marketing tool but also a business strategy instrument that drives the sustainability of competitive advantage (Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013) .

However, consistency of identity does not mean rigidity and an inability to adapt. Brands still need to make minor updates to keep up with market relevance and current trends. However, these updates must be made while maintaining the same essence of identity. Controlled adaptation will extend the brand's relevance without damaging the continuity of identity, so that the brand remains easily recognisable while being able to differentiate itself from its competitors.

Overall, brand identity consistency has proven to be an important element in building strong recognition and sustainable differentiation in a crowded market. A consistent identity helps brands to be quickly recognised, easily processed cognitively, and internalised as unique associations in the minds of consumers. This not only strengthens long-term loyalty, but also ensures the brand's strategic position in an increasingly dynamic competitive landscape. Therefore, maintaining brand identity consistency is a vital step for brands to remain relevant, widely recognised, and possess enduring differentiation.

Conclusion

Based on a systematic literature review, maintaining consistency in brand narrative and identity across various digital channels—such as websites, social media, email, and marketplaces—has proven to be key in building consumer trust while strengthening brand recognition. Narrative consistency helps create clarity, authenticity, and professionalism that minimises message contradictions, thereby increasing consumer confidence in the brand's credibility. At the same time, a visually and verbally consistent brand identity accelerates the brand recognition process, builds strong associations, and provides sustainable differentiation in a competitive market.

The findings of this study confirm that cross-channel consistency not only affects external communication aspects but also strengthens internal organisational cohesion. Clear identity and narrative guidelines help maintain message consistency across official communication channels, personal interactions, and commercial activities. With a consistent integrated communication strategy, companies can deliver a seamless and harmonious *customer journey*, thereby increasing the likelihood of consumer loyalty and recommendations.

In practical terms, this study implies that companies need to develop comprehensive brand guidelines, ensuring that communication is adapted to the characteristics of each channel without compromising core brand consistency. Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce the digital marketing literature on the role of narrative and identity consistency in building trust and brand recognition. Thus, consistency should be viewed as a long-term strategy oriented towards sustainability, differentiation, and brand competitive advantage in the digital era.

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