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The strive for the authentic
brand experience

How an identity-based authenticity
model can increase trust

APRIL 2021, GERMANY

**MAKING AN
IMPACT THAT
MATTERS**

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Preface

The rise of brand authenticity

On a consumers' longing for the authentic:

“Consumers have the feeling that authenticity has been withheld. They now require it back.”

In uncertain times, characterized by a global pandemic, poverty, inequality, youth unemployment and climate change, people feel a loss of available identity anchors and a loss of orientation. In this context, they face the challenge of finding points of reference for their own identity construction.

To meet this challenge and to develop a sense of continuity and belonging, people are increasingly looking for authenticity in their daily lives. Authenticity conveys a sense of genuineness, truthfulness and satisfies a fundamental human aspiration. The use of authentic brands combines inner satisfaction with the external expression of one's own self.

A growing importance of non-materialistic attributes also increases the appreciation of authenticity. This does not seem to occur as a fad, but rather as an attempt by consumers to change the socio-cultural characteristics of consumption.

More and more, people have the feeling that companies have deprived them of what is true and authentic. Now they are demanding brands that satisfy the awakening longing for the authentic.

Millennials are driving this societal trend; 40% of those polled by the Deloitte Millennial Survey believe the goal of businesses should be to 'improve society'. They assign authentic brands attributes such as morality and accountability. This is seriously worth pondering. Millennials already make up 40% of all consumers, influencing about \$40 billion in annual sales.



Management Summary

The consumers' faith in brands is declining, and with it the stability of the brand attachment.¹ The brand attachment as a central performance indicator of brand management plays a key role for brand success: as a result of all brand management activities, it results in concrete customer behavior such as the purchase decision, increased willingness to pay or a recommendation intention.² The brand trust herein is the decisive factor in establishing and maintaining the brand-customer relationship.³ However, the great importance of brand trust is currently colliding with a loss of trust across institutions.⁴ In times of *banking and financial crisis, fraud scandals and tax evasion* by global corporations, consumers increasingly see their trust abused.⁵

A cross-industry loss of brand trust is the result. This development leads to challenges within the brand management practice and immediately increases the research interest in the construct of brand authenticity recognized in academia and business practice as a central lever for building brand trust. This was the starting point for our quest to identify and empirically validate the drivers of brand authenticity.

When we analyze the building blocks of authenticity, we distinguish between two dimensions: the integrity level of a company consisting of an integral point of reference, behavioral continuity over time and coherence across touchpoints, and the level of originality of the brand identity.

¹Kleine-Kalmer, 2015, p. 57

²Burmann et al., 2018, p. 41

³Burmann et al., 2015, p. 59; Hegner, 2012, p. 52

⁴Deloitte Millennial Survey, 2019; Bialek, 2019

⁵Doyle, 2016; Fendel and Frenkel, 2009; IMF, 2010; Macho and Schaal, 2017; Merten, 2015; Schieritz, 2016; Simon, 2017; U.S. House of Representatives, 2015



KEEP YOUR PROMISE



STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF



VALUE YOUR HERITAGE

The Authentic Top 10s three commitments

Authenticity can neither be copied nor permanently faked. Just declaring that one's own brand is authentic can have the opposite effect. If the rhetoric of a brand does not correspond to the actual brand experience, the brand loses its authenticity. Brand authenticity is not only promoted, it is lived every day and at all brand touch points. At its core, this requires a relationship between word and deed.

Walk the talk

Approaching authenticity from its sociological roots, it describes the congruence between the existence of a profound brand identity and an actual brand behavior that can really and comprehensively be explained through this identity.

The consumer with their subjective ideas and expectations searches for authenticity, which they see confirmed when they assume that the brand acts according to an inner compass and avoids opportunistic alignment with trends.

Authenticity thus shows the perceived coherence between self-portrayal, behavior and identity, which is constituted by the determinants of **originality** and **integrity**.

We find, that the most authentic brands stick to three major rules:

01

Keep your promise

"Reliably keeping our promises."

The Most Authentic brands convey a feeling of reliability. No promises are made which cannot be kept. No matter the brand identity, whether they focus on quality leadership, innovation or unique design. Authentic brands walk the talk.

02

Stay true to yourself

"Do not bend and remain true to yourself - even as the brand expands."

Finding and preserving the brand core is what the most authentic brands master. This holds true day to day, on any brand touchpoint. Authentic brands stand out, especially when neglecting short-term economic goals to stay true to themselves without following any trend.

03

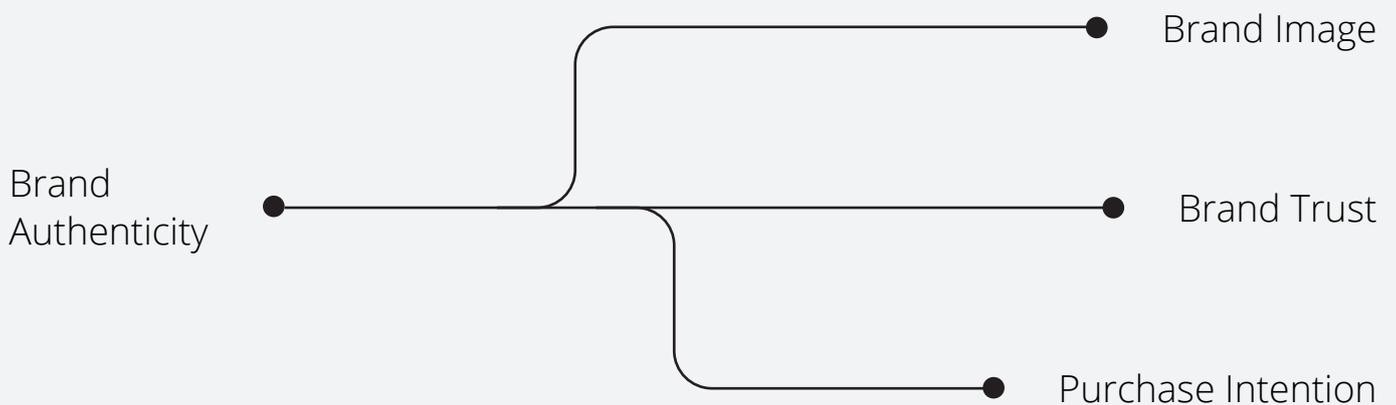
Value your heritage

"Stay consistently good for decades."

Authentic brands are coherent at any specific point in time and continuously managed over time. Knowing what they stand for and valuing their heritage, authentic brands are consistent for years in their promise and appearance. That does not mean they don't change, but staying true to their inner core: they've proven that over the years.

The most authentic brands master this rules and they do that for a good reason: Authentic behavior increases behavioral and economic performance indicators, with a highly significant impact on brand trust, purchase intention and the overall brand image.

Figure 1 Effects on consumer behavior



“Brand authenticity shows highly significant impact on brand trust, image and purchase intention.”⁶

⁶Adomeit, 2020

Authenticity increases Brand Trust

Brand parity and a cross-institutional loss of trust

Many markets today are characterized by a hyper-reality created by brands, in which consumers are confronted with illusory worlds that stage the unreal as reality. At the same time, however, attitudes towards a brand and purchasing decisions increasingly depend on the extent to which an offer is perceived as genuine by the potential buyer. In this situation, the consumers trust in the brand is becoming the most important factor for building strong brands. And the trust consumers have in a brand is seen as the most important factor for the future viability of the respective brand.

The great importance of brand trust collides with the loss of trust across sectors. One strategy against this loss of trust is seen in the authenticity of brands. Authentic brands differentiate themselves credibly, create preferences and contribute significantly to a stable brand-customer relationship.

A crisis of the similar

What do you stand for?

A general uncertainty and decreasing willingness to trust meets uniform brand communication and propositions. In the consumers' perception, the interchangeability of brands, called brand parity, is increasing.

The high competitive pressure in global markets and rapid imitation cycles have led to an increasing interchangeability of the functional and non-functional attributes. Despite an unending array of variations in supermarkets and mass merchandisers, the differences between brands are typically not significant enough for any single brand to stand out.

Today, 815,589 trademarks registered in Germany alone are available for consumers to choose from. The number of new trademark registrations per year rose from 59,849 in 2012 to 73,633

in 2019 and is fostering brand inflation. Increasing complexity in the purchasing process, decreasing brand loyalty and brand trust are the result of the flood of brands with interchangeable characteristics and promise. Brands are suffering from a crisis of the similar.

The crisis of the similar is the result of similar strategies, similar investments, similar understanding of consumer needs, and similar business models across the industry, demonstrating a strong focus on outside-in orientation. Brands tend to be reactive to consumer behavior instead of predicting changes in consumers' underlying attitudes and confidently deliver what the brand, inside-out, really stands for.

In order to still be included in the consumers' consideration set, strong brands have to claim new positioning fields. In the future, it will be less a matter of communicating unique brand promises than of credibly standing for a unequivocal brand purpose and actually delivering on that purpose. Brand authenticity will thus become a decisive bottleneck factor.⁷

⁷Adomeit, 2020

Brand Authenticity accounts for
92% of the brand trust

The Relevance of Brand Authenticity

Authenticity increases trust

“Brand authenticity increases socioeconomic KPIs such as brand trust, purchase intention and loyalty.”

Trust and emotional closeness moderated by trust are more important than functional performance and individuality of the brand. By influencing the willingness to buy, the willingness to pay and the willingness to recommend the brand, the monetary brand value of trustworthy brands increases.

Brand authenticity creates trust. The importance of brand authenticity for brand differentiation is therefore growing continuously. The high interchangeability of many brands reduces their credibility. Brand authenticity, as a factor upstream of trust, becomes a “guarantor” for the “authenticity” of the brand promise and justifies the building of trust.

The high relevance of authenticity for modern brand management results, in addition to its trust-building function, from the growing social call for authenticity. Consumers demand brands that offer an original story, a clear identity and a sincere commitment to their own promises.



Brand authenticity as an identity-based social construct

In uncertain times, characterized by the perceived and real dissolution of national borders, the decreasing importance of religion, a declining integration into local societies and exponentially advancing technology, many humans experience a deficit of available identity anchors.⁸ The challenge for individuals, today more than ever, lies in finding points of reference for their own identity construction - which in the past were conveyed through home, community or higher values - and thus developing their own self in a self-referential act.

In order to meet this challenge and to develop a sense of continuity and security, people seek for authentic experiences in their daily lives. This search is developing into a fundamental human endeavor and includes consumption and brand relationships. Social identity formation is enriched by the conscious consumption of brands that correspond to one's own (desired) identity and serves to position the consumer in a social context.⁹ Brands that are perceived as authentic serve this *identity-building process* particularly well and are therefore in a position to build stronger relationships with customers.

⁸Arnould and Price, 2000, p. 143; Heilinger, 2010, p. 46

⁹Burmann et al., 2015, p. 3

Conceptual Framework of identity-based brand authenticity

Identity is the sociological initial concept of authenticity

The concept of authenticity exists in the field of tension between a universal concept of validity and the academic construction within different disciplines and currents within sociology, philosophy, psychology and aesthetic art discourse. Etymologically the term authenticity is derived from the Greek word *authentikós* (reliable, genuine, original, correct) and the late Latin *authenticus* (recognized, guaranteed, reliable) and describes in particular the genuineness of documents.¹⁰

According to *Taylor*, the modern ideal of authenticity is fed through identity reconstruction from the ideals of *loyalty to oneself* and *self-determination*. Authenticity here integrates the surrounding social context.

In line with this understanding, *Kuhl* points out that authenticity is related to identity and that the evaluation process is based on the extent to which (assumed) *identity and behavior are in harmony*.¹¹ From this sociologist and psychological view, the authenticity construct can be translated to the marketing sciences.

Derivation and definition of brand authenticity as a perceptual construct

Analogous to its use within the social sciences, the term authenticity is also understood in the brand context oftentimes as a positively quoted semantic concept and is described as *genuineness, trustworthiness, credibility, naturalness, individuality* and *originality*. When we take up this conceptualization and transfer it into the identity-based brand management approach,

which consists of an internal identity concept representing the self-image of the brand, a concise and relevant positioning is derived that defines the brand promise and brand behavior across all brand touchpoints. Furthermore, in an external decoding process, this approach creates the external perspective, the brand image, in the consumer's mind. Within the identity-based brand management, authenticity can be defined as the *degree to which the brand behavior is causally linked to the brand identity*.¹²

Brand authenticity in this understanding, is therefore the result of a subjective evaluation process between a reference point - which is conceptualized as the anticipated brand identity - and the actual perceived brand behavior.

The definition ensures the integration of an internal (identity-based) and an external (perception-oriented) perspective. The internal management process is considered as well as the customer and all other stakeholder with their subjective ideas and expectations.

¹⁰Assmann, 2014, p. 28; Buciuman, 2010, p. 19; Mauthner, 2015; Zeno, 2016

¹¹Kuhl and Luckner, 2007, p. 9

¹²Burmann et al., 2018; Burmann and Schallehn, 2008; Adomeit, 2020

Scale development and validation

To the best of our knowledge, no stable measurement model exists in the literature for assessing perceived identity-based brand authenticity (IBBA) that consistently integrates brand authenticity into identity-based brand management and strictly applies the state of scale development re-search. For the development and empirical evaluation of IBBA, an established, approved process therefore was applied, reflecting existing insights regarding the operationalization of complex marketing constructs. According to literature¹³, the following process is required:

Table 1: Application of the scale development process for IBBA

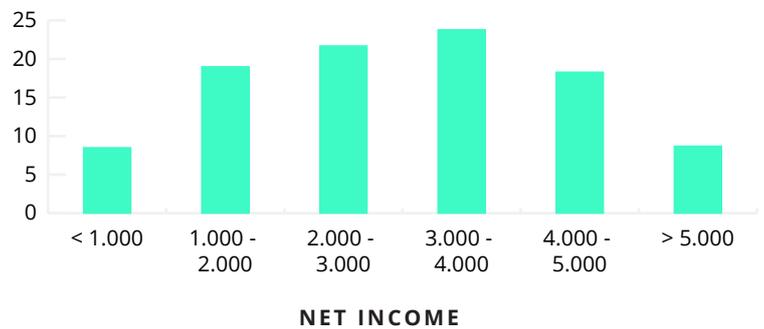
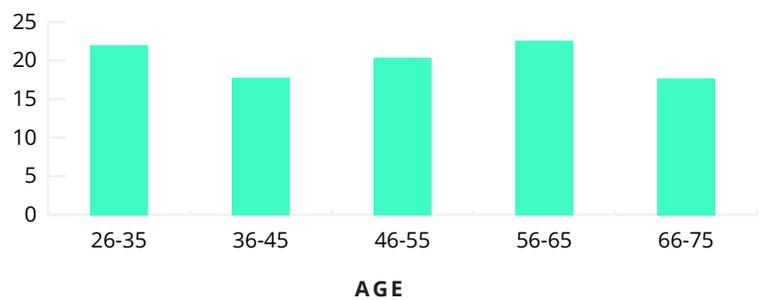
| PHASE | METHODOLOGY | OUTCOME |
|---|--|--|
| 01 Construct definition and item refinement | Study 1: Qualitative Analysis - Literature analysis - Qualitative research design Study 2: Expert interviews - Qualitative analysis with 15 in-depth interviews within an expert focus group. Study 3: Definition assignment task - Content validity - Expert evaluation with seven participants | - Basic, comprehensive understanding of the facets of the construct - Definition of the brand authenticity model in the context of identity-based brand management - Concept for possible factor structure/ dimensionality - Basic item set - Initial item generation (243) - Item reduction (154) - Final indicator quantity for the pretest (70) |
| 02 Item reduction and validation | Study 4: Pretest series - Quantitative survey with 13 panelists of the focus group - Review of item formulation (comprehensibility/ unambiguity) and elimination - Net sample of 40 participants from the focus group - Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) | - Quantitative derivation of the factor structure - Adjusted indicator set with 35 items in 2 dimensions - Optimization of the measurement model |

¹³Burmann et al., 2015, p. 91; Burmann et al., 2018, p. 355; Burmann and Maloney, 2007, p. 221; Maloney, 2007, p. 221; Piehler, 2011, p. 355; Schade, 2012, p. 91

| PHASE | METHODOLOGY | OUTCOME |
|---|--|---|
| <p>03</p> <p>Scale validation and evaluation of the measurement model</p> | <p>Study 5: Main study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Net sample of 1,015 participants from the focus group - Reliability and validity analysis - EFA - Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to validate model-fit of the reflective model - Validity check - Structural analysis to evaluate the formative model | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Final 2-factor measurement model with 14-indicators and competing 4-factor solution |
| <p>Notes:</p> <p>Following recommendations from (Churchill, JR., 1979; Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001; Eberl, 2004; Gieré and Wirtz, 2006; Homburg and Giering, 1996; Jarvis et al., 2003; Rossiter, 2002).</p> | | |

Consumer's characteristics

To understand the challenges and opportunities associated with the brand authenticity perception from the consumer's perspective, a representative survey of more than 5,020 customers in the German market was conducted. The sample was drawn from an online panel with population representative distribution across household income, education and gender between age 26 and 75. The net-sample of 1,015 was used as the data basis for the evaluation.



34.5%
completed secondary school.

25.8%
graduated from high school.

28.3%
completed university degree or higher.

49.1%
female.

50.9%
male

1/3 of consumers are loyal to their brands. Do you really want to loose the rest?

85% of Aspirationalists believe the brands they buy say a lot about who they are.

Study 1: Literature review

Deductive and inductive procedures were applied for the brand authenticity item development, starting with reviewing relevant literature (inductive). Based on an extensive, cross-disciplinary research, an initial set of potential items was developed. Due to the fact that authenticity constructs are not precisely and equally defined in the literature, a broad range of brand authenticity-related constructs was reviewed which included indicators and drivers that might be of importance. Items that do not represent perceptual attributes were excluded and redundant items were merged. An initial set of 110 items was identified through the literature analysis.



Study 2: Expert in-depth interviews

Following the recommendation for scale development, along with an extensive literature analysis a qualitative research design was established and qualified through 15 expert interviews to uncover the IBBA's factor structure.

The aim of the preliminary investigations was to verify the relevance of the research question and to further develop a valid item set for the brand authenticity scale that served as a basis for the main investigation. Based on the scale development procedure according to *Churchill*, an ex-act definition of the target construct forms the starting point for further operationalization. As a result of the extensive literature analysis and conceptual considerations, a fundamental, comprehensive understanding of the construct and definition of brand authenticity within the framework of identity-based brand management was derived.

In order to validate the rationale for the possible factor structure of the brand authenticity scale and to further generate a basic set of items, a total set of 15 expert interviews were conducted. The participants were recruited from various practical disciplines in the context of branding, general management and marketing.¹⁴ The age of the participants included a distribution between 24 and 44 years, with an average age of 32.5 years. The sample included a female share of 40% and a male share of 60%. The initial preparation of the interview guideline was followed by a pretest with doctoral students from the University of Bremen, to validate comprehensibility and completeness, and data collection was then initiated.

First, the experts were presented with the concept of authenticity as *'the degree to which the brand behavior is causally linked to the brand identity'*. The experts were then asked to think about brands that, from their point of view, show a high degree of authenticity.

Subsequently, a supplementary query for inauthentic brands was carried out. Participants were then asked to evaluate their imagined authentic brand. All participants were asked to present their imagined brand to evaluate and discuss authenticity characteristics.¹⁵

The following interview phase was divided into three sections. The first part included queries on attributes of authentic brands. In the beginning, the basic characteristics of authentic brands were requested. The participants were thereby urged to verbalize an understanding of brand authenticity based on the generic ideas of concrete brand examples. The next step was to name the behavioral and content-oriented characteristics of authentic brands from the perspective of the experts. Finally, the experts evaluated the effective parameters of brand authenticity. At this first stage, the inductive and deductive procedure resulted in an initial item pool of 245 brand authenticity items. After eliminating redundant items, 154 items remained for further purification.

¹⁴Gläser and Laudel, 2010, p. 111; Mayer, 2013, p. 38

¹⁵Santos, 2003

Study 3: Definition assignment task

After the development of the initial item set, the indicators were reduced according to common steps within the scale development process.¹⁶ Based on the state-of-the-art scale development procedure, a concise definition of the target construct forms the starting point for the operationalization and is used to evaluate and increase indicator validity. Items were therefore examined as to whether they can be derived logically from the understanding of the construct definition of brand authenticity as *'the degree to which the brand behavior is causally linked to the brand identity'*.

No logical contradiction between the brand authenticity definition and its related items can remain in the final model. In order to ensure rigor, a definition assignment task was carried out and the defintory validity of the indicators evaluated.¹⁷

12 experts, recruited from the *markstones Institute of Marketing, Branding & Technology* at the University of Bremen, were asked to evaluate the extent to which the respective item is logically related to the definition of brand authenticity on a 7-point-Likert-scale from 1 (*does not agree at all*) to 7 (*fully agree*). Of the 154 indicators in the set, 84 were eliminated. The validity of the remaining 70 items was en-sured by a strict orientation to the scope of meaning of the brand authenticity definition.

¹⁶Schade, 2012, p.133

¹⁷Beierlein et al., 2014

Study 4: Pretest series

In the following step, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied as to evaluate the items and factors of IBBA. The qualified and reduced set of items was first checked for comprehensibility in three quantitative pretests and then evaluated for dimensionality and reliability.

In the *first pretest*, the basic comprehensibility of the formulations was analyzed checked and an initial reduction of the items was carried out. A net sample of 44 participants, recruited from an online panel of female and male adult consumers aged 18-70, evaluated the 70 remaining items with regard to their comprehensibility. Based on the first pretest, nine indicators were removed and indicator formulations slightly modified to improve their clarity and conciseness.

A *second pretest* was conducted to confirm the multi-dimensionality of the brand authenticity scale and further reduce the set of indicators. For the EFA of the 61 items, an adjusted completion sample of 140 participants from a

representative online-panel was statistically evaluated. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin criterion of sampling adequacy of the initial variables was .949, well above the required cut-off value, and thus shows the variables to be appropriate for EFA. In the second pretest phase, indicators with values $< .40$, a high number of cross loadings and cross loadings $< .1$ were eliminated (Hair et al., 2014a). Due to the small sample size, the elimination rules from the literature were not applied more strictly (Schade, 2012, p. 34). After re-elimination, a set of 35 items remained for further investigation.

A *third pretest* with a net sample of 92 online-panelists confirmed the results of the second test. All 35 indicators showed high factor loadings, with MSA of .825 well above the required cut-off of .50. According to *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin* the data set shows a high suitability of for the implementation of the EFA (Backhaus et al., 2016, p. 397; Weiber and Mühlhaus, 2014, p. 132). The appropriability of the indicators for factor analysis is also confirmed by the *Bartlett test*

by rejecting the null hypothesis (Backhaus et al., 2016, p. 397; Weiber and Mühlhaus, 2014, p. 132).

According to the eigenvalue rule (eigenvalues > 1) a *two-factor solution* emerged for IBBA: One factor labeled *originality*, and a second factor labeled as *integrity*.

A further reduction of the remaining 35 items as well as the investigation of the dimensionality and confirmation of the two-factor solution remain for the main investigation in order to subject the measurement model to a final factor-analytical evaluation in a large sample. Against the background of these first satisfactory test results, the pretest series could be completed.

Study 5: Main study

In a representative online-panel 1,015 participants were confronted with a randomized selection of items to be evaluated along a seven-point Likert scale with precisely defined endpoints (e.g. “fully agree” and “disagree”). After empirical evaluating the data, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin criterion was first determined to test the data quality for an EFA.¹⁸ The KMO value of .971 can be classified as *marvelous* as it meets the highest quality requirements and clearly exceeds the required minimum level of .50.¹⁹ Despite the large sample size, the *Bartlett Test of sphericity* was significant. The Anti-Image values of the *Anti-Image Covariance Matrix* were examined for the final test of data suitability for an exploratory factor analysis.²⁰ Less than 25% of the non-diagonal elements from the anti-image covariance matrix show values $> .09$, which can be confirmed for the present sample. Thus, it can finally be stated that the data set is highly suitable for carrying out an exploratory factor analysis.

In an iterative process, the calculation results were examined and the scale adjusted according to the quality criteria. This enabled a gradual approximation to the final item structure to take place. Items were eliminated if they loaded $< .50$ on one factor or $> .50$ on two factors. After eliminating the items from the initial set, a new calculation was performed until no item loaded $< .50$ on one factor or $> .50$ on two factors.

Subsequently, a reliability analysis was carried out and the item-to-total correlation investigated. Items with a corrected item-to-total correlation (CITC) $< .50$ and items whose elimination led to an improvement of the Cronbach alpha were removed. The remaining items, confirmed through the EFA, show loadings clearly above the cut-off value of .40, which confirms the convergence validity for the final item set.

¹⁸Hair et al., 2014a, p. 102

¹⁹Kaiser and Rice, 1974, p. 111; Sander, 2019, p. 25

²⁰Hair et al., 2014a, p. 103

Table 2: Item-Scale-Statistic with CITC and Cronbach Alpha

| ITEM | CRONBACH'S ALPHA | CORRECTED ITEM-TO-TOTAL CORRELATION | CRONBACH'S ALPHA (IF ITEM DELETED) |
|--|------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| The brand keeps its promises. | | .899 | .965 |
| The brand's behavior is in line with its promises. | | .904 | .965 |
| The brand does not try to be something it is not. | .970 | .799 | .969 |
| The brand lives up to its promise without contradiction. | | .864 | .966 |
| The current behavior of the brand is coherent with its promise. | | .859 | .967 |
| The brand imparts coherence. | | .849 | .967 |
| The brand already fulfilled its promise in the past without contradiction. | | .879 | .966 |
| The brands appearance up to now is consistent with its promise. | | .894 | .965 |
| The brand promise and its appearance over recent years are a good match. | | .877 | .966 |
| The brand has its own distinct style. | | .776 | .865 |
| The brand does not try to copy other brands. | | .658 | .890 |
| The brand stands out from other brands. | .894 | .755 | .868 |
| The brand has something special that makes it appear special. | | .793 | .859 |
| The brand has distinctive characteristics. | | .732 | .874 |

Cronbach's Alpha is clearly above the minimum level of .70 for both factors and thus confirms the high reliability of the measurement model. In addition, all CITC values are well above the required minimum level of .50, so that all indicators remain in the final set. This result is also supported by the fact that the Cronbach Alpha could no longer be increased by eliminating further indicators. The internal consistency of this indicator set can thus be confirmed.²¹

For the remaining item set, the dimensionality of the brand authenticity scale was first estimated again using the Kaiser criterion, according to which the number of factors to be extracted equals the number of factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1. Since the value of the third component of .529 is below the threshold value of 1, the two-factor solution has been confirmed. This assumption is supported by the *elbow criterion*,

indicating the change in the measure of heterogeneity of alternative factors and thus providing information about the number of factors (Backhaus et al., 2016, p. 495). The Elbow criterion also points to a two-factor solution.

The final scale of two factors with 14 items accounted for 76.274% of the total variance and thus significantly exceed the required minimum level.²²

After checking the variance, convergence and discriminant validity of the two-factor solution are examined. The main loadings clearly exceed the minimum level of .40 required in the literature, which confirms the convergence validity for the final item set. In addition, only six indicators show cross-loadings above .40, still well below the main loading. The discriminant validity is therefore also confirmed.

²¹DeVellis, 2016; Hair et al., 2014a; Nunnally, 1978; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994

²²Homburg et al., 1998, p. 120

Table 3: Explorative factor analysis

| ITEM | FACTOR 1 α = .970 | FACTOR 2 α = .894 |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| The brand keeps its promises. | .822 | |
| The brand's behavior is in line with its promises. | .826 | .408 |
| The brand does not try to be something it is not. | .706 | .411 |
| The brand lives up to its promise without contradiction. | .846 | |
| The current behavior of the brand is coherent with its promise. | .818 | |
| The brand imparts coherence. | .761 | .440 |
| The brand already fulfilled its promise in the past without contradiction. | .817 | |
| The brands appearance up to now is consistent with its promise. | .826 | |
| The brand promise and its appearance over recent years are a good match. | .790 | .430 |
| The brand has its own distinct style. | | .772 |
| The brand does not try to copy other brands. | .457 | .595 |
| The brand stands out from other brands. | | .783 |
| The brand has something special that makes it appear special. | .474 | .739 |
| The brand has distinctive characteristics. | | .830 |

Validation of the first order measurement model

Based on the quality criteria of the first generation, the theoretically conceptualized identity-based brand authenticity scale could be confirmed as reliable and valid. Since, however, weaknesses of these quality criteria are reflected in the literature, the scale is also to be confirmed in the following about quality criteria of the second generation.²³ Therefore, a series of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using maximum likelihood method (ML) and structural equation modelling (SEM) was performed to verify the validity of the brand authenticity scale.

In the first validation step, the item and factor reliability were analyzed on the basis of local quality criteria. As shown below, all quality criteria clearly exceed the required thresholds. The factor loadings are well above the cut-off value of .40 and the C.R. values indicate that all loadings are highly

significant. Factor reliability for the two-factor model (factor 1 (.969), factor 2 (.907)) and AVE (factor 1 (.757), factor 2 (.611)) also exceed the minimum requirements at a significant level.

After confirmation of all local quality criteria, the construct validity was checked.²⁴ For this purpose, the discriminant validity is evaluated in a two-staged approach. In the first step, the confidence interval was determined and in the second step, the discriminant validity according to *Fornell/Larcker* was confirmed.²⁵ The confidence interval did not include the value 1 (with *upper endpoint* .799 and *lower endpoint* .716), thus confirming discriminant validity.

Second, the Fornell-Larcker-criterion was tested through the comparison of the average variance extracted with the squared correlation between the

constructs.²⁶ As AVE is greater than the squared correlation, the Fornell-Larcker-criterion can be confirmed and discriminant validity is supported for the construct. Also an AVE value above .50 indicates that, on average, less error remains in the items than variance explained by the latent factor structure. Hence convergent validity is supported for the model.

²³Hieronimus, 2003, p. 133; Schade, 2012, p. 145

²⁴Himme, 2009, p. 493

²⁵Churchill, JR., 1979, p. 70; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, p. 210

²⁶Fornell and Larcker, 1981, p. 46

Model comparison

Having established a two-dimensional scale, a model comparison was conducted in line with common scale development recommendations and prior research to determine the optimal factor structure of the brand authenticity scale using competing models to reveal.

The comparative analysis included the following models:

- Baseline model
- Two-factor model
- Three-factor model
- Four-factor model

The evaluation supports the established two-factor solution, with *integrity* and *originality* as the dimensions of the IBBA scale. The two-factor model showed the highest quality across all characteristic values. χ^2 (185), RMSEA (.06), SRMR (.033) and AIC (275) not only showed the lowest values, which indicates best fit. In addition, CFI (.980) and TLI (.971) were most pronounced in the two-factor structure.

Examination of the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI, .925), the Adjusted-Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI, .900), the Relative-Fit Index (RFI, .954) and the Normed-Fit Index (NFI, .963) also support the two-factor solution.

Thus, the quality criteria of the 1st and 2nd generation are met. The indicators for measuring brand authenticity have very high loadings and are confirmed for the two-factor model.

Following the goal to develop a parsimonious brand authenticity scale, the factor structure with a limited item set meets the requirements of a parsimonious scale for the management practice.

²⁷Burmann et al., 2015, p. 153; Schade, 2012, p. 153

Assessing predictive validity

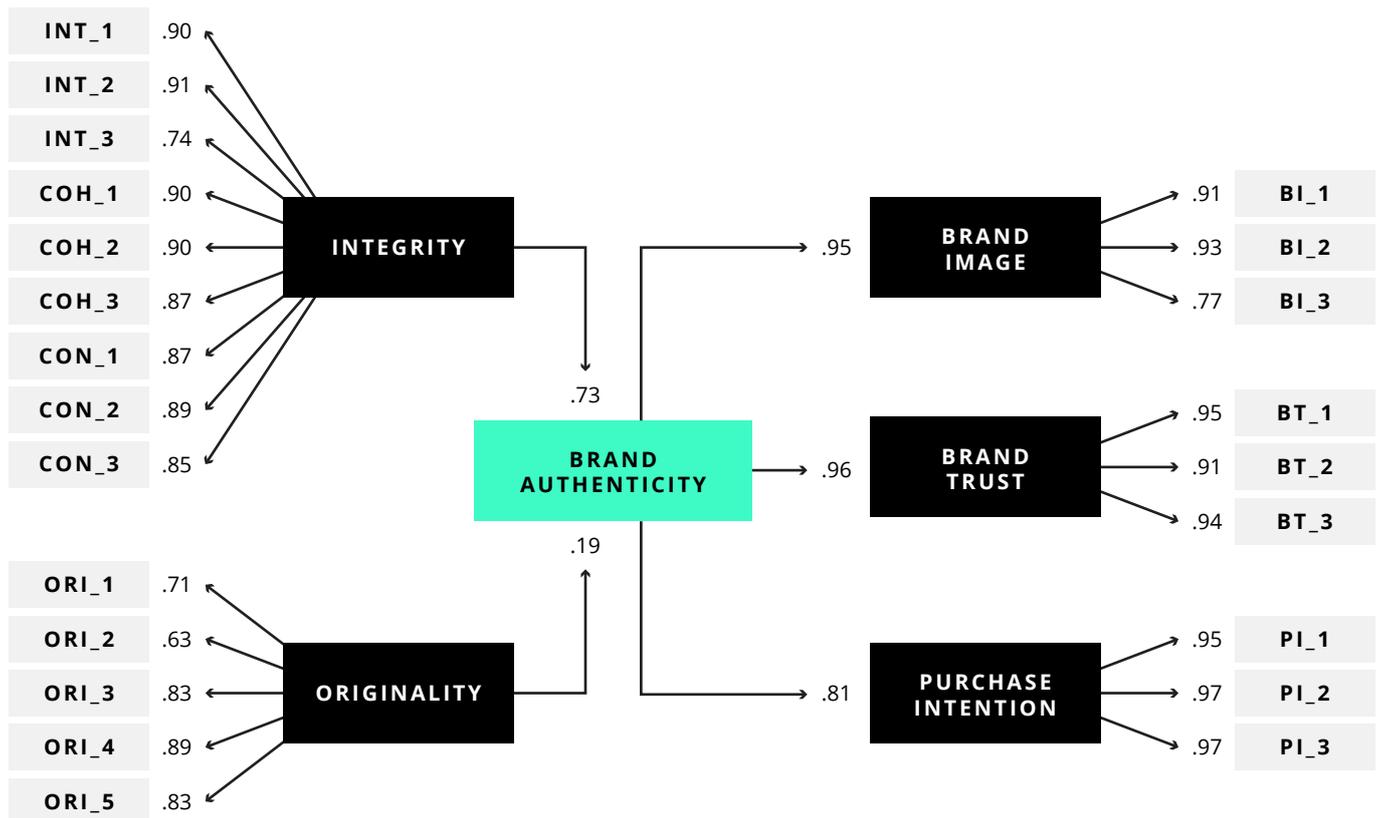
After the operationalization and factor-analytical evaluation of the brand authenticity scale, the final structural equation model was empirically examined. The coefficient of determination R^2 , shows a high degree of adaptability for the model of brand authenticity. R^2 (.80) can be clearly classified as substantial, even following the strictest guidelines in literature. Finally, to assess IBBA's *predictive validity*, it was examined whether IBBA explains the variance of the hypothesized effect on the dependent variable *brand image*, *brand trust* and *purchase intention*. The effect of brand authenticity is first evaluated using path coefficients and t-values.²⁷ The analysis shows that the assumed positive influence of IBBA on the brand image according to the effective direction of the path coefficient ($\beta = .947$) with a t-value (t-value = 10.291) at 1% level can be described as highly significant as well as the proportion of the variation in the perceived brand image is explained with R^2 of .90.

For the brand trust, the effect of IBBA shows even stronger loadings, as hypothesized, with path coefficient ($\beta = .958$) and a t-value (t-value = 15.173) at 1% level also described as highly significant. The variance explained through brand authenticity has high measures with R^2 of .92.

Following the hypothesis, brand authenticity shows a strong effect also on purchase intention, while this effect is the lowest of the three measures, as it is strongly depending on additional factors such as net income. With a t value of 6.742, the path coefficient indicates significance at 1% level, with an effect size f^2 of 0.743 clearly above the required cut-off. The declared variance was determined by the coefficient of determination R^2 and is with an R^2 of .66 clearly above the required minimum level.

All quality criteria can thus be confirmed for the effect of brand authenticity on brand image, brand trust and purchase intention.

Illustration 5: Structural equation results of the two-factor brand authenticity scale



The series of empirical studies support the stability as well as discriminant and predictive validities of the IBBA scale.

Finally, the results support the predictive validity of the scale, with significant effects on the outcomes (brand image, brand trust, purchase intention).

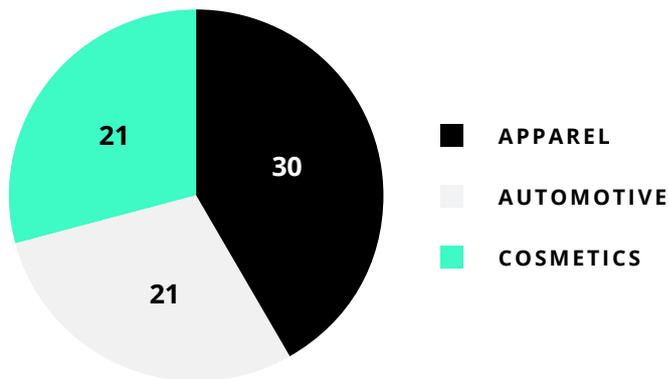
Conclusion

Most authentic brands

After understanding the structural model of brand authenticity, we dove deeper to understand the actual perception of brand authenticity within the German market.

The Top 3 Industries:

The top 3 industries Apparel, Technology and Automotive account for 70% of the most authentic industries.



Most Authentic Industries

The top industries within the top 25 most authentic brands are apparel, automotive, cosmetics.



Apparel leading the top 25 authentic brands, driven by the big sports apparel manufacturers and apparel retailers.

The top ten brands account for 48 % of the consumers brand authenticity notions.

60% of the top ten most authentic brands are German.

6 out of ten brand with German founding story.

Relation to the regional market strengthens the perception of authenticity, as people tend to have a better understanding of cultural foundation of the brand. This shared understanding serves as an anchor for the evaluation of the expected brand identity as a starting point for the assessment of the brands authenticity.



80% willing to pay price premium if brand acts responsibly

Corporate Social Responsibility becomes a success factor for authentic brands

20% see CSR as a crucial factor for authentic brands

20% of consumers cited social and ecological commitment as the basis for attributing authenticity. In total, 1/5 of the brands mentioned were assigned to the CSR sector. Doing good, behaving responsibly, whether for nature, society or one's own employees, holds great potential for strengthening the image of the brands authenticity. This is particularly interesting in so far as authenticity per se is understood in a neutral way. Imagine the authentic liar, who remains dramatically true to himself with this pattern of behavior, thus does not exhibit high social compatibility and certainly gambles away the (brand) sympathy in the long run, but by definition acts authentically.

With the increasing importance of CSR and the growing expectation of companies to create a social impact, responsible behavior also seem to become integrated in the general authenticity perception process.

A strong moral compass increases the likelihood of being perceived as an authentic brand. And this generates revenue. 80% of consumers would be willing to pay a price premium, if a brand raised its prices to be more social or ecological sustainable. Particularly millennials want brands to be an extension of their own values and therefore value a concise and authentic purpose driven brand behavior.

A final note

The central motivation for this paper was based on the hypothesis that in times of declining brand trust, authenticity seem to be valued by potential customers as a central driver for trust, which increases brand preference, purchase intention and the brand image over time. Building on this, the question was investigated as to how the concept of authenticity is determined in the brand context, through which antecedents brand authenticity is expressed and which causal effect can be positively influenced.

The common reference to social sciences leads to a connection between the authenticity approach and the identity-based branding concept. The starting point of this research project was therefore the research gap regarding a state-of-the-art scale development process for an identity-based brand authenticity construct.

The primary objective of this research was to develop and empirically validate a brand authenticity scale that is comprehensively integrated into the concept of identity-based brand management.

Based on the understanding of the construct that *brand authenticity is the degree to which the brand behavior is causally linked to the brand identity*, which manifests itself as a subjective perception variable in the mind of the evaluator, we identified a set of brand authenticity items. The items were then analyzed in a multi-stage scale development process.

The scale's convergent validity was indicated in the pretest series as well as in the main study. Discriminant validity was obtained found in the main study, that also offered evidence of predictive validity, showing that IBBA predicts brand image, brand trust and purchase intention.

The final IBBA scale reflects two factors, labeled integrity and originality – validated for 18 brands across six industries and explaining 80% of the IBBA's variance. Finally, a parsimonious scale could be established which is reasonable and easy to integrate for management practice. The aggregation on two factors makes it an easy-to-implement framework for brand managers.

(1) *Integrity* includes the dominance of intrinsic brand behavior and is defined as the *avoidance of brand exploitation by aligning the brand behavior with fundamental brand values and convictions* of the brand. Since *integrity* is composed of indicators which can be assigned to the categories *integrity*, *continuity* and *coherence*, their consideration determines the perception of authenticity. *Continuity* can be understood as the '*retention of essential brand characteristics over time*'. It serves to ensure the brand identity's stability and is the basis for the consolidation of strong brand associations in the mind of the target groups. The decisive factor for *coherence* of the current brand behavior along all brand touch points - in contrast to consistency - is not a uniformity, but the explainability of the brand behavior, which is integrated into a comprehensible context of meaning and thus meets the requirements of a modern brand management, which is characterized by fragmented, fast-moving touchpoints.

(2) *Originality*, as a demarcation-related dimension stands for the rejection of imitation in the design of a concise brand promise and is defined as the *perceived genuineness of the brand positioning*.

Altogether, a very high explanatory power of the structural equation model could be attested, also across all target variables. It should be emphasized that the theoretically-derived, qualitatively conceptualized and comprehensively empirically evaluated identity-based brand authenticity scale completely fulfills the quality criteria of the 1st and 2nd generation. At the same time, the structural equation model confirms the postulated relationships between brand authenticity and the downstream goals of brand image, brand trust and purchase intention.

Thus, it is recommended to apply a managerial process along four dimensions (*continuity, coherence, integrity, originality*) to increase the transparency for brand managers and enable concise, comprehensible recommendations.

Managerial implications

A sound conceptualization of brand authenticity helps brand managers to create a consistent vocabulary and understanding within the organization. Brand authenticity as the extent of identity-based causation of action can be adopted as a definitional framework in brand management efforts. This closes a fundamental, practical gap in knowledge, which is shown by the fact that 80% of the top 25 globally operating strategy consultancies name brand authenticity as an essential success factor of brand management, yet despite a growing preoccupation with the construct, none of those companies provide a concise construct definition. The implementation therefore lacks a clear understanding of the target construct and its design. The results of the present study thus provide the basis for the targeted integration of authenticity into the brand management process and its further development from a pure marketing concept, to a strategically evaluable instrument. Starting from the definition of the term as a basic principle of brand work, a comprehensive

construction definition is required, which creates an understanding of the influencing factors of brand authenticity and thus can be the basis of a management tool for the development and maintenance of brand authenticity. With the design of an empirically validated identity-based brand authenticity scale within the present study, this construct definition is provided.

Thus, a measurement model of brand authenticity can be made available in order to specifically increase brand authenticity and to evaluate the authenticity characteristics of a brand. The influence of indicators which can be summarized in the categories integrity, coherence, continuity and originality and which load the dimensions integrity and originality was systematically analyzed and confirmed. With the help of the brand authenticity scale, brand leaders can determine the degree of authenticity on the basis of 14 indicators to form an index. The scale elements are formulated in such a way that they are easy to understand and can be queried in a short questionnaire.

The model was validated with a population-representative sample for 18 brands in six industries (automotive, consumer electronics, retail, cosmetics, food, sporting goods), making it generalizable and applicable across industries. It is recommended that brand management practice employ a management model for brand authenticity control in which the indicators are tracked across the four facets of content. This approach increases the level of detail and transparency at the same time as the level of abstraction is reduced.

For further information on the construct development, empirical evaluation and managerial application see "Adomeit, 2020, Markenauthentizität als strategisches Markenführungsinstrument."

About the Study

This paper has been developed through a collaboration between Deloitte and the markstones Institute of Marketing, Branding & Technology (University of Bremen). It's based on an external research assignment conducted by Malte Adomeit and supervised by Prof. Dr. Christoph Burmann.

About the markstones Institute for Marketing, Branding and Technology

The markstones of Marketing, Branding & Technology is a cooperation of the working groups of Prof. Dr. Burmann, Prof. Dr. Eisenbeiß and Prof. Dr. Klein. We combine competences in the areas of digital marketing, brand management and consumer research. While integrating the latest technological developments we aim to advance and convey up-to-date knowledge. Our re-search and teaching activities are guided by high practical relevance and methodological competences.

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About the Authors

Deloitte

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