Brand Authenticity: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Its Conceptualization and Measurement

Manfred Bruhn, University of Basel, Switzerland

Verena Schoenmüller, University of Basel, Switzerland

Daniela Schäfer, University of Basel, Switzerland

Daniel Heinrich, Technische Universität Braunschweig, Germany

In times of increasing uncertainty, authenticity is an essential human aspiration, making it a key issue in contemporary marketing and a major factor for brand success. By conducting a literature review and several studies with different consumers and brands, we develop a scale for measuring the strength of consumers' perceived brand authenticity, where authenticity is analyzed as consisting of four dimensions identified as continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness. We also demonstrate the discriminant validity of brand authenticity with regard to related marketing constructs such as brand involvement, brand image, and brand satisfaction. Finally, we conclude our paper by discussing the implications for marketing practice and by offering stimuli for further research.

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ABSTRACT

In times of increasing uncertainty, authenticity is an essential human aspiration, making it a key issue in contemporary marketing and a major factor for brand success. By conducting a literature review and several studies with different consumers and brands, we develop a scale for measuring the strength of consumers' perceived brand authenticity, where authenticity is analyzed as consisting of four dimensions identified as continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness. We also demonstrate the discriminant validity of brand authenticity with regard to related marketing constructs such as brand involvement, brand image, and brand satisfaction. Finally, we conclude our paper by discussing the implications for marketing practice and by offering stimuli for further research.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, our society is increasingly characterized by a growing feeling of uncertainty due to events such as the global financial crisis, increasing political instability, or climate change. People try to relieve this uncertainty by seeking authenticity in their daily lives, even in the products they consume and the brands they own. Thus, authenticity is as an essential human aspiration, making it "one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing" (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003, 21). Moreover authenticity is also defined as one of the key values of brand image (Ballantyne, Warren, and Nobbs 2006) and a major success factor for brands in being a characteristic of brand identity (Beverland 2005; Kapferer 2004).

However, academic research on brand authenticity is still in its infancy. The few studies that do exist are predominantly of a general nature, either in establishing theoretical foundations or analyzing manifestations of authenticity in the marketplace: "Yet, consumer research has not given considerable focused attention to authenticity" (Grayson and Martinec 2004, 296). Past research (Ballantyne et al. 2006; Beverland 2006; Brown et al. 2003; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Groves 2001) presents a differentiated understanding of authenticity in general, and of brand authenticity in particular. This is often enhanced by the studies' focus on a specific product category such as wine (Beverland 2006), tourist attractions (Grayson and Martinec 2004), or food production (Groves 2001). Therefore, there is no consensus on a general definition for brand authenticity as well as no agreement regarding its dimensional structure in consumer research. Thus, it is necessary to conceptualize brand authenticity using a "bottom-up approach" and to acquire a deep understanding of how consumers perceive authentic brands.

To address this research gap, we aim to conceptualize the phenomenon of brand authenticity. As with other brand research, the underlying dimensions of brand authenticity need to be identified by means of a conceptual analysis. We generate a scale to assess the intensity with which a brand elicits diverse authenticity dimensions. As the phenomenon cannot be attributed with any one specific basic discipline, we have to conceptualize our construct based on a variety of academic fields and develop scale items based on this comprehensively derived theoretical conceptualization.

In order to define, conceptualize, and analyze the construct of brand authenticity, we structure our paper as follows. We begin by classifying brand authenticity within the general authenticity concept and derive its particularities. Based on this, we distinguish brand authenticity from other branding concepts. We then provide a review of the literature to understand and differentiate several brand authenticity dimensions. Additionally, we conduct qualitative consumer interviews (study 1) to assess the consumer's understanding of brand authenticity. Combining the results from the literature review as well as the interviews, we derive the different brand authenticity dimensions. In study 2, we ask test-persons to review the identified items and complement the item list with further brand authenticity associations. Using standard procedures, we reduce the number of items. In study 3, we request students to evaluate brands on the elaborated item list and run an exploratory factor analysis to identify the dimensions of the brand authenticity construct. In study 4, we empirically validate the scale and expand its generalizability. Moreover, in study 5, we examine the scale's discriminate validity. We conclude our paper by discussing the implications for marketing practice and by offering stimuli for further research.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Brand Authenticity

The concept of authenticity is derived from the Latin word *authenticus* and the Greek word *authentikos* conveying the sense trustworthiness (Cappannelli and Cappannelli 2004, 1). Due to its pertinence to the humanities and social sciences, it covers a wide field of conceptual associations. Within marketing research, a definition of the concept of authenticity can only be rarely found. Thus, a variety of associations and denotations of the term are implemented by different researchers (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Leigh, Peters, and Shelton 2006). It has been defined as a positively connoted concept with semantic associations of "genuineness" (Stern 1996; see also Aaker and Drolet 1996), agelessness and tradition (Aaker and Drolet 1996), "positive valuation", "cultural" and "personal" aspect (Stern 1996), originality (Ballantyne et al. 2006; Holt 2002; Stark 2002), substantiveness (Ballantyne et al. 2006; Stark 2002), "uniqueness […]", "cultural or traditional associations", "characteristics of the production process", "presence of an authority" (Groves 2001, 251), "evidence and truth" (Grayson and Martinec 2004, 310), "heritage and pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, relationship to place, method of production" (Beverland 2006, 253), and dissociation from commercial motives (Beverland 2006; Holt 2002).

To sum up, the definitions of the general concept of authenticity differ. Nevertheless, the following conclusions can be drawn for the specific context of brand authenticity: (1) Authenticity in the context of brands deals with the authenticity of market offerings (objects and services) in contrast to the authenticity of human beings; (2) Brand authenticity is based on the evaluations of individuals rather than being solely related to the inherent attributes of the brand (for references on this topic cf. Beverland and Farrelly 2010); (3) Brand authenticity corresponds to a variety of attributes since there is no unique definition of the authenticity concept, particularly in the branding context.

Distinction Between Brand Authenticity and Further Brand-related Constructs

Although brand authenticity has conceptual commonalities with several other constructs within the branding context, it necessarily possesses its own distinctive features. It differs from brand involvement, brand image, and brand satisfaction. Brand authenticity differs from brand involvement in that the latter is defined as "A person's perceived relevance of the object [brand] based on inherent needs, values, and interests" (Zaichkowsky 1985, 342). In contrast to this definition, brand authenticity does not involve a motivational aspect. Consumers may perceive a brand to be authentic without being motivated to possess it or linking it to themselves in any way. Equally, brands that elicit a consumer desire for involvement need not possess any aspect of authenticity.

Brand authenticity is also not identical to brand image, but it could be seen as an aspect of brand image and thus as constituting characteristics that consumers associate with a brand. Brand image consists of the consumers' mental pictures of a brand which are linked to an offering (Dobni and Zinkhan 1990) and thus to a set of the consumers' perceptions about the brand, namely brand associations (Dobni and Zinkhan 1990; Keller 1993). This implies that brand authenticity can be regarded as one specific (positively connoted) brand association of consumers and thus a highly authentic brand could be assumed to have a positive effect on the overall image of a brand.

Brand authenticity can also be conceptually distinguished from brand satisfaction. Brand satisfaction can be defined as a positive emotional state of mind resulting from the fulfillment of a desire to consume a brand (cf. Hunt 1977 cited after Mano and Oliver 1993). It results from the perceived discrepancy between an initial reference point, the expectation, and the actual brand perception (Oliver 1980). Alternatively, brand authenticity need not be seen as depending on consumption of the brand. A consumer's judgement of a brand's authenticity then derives rather from an a priori notion of it. Moreover, brand authenticity is not the result of a perceived discrepancy, but instead is based on a single variable rooted in the consumer's brand mindset. Nevertheless, it could be expected that consumers who attribute a high degree of authenticity to a brand are more likely to be satisfied with that brand.

The Role of Authenticity in Other Scientific Disciplines

Considerable consensus exists on the meaning of authenticity among philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists. Within the field of philosophy, authenticity is related to the emancipation from conventional bonds as well as with originality (Taylor 1991). Moreover, the authentic individual is often defined as not being self-deceptive and thus being self-reliant as well as true-to-self (Steiner and Reisinger 2006). According to Heidegger (1996), authenticity is related to being oneself and thus implies that individuals who strive for conformity in their lives are inauthentic and risk losing their own identity (Steiner and Reisinger 1996). Sociologists investigate authenticity with regard to individuals, objects, their representation and/or performance. They denote authentic experiences or performances as being original, credible, sincere, genuine, natural, and unaffected (Carrol and Wheaton 2009; Fine 2003; Grazian 2003). In anthropology authenticity is often associated with the preservation of cultural values. Authentic experiences are comprehensively characterized as natural (e.g., unspoiled, untouched) (Handler 1986) and the opposite of being a fake, plastic, and kitschy imitation (Gable and Handler 1996). Anthropologists also understand authentic as being credible and convincing and at the same time closely related to distinctiveness (Bruner 1994; Cameron and

Gatewood 1994). Psychologists state that authentic individuals possess a strong and unique inner reality (Smelser and Baltes 2001). They regard the increasing orientation of the individual's behavior towards social expectations as the opposite of authenticity (Guignon 2004). Within psychology several researchers have proven an individual's authenticity to be a multidimensional construct (Goldman and Kernis 2002; Kernis 2003; Kernis and Goldman 2006; Lopez and Rice 2006; Wood et al. 2008).

Consistent with our conceptualization, the literature review of the different scientific disciplines reveals that authenticity is a rationally-created characteristic informing an individual's subjective perceptions and is thus not a characteristic interpreted as being immanent in objective reality. Combining these thoughts and results, authenticity seems to be related to and connected with terms such as stability, endurance, consistency, particularity, individuality, trustfulness, credibility, keeping promises, genuineness, and realness. In order to establish a holistic conceptualization of brand authenticity, we integrate the consumers' understanding of brand authenticity within the brand authenticity construct. Thus, we complement the results gained from the relevant research disciplines with an exploratory, qualitative study.

STUDY 1: ASSESSING THE CONSUMER'S NOTION OF BRAND AUTHENTICITY

As we aim to ensure that the consumer's notion of brand authenticity corresponds to the one we have developed so far, we ask 17 people to describe their perceptions of authentic brands by thinking of one brand of their choice. In a first step, using open-ended questions, we ask participants to select a brand which they perceive as highly authentic, to write down the brand name as well as the reasons why they perceive the brand as authentic. In a second step, we ask them to select a brand from an identical or closely related product category which they perceive as being hardly authentic or totally inauthentic. Contrary to the first case, participants in the second case are stimulated by words that we identified through the literature review as representing brand authenticity. This allowed us to establish whether consumers share our understanding of brand authenticity and investigate whether their perceptions of very authentic brands and hardly authentic brands differ (for the procedure of this study, cf. Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009). For a detailed analysis see table 1.

Later, we ask three raters to assign descriptions derived from the concept of authenticity to each brand identified as being authentic. For a better visualization of the descriptions, table 2 presents two characterizations selected by the raters for each of the strongly authentic brands. For Nivea and Porsche, we provide six descriptions and four descriptions, respectively, as these brands are named more than once. As displayed in table 2, respondents gave descriptions referring to stability, endurance, and consistency (e.g., "constant in its style," "offers consistent high quality," "was always like this"), a plethora of clues regarding particularity, individuality, and innovativeness (e.g., "novel ideas," "very innovative marketing campaigns," "satisfies exceptional needs," "witty creations"), descriptions about trustfulness, credibility, and keeping promises (e.g., "answers my product expectations," "trustworthy," "reliable," "confidence-building," "keep this promise"), and different indications regarding genuineness and realness (e.g., "it is what it is," "naturalness," "genuine," "uncontrived"). Participants situate their reminiscences of the brand in a commonly shared context (e.g., "I've been knowing it from my grandma's bathroom since I was little," "the company is still locally anchored in the area where it has its roots"). We also contrast the participants' descriptions of weakly and strongly authentic brands.

Table 1
Authentic and Inauthentic Brands

Strong Authentic Brands	Weak Authentic Brands
Number of Naming (in parentheses)	
Adidas (1)	Ariel (1)
Alnatura (1)	Balea (1)
American Apparel (1)	Bally (1)
Axe (1)	Crane Sports (1)
Calida (1)	Dove-Men (1)
Coca-Cola (1)	Fila (1)
Landliebe (1)	H&M (1)
Miele (1)	Jägermeister (1)
Nivea (3)	Müllermilch (2)
Nutella (1)	Nestlé (2)
Persil (1)	Opel (1)
Porsche (2)	P2-Cosmetics (1)
Tamaris (1)	Samsung (1)
66° North (1)	Snickers (1)
	Tata Motors (1)

Note: Some of the brands named in the studies were only known in the area where the study was conducted, and are therefore outlined in Appendix A.

This reveals that weakly authentic brands are perceived primarily in terms of their lack of an unambiguous brand image, which is not the case for strongly authentic brands.

Finally, additional findings that appear to be interesting were that all characterizations of strong authentic brands are positive, except for two. Moreover, many descriptions referring to authenticity are formulated in the same general terms that our conceptualization offered. The results of the first study indicate that all consumers have an idea of brand authenticity and that the descriptions assigned to brand authenticity by the respondents are mostly in line with the findings we derived from the literature review. Building on these results, it seems that the terms related to authenticity can be grouped into four overall categories representing a brand (1) to be stable and/or continuous over time; (2) to be creative, original and/or innovative; (3) to keep promises and/or be reliable; (4) to be genuine and/or natural. Thus, we anticipate brand authenticity to be a four-dimensional construct. We term the four dimensions comprehensively as (1) continuity, (2) originality, (3) reliability, and (4) naturalness.

STUDY 2: GENERATING AND SELECTING ITEMS FOR THE BRAND AUTHENTICITY SCALE

To capture the four elaborated dimensions of perceived brand authenticity, we develop a brand authenticity scale. The development of an appropriate scale presents specific methodological challenges. On the one hand, brand authenticity is a concept that has a very wide spectrum of reference. Therefore, we have to investigate several research disciplines in order to select items that are suitable in establishing its definition for our present investigation. On the other hand, the scale items should refer to the extent to which a consumer evaluates the brand as continuous, original, reliable, or natural; they should not measure the continuity, originality, reliability, or naturalness of the brand's specific components (e.g., whether the brand's advertisement is credible and likely to be true).

We conduct an extensive literature review to identify concepts associated with the four dimensions of authenticity that also prove to be transferable to the branding context. The literature demonstrates that continuity is an important concept, being often discussed in the

Table 2
Description of Authentic Brands

Adidas	Offers reliability regarding the quality and continuity of its products.
	Answers my product expectations.
Alnatura	Principles, promoted in marketing campaigns, are observed; i.e., employee satisfaction and organically produced.
	Always offers exceptional high-quality food.
American Apparel	American Apparel offers successfully reliable, beautiful, and consistent products.
	They've taken care of ecologically and socially sustainable production for a long time.
Axe	Very innovative marketing campaigns; they differ from one another but fundamentally have the same content.
	It's not a copy – it is what it is.
Calida	A confidence-building brand.
	A reliable brand that delivers what it promises; i.e., high quality and pleasant wearing comfort.
Coca-Cola	The advertisement is always modern and new but constant in its style.
	A classic beverage that hasn't changed over time.
Landliebe	Offers uncontrived and environment-friendly groceries.
	A natural-taste adventure.
Miele	Reliable, rich in tradition, and thereby constantly premium of quality.
	Longstanding success without aggressive advertising.
Nivea	Nivea offers consistent high quality in diverse product categories.
	Nivea is trustworthy and even abroad I can rely on its products being harmless.
	Nivea was always like this.
	It also satisfies exceptional needs.
	Stands for naturalness.
	I've known it from my grandma's bathroom since I was little.
Nutella	I buy it because it's delicious and I know what I get.
	Nutella promotes its brand with honest product claims.
Persil	Advertising messages are honest and appropriate.
	Persil has a long-standing market success and is always up-to-date.
Porsche	Genuine brand image of sportiness, exclusivity, and high quality.
	Company is still locally anchored in the area where it has its roots.
	Products are not very innovative, but the design still reminds me of nostalgic cars.
	Porsche is a brand with a long tradition.
Tamaris	I can trust in finding witty creations at Tamaris.
	The shoes are affordable and keep this promise, but are not made for eternity.
66° North	I can rely on the brand's quality even in extreme weather conditions.
	Products are created by experts who always have novel ideas.

context of relationships between individuals, consumers, and companies. However, research so far only defines and measures the continuity of relationships in terms of relationship duration (Anderson and Weitz 1989; Hess, Ganesan, and Klein 2003; Lusch and Brown 1996). For originality, we examine research on brand image, consumer, and advertising research (Lynn and Harris 1997; Netemeyer et al. 2004; Olney, Holbrook, and Batra 1991) and identify scales such as the originality scale, which assesses how a person views him- or herself as being creative, individual, and spontaneous (Im, Bayus, and Mason 2003). For reliability, we review the literature on branding, consumer, and advertising research (Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell 2000; Ohanian 1990; Rodgers 2004; Sengupta and Johar 2002) and find scales such as the brand trustworthiness scale (Erdem and Swait 2004), the brand trust scale (Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán, and Yagüe-Guillén 2003) and the ad believability scale (Beltramini 1988). Finally, for naturalness, only a limited number of literature streams that deal explicitly with the naturalness of products or brands are identified. The naturalness of products has recently become an important feature in the food sector, reflected in the huge demand for organic groceries. Thus, we review articles dealing with the naturalness of these and related products (Tenbült et al. 2005; Verhoog et al. 2003).

This literature review led to the identification of 31 terms. Although, we invested substantial effort in reviewing adequate scales and scale items, we cannot adopt these specific items and apply them to our four authenticity dimensions without reservation. One of the main reasons for their sometimes limited transferability often relates to their implementation within a non-branding context. Additionally, these identified items only refer to a partial aspect of brand authenticity and thus cannot comprehensively reflect whether and to what degree a consumer has a continuous, original, reliable, or natural perception of a brand.

Thus, to check the identified terms and to determine further items designed to capture the brand authenticity construct, we ask a sample of 10 students as well as marketing experts to name a brand which they perceive as highly authentic. Participants are then requested to specify on a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 indicating 'not at all' to 7 indicating 'very much') the extent to which the 31 items describe the brand's authenticity. Additionally, respondents are asked to name further associations characterizing authentic brands that are missing in the initial list. Another 36 additional items are generated by this procedure, augmenting the total number to 67 items, which are then assigned to: (1) the continuity dimension covering items referring to stability, endurance, and consistency; (2) the originality dimension covering items referring to particularity, individuality, and innovativeness; (3) the reliability dimension covering items referring to trustfulness, credibility, and keeping promises, and (4) the naturalness dimension covering items referring to genuineness, realness, and non-artificiality.

For item purification, we ask a new sample of 20 students to name a brand they would classify as authentic and then ask them to point out the degree to which the 67 items describe the brand's authenticity using a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 indicating 'describes poorly' to 7 indicating 'describes very well'). Building on the results of the participants' ratings, we remove items with a mean rating below four. We also reject the items that were not rated by more than 10% of respondents, supposing poor comprehensibility of these items (see Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005 for this approach). We also rephrased some items based on respondent's comments and conducted a face-validity check regarding the plausibility of the items as well as in order to

examine whether the items' content overlap. After these validations, we finally retain 24 applicable items.

Next, another sample consisting of 10 test-persons complete a comparative rating task for our assessment of substantive-validity. In this item-sort task, the respondents are requested to ascribe each identified item to one of the four authenticity dimensions. Respondents are then asked to verify their assignment of items to the respective construct and to review their responses as well as to make – in their opinion – any necessary changes. Following Anderson and Gerbing (1991), we calculate the "substantive-validity coefficient". This value indicates "the extent to which respondents assign an item to its posited construct more than to any other construct" (Anderson and Gerbing 1991, 734). This conducted procedure confirms the validity of all included items, confirming the developed item structure for the four brand authenticity dimensions.

STUDY 3: REDUCING ITEMS AND ASSESSING THE DIMENSIONALITY OF THE SCALE

The aim of study 3 is to further reduce items and establish the number of constituent brand authenticity dimensions. We choose to conduct the study with brands from the sports apparel and the soft drinks industry for two reasons: (1) First the brands that were most often mentioned in study 1 belong to these two product categories; (2) Second these categories differ as sports apparel represents durables and soft drinks represent commodities supporting the generalizability of the results. Based on this, we conduct a survey asking 60 students to name one authentic brand within these two product categories. The stated authentic brands are Adidas, Boss, Burton, Capri Sonne, Carpe Diem, Coca-Cola, Diesel, Esprit, Fanta, Gatorade, Gazosa, Gucci, H&M, Lacoste, Levi's, Nike, Orangina, Red Bull, Rip Curl, Rivella, Schweppes, Sprite, Strellson, Tommy Hilfiger, Vittel, Volvic, and Zara.

In the main study, we ask a new student sample (n = 288) to judge how well the 24 items describe the authenticity of one of the brands listed above. We use a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 indicating 'strongly disagree' to 7 indicating 'strongly agree') to capture the test-persons' evaluations of brand authenticity. As the literature review as well as the results of our empirical studies 1 and 2 lead to the assumption of four distinct brand authenticity factors, we conduct a factor analysis using varimax rotation limiting the number of factors to four. The factor analysis with a strict loading condition (> .7) reveals a solution with eigenvalues greater than 1 (the variance explained shows a value of 70.33%). Fifteen items out of 24 are found to fulfill this condition (cf. Table 3). The identified four factors confirm the theoretical assumption of a four-factor structure. This means in more detail that solely reliability items load on the first factor (4 items), merely continuity items load on the second factor (4 items), only originality items load on the third factor (4 items), and finally, just naturalness items load on the fourth factor (3 items). Additionally, we test the derived items regarding their reliability using Cronbach's alpha (Nunally 1978). The Cronbach's alphas are in line with the required minimum value regarding all items of the four factors: continuity (.90), originality (.90), reliability (.96), and naturalness (.95).

STUDY 4: VALIDATING THE DIMENSIONS OF BRAND AUTHENTICITY

In study 4, we aim at validating the four dimensions by conducting exploratory as well as confirmatory analyses. We employ again new group of participants and brands to verify the stability of our scale. By doing this, we ensure that the scale items do not depend on the participants and brands. This enables us to reveal a general brand authenticity. For pre-testing we conduct 27 interviews

Table 3
Exploratory Factor Analysis

Item	Factor			
	Reliability	**Continuity**	**Originality**	**Naturalness**
I think *brand* is consistent over time.	.29	**.81**	.20	.08
I think the brand *brand* stays true to itself.	.27	**.79**	.20	.30
Brand offers continuity.	.28	**.84**	.16	.24
The brand *brand* has a clear concept that it pursues.	.17	**.77**	.32	.17
The brand *brand* is different from all other brands.	.10	.23	**.86**	.15
Brand stands out from other brands.	.12	.35	**.83**	.15
I think the brand *brand* is unique.	.33	.07	**.79**	.13
The brand *brand* clearly distinguishes itself from other brands.	.21	.19	**.83**	.23
My experience of the brand *brand* has shown me that it keeps its promises.	**.81**	.31	.25	.27
The brand *brand* delivers what it promises.	**.84**	.30	.23	.29
Brand's promises are credible.	**.82**	.28	.19	.33
The brand *brand* makes reliable promises.	**.83**	.28	.21	.32
The brand *brand* does not seem artificial.	.33	.24	.17	**.79**
The brand *brand* makes a genuine impression.	.32	.20	.23	**.86**
The brand *brand* gives the impression of being natural.	.31	.22	.22	**.85**

Table 4
Model Fit Comparison

Model	χ^2	d.f.	NFI	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
Independence model	17531.13	105	–	–	–	–
One-factor model	5898.74	90	.66	.67	.46	.28
Four-factor model	457.63	84	.97	.98	.93	.07
Second-order with four subdimensions	457.97	86	.97	.98	.93	.07

by asking participants to name two brands they regard as authentic and one brand they would classify as inauthentic. We focus on the brands with the highest frequencies of mention, for example Nivea and VW (each 5 mentions as being authentic), BMW and Coca-Cola (each 4 mentions as being authentic) and Müller-Milch (2 mentions as not being authentic). Most of the mentioned brands belong to the following product category: automobile, sports apparel, beverages, and body care. Following explicit calls for research regarding the attribution of human characteristics to retail brands (Ailawadi and Keller 2004), we integrate retail brands as an additional product category into the subsequent study, leading to a total number of 15 brands (three per category). Based on this broad pool of authentic and inauthentic brands, we conduct a main study to validate the generalizability of our proposed scale.

The study has the purpose to verify the scale's stability and to compare the four-factor model with other possible models for further validation. Thus, we analyze three different models which are oulined in the following: (1) a four-factor model (continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness) with correlated factors, (2) a one factor model assuming that the entirety of items load on one brand authenticity factor, (3) a second-order model with four subdimensions. We conduct structural equation modeling and employ confirmatory factor analyses in order to define the model that produces a fit which is better than the fit of the other two models. We generate
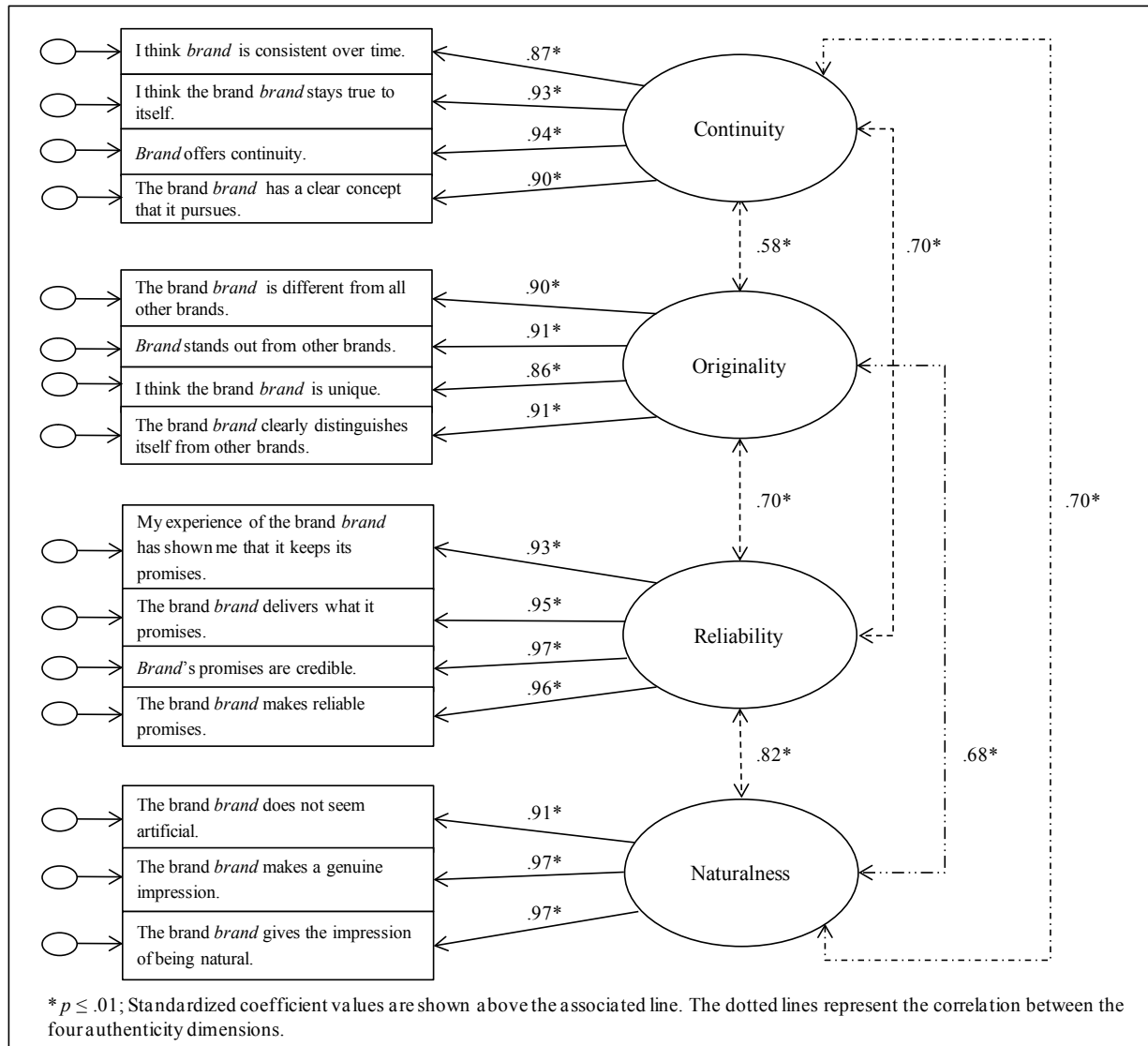
a sample of 857 participants with an age range of 34 to 69 and an average age of 49.6 years.

The results of the analysis demonstrate that the four-factor model fits the data very well: $\chi^2(84) = 457.63$, $p < .001$, normed fit index (NFI) = .97, the comparative fit index (CFI) = .98, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .93, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07. The four-factor model shows a clear superior fit to the one-factor model. The comparison to the second-order model with four subdimensions demonstrates a very good fit of both models and can not reveal one model to demonstrate a superior fit (table 4). As our theoretical derivations support the four-factor model with correlated factors and as there is no theoretical foundation that would privilege the more complex second-order model, we approve the four factor-model with correlated factors as the most suitable model (figure 1).

STUDY 5: ASSESSING DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY OF BRAND AUTHENTICITY AND RELATED

The objective of study 5 is to test for discriminant validity of the brand authenticity scale, demonstrating its discriminability from other relevant latent variables. A new sample of 115 participants respond to the 15-item brand authenticity scale and scales relating to brand involvement, brand image, and brand satisfaction. These constructs are measured implementing measurements that have been

Figure 1
Confirmatory Factor Analysis: The Brand Authenticity Construct

* $p \leq .01$; Standardized coefficient values are shown above the associated line. The dotted lines represent the correlation between the four authenticity dimensions.

already developed and approved in previous works (Appendix B). To create variation in brand authenticity values, we followed the procedure of Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005). We requested about one third of the participants to imagine a brand which they evaluate as "strongly," "moderately," or "not authentic" in order to fill out the questionnaire. For manipulation checks, we examined the consumers' reported brand authenticity. Results demonstrate that the scores average 3.03, 5.63 and 6.67 in the three manipulation conditions (weak, moderate, and strong). Moreover, the resulting means significantly differ from one another ($p < .01$).

Prior to the analysis of discriminant validity, we transform all semantic differential scales to Likert scales ranging from 1 to 7 and compute composite scores for the four brand authenticity dimensions. The discriminant validity of the brand authenticity scale is assessed using an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation that included the composite scores of the brand authenticity dimensions as well as the items indicating brand involvement, brand image, and brand satisfaction. The factor analysis reveals four factors. Table 5 reports the results of this analysis.

Factor one and two represent brand satisfaction and brand involvement, respectively, whereas the third factor that emerges reflects brand authenticity. The fourth factor is comprised of items from the brand image construct. These results demonstrate the discriminant validity of the brand authenticity scale compared to other related marketing constructs, and it also shows that continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness load on a single brand authenticity factor.

DISCUSSION

This paper primarily aimed at the development of a measure reflecting the consumer's perception of a brand's authenticity. We identified brand authenticity as a construct consisting of four dimensions, namely continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness – with the dimensions being differentially evaluated for various brands. The final brand authenticity scale (15-items) is reasonable regarding its length and therefore easy to implement. The existence of the four-factor model is consistent across different samples and studies and thus passes reliability and validity tests successfully. Moreover, evi-

Table 5
Exploratory Factor Analysis with Brand Authenticity, Brand Satisfaction, Involvement and Image

Item	Factor			
	Satisfaction	**Involvement**	**Authenticity**	**Image**
Naturalness	.40	.31	.71	.28
Reliability	.47	.39	.72	.09
Continuity	.29	.16	.86	.04
Originality	.19	.34	.65	.41
Satisfaction 1	.76	.39	.21	.30
Satisfaction 2	.76	.32	.25	.35
Satisfaction 3	.83	.28	.32	.21
Satisfaction 4	.80	.31	.40	.10
Satisfaction 5	.78	.37	.39	.07
Satisfaction 6	.77	.42	.22	.27
Satisfaction 7	.79	.32	.17	.30
Involvement 1	.35	.80	.18	.22
Involvement 2	.34	.82	.19	.27
Involvement 3	.31	.84	.22	.23
Involvement 4	.33	.80	.23	.28
Involvement 5	.33	.63	.40	.02
Involvement 6	.35	.78	.27	.25
Image 1	.22	.26	.20	.83
Image 2	.15	.29	.21	.86
Image 3	.26	.11	-.01	.82

dence of discriminant validity is obtained in study 5, where brand authenticity is distinguishable from other branding concepts.

Several implications for brand managers can be drawn from the results of our studies. In order to positively influence a brand's continuity and thus its authenticity, it seems necessary to determine key facts (historically as well as over time) about the brand, such as its foundation and its circumstances, the features upholding its traditions, its anniversary, the values based on its traditions, and to implement these in the marketing mix. Implementations can take a variety of forms: a brand's permanent pledge to its roots, and the introduction of proxies (e.g., founders, innovations, stories) that symbolize a brand's heritage. Key facts about the brand can also be implemented within brand communications in order to promote positive brand features associated with its traditionalism. This can be achieved by presenting images of traditional elements on brand packaging and integrating these values visually in brand logos and verbally in slogans. Events can also be used to convey these key facts about the brand: traditional occasions and brand anniversary celebrations offer opportunities to animate such associations.

Brands which symbolically embody the image of the consumer's national identity benefit from epithets such as 'rich in culture and tradition', and are thereby attributed with authenticity. Moreover, brand's originality and naturalness can be positively influenced by stimulating local icon value, as this is unique for every single brand and part of its real self. Thus, brand managers firstly have to

examine the values of a specific country and its culture, respectively. Secondly, they have to investigate the symbols (e.g., a logo, an image) that represent these values, which can be expected to vary widely between different countries and cultures. Numerous channels exist for conveying these identified values and integrating them within the company culture: They can be incorporated in symbols printed on the brand's packaging and, if possible, integrated in the product design; they can be transmitted graphically, verbally or actively using the media of the brand's communications (e.g., storytelling through advertising, events); they can be incorporated in rituals and artifacts designed to promote them and be reflected in a pricing strategy and distribution channels that serve to reinforce them.

To enhance a brand's authenticity, companies should also aim at creating a unified brand perception, using all internal and external communication sources in order to ensure its reliability. This implies a persistent presentation of the brand name, logo, and slogan through all communication media and communication tools. Additionally, marketers need to focus on a contextual, formal, and temporal integration of all these communication activities. Contextual integration can be achieved through a consistent implementation of messages, arguments, and statements which should particularly emphasize the different dimensions of a brand's authenticity. Formal integration can be attained by a consistent brand appearance. This entails establishing fixed brand references such as the brand name, logo and slogan as well as to the font, typography, layout, colors, and images. Finally, temporal integration demands an action plan regarding the implementation of the different communication activities. In addition, communication also needs to be consistent with regard to the different target groups (consumers, retailers, the public) and external communication activities need to be coordinated with internal brand management. This also enhances a brand's reliability. One specific example of how to create authenticity using an integrated brand presence would be to create a communication platform to address the topic of sustainability and thereby highlight the company's engagement in supporting this issue (e.g., advertising campaigns, sponsoring activities). This communication platform could then be implemented for external as well as internal communication purposes. In summary, in order to achieve an integrated brand presence, companies need to ensure consistency (consistent statements), congruence (between communication and behavior), and continuity (regarding the implementation of the different communication instruments) of brand communications.

Thus, the brand authenticity scale developed in this paper is not only theoretically relevant, but will find application in marketing practice. As marketers strive to satisfy the consumer's search for authenticity more than ever before and as companies try to understand and improve the authenticity of their brands by clearly communicating their brand's salient sale's features, both groups will be able to use the brand authenticity scale for assessment, planning, and tracking purposes. With regard to using brand authenticity for appraisal and planning purposes, the brand's positioning should be assessed, and brand authenticity should be integrated within the company-specific brand model as a major component of brand positioning. The application of brand authenticity to brand positioning is also a relevant factor in the context of brand repositioning in a competitive market. Moreover, the scale can be used to track changes in brand perception when implementing any kind of marketing action (e.g., communication campaign), and it can also be used to track and evaluate important competitors over time in terms of their brand authenticity.

Nevertheless, our study is not without limitations. Although, we have been successful in validating the generalizability of the

brand authenticity scale across various product categories, we have not fully achieved the aim of capturing the respondents' reports on brands that reflect extreme levels of brand authenticity. One possible explanation for this might be the fact that respondents in German-speaking regions tend to tick less extreme response categories than respondents in southern European countries (Van Rosmalen, van Herk, and Groenen 2010). This implies that it is necessary to validate the scale in further countries by paying particular attention to the country-specific differences in response behavior. This leads to another interesting area for future research; namely, an intercultural comparison of brand authenticity. It can be assumed that certain characteristics of brand authenticity are differently evaluated depending on cultural background.

With regard to the authenticity levels, the findings also demonstrate that brands with low measures of authenticity are scarce. However, some brands show moderate levels of overall brand authenticity, while they show very low values for specific authenticity dimensions. This result indicates that managers who aim to enhance their brand's authenticity should pay attention to the specific authenticity dimensions and implement dimension-specific analysis. The sparseness of results on highly authentic brands may either indicate that such brands are rare in the general branding context or that managers still have a considerable distance to go in improving their brand's authenticity. This requires future research.

Additionally, further research should be undertaken using the brand authenticity scale. It is interesting that the brands chosen by the respondents tended to be consumer goods, as opposed to services or even industrial goods. It is possible that consumer goods' brands are more frequently mentioned, because they are more salient and memorable, irrespective of their authenticity level. However, future research must investigate whether the type of product is relevant to the level of brand authenticity perceived and required by the consumer.

Additionally, longitudinal research on the development of brand authenticity over time would also be useful in order to identify the changes in brand authenticity that are possibly connected with changes in society. In the context of these issues, it would also be interesting to investigate whether the often-stated assumption of an increased consumer quest for authenticity in times of uncertainty, for example in financial crises or periods of political instability, can be empirically proven. In this context, an investigation of the role that brand authenticity performs in critical corporate situations arising, for instance, from environmental scandals or public outcries against poor working conditions would present an interesting field for future research. Finally, an application of the authenticity concept to other contexts such as the authenticity of politicians would offer very promising research questions, particularly in view of the public's increasing political apathy today. Given the increasing relevance of brand authenticity in a constantly changing marketing environment, our findings provide a threshold to a wide area of future research.

APPENDIX A

Alnatura: Alnatura is a retail brand in the biological grocery sector. Alnatura offers groceries and textiles which are fabricated according to ecological standards and certified by an independent accredited institution for organic product testing.

Balea: Balea is a private body- and hair-care brand of a drugstore chain.

Calida: Calida is an underwear brand that specializes in day and night wear for men and women as well as on luxurious lingerie.

Landliebe: Landliebe is a dairy brand that emphasizes the naturalness of their products by claiming to guarantee that their animals are not fed on genetically modified food.

Lidl: Lidl is a discount chain for groceries.

Müllermilch: Müllermilch is a milky drink brand that is offered in a variety of basic flavors such as strawberry, vanilla, and chocolate, as well as special flavors such as pistachio-coconut.

Persil: Persil is a brand of laundry detergent.

P2-Cosmetics: P2-Cosmetics is the private make-up brand of a drugstore chain.

Rewe: Rewe is a retail chain for groceries.

Ryan Air: Ryan Air is a low-cost airline.

Tamaris: Tamaris is a shoe brand offered in their own outlets or in multibrand stores selling women's shoes at reasonable prices.

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APPENDIX B

Author/Year	Construct	Scale
Based on Zaichkowsky (1985)	Brand Involvement	**Six items, seven-point semantic differential:** "unimportant to me/important to me," "of no concern to me/of concern to me," "irrelevant to me/relevant to me," "means nothing to me/means a lot to me," "useless to me/useful to me," "insignificant to me/significant to me".
Based on Laroche et al. (2005)	Brand Image	**Three items, seven-point Likert scale:** "It is easy to describe many features related to the brand," "I could easily explain many features associated with the brand," "It is not difficult to give a precise description of the brand".
Based on Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009); Hausman (2004), Oliver (1980); Westbrook and Oliver (1981) cited after Swan and Mercer (1982)	Brand Satisfaction	**Seven items, seven-point Likert scale:** "This brand is exactly what I need," "This is one of the best brands I could have bought," "My choice to buy this brand was a wise one," "I am satisfied with my decision to buy this brand," "I am satisfied with the brand and its performance," "I have truly enjoyed this brand," "Owning this brand has been a good experience".

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