

Perceptions of Authenticity within Contemporary Commercialised Markets

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Aim of research

- to empirically explore consumers' perceptions of authenticity within contemporary commercialized market

Importance of authenticity



- Traditionally consumers' were demanding authenticity
- Today they no longer seem interested in telling the difference between the real and fake
- We therefore observe a destabilization of the fundamental concept of authenticity in our times (Frow 1997)
- However consumer research has not given considerable focused attention to authenticity and its market manifestations (Penaloza 2000)

What is Authenticity?

- The word “authentic” is sometimes used to describe something that is thought not to be a copy or an imitation. In this sense, an object is authentic when it is believed to be “the original” or “the real thing” (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Beverland 2005).
- Managing consumers perceptions of authenticity will be critical because research reveals what is perceived as authentic must conform to consumers’ mental frames of “[how things ought to be](#)” (Grayson and Shulman 2000; Grayson and Martinec 2004).
- Yet, the words “genuine” and “true” or “[how things ought to be](#)” can mean different things to different consumers in different contexts.



What is Authenticity?



- Proposed forms of authenticity (Leigh et. al 2006) :
 - ❑ Objective
 - Relates to product's degree of originality
 - Indexical (Peirce 1998, Grayson and Martinec 2004)
 - ❑ Constructive
 - allows for different interpretations of reality on the basis of consumers' perceptions onto objects and is essentially symbolic
 - Iconic (Peirce 1998, Grayson and Martinec 2004)
 - ❑ Existential
 - proposes that there are no admitted original objects, and as a result the more authentic a representation looks and feels to the consumer, the more real it is (Leigh et al. 2006)



Research Objective

- To explore empirically consumers' perception of authenticity in the context of market offerings
 - We are particularly interested in investigating how Chinese consumers perceive, evaluate and differentiate between the numerous available product offerings with regards to authenticity.
 - Most existing studies approach authenticity as a preoccupation of modern Western culture
 - Chinese consumer market due to its:
 - Considerable size
 - Consumers' differences in beliefs and attitudes



Methods

- In-depth interviews
 - ✓ as this method is concerned with how participants actively create meaning (Silverman 2001)
 - ✓ because during an in-depth interview the consumer will most likely talk about experiences and emotions in an ideographic and natural way (Hirschman 1986)
 - ✓ 45 Chinese consumers from rural areas, both males and females within the age range of 18-40 years old.
 - ✓ The transcripts were then analysed using the interpretive thematic analysis technique (Spiggle 1994)



Findings

- Chinese consumers view authenticity evaluation as relational and hierarchical, rather than in terms of originality and uniqueness
- Two additional types of authenticity emerged
 - ❖ domesticated authenticity
 - ❖ mimic authenticity



Findings

- ❖ Domesticated authenticity
 - products offered by local joint-ventures of foreign-run factories
 - Weaker evaluation of authenticity
 - Lower perceived value, in terms of functionality



Findings

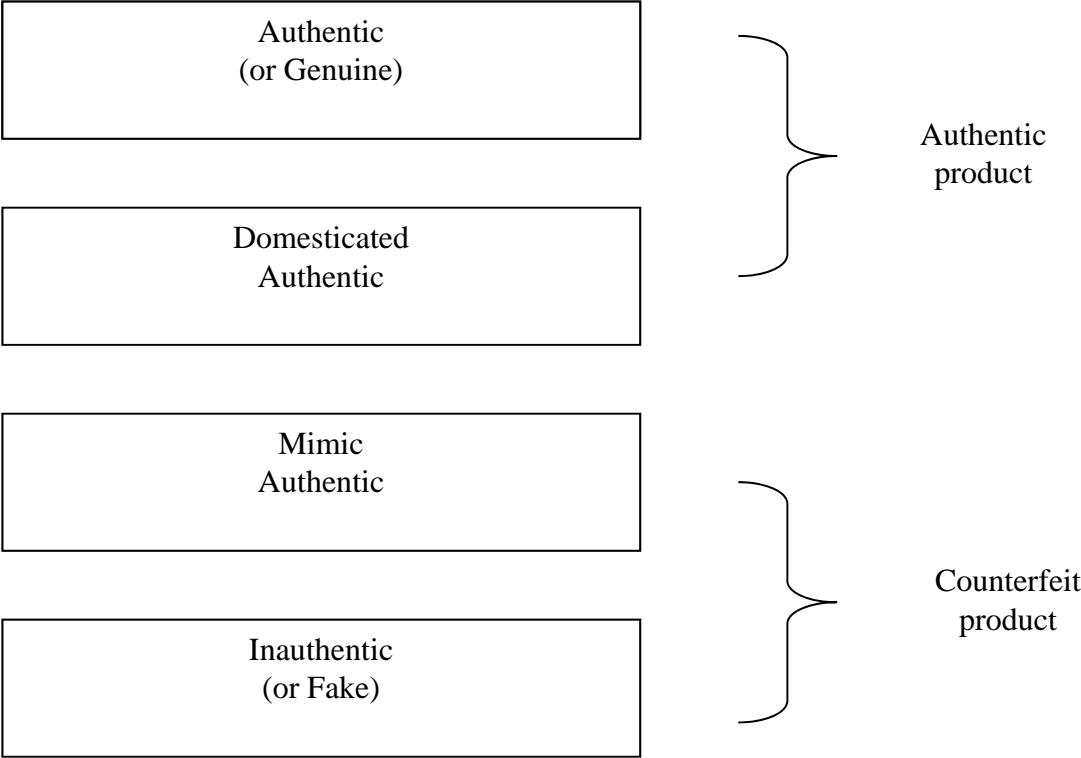
- ❖ Mimic authenticity
 - Copy authentic products in the best of their ability
 - Lower quality
 - Affordable prices
 - Carry a name and logo of their own
 - Same or even better functions of authentic ones
 - Perceived as sincere market offerings
 - Addressed favourably
 - E.g. Toyota and BYD seen as “poor man’s” Toyota
 - Differentiated from inauthentic or counterfeit



Implications

- Theoretical
 - the introduction of two new dimensions of authenticity that of “domesticated” and “mimic”.
 - offers opportunities for further research regarding potential additional evaluators and types of authenticity, along with the affects that these might have on branding.
- Practical
 - a tool to marketing practitioners, which will assist them in creating new consumer segmentations’ based on the above proposed classification of different levels of authentic goods, and consequently building and preserving long-term trusting customer relationships

A Hierarchical Relationship of Product offerings' Authenticity Evaluation





Thank You!