

**Achieving alignment for corporate brand success: The consumer quest for authenticity and heritage**

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## Introduction

Almost thirty years passed since scholars claimed the consumers' preference for a role in the production process and their disinterest in distinguishing between authentic or fake ("Nous ne distinguerons pas le vrai du faux, nous chercherons le plus faux que le faux: l'illusion et l'apparence", Baudrillard, 1983; Eco, 1983). Twenty years later Holt (2002) stressed the importance of cultural emplacement: authenticity should instead be seen as a cultural resource. In this context, influenced by the fatigue determined by consumers' overchoice, authenticity appears to be a response to hyperreality and globalness (Arnould and Price, 2000; Ballantyne et al., 2006). As such, it was found to be one of the "cornerstones of contemporary marketing" (Brown et al., 2003) a new business imperative for the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 2007) and may be conceived as what is genuine, real and true (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). Thus nowadays, to be successful, a brand should be authentic (Beverland, 2005), as authenticity is considered critical to brand identity (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2001) representing the "essence of a brand" (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Brown et al., 2003; Newman and Dhar, 2014).

Consequently, to gain insights regarding what authenticity is, its core components and the criteria consumers follow to distinguish what is authentic from what is non authentic, many scholars developed explorative research through the qualitative analysis of multiple case studies (Alexander, 2009; Beverland, 2005, 2006; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Brown et al., 2003; Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Leigh et al., 2006; Rose and Woods, 2005).

Nevertheless, recently scholars also developed quantitative measures to gain more generalizable insights on this central concept (Bruhn et al., 2012; Eggers et al., 2013; Ilic and Webster, 2014; Napoli et al., 2014; Shallen et al., 2014). In this context, authenticity has been mainly conceived as a secondary construct, composed by further constructs such as continuity, reliability, originality, uniqueness, naturalness, quality commitment, sincerity and heritage (Bruhn et al., 2012; Napoli et al., 2014). Additionally, Shallen et al. (2014) proposed an identity based approach, whereas Ilic and Webster (2014) developed a scale that measured a new authenticity construct (i.e., relational authenticity). Whilst these scales are all customer oriented, Eggers et al. (2013) developed an internally based scale, where authenticity was again a second order construct based on employees' brand customer orientation, consistency between values and brand strategy and congruency between individual and corporate values.

It should also be noted that recently scholars extended the authenticity research to mass market (Alexander, 2009; Gundlach and Neville, 2012) and determined the need for further mass market research.

The aim of this paper is to extend the authenticity research towards further mass markets (products and services) and to explore the effects of consumers' authenticity perceptions on brand image, trust loyalty and premium price. To achieve these purposes, the authors combined two existing authenticity scales (Bruhn et al., 2012 and Napoli et al., 2014) applying them to four different Italian brands, two of which from the manufacturing sector (Peroni Sabmiller, beers; Vespa-Piaggio, motorcycles), the others from the service sector (Enel, electricity and energy; Cinecittà Studios, cinema and entertainment). Additionally, to gain explorative insights about the alignment between consumers' and managers' perceptions of authenticity, four in-depth interviews to the

companies' senior management have been also conducted and secondary sources have been analyzed.

This paper is structured as follows: first of all a theoretical framework has been provided, followed by the methodology and the results section. Then the results are discussed and limitations, future directions and managerial implications are suggested.

## **Theoretical framework**

### *Forms and attributes of brand authenticity*

Despite the fact that scholars claimed that consumers find authenticity also in fake or contrived objects (Rose and Woods, 2005), brand authenticity is generally conceived as what is real, genuine and true (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). Thus, consumers use different cues to assess the authenticity of an object: indexical cues, that prove its originality and represent a perceived evidence of its authenticity, and iconic cues, that are a physical manifestation of something that is indexically authentic, and is strongly linked to the past (Grayson and Martinec, 2004).

Authenticity can take three different forms: objective, constructive and existential (Leigh et al. 2006). Thus, whilst the former is achieved through indexicality, the constructive and the existential forms are more activity driven (Leigh et al. 2006). Additionally, in the advertising context, Beverland et al (2008) discovered three forms of authenticity: pure, approximate and moral, which involved both indexical and iconic cues. More recently, scholars suggested the importance of both indexical and iconic cues to "green" involvement (i.e., on packaging, during advertising campaigns, etc.) to assess real corporate commitment to social responsibility (Ewing et al. 2012).

Beverland (2005) claimed that brand authenticity can be achieved through the company's selection of different attributes: place, traditional methods, stylistic consistency, history, and being above commercial consideration. Only one year later, analyzing the context of luxury wines, Beverland (2006) included an additional attribute: the company's quality commitment. Nevertheless, giving a hierarchy of these attributes, Alexander (2009) found that three attributes were particularly important: stylistic consistency, relationship to place and downplaying commercial motives. It should be also noted that the relationship to the place of production of the product was also explored by different authors, that underlined the centrality of the origin of the product (Groves, 2001; Newman and Dhar, 2014).

More over, heritage seems to be one of the most important component of brand authenticity, as highlighted by different authors (Brown et al., 2003; Beverland, 2005, 2006; Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Leigh et al., 2006; Napoli et al., 2014). Thus, whilst literature sees the heritage as a component of brand authenticity (Brown et al., 2003; Beverland, 2005, 2006; Grayson and Martinec, 2004, Napoli et al., 2014), some scholars, on the contrary, claimed authenticity to be one of the key factors and component of corporate heritage (Balmer, 2012, Fionda and More, 2009; Wiedmann et al., 2012a,b). Overall, it seems that the link between the two is not questionable.

### *Authenticity as a socially constructed phenomenon*

In 2005, a special edition of the Journal of Management Studies (Jones et al., 2005) stressed one of the main dilemmas of companies' authenticity: is authenticity an individual or a social

phenomenon? Whilst authenticating acts are self-referential, authoritative performances emphasizes community participation (Arnould and Price, 2000). Thus, over years, scholars made multiple attempt to answer this question and it seems now that one can argue that authenticity is a socially constructed phenomenon (Beverland, 2006; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Beverland et al., 2008; Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Jones, 2005; Rose and Woods, 2005; Thompson et al, 2006).

Legitimization is socially constructed by consumers, marketers, media, journalists, thus everyone that is involved in the analyzed field (Kotzinets, 2001; Peterson, 2005). As such, meanings of authenticity are socially constructed (Fine, 2003; Chalmers, 2008). A community can add meanings to the authenticity of a brand (Mc Alexander et al., 2002; Wilson and Morgan, 2011). The social construction of authenticity is also highlighted in Leigh et al.'s (2006) that considered multiple forms of authenticity, as previously mentioned: objectivity is achieved through the preservation of brand heritage (i.e., restoring cars), the constructive dimension is achieved through consumers' experience (i.e., driving cars and self-work), while the existential dimension is achieved through pleasure and fun (i.e., role performance and communal commitment). Aitken and Campelo (2011) underlined the importance of co-created experiences within the community, where consumers are responsible for the shaping of the brand (Bertilsson and Cassinger, 2011). In particular, Alexander (2009) explored the co-branding relationship with a sponsorship team, that might enhance the perception of authenticity, especially when linked to its origin, thus enhancing the nationality of the corporation (i.e., Welsh).

### *Outcomes of authenticity*

Scholars claimed that authenticity might enhance three different identity benefits: control, that has functional performance benefits; connection to place of origin, events, community (that lead to a positive experience); and virtue (i.e., feeling virtuous) that enhances the individual morality highlighting and the importance of honesty (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). Additionally, brand authenticity has a key role in building, sustaining and defending brand reputation, in particular during the crisis of a company (Greyser, 2009). Moreover, it can predict brand attitudes and purchase intention (Ewing et al., 2012; Ilic and Webster; 2014).

The most recognized positive outcome of authenticity is its capacity to build consumers' trust (Ballantyne et al., 2006; Balmer, 2012; Beverland, 2006; Greyser, 2009; Gustafsson, 2006; Holt, 2002; Schallen et al, 2014). Thus, to build trust, the brand should be conceived as a good citizen, showing the alignment between the values of the brand and the company's actions (Holt, 2002). In this way, brand individuality, brand consistency (a "present oriented construct") and brand congruency (a "past oriented construct") lead to brand authenticity, which in turn leads to brand trust (Schallen et al., 2014). Thus, four different authenticity strategies (i.e., talking, being, staying and defending) contribute towards the organization (Greyser, 2009).

Additionally, trust is the link between authenticity and affinity, conceiving brand authenticity as the brand promise (Balmer, 2012). Consequently, authenticity might be conceived as proof of the company's reliability (Ballantyne et al., 2006). To conclude, it should be noted that authenticity not only leads to consumers' trust, but also to consumers' willingness to pay a premium price (Beverland, 2006).

### *Authenticity and the challenge of corporate brand alignment*

As aforementioned, authenticity can be also conceived as a tool to consistently deliver the brand promise (Balmer, 2012). In fact, the corporate brand covenant should be authentic (i.e., the corporate brand promise should mirror the identity of the firm) to enhance the corporate brand credibility, which is “a modus vivendi, a way of living the brand” (Balmer, 2012, p. 28). As such, a company can be seen as authentic if there is consistency between espoused values, ideal identity and how it actually behaves (Beverland, 2006; Holt, 2002; Morin, 2010). Therefore, internal and external brand perceptions should be aligned to ensure reliability and trust (Bruhn et al., 2012; Holt, 2002). Building on this, but shifting towards a more internal oriented perspective, Eggers et al., (2013) operationalized the brand authenticity construct using brand consistency (i.e., the alignment of brand strategy and corporate values) and brand congruency (i.e., the alignment of individual and corporate strategy), finding that both these constructs can significantly drive the company’s growth and trust.

In this scenario, corporate brand misalignment have been seen as “breaches of the brand promise”, especially when companies are facing strategic changes such as corporate rebranding (Merilees and Miller, 2008, p. 548). In line with this, scholars underlined the importance of alignment to achieve the brand legitimacy and to avoid attack from the anti-branding movement that often asks for brand authenticity (Charmley et al., 2013; Holt, 2002; Gustafsson, 2006; Thompson et al., 2006). In fact, the mismatch between the brand image and the corporate actions might provoke collective actions that enhance brand avoidance and brand attacks (Charmley et al., 2013; Gustafsson, 2006; Holt, 2002) For example, anti-branding activists might diffuse a doppelganger brand image (i.e., cultural brand meanings) highlighting the incongruence between the actual and the communicated emotional branding strategy, as observed by the culture jammin’ Starbucks’ mermaid logo, that was ironically transformed (Thompson et al., 2006).

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this research is to test the applicability of Napoli et al.’s (2014) and Bruhn et al.’s (2012) factors regarding authenticity in a generalized context of products and services (within the entertainment sector can be considered specific but a fundamental industry in Western economies, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2014). The purpose of this research is to measure the brand authenticity from a consumer’s perspective in accordance to the companies’ vision and operations (in the case through the analysis of four Italian leading brands).

Two separate studies were conducted. The first one, an exploratory multiple case study (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin 1994), is based on in-depth interviews to the top managers of the leading brands: Peroni-SabMiller (founded in 1846, beers), Vespa-Piaggio (founded in 1946, motorcycles), Enel (founded in 1962, electricity and green energy) and Cinecittà Studios (founded in 1937, cinema, entertainment). These companies have been chosen for their longevity and for their high brand awareness among the Italian mass public. In fact, whilst the former is a typical characteristic

of brand authenticity, the latter was necessary to interview Millennials, who had to know the brand they were interviewed for. Interviews to managers (open ended questions, semi-structured format, on average lasted for three hours, recorded responses), have been conducted during the period November 2013-May 2014 and led the Authors – by a support to the qualitative data analysis with NVivo – to identify the internal brand authenticity .

Questions were about the brand's history and values, guiding philosophy of business, the main events in brand's life, the marketing practices, the positioning and production, the competitive market and the main features attributed to the concepts of brand authenticity and brand heritage. These results have been also compared to the direct observations of the Authors and to the brands' secondary sources (use of identity package, company press releases, websites, monographies, company museums, etc.) to focus the main cues that brands are used to attribute managerially to the meaning of authenticity.

The second large-scale study focused on brand authenticity factors by using the scale items generated and defined recently by Napoli et al. (2014) and Bruhn et al. (2012), and measured the impact of all these dimensions on the consumers' perception of brand image, brand trust, loyalty and premium price (Wiedmann et al., 2011).

The questionnaire (31 items/statements) reflected, for each of the 4 brands, different dimensions of brand authenticity as conceptualized by the extant literature: brand heritage, nostalgia and design consistency (5 items), quality commitment and craftsmanship (7 items), sincerity (2 items), originality (4 items), reliability (4 items) (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, Farrelly, 2014; Bruhn et al., 2012); and the impact of authenticity on consumers' perceptions of image (2 items), trust (2 items), loyalty (3 items) and premium price (2 items) (Wiedmann, K. P., Hennigs, N., Schmidt, S., & Wuestefeld, T., 2011).

The questionnaire was distributed to a convenience sample of Millennials: 400 respondents, 19-23 ys old, July 2014, extracted by the 2837 students of the business and management courses at the Dpt. of Business Studies-University of Rome Tor Vergata. As stated by some scholars (Beltramini, 1983; Khera & Benson, 1970), students can be considered relevant surrogates for adult consumers when the research is aimed at discovering attitudes more than behaviours. Further more, University students are the ideal respondents to this study as they are common market for these industries as well as being a standard group for experimental research (Manser et al., 1979).

The average age was 22.63, the gender was male 46% and female 54%.

The 31 items, for each brand, were placed on a 7-point scale where 0 represents "strongly disagree" and 6-"strongly agree". The respondents were asked to record how strongly they felt that the single brand could be considered truly authentic following the factors of quality, heritage, sincerity, originality and reliability as stated by the Napoli et al.'s (2014) and Bruhn's (2012) scales. Additionally the research measured the correlation of these dimensions with the consumers' perception of image, trust, loyalty and premium price to assess the predictive validity of the scales. Nevertheless consumers' authenticity evaluations are subjective, personally constructed and changeable (Grayson & Martinec, 2004) and reflect consumer's attitude and beliefs toward an object (Napoli et al., 2014) or a brand.

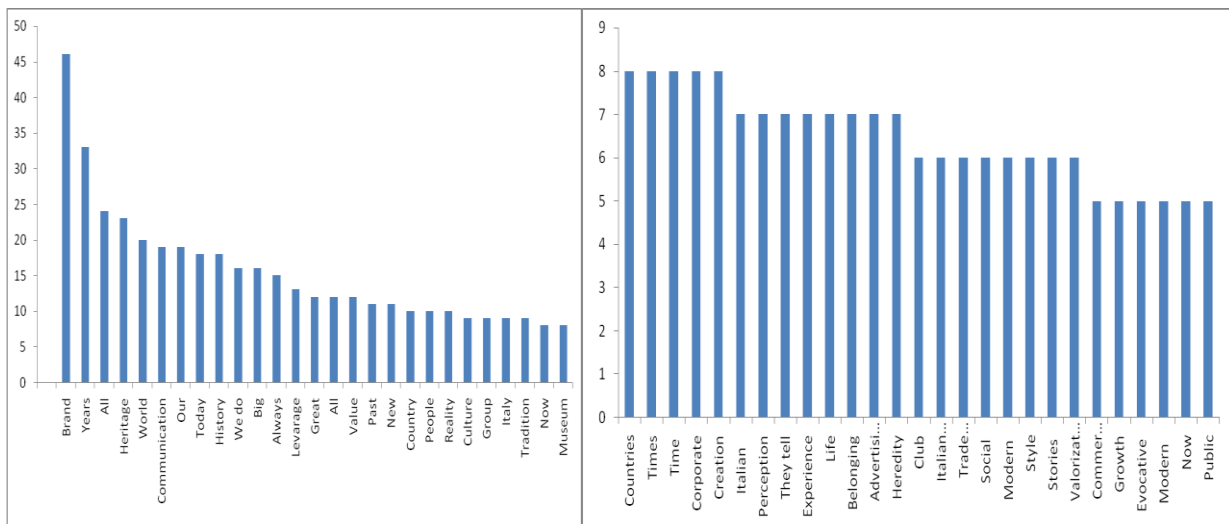
The analysis was conducted by a linear regression based on SSPS software using brand image, brand trust, loyalty, and premium price as dependent variables. After interviewing our sample of

consumers the characteristics we found did fit completely or almost either Napoli et al.’s (2014), Bruhn et al.’s (2012) or Wiedmann et al.’s (2012) framework (as will be demonstrated).

## Results

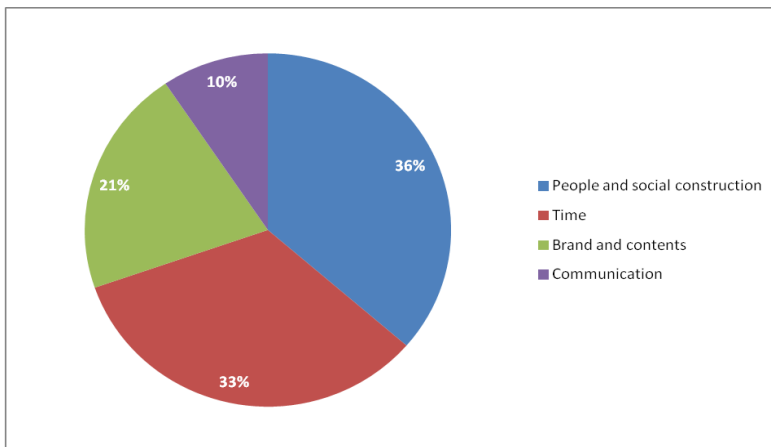
The first qualitative study led to the results through which we can assess how brands consider their authenticity (in terms of a large scale concept called “heritage”) (Beverland, 2005) as made of “people and social construction” (community dimension, internal and external ones, relationship to place, countries, global dimension); “time” (chronological and longevity dimension of the brand); “brand and contents” (brand meanings and features, institutional identity, stylistic consistency, object and design dimension); and “communication” (commercial motives, media dimension expressed by off and online tools and technological platforms). See Table 1 for a synthetical view.

**Table 1 – The brands vision – Data analysis in-depth interviews**



In Table 2 all the textual statements and the emblematic words (extracted by NVivo from the top managers’ in-depth interviews) have been integrated semantically into 4 categories: 1. People and social construction; 2. Time; 3. Brand and contents; 4. Communication. As shown below, from the companies’ point of view, the dimension of people and social construction (consumers’ dimension as community experiences and expressions) and the focus on time and longevity (where also the concepts of heritage, past, present and today, etc. can be found) are the fundamental aspects that are linked to the constructs of authenticity and heritage.

**Table 2 – The brands vision. Authenticity and heritage factors emerged in the in-depth interviews.**



To the companies, as emerged in the interviews and confirmed by the secondary sources (companies’ documents and presentations), both brand authenticity and heritage have a precise impact on brand awareness and image, consumer satisfaction, stakeholders’ trust and loyalty, consumers’ purchase intention, sense of belonging to a community or group – both an internal and an external one - status and internationalization. A minor impact is attributed to the capacity of authenticity and heritage to affect the consumers’ willingness to pay a premium price.

To verify the scales’ reliability a Cronbach’s alpha analysis has been conducted leading to the results explored in Table 3. These results confirm clearly the reliability of the scales.

**Table 3 – Brand authenticity drivers and outcomes (Cronbach’s alpha)**

<b>Brand Authenticity Drivers</b>	
Quality	.933
Heritage	.901
Sincerity	.793
Originality	.867
Reliability	.889
<b>Brand Authenticity Outcomes</b>	
Image	.734
Trust	.783
Loyalty	.800
Premium Price	.793

Vespa Piaggio (Table 4) is the brand that can be considered as the most “authentic” in the consumers’ perception in terms of quality, heritage, sincerity, originality, and reliability.



The case of Cinecittà Studios shows how the consumers feel distant from the companies' vision of sincerity and reliability while heritage and quality are felt very near to the programmed ones so only these two features can be considered aligned.

The case of Vespa Piaggio and Peroni beers prove, on the contrary, how industrial sectors and above all "iconic brands" such as Vespa Piaggio undoubtedly is also globally (Holt, 2002; Brandt, 2014; Pattuglia, 2011), are able to communicate and make people perceive very distinctively their quality, heritage and sincerity itself.

The quantitative study shows the consistence of the quality, heritage, sincerity, originality and reliability factors that are perceived by the consumers of the brands Peroni, Vespa, Enel, Cinecittà Studios and their association with the concept of authenticity and how these outcomes resonate with the companies' vision.

Data show in a very clear way how each one of these attitudes is present among the respondents to the survey and how the Napoli et al.'s (2014), Bruhn et al.'s (2012) and Wiedmann et al.'s (2011) constructs can explain the brands "aura" (Alexander, 2009).

**Table 4 – Mean, variance and Cronbach's Alpha of the diverse factors in authenticity**

<b>QUALITY</b>			
BRANDS	Mean	Variance	Chronbach's alpha
Peroni	3.210	.022	.939
Vespa	3.999	.015	.924
Enel	3.285	.050	.914
Cinecittà Studios	2.985	.008	.845
<b>HERITAGE</b>			
BRANDS	Mean	Variance	Chronbach's alpha
Peroni	3.545	.092	.894
Vespa	4.497	.021	.895
Enel	3.479	.016	.881
Cinecittà Studios	3.892	.409	.818
<b>SINCERITY</b>			
BRANDS	Mean	Variance	Chronbach's alpha
Peroni	3.248	.002	.837
Vespa	3.970	.024	.825
Enel	3.121	.002	.757
Cinecittà Studios	3.020	.019	.788
<b>ORIGINALITY</b>			
BRANDS	Mean	Variance	Chronbach's alpha
Peroni	3.140	.013	.875
Vespa	4.355	.012	.901
Enel	3.288	.051	.861
Cinecittà Studios	2.985	.008	.845
<b>RELIABILITY</b>			
BRANDS	Mean	Variance	Chronbach's alpha
Peroni	3.127	.020	.894

Vespa	3.777	.009	.871
Enel	3.130	.028	.883
Cinecittà Studios	2.750	.023	.858

To assess the impact that the brand authenticity has on brand image, trust, loyalty, and premium price a specific analysis has been carried on (Table 5).

In the case of Vespa, the heritage dimension shows a great presence and association with the construct of authenticity as also verified in the case of Cinecittà Studios brand, even if in this last case, the variance is actually consistent.

In the service sector (energy), Enel is a distinctive leading Italian brand although recently moved from a monopolistic and public market position to a competitive private one (same as Cinecittà Studios did), and has been successful in keeping the consumers' perception very high about its reliability and differently from what Cinecittà Studios managed to. Documentary analysis and participant observation, in this last case, also provide valuable insights and confirm these results giving further information about press campaign against the new Cinecittà Studios' owners and peculiar company's vision and mission.

Authenticity shows the great impact on brand trust and this outcome is verified in all the cases. This result is also interestingly consistent with the extant literature (Ballantyne et al., 2006; Balmer, 2012; Beverland, 2006).

On the contrary, brand authenticity doesn't seem to predict the acceptance of a premium price. And this is not consistent with the previous studies (Beverland, 2006). Nevertheless, it's coherent with our qualitative results (interviews) where managers strongly stressed their incapacity of bonding authenticity to the consumer perception and intention to buy a premium price product or service. But, this perhaps can be explained by the specific features of the sectors that have been analyzed in this research (mass market products and services, durable products, entertainment services) which are different from the luxury one (i.e. ultra-premium wines, Beverland, 2005, 2006).

Vespa has a R square of .247 that seems very particular to interpret if compared to the "iconic" importance of the Italian brand (Brandt, 2014). This can be explained through the qualitative interviews and documents in which it is clearly shown that the customers' base of Vespa is about 30-40 ys. old and the loyalty is mostly generated by the international market than by the Italian one ("made in Italy" effects and Italian style).

**Table 5 – Predictive validity of brand authenticity. The impact on image, trust, loyalty and premium price**

<b>BRAND IMAGE</b>			
<b>BRANDS</b>	R Square	Unstandardized Coefficient	p-Value
Peroni	.677	.090	.000
Vespa	.733	.093	.000
Enel	.731	.095	.000
Cinecittà Studios	.624	.102	.000
<b>BRAND TRUST</b>			
<b>BRANDS</b>	R Square	Unstandardized Coefficient	p-Value

Peroni	.754	.094	.000
Vespa	.733	.091	.000
Enel	.772	.098	.000
Cinecittà Studios	.657	.101	.000
BRAND LOYALTY			
BRANDS	R Square	Unstandardized Coefficient	p-Value
Peroni	.635	.136	.000
Vespa	.247	.061	.000
Enel	.698	.139	.000
Cinecittà Studios	.580	.100	.000
PREMIUM PRICE			
BRANDS	R Square	Unstandardized Coefficient	p-Value
Peroni	.440	.080	.000
Vespa	.450	.082	.000
Enel	.305	.069	.000
Cinecittà Studios	.398	.085	.000

## Discussion and conclusion.

Today the new internet, the overloading web and social media communication, and the overriding mobile marketing and communication, the outcomes of the so called “experience economy” (Gilmore and Pine, 2007), the big data overload and the ever growing fragments and socially acting communities (Kapferer, 2008), instead of traditional targets and segments, lead the consumers to the perception of some somehow “untrusted brands” which are not considered reliable and credible anymore (Balmer, 2012a). Nevertheless, trust predicts the perceptions of brand credibility (Erdem and Swait, 2004), loyalty and commitment (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al. 2002), and it is an essential factor in building successful marketing relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Urban, Sultan, and Qualls, 2000).

In the meantime, brand authenticity is being increasingly desired as it gradually diminishes in the commercial world (Penaloza 2000; Peterson 2005, Beverland, 2005).

We assist to the show of the “consumers’ quest for authenticity” that leads the marketers to the need of reengineering and reassessing their (brand) strategies (Napoli et al., 2014). In the “experience economy” it is thus important that the quest for authenticity is able to grasp the experiences themselves, the expectations and the desires of the target groups in order to respond to their values (Molleda, 2010)

This is why success in brand management resides in the “corporate brand identity alignment” (Balmer, 2012b; Balmer et al., 2009), being the best correspondence between what an organization creates, projects, plans, communicates and lives (also internally) its identity and communicates about its identity and brand constructs and how these strategies and brand operations are finally perceived by consumers and stakeholders (Balmer, 2012b, Hatch and Schultz, 2001, 2008) in terms of “distinctiveness” and , finally, of “authenticity” of the brand.

In this research – made up of two studies – we stress that brand authenticity is a multidimensional construct as stated by the extant literature that goes from the meaning of genuineness, reality and truth (Kennick, 1985), to sincerity, innocence and originality (Fine, 2003); sincere execution (Authentic Brand Index, 2008), to being natural, simple, honest and unspun (Boyle, 2003); self-authored and self-determine (Sheldon et al, 1997; Wild, 1965, Deci and Ryan, 1991); committed to traditions, passion for crafts and excellent in production (Beverland, 2005, 2006, Fine 2003); belonging to time honored traditions (Postrel, 2003) as brands with a sense of history and connection with traditional cultures, customs, religions and beliefs as distinctive identity and nostalgic aura (Brown et al., 2003; Chhabra et al., 2003, Penaloza, 2000; Postrel, 2003), to symbolic meaning (Kates, 2004) and integrity, quality, sense of moral virtues, intrinsic love of the product rather than “economic agenda” (Beverland, 2006; Beverland et al, 2006, 2008).

Many scholars prefer to consider authentic brands as “above commerce brands” (Napoli et al., 2014) or authenticity as “non commercial values” (Beverland, 2005). Others refer to it as a modern concept of an ever evolving design which follows and reflects modern times (Beverland, 2002, 2006, Beverland et al. 2008) or – philosophically – think authenticity as related to a superior “moral zeitgeist” (Holt, 2004)

In the meantime authenticity resides and is based on the answers that a company is able to address through its brands to the interest and knowledge of a subject (Grayson, 2003).

The research demonstrates how brand authenticity is both a theoretically and managerially relevant construct to both scholars and practitioners.

Nevertheless the research also shows how the authenticity objective is much easier to achieve in the case of product (standardization, globalization, mass market, great role devoted to market research, advertisement and promotion) than in the service sector (adaption, prosumership, heterogeneity) (Gronross, 1994; Gummesson, 1987, 1998). Moreover, authenticity is deeply conditioned by the supply chain model: in our case studies, Peroni is much more influenced by its distributors (stores as point of touch to its consumers) than Enel that provides directly to sell electricity to the clients.

The alignment or misalignment corporate brand (Hatch and Schultz, 2001) that we empirically found in some strategies and operations regarding the brands analyzed, simply demonstrate how brand authenticity is actually a measure of the consistency and congruency (Eggers et al., 2012) between the companies’ strategies and operations regarding brands and the actual consumers’ perceptions.

As we showed in our results comparing the first and the second study, the corporate brand alignment has undoubtedly some fundamental managerial implications about the assessing of the external and internal marketing, the interfunctional and multifunctional role for identity and corporate communication, finally to the construction of a leading role for marketing and communication managers.

The results of the second quantitative study demonstrate that companies must act transparently and sincerely, honestly, if they want to be perceived as qualitative, traditional and with heritage, original and reliable. This means that communication and marketing are good leverage to products, services and brands but they must be boosted by the high quality of the objects to be able to keep up with the core attributes on which the brand has been originally founded (Beverland, 2005; Gilmore and Pine, 2007, Balmer, 2012b). Beverland (2005) talks about “understated branding and promotion”. At the

same time we need also to consider the role played by the macroeconomic scenario. If the customer's premium price orientation is not related to a special segment of production and offer (as in the case of ultra-premium wines, Beverland et al., 2006) it can be really influenced by the severe effects that a long lasting economic crisis is spreading out and his price sensitivity can be deeply affected as we proved in all the cases we mentioned in our research.

There are several limitations to be stressed. First of all, even if the growing literature about brand authenticity has been here reported focusing the large variety of cues about defining the construct, mainly five factors have been considered (quality, heritage, sincerity, originality and reliability). Further research could be directed towards the other aspects of the constructs, above all those which can be found in the concept of symbolism and values, limit that has been noted also by Napoli et al. (2014).

Second, in this research the brands have been chosen by following a criteria of extreme awareness and knowledge of the subjects the Authors would interview on and the implicit comparison they could establish between product (Peroni, Vespa) and service sectors (Enel, Cinecittà Studios) even if the Napoli et al.'s (2014) and Bruhn et al.'s (2012) scales were mainly based on product brands. Constructs and items have been here logically adapted to service cases.

Third, it could be interesting to assess the construct and predictive validity of the scales in the case of a greater quantity of the Italian brands (sample A – product; sample B – services) by a second large-scale survey that could be conducted on adult consumers to limit the deviation which is implicit when focusing more on the attitudes than the behaviors (Beltramini, 1983; Khera & Benson, 1970) and the actual purchase intention.

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