AUTHENTICITY IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETING FIELD: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE

This study aims to use a systematic literature review process to get the state of the art on the concept of authenticity in marketing field. The review question defined is: "What marketing research has been conducted on authenticity in international marketing until now and what could be future avenues for research?".

BACKGROUND

Authenticity has been considered a key attribute of contemporary life, occupying a very important position in contemporary culture (Fine, 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). The roots of the term *authentic* come from *Authenticus* (Latin word) and *Authentikos* (Greek word), meaning "worthy of acceptance, authoritative, trustworthy, not imaginary, false or imitation and conforming to an original" (Cappannelli & Cappannelli, 2004, p. 1). However, in the literature, the word has been applied with different meanings (Beverland, 2005; Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

The importance of the topic has led many scholars to study it in different fields of knowledge like philosophy, sociology, anthropology and psychology (Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer, & Heinrich, 2012; Fritz, Schoenmueller, & Bruhn, 2017). Within the marketing field, authenticity has been considered "one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing" (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003, p. 21). The concept is recognised as an important human aspiration because people look for authenticity in their daily lives, in the products and in brands they consume (Bruhn et al., 2012). When referring to consumers, authenticity can be found in consumption experiences, in objects or in brands (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). In fact, within the international marketing field, two important streams of research have been developed: authenticity as an attribute of a subject (for instance, employees´ emotional authenticity) and authenticity as an attribute of an object (e.g. brand authenticity) (Fritz et al., 2017).

Methodology: Two dominant academic databases, Web of Science and Scopus, were used to explore and identify the main articles related to the analysed topic. These databases were chosen amongst others because they provide the greatest coverage with peer-reviewed articles published in high quality journals. The search for this study was done on 08/03/2019 and on 12/03/2019 and the

keywords used were: "Brand" AND "Authentic*". Firstly, an attempt was done with the keywords "Brand authenticity". However, we realised that the number of articles found was much reduced and that very important articles were not being included. Hence, we decided to use "Brand" AND "Authentic*" as it seemed the best combination to find relevant studies related to the topic. The research performed, both in Web of Science and in Scopus, was not limited to a specific publication year, including all relevant studies (related to the topic), independently of their publication year.

 In Web of Science, the search was done within the core collection. Articles were identified using the specific keywords in the "Topic". Moreover, some filters have been applied. On the one hand, the type of documents analysed were articles and reviews. On the other hand, to keep the search process specific to the objective, the Web of Science categories that were used were: business; management; hospitality, leisure, sport & tourism; communication; ethics; psychology applied; psychology multidisciplinary and psychology experimental. Another filter that was applied was the Quartile of the Journal as the objective was to include only high ranked journals. For articles found in the Web of Science database, only articles of journals listed in JCR 2017 in the Quartiles Q1, Q2 or Q3, were included in the analysis. In Scopus, the search was done introducing the keywords in the "article title, abstract, keywords". The subject area, the document type and the language were used as filters. The subject areas were limited to "Business, Management and Accounting", "Social Sciences" and "Psychology". The document type searched were articles and reviews and the language was English. Finally, only articles belonging to journals placed in Q1, Q2 or Q3 in the ranking of Scimago (SJR 2017) were included in the study.

From the analysis based on the Web of Science electronic database, a total of 324 articles were identified with the keywords "Brand" AND "Authentic*". From these, the articles that were not Q1, Q2 or Q3 in JCR2017 were excluded which led to 229 final articles. In what concerns the analysis from Scopus database, the number of articles identified with the keywords "Brand" AND "Authentic*" were 463. The papers that were not included in Q1, Q2 or Q3 journals from Scimago 2017 (SJR 2017) were excluded, which led to a total of 281 articles. When combining the selected articles from both databases and excluding the duplicated articles (when the same article was in both databases), this led to a total of 375 papers. After reading the abstracts of all the articles, the ones that were not directly related to the topic and were considered irrelevant were excluded which led to 115 papers. After reading the full text, some articles were excluded and 75 papers remained to be included in the analysis. However, after reading the reference lists of several articles, we realised that some reference articles and books related to the topic were not being included in the scope of the systematic review due to the filters applied. Therefore, there was a need to include, afterwards, these articles and books. Some reasons for this to happen can be pointed out. On the one hand, some of these reference articles

have not been published in peer-reviewed journals and, on the other hand, as several reference "authenticity" articles do not include the word "brand", they do not appear in the systematic search. However, as these articles are important to understand the context of authenticity, they were included, afterwards, in the analysis. Moreover, there were also some important books about the concept that were included as they are key to analyze the topic. Therefore, to the 75 articles that came out from the systematic review, 14 additional articles and 3 books/book chapters were added and included in the analysis. After the final decision about which articles to analyse, data were extracted from the selected articles and the analysis was performed. The data extracted included article title, scientific journal, authors, publication year, methodology, methodology description, industry, country, theories, brand authenticity definition, brand authenticity dimensions, scales used, main objective of the study, constructs, antecedents and consequences, main conclusions, limitations/gaps and future research, among others.

MAJOR FINDINGS

As the literature review performed highlights, authenticity and, in concrete, brand authenticity, seems to be an important area of research within the marketing field. The growing number of studies about the topic, published in different peer-reviewed journals, especially since 2012 on, shows the increasing interest of researchers on the topic. Furthermore, there is a diversity of authors studying brand authenticity, with the majority of articles being published by more than one author. The analysis also shows that research has been done worldwide with a strong focus on Europe and America and in different research contexts (industries analysed). In what concerns the methodologies used, empirical studies have been the most common studies performed.

Based on the 89 peer-reviewed articles and on the 3 books/ book chapters analysed, we can conclude that the research on authenticity and, in concrete, on brand authenticity has been very fragmented, which introduces challenges when trying to synthetize the knowledge around the concept. This fragmentation is mirrored on the different theoretical perspectives that are found in the literature, on the different definitions given by the authors or on the different dimensions that appear associated to the constructs. Despite the challenges found, one of the key objectives of the systematic review performed was to find what has been the common ground among researchers, around the topic. In concrete, on the one hand, to understand what have been the most well accepted perspectives, definitions, dimensions, scales and related constructs and, on the other hand, to analyse the main differences of what has been presented until now. Having that in mind, when analysing the theoretical perspectives and the nature of authenticity, it seems that, three types of authenticity tend to be referred by different authors: objective authenticity, constructive/ constructivist authenticity and

existential authenticity. These types of authenticity are many times associated with the relevance of iconic and indexical cues that are considered important to build the perception of authenticity. However, although there seems to be some common ground among some researchers about the types of authenticity, other perspectives emerge. Therefore, concepts like pure authenticity, approximate authenticity and moral authenticity, also appear. Within tourism and hospitality literature, it seems that the authenticity concept is being organized around three main perspectives: objectivist, constructivist and postmodern.

Authenticity has, in fact, been studied across different research disciplines and, therefore, it is applied to objects, subjects, experiences, places, among others. Within marketing research, and based on the literature review performed, it seems that many studies can be organized around two different streams of research: authenticity as an attribute of a person (e.g. employee authenticity) and authenticity as an attribute of an object (e.g. brand authenticity). In fact, when authenticity is applied in the context of brands, the construct of brand authenticity appears, associated with a specific market offering (object or service). Based on the different definitions of the construct and particularly on the ones that have been mostly referred by the authors, it can be concluded that brand authenticity is, many times, associated with a brand being genuine, real, true to itself and its consumers and with a consistent behaviour, reflecting its values. Many authors also identify key attributes that they consider to be fundamental for a brand to be considered authentic.

The majority of the analysed articles assume that authenticity and brand authenticity are multi-dimensional constructs and, concerning measurement scales, it is possible to conclude that that the scales developed by Bruhn et al. (2012), Napoli et al. (2014), Schallehn et al. (2014) and Morhart et al. (2015) are the ones that seem to act as a reference to measure brand authenticity. Although the dimensions integrated in the scales are different, it is possible to find communalities among the different dimensions considered.

Several constructs have also been identified as antecedents and/or consequences of authenticity and brand authenticity, impacting the analysed constructs, separately or in combinations with each other. However, the analysis, especially in the case of the antecedents has not been straight forwards as some constructs have been considered by some authors as an antecedent of brand authenticity and by other authors as a dimension of brand authenticity, which can lead to some confusion. However, also in this topic, some common ground can be found. In the case of the antecedents, it can be concluded that Perception of iconicity/ Iconic cues, Perception of indexicality/ Indexical cues, Rarity, Stability, Family firm image, Manufacturing factors and Marketing factors/ Perceived Brand marketing communications are the constructs that have been studied by more researchers (in two or more studies) as antecedents. In the case of the consequences, the ones that have been studied by more

researchers (in five or more studies) are: Brand attitudes, Purchase intention/ willingness to buy/ brand choice intention/ consumption behavior, Brand attachment, Trust and Loyalty.

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