

# What consumers mean when they say your products are authentic

May 7 2021, by Matt Weingarden

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Researchers from University of Southern California, Bocconi University, and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam published a new paper in the *Journal of Marketing* that explains the six types of judgements

consumers make when determining a product's authenticity and how marketers can use this insight to deliver more authentic offerings.

The study, forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing*, is titled "The Concept of Authenticity: What it Means to Consumers" and is authored by Joseph Nunes, Andrea Ordanini, and Gaia Giambastiani.

Consumers crave [authenticity](#). Yet marketing itself is typically considered inherently inauthentic. Hence, firms must learn to understand, manage, and excel at rendering authenticity. The critical question is: how? Marketers who wish to deliver authentic consumption experiences would benefit from guidance regarding ways to enhance [consumers'](#) assessments of the authenticity of their offerings. The starting point is knowing what consumers mean when they talk about authenticity, a nebulous concept.

Nunes says "When consumers talk about authentic consumption experiences, they really are referencing six types of judgements they make involving: accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency." Accuracy refers to the seller being transparent and reliable in what is conveyed to consumers.

Connectedness describes consumers' feelings of engagement and at times a sense of transformation. Integrity means the source is seen as intrinsically motivated, while acting autonomously and consistently. Legitimacy refers to conformity in terms of adhering to norms, standards, rules, or traditions. Originality refers to a product or service standing out from the mainstream. Finally, proficiency refers to the display of skills, craftsmanship, and/or expertise in the offering.

Knowing that judgments of accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency are what comprise assessments of authenticity, managers can more efficiently and effectively deduce actionable strategies in terms of positioning. Ordanini continues, "From

this research, practitioners can also tell which of these six judgments to emphasize and when in their customer marketing and communications. For example, companies selling hedonic products should see relatively large returns perception-wise from emphasizing proficiency because it matters more for hedonic products than for utilitarian products." The mattress company Tuft & Needle (what is more hedonic than sleep?) illustrates this by focusing on their belief in "quality craftsmanship without the gimmicks" on their website.

**More information:** Joseph C. Nunes et al, EXPRESS: The Concept of Authenticity: What it Means to Consumers, *Journal of Marketing* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/0022242921997081](https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242921997081)

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