# AUTHENTICITY IN FOOD MARKETING

The Effects of Authentic Marketing on Consumer Evaluations

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## Abstract

Western European food producers have to hedge against rising competition that can provide similar quality at low(er) prices. The long tradition and history of the Dutch agricultural industry suggests that an emphasis on the heritage and pedigree of the domestic agriculture in food marketing can offer a strategic entry point for such a hedge on both domestic and foreign markets. There is a lack of scientific insight into the effect of authenticity on consumer evaluations regarding food products, and into the question whether nationality effects and perceptions of manipulative intent on behalf of the consumer have an influence on these evaluations.

This MSc thesis therefore aimed to gain quantitative insight into the effect of authenticity marketing on consumer evaluations of food products. It furthermore researched whether a match between the nationality of consumer and product is beneficial to such evaluations, and investigated whether a consumer's perception of manipulative intent moderates the effect of authenticity marketing on consumer evaluations. Therefore did a survey map respondents' willingness to pay, purchase intention and perceived quality with regard to products shown in an advertisement. Results show that there is no overall effect of authentic marketing on consumer evaluations. There is, however, a relationship between nationalities of consumer and product. Perceived manipulative intent furthermore has no moderation effect on the relationship of authentic marketing and consumer evaluations.

# 1   Introduction

The Dutch farming sector, which is currently the second largest exporting agriculture in the world with a total volume of €75.5 billion 2012 and a productivity as much as 5 times higher than the European average (Holland Trade, 2013), is a major driver of the domestic economy. It provides significant added value to the country, and creates and maintains employment to the Dutch. A great part of the Dutch society and business environment relies on its strong agricultural sector; universities like Wageningen UR and private R&D players are focused on food technology and -consumption.

However, the Netherlands is a small country with a total area of just 41,503 km², of which 55.6% are arable (World Bank Group, 2015). Striving economies of Eastern Europe and Central Asia have much more land available; the Czech Republic, for instance, has 78,866 km² land, of which 55% are arable. This arable area almost encompasses the entire area of the Netherlands (World Bank Group, 2015). These growing economies inhabit an increasing number of large-scale farming corporations (Koester, 2003), which will pose an increasing threat to the demand for Dutch agricultural products in the coming years. The Netherlands has a long history of agriculture, which is strongly intertwined with culture and society (Bieleman, 1991). This long history, the cultural heritage connected to it and the strong scientific fields around it can be seen as a possible entry point for a strategy that hedges against the risk of declining demand due to foreign farming industries that the Dutch agricultural sector might encounter in the future.

One probable solution from a consumer behaviour perspective is that consumers must be able to learn from its packaging that the food product they're seeing in the shelf is from the Netherlands, and that it has a long history of generations of Dutch putting in all their knowledge to deliver the high quality product you can buy today. This brings a closely related current concept in marketing research to mind: Authenticity. Nowadays, many companies utilise their potential for authenticity marketing (originality, history, tradition, etc.) to market their products more effectively. It is not something that is tangible or visible, but it is more a "socially constructed interpretation of the essence of what is observed rather than inherent to an object" (Beverland & Farelli, 2010). The emphasis in this lies in the fact that authenticity is something that can be constructed. Scholars suggest that consumers attach numerous positive attributes to "authentic" products, like a superior

morality, trendiness, environmental considerations as well as cultural and historical factors (Autio et al., 2013). It has furthermore been concluded that consumers actually seek authenticity (Beverland & Farelli, 2010) and prefer brands that reinforce their desired personal identity. As Brown, Kozniets and Sherry (2003) found, in times of economic hardships and uncertainties, nostalgia (which is linked to authenticity; Hamilton & Wagner, 2014) "provides a sense of comfort" to consumers.

## 1.1    Scope & Contribution

This thesis will examine the concept of authenticity and its effect on consumer perceptions of Dutch food products. This works towards a marketing approach to hedge against the issues that have been introduced previously. The impact of authenticity branding on perceptions of, for instance, quality, purchase intention or other prominent concepts in consumer literature will provide managerial implications for a marketing strategy that caters sustainable long-term competitive advantage.

Authenticity as a concept can be found back in various strains of marketing and consumer behaviour literature, and is attributed attention in practice, as well. In his New Marketing Manifesto, John Grant (a practicing marketing consultant) stated, "Authenticity is the benchmark against which all brands are now judged" (Grant, 1999). Others have said that it is "one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing" (Brown et al., 2003). Scholars have found that consumers increasingly seek happiness and meaning in our globalised world with its abundance of stimuli, and by that, increasingly seek authenticity as well (Liao & Ma, 2009).

However, quantitative consumer research dealing with authenticity in the context of food products is limited. There are articles dealing with authenticity in a qualitative or meta-analytic manner (Hamilton & Wagner, 2014; Beverland, 2005; Alexander, 2009; Brown et al., 2003), also in relation to food and beverages (Beverland, 2005 (2); Autio et al., 2013). Some have investigated the benefits that "authentic" food can bring to tourism (Sims, 2009; Beer, 2008), while others are more focussed on food technology and intrinsic aspects of food (e.g. Lees, 2003; Dean, Murphy & Downey, 2006), political considerations of "gastro-nationalism" (DeSoucey, 2010) or psychological conceptualisations regarding authenticity and the self (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Yet, there is a significant gap in

literature regarding the application of authentic marketing cues on products that have no intrinsic authenticity value (unlike e.g. luxury wine labels or traditional Dutch cheeses). Further is there a gap regarding the effect that such cues would have on outcome variables (e.g. purchase intention) that provide insight into the translation of authenticity marketing in in-store behaviour.

As there is a narrow range of literature that specifically investigates consumer responses to food produces in relation with authenticity branding, this paper will contribute to filling this gap by quantitatively testing these responses by means of an online experimental treatment. Insights from such an analysis contribute both to academic marketing intelligence by statistical analyses and to practical marketing strategy through translation of those analyses into managerial implications. To add further depth and specialisation to this contribution, this thesis will comparatively analyse Dutch and German consumers to investigate whether there is an interaction between the nationalities of the consumers on the one hand and the nationality of the product on the other hand. This consumer-nationality linkage additionally adds value to the practical implications provided by this paper, and will be named "nationality match" in the following. It is expected that authenticity branding will have a positive effect on Dutch and German consumer perceptions about Dutch and German food products in general. It is expected that Dutch consumers will value Dutch products as more authentic, while Germans value German products as more authentic.

Current literature on consumer responses to authenticity branding implies that it is indeed a quantitatively measurable and statistically significant, and therefore scientifically viable, concept (Napoli et al., 2014; Eggers et al., 2013). However, these scholars are either focussed on business performance or concept building and testing. The concept of authenticity in branding itself has been treated by many scholars (e.g. Hamilton & Wagner, 2014; Beverland, 2005; Alexander, 2009; Brown et al., 2003), in relation to food, as well (Autio et al., 2013). This thesis will investigate the possibilities the impact of authenticity marketing on consumers' judgements of a food product. Quantitative data will provide a comprehensive analysis of these judgements relative to products that were not branded by means of the concept of authenticity. With this insight, the effectiveness of such a marketing approach can be determined. To add more contrast and validity to this data, a

matched study will be executed in Germany, which has a similar history and importance to its agricultural sector as the Netherlands. Based upon that, the following research question is proposed:

- Does Authenticity-Branding affect the way Dutch and German consumers perceive a Dutch or German food product advertisement?
    - Is there an effect of the "Nationality Match" on perceptions of Dutch or German consumers on Dutch or German food product advertisements?
    - Does perceived manipulative intent influence the effect of authenticity marketing on food product advertisements?

## 2      Literature & Theory

### 2.1      CONCEPTUALISATION

There are several different opinions as to what authenticity in the context of marketing means and what it encompasses. Synonyms of authenticity include "natural, ethical, simple, honest, sustainable, human and rooted" (Boyle, 2003). Its etymological origin presumably lies in the Greek *authentikos,* which stands for "original, principal, and genuine".

Nicholas Alexander's (2009) overview of authenticity literature refers to the definition of authenticity as "the process of creation and the physical materials used in the creation process or by constructive values that are subjective and derived from users' perceptions of authenticity". This, however, originates from research in the field of leisure and tourism and is therefore not an optimal definition for a research in the domain of consumer sciences. Leigh *et al.* (2006), who researched effects of authenticity cues on the car manufacturer MG, offer another approach to the definition, which originated from Grayson & Martinec (2004): [object authenticity is created when] "objects have a factual and spatiotemporal link with the world" or "they physically resemble something that is […] authentic". A more pragmatic and straightforward definition coming from a technical point of view is that "authentic food is one that is what it purports to be" (Dean, Murphy & Downey, 2005), which is, again, not optimal in the context of consumer research, as it

disregards the aspect of social construction that is inherent to the concept of authenticity. Authenticity is furthermore described to base on "consumers' mental perspectives of how things ought to look" (Beverland, 2005), which is a more simple and consumer-based description of authenticity that aims at the same underlying substance. Many of the various definitions of authenticity include a statement in the sense of "authenticity means being authentic", which is neither informative nor satisfactory, especially from an editorial point of view, as it merely refers to an adjective of the same root word. Thus, it makes sense to look at the definition of that adjective as provided by a standard dictionary rather than just using that very adjective as a pretext for not having a good definition of authenticity. "Authentic" is defined as being "of undisputed origin" (and not a copy) or "genuine" (Oxford University Press, 2015). Consequently, authenticity in this thesis refers to "being or being perceived as genuine".

It may occur that aspects of authenticity of a product are not crafted or intrinsic, but rather constructed by individuals and society (e.g. Beverland, 2006; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Thompson et al., 2006; DeLyser, 1999; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009); this has been referred to as symbolic authenticity (Leigh et al, 2006). Consumers do this because "self-authenticating" benefits them and acts as a means to maintain control over themselves and to stay connected to their social environment (Beverland & Farelli, 2010). A fundamental aspect one has to be aware of when researching authenticity is that this concept has is often seen as "ruse rather than reality" (Alexander, 2009). This constructed form of authenticity is referred to as "staged authenticity" in tourism literature (MacCannell, 1973). This implies that almost any product can be marketed as authentic, regardless of its origin and properties. The efficiency of such a marketing technique may be very different between, for instance, cars, banks or retail chains. In principle, the concept should then be applicable to almost any type of product or service. Authenticity can furthermore derive from inherence, historical relations, organisational structure and nature, or, as mentioned before, just be contrived (Beverland, 2005). This again points out that authenticity is very versatile and can thus be constructed and applied in various manners.

It is important to point out that literature mentions three sources of which authenticity can be derived: object, community and the self (Beverland, 2006). The proven existence of authenticity as derived from objects induces that a consumer's desire for authenticity can

be saturated by means of consumption of products (objects) that are perceived as authentic, which might explain why consumers value authenticity in products.

There are six attributes (also referred to as "dimensions" in the following chapters) that influence authenticity which have been confirmed by prior quantitative research: heritage and pedigree (1), stylistic consistency (2), quality commitments (3), relationship to place (4), method of production (5) and downplaying commercial motives (6) (Beverland, 2006). These dimensions will be used as a pivot for designing an advertisement that evokes consumer's perceptions of authenticity, and will therefore be explicitly expounded in the following section.


## 2.2 THE DIMENSIONS OF AUTHENTICITY

The following section will elaborate on the conceptual composition of authenticity following Beverland's research (Beverland, 2006). This elaboration will be used as a basis and guidance for the construction of products and advertisements to be used as manipulation in the data collection, and includes a statement of the presumed effect of each item.


### 2.2.1  Heritage & Pedigree

This attribute of authenticity refers to an object's connection to the past. When a product has heritage, it has had consistently high levels of quality, from past to present. In case a product is able to hold up to this standard, it is attributed pedigree, as well. According to qualitative research on premium wine brands, this leads to consumers having higher expectations on quality on the one hand, while accepting a price premium on the other hand (Beverland, 2006).

Heritage and pedigree are likely to have a positive effect on the Dutch and German consumers' evaluations of authenticity of food products, and may even lead to consumers accepting a price premium (while expecting higher quality, though) as well, This can be explained by the fact that heritage refers to something highly valued due to its longevity and history. Dutch consumers, for instance, might evaluate a Dutch Elstar apple, a typical fruit from the Netherlands that has been around since the 1950's, to be superior to a new generic breed of apples because they connect memories from their childhood to it.

### 2.2.2  Stylistic Consistency

As its name suggests, this attribute indicates the steadiness and reliability of a products parameters, mostly related to design over time. This does not mean, however, that a product's properties should not be changed at all in order to maintain authenticity Beverland, 2006). An example for a product that shows stylistic consistency is Heineken Beer, which has changed its appearance over the years, but only incrementally, not reactionary to every short-termed trend.

Stylistic consistency will have a positive effect on consumers' evaluations of Dutch and German food products' authenticity, as it relates to one essential factor of being authentic: the assurance that next time I buy this product, it will still have the same extrinsic properties.


### 2.2.3  Quality Commitments

For a product to be authentic, consumers expect the manufacturer to spare neither trouble nor expense when it comes to the quality of their product. Others have defined quality commitment as "the extent to which an individual is identified with and is involved in a quality job […]" (Lee & Peccei, 2006). Here, "individual" refers to employees of the producing company, reflecting how much every one should be attached to the products they're making in order to deliver superior quality. This is, according to literature, noticeable by consumers in the end. Committing to quality is worth the investment because consumers greatly appreciate that and value the brand higher (Beverland, 2006). This is why, for this research, quality commitment will likely have a positive effect on consumer evaluations.


### 2.2.4  Relationship to Place - or Country of Origin?

Another element of authenticity according to Beverland is the product's (or brand's) relationship to place. This is particularly interesting for this research, as this research compares consumers of two different countries and their evaluations of the authenticity of a product. In Beverland's study on luxury wines, the relationship to place played an important role in authenticity evaluations (Beverland, 2006). We expect that in this thesis, relationship to place will have a positive effect on consumer evaluations, especially because national products are much more likely to be purchased than products from anywhere else in the world (Hu, Woods & Ernst, 2012).

The issue with an application of the dimension of "relationship to *place*" is that the focus of this paper will lie in the analysis of the effect of *nationality matches between consumer and product.* Place and nationality are not the same things - the dimension of place in the context of authenticity has a more narrowed-down essence in spatial terms. Place, as for instance in Beverland's works on wine brands, refers to *regions.* This means that for example the Champagne in France, Limburg in the Netherlands or the Schwarzwald in Germany fall under that term. Yet, "made in the Netherlands" does not. However, previous research has proven that the *country of origin* of a product does have an effect on consumer evaluations (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). This has been found for German and Dutch consumers, in particular, as well (Okechuku, 1994).

This implies that authenticity literature focuses on a geographically smaller scale when it comes to locational aspects, while this paper concentrates on nationality aspects, which are proven to be relevant for consumers, as well. Therefore, I will augment the concept of authenticity by changing the scope of the relationship-to-place-dimension to a national focus. Questions asked to participants of the data collection measure will be specified in such a way that it is absolutely clear that nationality, not locality, is the focus of this research.

2.2.5  Method of Production

The method of production is the fifth attribute identified by Beverland (2006) that builds authenticity. In the case of luxury wines, consumers were highly interested in the method of production. The impact of this aspect on consumer responses on authenticity should be largely positive, since consumers mostly have positive attitudes towards "unconventional" production methods (e.g. Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Magnusson et al., 2001). Framing products as "made by Dutch farmers" serves to combine the attributes of relationship to place and production method, which is expected to have a jointly positive effect on consumer evaluations.

2.2.6  Downplaying Commercial Motives

Downplaying commercial motives is the sixth attribute of authenticity as defined by Beverland in 2005 and, in context of his research, turned out to be a deciding factor for consumer response (Beverland, 2005). This dimension will, too, play a role in this thesis,

since it reflects the general scepticism of a consumer who suspects commercial motives to be underlying. It might even have a negative effect when it is too obvious that there are commercial motives that are just covered desultorily, so that it is easy for consumers to "smell the rat" and avoid the product afterwards.


## 2.3    MEASURING CONSUMER EVALUATIONS

In order to grasp the impact that authenticity has on consumer evaluations of a product, it is necessary to operationalize that impact. There is a vast number of concepts that could be transformed into outcome variables for this thesis, as for instance a consumer's willingness to pay (WTP) or his perception on quality regarding a product. The following section will define and apply selected relevant concepts from the domain of consumer research that are eligible for use as outcome (dependent) variables, which will be applied simultaneously. The scale of an MSc thesis suggests that this study will focus on three dependent variables to use as outcome indicators in the coming quantitative analysis of authenticity. These dependent variables are chosen under the premise that they should be both theoretically and practically relevant in the context of marketing and consumer research.


### 2.3.1  Willingness to Pay

One concept that helps to operationalize the impact of authenticity is the consumer's willingness to pay, which is the maximum amount at which someone would purchase a product. A consumer "would not buy [the product] if it costs more than this amount, but is eager to buy it if it costs less" (Krugman, Wells & Graddy, 2007). Using willingness to pay (hereafter often referred to as "WTP") as a dependent variable in this research adds a monetary dimension to the consumer's product evaluation, which might lead to interesting results later on. After all is a price premium, which is to be found by comparing WTP's of authenticity-branded and non-authenticity-branded products, considered to be a key indicator of a brand's strength (Aaker, 1996). Furthermore can a person's willingness to pay for a service or product be seen as an indication of the degree of that person's satisfaction with the service or product (Homburg et al., 2005). Willingness to pay is a straightforward and practical measure of the consumer-side of a key question in marketing and product development: how much should my product cost? Due to the mentioned

facets and applications of WTP, it will be used to measure the impact of authenticity branding on consumers. This concept can be measured directly by means of an open-ended question (Miller et al., 2011).

### 2.3.2  Purchase Intention

One way to learn how consumers evaluate products is to ask them about their intentions to purchase a certain product. Purchase intention is a routine tool in consumer research (Kalwani & Silk, 1982), mainly because "the best single predictor of an individual's behaviour will be a measure of his intention to perform that behaviour" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It has furthermore been found that purchase intention stands in correlation to brand credibility (Jeng, 2016), which indicates that purchase intention can serve as an indicator of the success or impact of a marketing strategy. Additionally, scholars have demonstrated that purchase intention is a concept that reflects a consumer's perception of the value of a product, (Chang & Wildt, 1994), which again demonstrates that the measurement of a consumer's intention to buy a certain product can serve as a good measurement for the success of marketing efforts.

### 2.3.3  Perceived Quality

A further interesting concept in this context is the consumer's perception of quality regarding the product. Quality is also reflected in Beverland's six dimensions of authenticity (Beverland, 2006). In contrast to physical quality, perceived quality is *the consumer's evaluation* of a product's overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml, 1988). Perception of quality is a representation of abstract beliefs about the quality of a product, and entails both intrinsic and extrinsic attributes and cues (Ophuis & Van Trijp, 1995). The advantage of using perceived quality to measure consumer evaluation is that it is a combined representation of a number of underlying factors, e.g. appearance, colour, shape, but also price or product information (Ophuis & Van Trijp, 1995). Quality is furthermore known to be a core aspect to consider for the creating of competitive advantage, which is, for instance, reflected in Michael Porter's differentiation strategy (Murray, 1988).

## 2.4     THE NATIONALITY MATCH

The implementation of a so-called "nationality match" as factor to consider in the authenticity product evaluation causality gives information on the influence of "national branding" in consumer evaluations on authenticity. That is, do Dutch consumers value Dutch products as more authentic than for example German products? And what about Germans?

The motivation to do this research originated from the concern that Central European food producers will have to find efficient ways to fight off increasing competition, especially from Eastern Europe and Asia. The nationality match contributes to that scope because it will clarify the hypothesis that there is a correlation between authentic branding and nationality, and therefore gives implications on the effectiveness of the use of nationality as a cue in authenticity branding.

Giving both Dutch and German consumers a German and a Dutch product to evaluate and comparing those scores will assess the possible existence of a nationality match. This effect will most likely act as a positive factor to the relationship between authentic treatments and consumer evaluations. This means that the fact that a Dutch person realises the product is originating from the Netherlands results in more positive evaluations. The assumption that this effect will turn out to be positive is based upon the fact that nationality of the product itself is known to have an impact on product evaluations (Hulland, 1999).

## 2.5     MANIPULATIVE INTENT

As mentioned before, authenticity is to some extent a socially constructed phenomenon (e.g. Beverland, 2006; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Thompson et al., 2006; DeLyser, 1999; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009). Hence, it might occur that consumers are aware of manipulation through marketing messages, and react in a negative manner accordingly (Campbell, 1995; Cotte, Coulter & Moore, 2005). This may result in refrain from purchase after all. Such an inference of manipulative intent possibly affects the extent of authenticity that a consumer sees in a product. Inference of manipulative intent is defined as "consumer inferences that the advertiser is attempting to persuade by inappropriate, unfair, or manipulative means" (Campbell, 1995). Participants of the proposed experiment will be asked to evaluate products that are designed by the author of this thesis to have an

authentic appearance, which shows that a manipulative intent is given. This lack of intrinsic authenticity of the product at hand validates the usage of this variable, because it is, in fact, a manipulation of the respondent in the sense that they will be manipulated to believe that the product is an authentic Dutch or German food product, while it is in fact not intrinsically authentic at all. It is expected that when consumers perceive the advertisement to have a manipulative intent, their perceptions on authenticity will be harmed, as it does not appear to be genuine. Manipulative intent will thus presumably negatively moderate the relationship between an authenticity treatment and a consumers intention to purchase the product at hand, because the fact that one perceives to be manipulated could lead to the neglect of the product in favour of a product that is not perceived to attempt to manipulate oneself. The same goes for willingness to pay; it is expected that ones willingness to pay for a product that is believed to manipulate oneself is lower than when there is no perception of manipulation. Likewise will this perception of manipulative intent possibly harm the perception of quality of the product.

## 2.6      THE EFFECT OF AUTHENTICITY ON CONSUMER EVALUATIONS

### 2.6.1   Willingness to Pay

Willingness to pay is expected to be positively influenced by an authenticity treatment. The context of the literature mentioned in the earlier paragraphs suggests that authenticity can be used to make a product appear to be genuine, of undisputed origin, and of higher quality. This leads to the point that a consumer should be willing to pay more for a product that is marketed as being authentic, as long as the marketing strategy is effective and the product is perceived as being authentic.

### 2.6.2   Purchase Intention

Due to the same reasoning as presented in the previous paragraph, it can be assumed that an authenticity treatment will increase the intention to purchase this product. Or, more precisely and contextually speaking, a consumer will show a higher purchase intention for an "authentic" product than for a regular one, since it includes cues that insinuate a higher quality and/or value of the product. This is assumed under the condition that there is either no price for the respective products given.

### 2.6.3 Perceived Quality

This measure directly reflects one of the dimensions of authenticity, which induces the assumption that an authentically marketed product relates to a higher quality perception in the consumer. It thus expected that when a consumer evaluates a product that is marketed authentically, it would have a positive effect on quality perception, since quality is an aspect intrinsic to authenticity itself. The actual quality of the product does admittedly not change, but this thesis hypothesises that authenticity marketing also affects consumer evaluations of a product that is marketed authentically even though it does not possess intrinsic quality. Consequentially, this would affect quality perception.

### 2.6.4 Manipulative Intent

The explanation of the effect of authenticity on manipulative intent differs from the previous paragraphs since it is not used as a dependent, but as a moderator variable. Manipulative intent has to do with a sensation of being manipulated by an advertisement or product. It is assumed that a *high* perception of manipulation accounts for a decrease of the means of the mentioned dependent variables. A *low* perception of manipulative intent accounts for an opposite moderation effect. It is *not* implied that a message is perceived as manipulative or not, which then influences perceptions of authenticity itself, which is not accounted for in the scope of this thesis. More precisely, it is hypothesized that a perception of manipulation moderates the effect that the treatment of authenticity has on the dependent variables. This means that, when a message is perceived as manipulative, the "translation" of an authentic treatment into a higher WTP, PI and PQ is negatively impacted.

<u>2.6.5   Hypotheses</u>

The following hypotheses are therefore induced by means of the previous literature analysis:

H1: Authenticity branding positively affects consumer evaluations on food products, regarding Willingness to Pay, Purchase Intention and Perceived Quality.

H2: The nationality match will account for differences in means between matched and non-matched participants, and positively influence the relationship between authenticity and the dependent variables.

H3: Perceived manipulative intent negatively moderates the relationship between authenticity branding and consumer evaluations.

The hypothesis stated under H1 is built up following the logic from literature. The hypothesis that authenticity influences consumer evaluations of a product is a means to quantify the suggestions from existing literature regarding the effect of authenticity. Instead of researching how measures of authenticity itself are affected by "authentic marketing", the focus lies on the assessment of the *impact* of such a marketing treatment.

H2 introduces the Nationality Match to the authenticity-consumer evaluation relationship. It is hypothesised that this match positively influences consumer evaluations, meaning that a match between Dutch consumer and Dutch product will show a higher effect on consumer evaluations than a match between a Dutch consumer and a German product. A visualisation of the whole mechanic is shown in figure 1 below. Current literature already attributes a spatial dimension to authenticity, so a match between nationality of participant and product should consequentially result in higher willingness to pay, quality perception and purchase intention.

H3 manifests the assumption that consumer evaluations of products (regarding authenticity) will deteriorate when the consumer suspects a manipulative intent behind the provided marketing messages. Most likely, a product will be perceived as less authentic

when such intent is assumed. The fact that the data collection of this thesis will resort to a made up product that has no intrinsic authenticity value suggests that there will be a certain level of manipulation perceived by respondents. This should have a diminishing effect on willingness to pay, perceived quality and purchase intention.
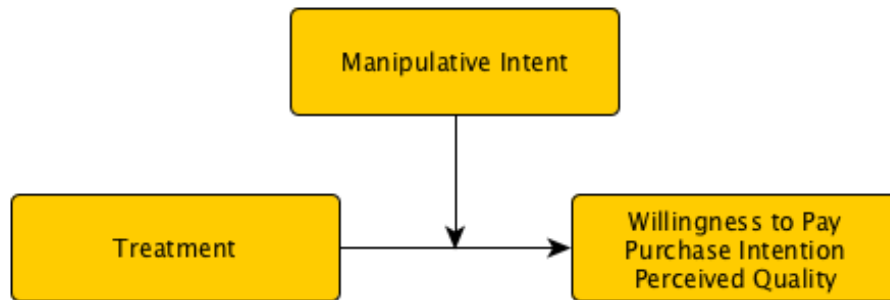


*Figure 1: Framework (not including Nationality Match)*

## 3 Methodology

To answer the proposed set of research questions, quantitative data has been gathered and a number of analyses have been performed. An experimental approach was useful in this context, as it provided the opportunity to test effects on both a treatment group and a control group, and thus check for the effectiveness of the proposed manipulation. Investigating the effects of such treatments requires attention towards (statistically significant) differences between the means of groups that received various treatments.

The "authentic" advertisement used to in this thesis was constructed using the six dimensions of authenticity as a guideline for marketing messages and cues on the product itself. Data gathering took place in two countries, the Netherlands and Germany, to measure the potential effects of the newly introduced nationality match. The experiment was designed and executed with the help of Qualtrics, an online survey platform that allows for extensive customisation regarding design, implementation and analysis of such a quantitative approach. Two surveys were designed in order to provide the potential

participants of this study with a setting that is as convenient as possible for them: one in Dutch, and one in German. All texts were identical, since the "basis" for the survey was created in English, and subsequently translated into Dutch and English, and thus split in two. These translated versions were each reviewed by a native speaker.

## 3.1     PARTICIPANTS & DESIGN

A limit on age, gender, socio-economic status or other demographic factors of potential respondents would have only hindered the generalizability results, since these results could then not be applied to consumers outside of that limit. This is why any respondents willing to take part in the survey were considered appropriate for this research. Exclusion would be children, which were not approached for data collection. Additionally, sampling was done anonymously, both via distribution of invitations to an online experiment through e-mail, or via advertisement on social media. This way, selection biases were mitigated, and the representativeness of the study is given (Moore & McGabe, 1989). This means that the experiment has been shared via various social media channels, as well as via e-mail and word-of-mouth, so the overall method that was applied to gather participants can be regarded as a form of *convenience sampling* (Ferber, 1977). Since these online distribution methods are not quite transparent in terms of participants since the researcher does not have any direct contact to a respondent, it is crucial to include a section on demographics in the experiment (Sue & Ritter, 2008). This way, an assessment regarding the representativeness and external validity of the experiment becomes possible.

### 3.1.1  Number of participants & Division across conditions

The survey software Qualtrics randomised the division across conditions. Both of the surveys contained a randomisation tool that distributed respondents across 4 conditions each, with the goal of reaching a balanced N across all conditions. The two questionnaires that were distributed resulted in a total of N=162 completed responses. The split between nationalities is perfectly even, which gives N(Dutch)=N(German)=81. A detailed visualisation of the number of participants is shown in table 1 below. All eight conditions have around 20 observations, with the exception of the German control group, which contains N=27 observations.

In order to be able to draw conclusions about the effect of authenticity branding strategies on dependent variables, a number of conditions were created (see figure 2). Control conditions serve as comparative measure for that matter. Since testing the nationality match is one central objective of this paper, both treatment- and control conditions were created for both Dutch and German products. Additionally, both German and Dutch recipients got to evaluate either a German or a Dutch product. This means that there are eight total conditions, of which each four treatment- and four control conditions:

1. Dutch Respondent - Dutch Product – Treatment
2. Dutch Respondent - Dutch Product - Control
3. Dutch Respondent - German Product - Treatment
4. Dutch Respondent - German Product - Control
5. German Respondent - German Product - Treatment
6. German Respondent - German Product - Control
7. German Respondent - Dutch Product - Treatment
8. German Respondent - Dutch Product – Control



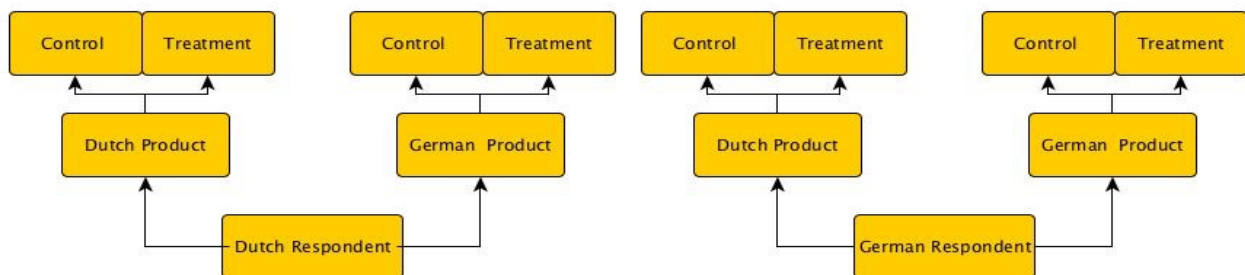*Figure 2: Visualisation of experimental conditions*

*Table 1: Number of participants in experimental conditions*

| N | Treatment | | Control | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant | NL | DE | NL | DE |
| NL | 20 | 20 | 19 | 22 |
| DE | 18 | 18 | 18 | 27 |

### 3.1.2  Gender & Age

72.8% of Dutch respondents were female, while 42% of German respondents were female. The mean age of Dutch respondents was 22.04 years (SD= 3.13), while the mean age for German respondents was 35.85 (SD= 17.65). Detailed means and standard deviations across conditions can be found in table 2.

*Table 2: Means & Standard Deviations of participants' age*

| Age  [M(SD)] | Treatment | | Control | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant | NL | DE | NL | DE |
| NL | 21.5 (1.90) | 21.85 (2.72) | 21.74 (4.20) | 22.82 (3.30) |
| DE | 43.83 (20.59) | 31.94 (14.98) | 38.83 (19.81) | 31.15 (13.93) |

### 3.1.3  Incentive

Participation in this survey was in principal voluntary. The incentive to participate was increased by the prospect of winning a 10€ voucher, provided an e-mail address is given. The winners of these vouchers will be determined by a random number generation and informed via the e-mail address that was given when the thesis project has ended. These addresses were taken out of the dataset prior to the analysis to ensure that privacy is upheld.

## 3.2       PROCEDURE & VARIABLES

The choice for an online experiment (survey) rules out the testing of consumer evaluations about a tangible, physical product, which is why participants were shown an advertisement for a fictional product that was created in Photoshop. The basis, meaning the blank packaging, background, font and text positioning were the same across all conditions. The difference between treatment- and control conditions lied in the ad text (all versions can be found in the appendix) and a reference to the country of origin of the product. The advertisement used for condition 4 can be seen in figure 3 below as an example.

*Figure 3: Advertisement used in condition 4*

The first thing that was shown when opening the survey was a small introduction text that included obligatory factors like a confidentiality statement, an indication of the length of the survey and a hint that an advertisement will be shown, which should be read carefully in order to be able to answer all questions. Then, depending on the Qualtrics randomisation algorithm, one out of four possible advertisements was shown to the respondent. Recipients of the Dutch invitation to the survey were randomly divided across conditions 1-4. Recipients of the German invitation link were randomly divided across conditions 4-8, respectively. Then, questions on the dependent variables, for instance regarding purchase intention ("I would buy this product if it was available in my supermarket" and "It is probable that I would buy this product if "Chips" were on my shipping list") were asked. Instead of presenting all the survey questions here in a flowing text will paragraph 3.2.1 entail a list of asked questions in the order that they were experienced by the respondent. Questions on Age, Gender and nationality (to make sure the respondents are actually German or Dutch, not just speakers of the respective languages) were asked after questions on dependent variables.

3.2.1  Scale Adaptation & Introduction of variables

As mentioned, the effect of the experimental manipulations was measured by the dependent variables purchase intention, willingness to pay, perceived quality and manipulative intent. Justification for the use of these dependent variables can be found in chapter 2.3. Questions on purchase intention, willingness to pay and perceived quality were asked to be answered on 7-point Likert scales (e.g. ranging from 1 - "fully disagree", to 7 - "fully agree"), which is a common and useful tool in this field of science (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

1) Purchase intention

Purchase Intention is best measured on a 7-point-scale (Kalwani & Silk, 1982), where respondents are asked whether they plan to buy the product in the future. This way, the concept of purchase intention is fully captured. The constructed variable for purchase intention will be named "purchase intention" in the following.

I.  "I would buy this product if it were available in my local supermarket".
II. "On a scale from 1 to 7, how likely is it that you would buy this product if Chips were on your shopping list?"

There was furthermore a simple question asked: "Would you buy this product?". Here, participants could either answer "yes" or "no". This item will be used to add further depth, and will be referred to as "Willingness to Buy" in the following.

2) Willingness to Pay

For this item, respondents were asked directly which amount they would pay for the product during their regular shopping chores. This is a commonly applied method to capture the amount that someone is willing to pay for a product or service (Miller et al., 2011). The constructed variable for willingness to pay will be called "willingness to pay", or in short, "WTP" in the following.

3) Perceived Quality

The consumers' perception of quality of the product is measured on a 7-point scale, where the perception of quality is based on scales that were used in earlier research on

authenticity (Napoli et al., 2014). The concept of perceived quality will be captured in the variable "perceived quality", or in short "PQ". Accordingly, the items that were used to test consumer evaluations on quality, on a 7-point-scale (from [1] "strongly disagree" to [7] "strongly agree") are:

I. "Quality is central to this product."
II. "Only the finest ingredients/materials are used in the manufacture of this product."
III. "The brand has a mark of distinction that signifies quality."

4) Manipulative intent

The proposed moderator Manipulative intent is measured on a 7-point-scale. The construct of manipulative intent will be called "manipulative intent", or short "MI" in the following.

I. "This product tries to persuade me that it is something which it isn't"
II. "The claims on this product seem false or exaggerated to me"
III. "The product tries to appear better than it is"

5) Nationality of the Participant

The nationality of the participant is relevant for an analysis regarding the nationality match, and is captured in the variable "nationality", which can have the two values "Dutch" (1) or "German" (2), and is constructed by grouping the participants of conditions 1-4 under the value "1" and participants of conditions 4-8 under the value "2".

6) Nationality of the advertised product

The nationality of the product is a second factor that has to be taken into account in the analysis of the hypothesised existence of a nationality match, and is captured in the variable "nationality of the advertised product" (or just advertisement), or in short "NatAd". NatAd can take the values "1" for Dutch products (conditions 1,2,7 and 8) or "2" for German products (conditions 3,4,5 and 6).

7) Match

The variable "match" is used for an assessment of the proposed nationality match, and depicts whether there is a match between participant nationality and nationality of the

advertised product. This variable has two values, "1" for a match between the previously mentioned factors (conditions 1,2,5 and 6) and "2" for a mismatch of these factors (conditions 3,4,7 and 8, respectively).

## 4    Analysis

As a fist step in the analysis, descriptive statistics were obtained, and are shortly explained and linked to assumptions regarding the validity of this thesis. This includes counts, ranges, means (as a measure for central tendency), standard deviations and variances (both as measures of variability), of all dependent variables.

It needs furthermore to be analysed whether the application of authenticity in the treatment condition had a significant impact on the means of the dependent variables (H1). To enable a statistically reliable statement on this, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with experimental conditions as independent variable needs to be performed. This ANOVA will reveal whether the differences between group means that presumably exist are significant. In order to capture as much data for as many hypotheses as possible, a three-way ANOVA was performed for each dependent variable, except manipulative intent. Manipulated intent was not assessed via an ANOVA because the point of adding this variable is not to investigate whether the treatment(s) had an effect on perceptions of manipulative intent. Insights from these analyses can be used to test H1. Independent samples t-tests were performed in order to gather statistical information with respect to each individual group (conditions 1 and 2, conditions 3 and 4, conditions 5 and 6, conditions 7 and 8).

Three-way-interactions between participant nationality, nationality of the advertised product and a variable that captures whether the respondent was in the treatment- or control group are used to analyse whether hypothesis 2 (H2) holds. These three-way-interactions are derived from the mentioned three-way ANOVA. Here, we firstly need to gain insight on whether the Dutch national - Dutch product relationship shows significant differences between treatment and control condition. Then, the same analysis needs to be

performed for the Dutch resident - German product relationship. This applies for German national – German product and German national – Dutch product relationships, too.

To test H3, it needs to be assessed whether the variable "manipulative intent" exerts a moderation effect on main effect between conditions and dependent variables. Andrew Hayes developed a model that provides syntax for statistical analysis for exactly this kind of problems, which is an approach to process analysis and is covered in his book "Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach" (Hayes, 2013) under "Model 1". The approach of this variant of process analysis is to "integrate moderation and mediation analysis and [is] used when one's analytical goal is to describe and understand the conditional nature of […] mechanisms by which a variable transmits its effect on another" (Hayes, 2013). This fits the context of H3 well. This model will be used to assess the moderation effect of manipulative intent on the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables WTP, PQ and PI. The independent variable in this case takes two values: either "1" for participants in treatment conditions, or "2" for participants in control conditions.
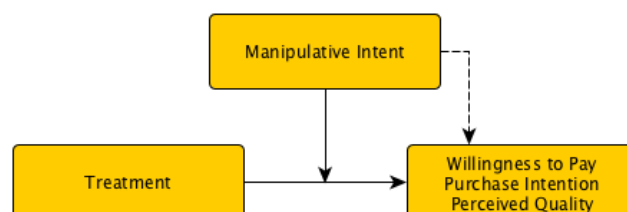


*Fig. 4: Model 1 after Hayes, 2013*

The results of the above mentioned analyses will be presented objectively per dependent variable in the following section(s). The choice to present results in this order has been made because every analysis has been carried out for each dependent variable separately on the one hand, and because it increases the reader's ability to follow the lines of argumentation later in the discussion and conclusion sections of this thesis on the other hand.

# 5    Results

## 5.1      WILLINGNESS TO PAY

The variable *willingness to pay* was measured in a very straightforward way: respondents were asked, "How much are you willing to pay for this product? (In €)", and were able to indicate their answer in a text box. Due to the fact that one item was used to reflect the concept of one's willingness to pay for a product, the variable "WTP" directly reflects the respondents indication of the price they would pay for the product in store. Since commas and currency signs were inconsistent in some instances (€3,95 versus 3.95€), the data had to be manually fitted to a format that is eligible for data analysis in SPSS, so "3.95" instead of "€3,95". After this was done, results showed that across all conditions, participants were willing to pay a minimum of €0.50 and a maximum of €4.95, with a mean of €1.81 and a standard deviation of €0.70. The model for a three-way-ANOVA with NatAd, nationality and treatment as factors and willingness to pay as dependent variable was significant ($F(7)=4.174$, $p<.001$). The following sections will discuss results for main effects, two-way interactions and three-way interactions that come forth from the ANOVA.

Table 3: Means & Standard Deviations Willingness to Pay

| WTP  [M(SD)] | Treatment | | Control | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant | NL | DE | NL | DE |
| NL | 1.68 (0.95) | 1.61 (0.61) | 1.61 (0.48) | 1.39 (0.48) |
| DE | 2.16 (0.69) | 2.21 (0.60) | 1.80 (0.48) | 2.07 (0.74) |

### 5.1.1   Main effects

The main effects of treatment ($F(1)=3.745$, $p=.05$) and nationality of the respondent ($F(1)=21.418$, $p<.001$) were significant as well. The main effect of the nationality of the advertised product (NatAd) did not return significant results ($F(1)=0.008$, $p=.98$).

### 5.1.2   2-Way Interactions

The analysis of 2-way interactions in this setting showed no significant results for NatAd*Nationality ($F(1)=2.275$, $p=.13$), NatAd*Treatment ($F(1)=0.023$, $p=.87$) or Nationality*Treatment ($F(1)=0.232$, $p=.63$).

### 5.1.3  3-Way Interaction

The proposed 3-way interaction could not be confirmed for willingness to pay as a dependent variable ($F(1)=0.837$, $p=.36$). There is thus no interaction between NatAd, Nationality (of respondent) and treatment.

### 5.1.4  Independent Samples T-Tests

In order to gain additional in-depth insights into presumed mean differences regarding the nationality match, independent samples t-tests have been carried out. These compare the following groups: Dutch respondent – Dutch product ($M=1.68$, $SD=0.95$) versus Dutch respondent – German product ($M=1.61$, $SD=0.61$) as well as German respondent – German product ($M=2.21$, $SD=0.60$) versus German respondent – Dutch product ($M=2.16$, $SD=0.69$). In the Dutch case, no significant mean difference has been found; $t(38)=0.268$, $p=.79$. The same holds for significance in mean differences between the German respondents in this case; $t(34)=0.25$, $p=.80$.

A t-test between conditions 1 and 2 did further not show significant mean differences; $t(37)=0.30$, $p=.77$. Same holds for conditions 3 and 4; $t(40)=1.35$, $p=.18$. The conditions 5 and 6 show a similar tendency; $t(43)=0.66$, $p=.51$. The mean comparison between conditions 7 and 8 gave the result closest to statistical significance in comparisons between treatment- and control conditions; $t(34)=1.82$, $p=.07$.

### 5.1.5  Process Analysis

Further, the moderation effect of the consumer's perception of the treatments manipulative intent was investigated. The regression model itself was weak but significant ($F(3)=2.98$, $p=.03$, $R=.23$, $R^2=.05$, $N=162$). However, no significant moderation effect of Manipulative Intent on the relationship between treatments and Willingness to Pay were found. The $R^2$ increase due to interaction between independent variable and MI was not significant ($F(1)=0.2208$, $p=.64$, $R^2$ -$chng=.001$, $N=162$).

## 5.2 PURCHASE INTENTION

The concept of purchase intention was reflected in two items: "I would buy this product if it was available in my supermarket" and "It is probable that I'd buy this product when chips were on my shopping list". Answers on both items were measured on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). In order for these two items to form a coherent construct for purchase intention, it has to be checked whether they form a single construct. This was achieved by regression analysis. Results showed that the construct is eligible for further analysis; the two predictors explain 63% of the variance (R=.251, F(2.159)=5,329, p=.006). It was found that the conditions significantly predict item 1 (β =.417, p=.005) and item 2 (β=.427, p=.002). This means that the two items represent a single construct, and will be treated as such. All in all, the mean for purchase intention (N=162) was 4.38, with a standard deviation of 1.61. The whole spread of possible answers was represented in the data (Min=1, Max=7). The overall 3-way model with purchase intention as a dependent variable was significant (F(7)=2.141, p=.04).

Table 4: Means & Standard Deviations Purchase Intention

| PI [M(SD)] | Treatment | | Control |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participant | NL | DE | NL |
| NL | 4.68 (1.46) | 4.07 (1.43) | 4.02 (1.42) |
| DE | 3.80 (1.79) | 5.39 (1.48) | 4.64 (1.77) |

### 5.2.1 Main Effects

Results regarding the main effects showed no significant results for nationality ($F(1)=2.914$, p=.09), NatAd ($F(1)=0.615$, p=.43) or treatment ($F(1)=0.666$, p=.41).

### 5.2.2 2-Way Interactions

According to this three-way analysis of variance, there is a 2-way interaction of NatAd*Nationality with respect to purchase intention ($F(1)=4.936$, p=.02). However, this interaction does not exist for NatAd*Treatment ($F(1)=1.407$, p=.24) and Nationality*Treatment ($F(1)=0.666$, p=.42).

## 5.2.3  3-Way Interactions

The assumed 3-way interaction NatAd*Nationality*Treatment has been confirmed by statistical analysis ($F(1)=4.639$, $p=.03$).

## 5.2.4  Independent Samples T-Tests

Independent samples t-tests as group comparisons between Dutch respondent – Dutch product ($M=4.68$, $SD=1.46$) versus Dutch respondent – German product ($M=4.07$, $SD=1.43$) as well as German respondent – German product ($M=5.39$, $SD=1.48$) versus German respondent – Dutch product ($M=3.80$, $SD=1.79$) showed no significance in the Dutch comparison; $t(38)=1.31$, $p=.20$. However, a significant difference between means has been found in the German group comparison; $t(34)=2.89$, $p=.007$.

Mean comparisons between treatment- and the respective control conditions resulted in no significant difference between conditions 1 and 2; $t(37)=1.04$, $p=.16$. Conditions 3 and 4 show a similar tendency; $t(40)=0.36$, $p=.72$. Same holds for conditions 5 and 6; $t(34)=1.71$, $p=.09$. There was no significant mean difference between groups 7 and 8; $t(34)=-1.40$, $p=.17$.

## 5.2.5  Process Analysis

Lastly, it needs to be mentioned that Hayes' process analysis failed to confirm the existence of a moderation effect of manipulative intent with respect to the dependent variable purchase intention. The overall regression model produced here is rather weak, but significant ($F(3)=5.38$, $p=.002$, $R=.30$, $R^2=.09$, $N=162$). Process analysis further analyses the $R^2$-increase due to interactions between MI and the independent variable. This analysis showed no significant increase $F(1)=0.41$, $p=.52$, $R^2$ -$chng=.002$, $N=162$.

## 5.3     PERCEIVED QUALITY

Three items measured the concept of perceived quality: "Quality is central to this product", "only the finest ingredients are used to manufacture this product" and "the product has a distinctive feature that signifies quality". These items were to be assessed on a 7-point scale.

To investigate whether these three items form a coherent construct, factor analysis (PCA) was performed. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of .700, which is above the recommended value of .6, and a Bartlett's test of Sphericity showed significance ($\chi 2(3)=166.092$, $p<.001$). Eigenvalues showed that the three extracted factors explained 72,7% (Factor 1), 16.4% (Factor 2) and 10.9% (Factor 3) of the total variance. Reliability analysis on the construct of 3 items indicates a good reliability ($\alpha=.801$). These results indicate a clear one-factor solution. Thus, one component was extracted, with primary factor loadings of .871, .874 and .810, respectively; all three items fit the construct. The mean for perceived quality was then 4.91 (SD=1.12), with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 7.

The constructed model for a 3-way-ANOVA is significant ($F(7)=2.553$, $p=.01$).

*Table 5: Means & Standard Deviations Perceived Quality*

| P.Qual [M(SD)] | Treatment | | Control | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant | NL | DE | NL | DE |
| NL | 5.15 (1.01) | 4.53 (1.03) | | 4.36 (0.91) |
| DE | 4.35 (1.63) | 5.14 (0.88) | 4.94 (1.23) | |

## 5.3.1 Main Effects

A main effect of the experimental treatment could not be confirmed for perceived quality ($F(1)=0.02$, $p=.88$), Nationality of the respondent ($F(1)=0.942$, $p=.33$) or nationality of the ad ($F(1)=0.016$, $p=.90$).

## 5.3.2 2-Way Interactions

Results show that there are two-way interactions between ad nationality and participant nationality ($F(1)=9.559$, $p=.002$) as well as between participant nationality and treatment ($F(1)=4.399$, $p=.03$). There is no significant interaction between ad nationality and the treatment ($F(1)=0.446$, $p=.50$).

### 5.3.3 3-Way Interactions

The proposed three-way interaction between the three previously mentioned factors is borderline significant when tested for the dependent variable perceived quality ($F(1)=3.218$, $p=.07$).

### 5.3.4 Independent Samples T-Tests

A further t-test that compared between the treatment conditions Dutch respondent – Dutch product ($M=5.15$, $SD=1.01$) versus Dutch respondent – German product ($M=4.53$, $SD=1.03$), showed a borderline significant mean difference; $t(38)=1.907$, $p=.06$. A similar analysis between German respondent – German product ($M=5.15$, $SD=0.89$) versus German respondent – Dutch product ($M=3.80$, $SD=1.79$) returned a significant mean difference between said groups; $t(34)=2.18$, $p=.03$.

Mean comparisons between treatment- and control groups show no significant difference between groups 1 and 2; $t(37)=1.17$, $p=.25$. Same holds for groups 3 and 4; $t(40)=0.56$, $p=.58$ as well as groups 5 and 6; $t(43)=0.09$, $p=.93$, and groups 7 and 8; $t(34)=-1.20$, $p=.24$.

### 5.3.5 Process Analysis

Process analysis, which was performed to investigate moderation effects of manipulative intent, showed that for perceived quality, no moderation effect exist ($F(3)=14.02$, $p=<.001$, $R=.46$, $R^2 =.21$, N=162). The interaction of the introduced moderator and MI led to no significant increase; $F(1)=0.70$, $p=.40$, $R^2$ -chng=.004, N=162.

## 5.4 WILLINGNESS TO BUY

This variable was included in order to gain extra insight into the question in how far a customer's willingness to buy changes under the influence of the different conditions. It has not been used in advanced statistical analyses, but can be regarded as a means to add depth to the analyses that were carried out. To capture the respondents' willingness to buy, the question "would you buy this product?" has been asked, where participants could answer either "yes" or "no". To analyse such a question, cross-tabulation (short: cross tab) is useful. The cross tab analysis will be carried out in two variants: one where the variable "match" includes respondents from both treatment and control, and one where the variable

"match" only considers respondents from treatment conditions. Relevant results of the cross tabs can be found in table 6. A cross tabulation that paired the respondent's willingness to buy the product with the variable "match", which indicates whether the respondent had a product that matches his nationality or not has been carried out, which is particularly of interest to investigate hypothesis 3.

Results from Cramer's V for sequence 1 of cross tabulations (meaning where the match included both treatment and control group) show that there is a moderate but not statistically significant relationship between the two variables (*Cramer's V*=.16*, p*=.24). In total, 81.6% (N=31) of the respondents in the match-group said they would buy the product, while only 60,5% (N=23) of the mismatch-group said so. Moreover did 28.3% indicate they would not buy the product in the Match control group, while only 18.4% in the Match treatment group said that they would buy the product. Sequence 2, thus the same analysis without control groups, shows a different outcome: here, there is a moderate significant relationship to be found (*Cramer's V*=.23*, p*=.04). Results of this analysis can be found in table 6.

*Table 6: Results of Cross Tabulations for "Would you buy this product?"*

| Buy | Match Treatment | Mismatch Treatment | Match Control | Mismatch Control |
|-----|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------|
| **Yes** | 81,6% | 60,5% | 71,7% | 67,5% |
| **No** | 18,4% | 39,5% | 28,3% | 32,5% |

# 6    Discussion: Results

There were in total three 3-way ANOVAs, numerous independent samples t-tests, three moderation analyses and a cross-tabulation carried out to assess the proposed hypotheses. To recap, these are the hypothesis that will be discussed in the following section:

H1: Authenticity branding positively affects consumer evaluations on food products, regarding Willingness to Pay, Purchase Intention and Perceived Quality.

H2: The Nationality match will account for differences in means between matched and non-matched participants, and thus positively influence the relationship between authenticity and the dependent variables.

H3: Perceived manipulative intent negatively moderates the relationship between authenticity branding and consumer evaluations.

## 6.1 HYPOTHESIS 1

Hypothesis 1 was answered by means of an ANOVA and t-tests. Results of this analysis show that there is a significant main effect of the treatment on Willingness to Pay. A look at table 3 confirms the assumption that the treatment had a *positive* effect on the willingness to pay of the respondents. For instance is the mean for the German respondents who evaluated a Dutch product €2.16 (SD=€0.69) in the treatment, and €1.80 (SD=€0.48) in the control condition. Essentially did authenticity marketing justify a premium of €0.36 for the shown product in the eyes of the individuals that took part in this survey. This premium is not as high in all cases, but the trend of a higher WTP in the treatment than in the control condition existed in all cases. This was not confirmable by t-tests between the respective conditions, which failed to return significant results.

In the case of purchase intention, this hypothesis could not be confirmed, since there was no significant main effect of the treatment on the intention to purchase the product by the respondents of the survey. An insight into the question why this presumed relationship could not be confirmed can be provided by a look at the purchase intention means across the conditions (Table 4). Here, it seems that the mean difference between control- and treatment conditions in, for instance, Dutch participants with a Dutch product was (+)0.64. However, in the case of German participants with Dutch products, the mean difference between treatment and control condition was *negative* (-)0.84. These mean differences presumably cancel each other out, which hinders the production of unambiguous results in the analysis, and show that some groups of respondents do not value authenticity at all.

A similar pattern can be observed in the analysis of variance on perceived quality. Here, it is again the case that no significant main effect of condition has been found, despite the fact that from simple observation of the data, all mean differences are positive, except the case of German respondents who were asked to evaluate a Dutch product. Here, the mean of the control condition (4.94) is considerably higher than in the treatment condition (4.35). This observation is supported by the significant two-way interaction effect of AdNationality*ParticipantNationality ($F(1)=9.559$, $p=.002$), which shows that there, in fact, is an interaction between nationality of participant for perceived quality.

All these points show that there is no singular answer to hypothesis 1 that "fits all"; rather, it has to be seen very distinctively per dependent variable. Authenticity cues on an advertised product furthermore led the respondents to be willing to pay more for the product that contained these cues over a product that does not based on ANOVA's. This could, however, not be confirmed by group–specific t-tests. In the case of willingness to pay, hypothesis 1 is not rejected based on ANOVAs, but based on t-tests it is rejected. This observation could not be confirmed for purchase intention or quality perception of the respondents, which is presumably due to the earlier mentioned opposing mean differences for these dependent variables. Purchase intention and perceived quality were not found to be significantly influenced by the treatment, and hypothesis 1 is rejected for these two dependent variables. When one had to give a final assessment of hypothesis 1, it should be rejected, as there is no clear trend visible.

## 6.2      HYPOTHESIS 2

This hypothesis, too, was investigated within the three-way-ANOVA analyses. Special attention has to be paid on two-way interactions AdNationality*Treatment and AdNationality*RespondentNationality as well as the three-way interaction. A simplistic additional measure was taken in the form of a cross tabulation of the question "would you buy this product?" against the "match".

An analysis of Willingness to Pay with regard to the previously outlined interactions did, as mentioned, not show any significance, unlike the analysis of purchase intention and perceived quality. A nationality match has thus no effect on willingness to pay.

For purchase intention, a significant two-way interaction effect between the nationalities of the ad and the respondent could be established, which hints towards the confirmation of hypothesis two for the question whether a consumer would intend to purchase the presented product. This intention does unfortunately not necessarily need to lead to actual purchase behaviour, which will be addressed in the general discussion later on.

Investigation of the concept of quality perception yielded relevant results for this hypothesis, as well. As outlined in the section on data analysis, there exists a two-way interaction effect between ad nationality and participant nationality, as well as between participant nationality and treatment. In addition to this is perceived quality the only of three dependent variables where a three-way interaction effect could be found.

The complementing analysis of cross tabulation helps to illustrate the nationality effect: In all treatment- and control conditions did the majority of the consumers indicate they would buy the product if it would be available in their supermarket. However, the fraction of respondents in the matched group that said they'd buy it (81.6% in treatment and 71.7% in control conditions) was considerably larger than the fraction of potential buyers in the mismatched group (60.5% in treatment- and 67.5% in control conditions). Also, judging from these numbers did authenticity marketing virtually increase the fraction of respondents in the matched group that would buy the product by roughly 10%, while mismatched respondents were, on their own account, *less* likely to purchase the product when it claimed to be authentic. Note that numbers from outcomes regarding the control groups have to be seen as an additional illustration, since the cross tabulation model was insignificant when control groups were included in the analysis.

To put it in a nutshell: hypothesis 2 cannot be confirmed in general, but has to be diversified for the dependent variables that were measured in this thesis. Willingness to pay, for instance, is not at all affected by the nationality of the product. The intention to purchase the product, however, was indeed affected by the nationality match, hence the significant two-way interaction effect. The same holds for the perceived quality of the product, which is also affected by the nationality match. Results of the cross tabulation further validate these results. Therefore, the nationality effect exists, and hypothesis 2

holds, but with the exception of the direct amount that a consumer is willing to pay for the product.

## 6.3 HYPOTHESIS 3

Initially, it was hypothesised that when a consumer thinks that an ad or a product intends to manipulate them into thinking it entails authentic attributes that it does not have, his/her evaluation of the respective ad or product would be negatively affected. This is the reason that manipulative intent was assumed to be a moderator of the relationship between authentic branding and the respectively investigated dependent variables.

This hypothesis could not be confirmed, since no significant moderation effects of the variable manipulative intent could be found for any dependent variable. This implies that hypothesis 3 does not hold in any condition, and there is no moderation effect of manipulative intent on the effect of the experimental treatment on dependent variables.

## 7 General Discussion

Authenticity, at least in advertisements, is an ambiguous concept. There is not a one-size-fits-all general and straightforward way to the assessment of its workings in the mind of the consumer. Conclusions on the theoretical contribution of this thesis with regard to effect on the dependent variables have to be taken with scepticism, since statistical analyses showed ambiguous results. Further research could dig deeper into the connection of willingness to pay and authenticity in intrinsically authentic products, and possibly add various other items that measure other indicators of consumer evaluations in that regard.

It is furthermore safe to say that authenticity is not a concept that can be applied to any food product in order to increase sales. There is no straight line that indicates that the application of authentic marketing messages work in a predictable way.

There are other concepts in consumer research that might give better results than the application of authenticity. This thesis chose a made-up potato chips brand, which has traditionally no relation to authenticity in itself. In other cases, where products are intrinsically authentic, such a treatment might work better. For instance does authentic

marketing in wine or cheese make more sense, as these are products that have an intrinsic authentic factor, in contrast to potato chips. Here, when using real products that have heritage & pedigree and other dimensions of authenticity, the effect on, for instance, willingness to pay might be much more significant.

However, the decision to use potato chips and a made-up brand was made in order to be able to draw conclusions based on the generic nature of authenticity, meaning the question whether it can be applied to any food product in a made up context. This was not confirmed, so as far as theory goes, one can safely say that authenticity is a situational concept, meaning that its application requires certain prerequisites in the product itself in order to function. This implication is supported by earlier research that used wine labels, which were factually evaluated to be authentic. There, in a qualitative research setting, authenticity was perceived but not measured in terms of its impact on quantified dependent variables. This thesis deemed the impact of authenticity-related advertising on concepts that reflect its actual impact on consumer evaluations as more valuable than a measurement of that impact on authenticity measures. This is because that is a theoretical contribution that is divergent from the current stream of literature, and provides fruitful intelligence both on a theoretical and a practical dimension. The fact that there was no clear effect of authentic advertising on consumer evaluations shows that statements regarding the importance of authenticity for marketing and consumer behaviour should be reconsidered, and most of all brought in the context of the intrinsic authentic value of the product at hand.

A further point that has been found here is that the substitution of the dimension of relationship to place by the country of origin effect in order to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of a nationality match did have an effect. A consumers' intention to purchase the depicted product as well as his/her assessment of quality based on the advertisement are higher when the product is of the same nationality as the consumer. This thesis chose Germany and the Netherlands as pivots. These two are "neighbours" and thus have similar cultural traits and values. This choice has been made because it puts the hypothesis under more stress due to the fact that the familiarity of the two nationalities leads to diminishing effects of just those differences in mind-sets that are underlying factors for the variation in product evaluations with regard to the nationality match. It is, in addition to this, probable

that the nationality match highly depends on the country that the research is based in. The findings elaborated in the previous section give the theoretical implication that, although the nationality match does exist and contribute to superior product evaluations, it has no effect on willingness to pay.

Further was the consumer's perception of manipulation in this study captured in the construct "manipulative intent". Here, it has been demonstrated that manipulative intent has no moderation effect on any dependent variable used in this thesis. The perception of manipulative intent of the advertisement does not influence the effect of authentic marketing on consumer evaluations tested in this thesis. This is presumably due to the fact that authenticity had no effect in itself.

# 8    Practical Implications

One major point that has to be brought up when considering the practical implications of this thesis is that there were no consistent significant effects found for the application of authenticity marketing in general. Applying authenticity cues to a product that otherwise does not have an intrinsic connection to the general idea of authenticity mostly has no, or perhaps even negative effects on willingness to pay, purchase intention and quality perception. The intention to make a product appear original, and of undisputed origin, should be handled with care. Most importantly, there was no clear indicator that a consumer would be willing to pay a price premium for such a technique, which is presumably quite often a central motivation to apply authentic cues to a marketing message and/or product. A factor that might contribute to this fact is that authenticity is a rather abstract concept that has many facets and thus only indirectly translates into factual impact. Practically speaking, the concept of authenticity is still too abstract and diverse as to make an actual difference for products that are not intrinsically authentic, and should therefore only be applied when there is an intrinsic aspect of authenticity to be found. Consumers are not easily fooled, and it has to be noted that careful consideration needs to be put into the design of authenticity marketing strategies, as hypothesis 3 shows that consumers might perceive the message as being manipulative; although there were no significant effects, the means of manipulative intent were above 3.5 on a 7-point scale in

all cases. Also, one has to differentiate between an experimental setting and the actual business world, where (especially in the age of social media) such practices can lead to a backlash that has the potential to severely damage the image of a company in the long run, due the realisation of consumers that a company tries to "lure" them into buying a product based on advertising methods that are perceived as questionable by the consumer.

Companies that market their products in a large number of countries would have to put significant effort into research regarding country-of-origin effects, since no country is like the other. Companies that operate in a limited number of countries can investigate whether it is beneficial to market their products using nationality cues. For example does the application of "Made in Germany" work well in some countries, but the application of this concept is limited to products that involve some kind of engineering expertise. The proven existence of the nationality match shows that marketing a domestic product as authentic has beneficial effects. So, to link back to the initial problem that fuelled the idea to research authenticity, the Dutch expertise on the field of agriculture can be a possible entry point for authentic marketing with regard to country of origin effects, but should be applied to products that are actually authentic, and thus fulfil the dimensions of authenticity that were explained earlier, for example heritage & pedigree.

A further point regarding practical implications is that all findings with regard to purchase intention have to be handled with care, as marketers have to be aware that there is a considerable gap between the intentions and actual behaviour of consumers, which has for example been investigated for the consumption of sustainable food products (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006).

# 9 Limitations & Future Research

When inspected in a bigger picture, it has to be said that, from this thesis, it makes sense to deduct that the concepts used as dependent variables in data collection were not significantly affected by the authenticity treatment. This is where additional future research can set in; it can further investigate possible dependent variables in this context and investigate whether the hypotheses of this thesis hold in those cases. This, then, would serve as a facilitator to further operationalise the concept of authenticity in food marketing, which has practical implications, since consumer research as well as marketing practice both profit from more insight into the impact of authenticity cues in food products.

The effect of locality in marketing and consumer behaviour is quite disputed, so follow-up research could apply similar methods as the ones used in this thesis, but even more focus on the effects of locality versus nationality as experimental conditions. Also, the effect of nationality and the magnitude of the impact of a nationality match should be investigated systematically between countries that have less cultural imbrications. This can be done with practical implications with regard to the original problem statement: the research of nationality matches in countries that are/could become a big sales market for authentic Dutch food products can contribute to a better understanding of the connection between cultural closeness and the effect of nationality matches. The original problem statement implies that the Dutch agricultural industry might benefit from authenticity marketing. It has been found that this is not true for not actually authentic products, so future research should make use of product categories that are inherently authentic from a Dutch national perspective (e.g. certain dairy produces) and research if it makes sense to market such products from an authentic standpoint with regard to country-of-origin effects.

Rather high overall means for manipulative intent further suggest that the significance of results was compromised by a feeling of being manipulated, since consumers' different, which might account for inconsistencies between group means. So, one should consider the suggestion that the product that is planned to be marketed as authentic should contain intrinsic authenticity and focus on the impact of authenticity marketing on consumer evaluations within that limited scope.

One further aspect that has to be regarded as a limitation of this research is that it did not use an actual tangible product, but an online advertisement. Repeating the measures taken here with a tangible product in a direct setting might lead to different results, and should be considered in the future. Also could the sample size be increased from around 20 to 50 observations per condition in order to reduce in-group variances in ratings.

In addition to the previous points should one be aware of the fact that *asking* someone whether they feel manipulated might, in some cases, activate the reflection on this aspect in the first place. The fact that ratings of manipulative intent were rather high could also be attributed to this fact.

## 10    Conclusions

During the analysis of data collected for this thesis, it has been found that a product without any intrinsic authenticity (for instance potato chips) will overall not benefit much, if at all, from marketing messages related to authenticity. The main research question whether authenticity marketing affects the way Dutch and German consumers perceive a Dutch or German food product advertisement has therefore likewise to be refuted. A research that uses, for instance, Schwarzwälder Schinken might find a different answer to this, because that product is an actual authentic product. Future research should support this finding in a real-world setting.

Analysis of variance showed that there are significant three-way interactions between consumer nationality, nationality of the product and the authenticity treatment itself. There are significant two-way interaction effects between nationalities of consumers and product. This was demonstrated for the dependent variables purchase intention and perceived quality, but not for willingness to pay. Linking back to the research question, it can therefore be confirmed that there is an effect of the nationality match regarding quality perception and purchase intention, but it does not ultimately affect a consumer's willingness to pay for the product used here.

A process analysis was performed in order to investigate the proposed moderation effect. No such moderation of manipulative intent on the effect of the experimental treatment on purchases intention, willingness to pay or perceived quality was found. This means that perceived manipulative intent does not influence the effect of authenticity marketing on food product advertisements.

Authenticity is an intriguing but complex construct that we will encounter more and more in the future. It has its' benefits, but has to be handled with much caution. Effective applications for authenticity marketing are limited, and have to be further researched in the future.

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## Appendix A – Advertisement used in condition 1



## Appendix B - Advertisement used in condition 2

## Appendix C - Advertisement used in condition 3



## Appendix D - Advertisement used in condition 4

## Appendix E - Advertisement used in condition 5



## Appendix F - Advertisement used in condition 6

## Appendix G - Advertisement used in condition 7



## Appendix H - Advertisement used in condition 8