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## Conceptualising and measuring consumer authenticity online

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to conceptualize and measure consumer-based authenticity online and its relationship to consumption behavior, mediated and moderated by rational and experiential thinking. It is hypothesized that when consumers engage in online consumption behavior, authenticity is a multidimensional experience conceptualized and defined as: iconic, identification, practical/impersonal, production/situation, social, moral, pure approximate and virtuous-self, forms of the authentic experience. To test the hypothesized model, 491 usable responses were collected using a questionnaire through face-to-face interviews by random intercept interview method. The conceptual model was developed through confirmatory factors analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) using mediation and moderation analysis. The findings identify the importance of rational and experiential thinking to authentic consumption experiences. In experiential thinking there is a greater emphasis on the role of brands to enhance perceptions of fantasy, and symbolism linked to self. Rational thinking is dominated by brand-related information linking the brand to objective standards, original time of manufacture, history, and a commitment and feeling for its creator. Research implications are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this research is to conceptualize and measure online consumer-based authenticity and its relationship to consumption behavior that is mediated and moderated through rational and experiential thinking (Singh et al., 2014; Ertimur and Gilly, 2012). This aim is significant to digital practice and research because of the importance of authenticity to consumers online and the absence of a model to both conceptualize and measure authenticity in digital markets.

Online consumer behavior is embedded in the fact that consumers are unable to rely on traditional marketplace approaches to determine and experience whether a product or service is actually real. It is easy for consumers to establish and experience authenticity offline. For example, they can talk directly to someone in a store and can touch, feel and directly experience the brand from a rational as well as experiential perspective (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Ultimately, through this sensory engagement they are more likely to purchase the brand (Hill, 2003). However, online they must place greater emphasis on the experience of authenticity. An experience created by objects that they can't touch and feel, such as the brand, the community and the service, as well as rational and experiential decision making processes that together drives consumption (Balasubramanian et al., 2005).

While authenticity has been debated and conceptualized extensively

in the marketing literature (e.g., Abolhasani et al., 2017) there is little work on an online context that conceptualizes and measures the authentic experience and its sub-constructs. Further, little is known about its relationship to well established constructs in digital marketing such as rational and experiential thinking and consumption behavior (Jiao et al., 2014), including the role of the brand, the service and the community. This gap is creating confusion for practitioners and researchers. For example, Ertimur and Gilly (2012) uncovered the middle between credibility with authenticity in the case of unsolicited consumer-generated ads as word-of-mouth. Also, Pera et al. (2016) argue that as a result of this gap in our knowledge, online retailers do not understand how and why authenticity is distorted when consumers express personality through storytelling online in community and social media contexts.

What is alarming is that a lack of understanding of authenticity and how to measure it is being exploited in digital markets and creating the potential for misrepresentation, fraud and collusion (Davis et al., forthcoming; Pinkeret et al., 2003; Davis et al., 2000; Taylor, 1999). As online buyers and sellers are diverse, anonymous and temporally and physically separated (Gregg and Scott, 2006), they have little opportunity to build mutual relationships (Pavlou and Gefen, 2004). Anonymity, low-entry thresholds, and separation between buyer and seller gives rise to deception and fraud (Chang and Wong, 2010). Hence,

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online consumers are unable to differentiate between individuals who are credible or benevolent and those who are likely to deceive.

Consumers and digital marketers are calling for more work to build an online environment around the brand, the community and the service to support and enhance the experience of authenticity and its relationship to rational and experiential thinking and consumption behavior. Recent work has started this journey (Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014). Napoli et al. (2014) conceptualizes and measures brand authenticity, extended by Morhart et al. (2015), who develop an integrative brand authenticity framework. While both works are significant, they are limited in that they are only brand related and fail to take account of the effect of online service, brand and community, and the relationship to rational and experiential thinking and consumption behavior (Singh et al., 2014).

In this study it is hypothesized that when consumers engage in online consumption behavior, authenticity is a multidimensional experience conceptualized and defined as: iconic, identification, practical/impersonal, production/situation, social, moral, pure approximate and virtuous-self, forms of the authentic experience. Therefore, the aim of this research is the conceptualization and measurement of consumer-based authenticity online and its relationship to consumption behavior and rational and experiential thinking. The research also seeks to measure the mediated and moderated relationship between the sub-constructs of authenticity and consumption behavior by rational and experiential thinking.

By answering these questions a number of contributions are made. First, this research makes a theoretical contribution. Through an analysis of the existing literature on consumer authenticity a comprehensive model is developed. This model also links authenticity to consumption and thinking style (rational/experiential). The contribution is extended through the creation and validation of a measurement instrument to develop a conceptual model rigorously through confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling, including mediation and moderation analysis. This measurement approach can be applied to online and offline markets as well as other digital consumption contexts (e.g., computer games). Finally, the results provide clear guidance for online as well as offline practice. Managers now have a holistic framework from which they can think about and develop strategy and campaigns, and monitor their customers' authentic experience. They should expect enhanced performance through a positive effect on important components of the online experience such as satisfaction, engagement and interactivity.

The paper takes the following form. First, authenticity is defined, followed by the establishment of the conceptual model and hypothesized relationships. The model validation and development methodology and results are presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results, focusing primarily on the significant hypothesized relationships in the final structural model. Research and managerial implications are discussed.

## 2. Conceptual model and hypotheses

The conceptual model hypothesizes that the sub-constructs of authenticity, through experiential and rational thinking, have a mediated and moderated relationship to consumption behavior (Fig. 1). The model and hypotheses are developed following the definition of authenticity and its sub-constructs.

### 2.1. Defining authenticity

Authenticity is defined as the consumers' experience of authentic consumption (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). Beverland (2005) argues that consumers are offered authenticity through sincere messages to convince them rationally and experientially of the item's commitment to tradition, passion for craft, and production excellence. Authenticity is a subjective evaluation of genuineness attributed to an object by a

consumer (Napoli et al., 2014). Tourists collecting artefacts believe that the authenticity of an item is found in the article being constructed by a craftsman of a particular tribe and being for a specific purpose, whereas others find authenticity in mass produced (iconic) representations of the original object (Cohen and Cohen, 2012).

Authenticity may be based on sincerity, innocence and originality (Fine, 2003), or being simple, honest and natural. It may be related to the genuineness, reality, or truth of the object or experience (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). It can be based on a product being true to its heritage, using traditional modes of production (Beverland, 2005). Furthermore, authenticity can infuse the item or experience with a set of values that differentiate it from other, more commercialized, brands. Grayson and Martinec (2004) demonstrate that, ultimately, consumers use different cues to assess different kinds of authenticity for different effects (p. 297). For example, drawing on historical associations, authenticity has been shown to be central to consumer roles within sub-cultures, for example as experienced in classic car clubs (Leigh et al., 2006). Historical associations have also been found in communication strategies building brand authenticity with luxury wine makers (Beverland, 2005).

Therefore, the authentic consumption experience is a multi-dimensional construct made up concurrently of various states of consciousness (sub-constructs). For example: existential, (intra-personal and interpersonal) (Wang, 1999), iconic, indexical and hypothetical (Grayson and Martinec, 2004), self-referential and hyper-authentic (Rose and Wood, 2005), objective and constructive (Leigh et al., 2006), pure, approximate and moral (Beverland et al., 2008), control, connection and virtue (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010), and hot and cool (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). This definition is supported in different contexts, such as goods and services (Grayson and Martinec, 2004), food and beverage (Beverland, 2005; Beverland et al., 2008), tourism (Cohen, 1988; Cohen and Cohen, 2012; MacCannell, 1973; Wang, 1999), reality television (Rose and Wood, 2005), subcultures (Leigh et al., 2006), and advertising (Chiu et al., 2012).

Table 1 shows the sub-constructs that define authenticity in the conceptual model. Based upon this table and citations it is summarised that in the online consumption experience consumers need to feel connection to the original time of manufacture through the brand (*Time Origin*). Online consumption experiences also revolve around connection and identification with everyday people through the community (*Everyday People*). Often consumers on and offline through the service will seek positive first hand experience of the item to assist them in achieving personal goals of practical self-authentication (*First Hand Experience*). The community's independent judgment will also assist this process of self-authentication (*Independent Judgment*). They are then able, through focusing on the brand consumption, to make judgements about performance or best value for money (*Instrumentality*) and community interactions to allow for required standards to be tested (*Verification*).

Personal self-authentication is achieved by focusing on the service market leader (*Ubiquity*), its community (*Brand Proximity*) and its shared laws of governance (*Communal Norms*). Consumers online tend to create experience from the brand situation and production through their experience of the brand's script (*Scripted Narrative*), fantasy image (*Situation Fantasy*) and product experience (*Self-Relevant Goals*). Online, consumers need to make judgements about the authenticity of the original article through the brand (*Objective*). The service helps in this process as it often projects onto the brand imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, and powers (*Constructive*). Consumers also project their own values onto the brand (*Consumer Values*) and brand values assist the consumer to achieve moral self-authentication (*Brand Values*). Authentic brand consumption experiences are enhanced when the consumer feels involved with the creators of the brand (*Commitment to Tradition*) and its place of manufacture (*Place of Origin*). Authenticity is supported if the brand is guaranteed to be genuine (*Guarantee of Being Genuine*) and often the online service itself has official laws of

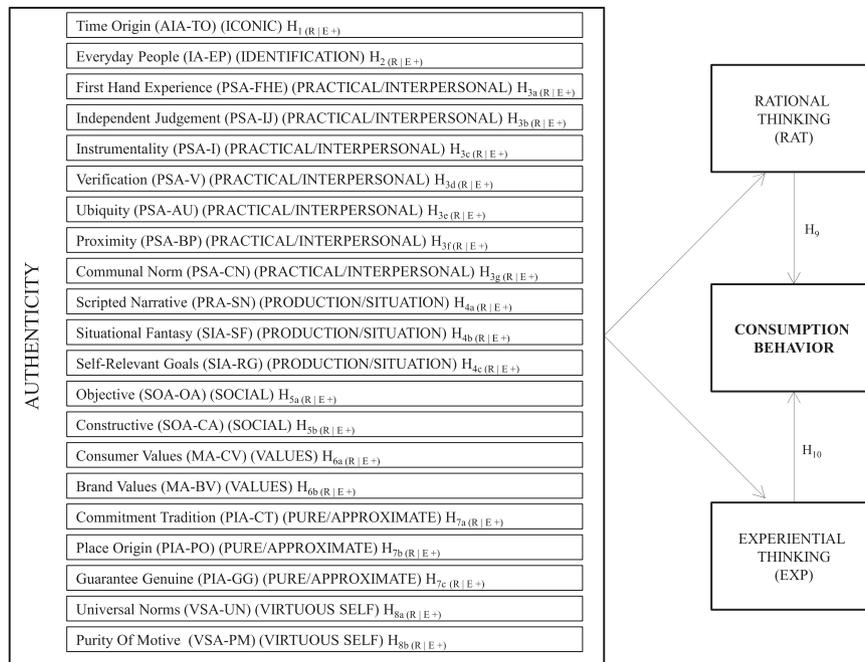


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

governance (*Universal Norms*) as well as community based morals that are consistently applied (*Purity of Motive*).

2.2. Hypothesis development

Following the definition of authenticity, the hypotheses are developed (Fig. 1). For each hypothesis it is argued that the individual sub-constructs of authenticity are in a mediated and moderated relationship (by experiential and rational thinking) with consumption behavior.

2.2.1. Iconic authenticity (time of origin)

Iconic authenticity is defined as an accurate reproduction of the original: something that physically resembles something else that is indexically authentic (Grayson and Shulman, 2000). This is important online because the consumer cannot participate in physical engagement. Icons are associated with the phenomenological experience of attending to an individual's senses, and iconic authenticity is identified as a consumer experience of an accurate reproduction of the original. An iconically authentic item, often described as an authentic reproduction or recreation, must provide the consumer with the phenomenological experience of the original item (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). This experience may have a positive effect on rational and experiential thinking as well as consumption behavior. Iconic authenticity is operationalized through time origin, defined as a feeling of connection to the original time of manufacture.

Consumers on Trademe will claim that this feeling of connection to the original time of manufacture achieves the goal of iconic authenticity. Authenticity as a connection to a period of time is important for consumers because it affirms tradition. If the brand provides an iconic cue or feeling that it will assist the consumer to acquire an authentic experience through connecting through to the time of its origin, the consumer will attribute iconic authenticity to the brand. For example, Grayson and Martinec (2004) explain that iconic cues to old age assist consumers to judge objects as authentic. Lowenthal (1985) proposes that even personal possessions such as clothing are manufactured to show signs of wear and tear to make them appear iconic or old. Therefore:

H<sub>1</sub>. Time Origin positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

2.2.2. Identification authenticity (everyday people)

Authenticity on Trademe online is enhanced through the experience of authentic people in the community. Consumers identify with people that they feel comfortable with or have had previous experience with, and this may have a positive effect on consumption behavior through enhanced rational and experiential thinking. Rose and Wood (2005) explain that if community members resemble the consumer (for example, in values), the consumer is able to closely identify with them and engage with that community. Identification authenticity is operationalized through everyday people, defined as those with whom consumers can identify. Through an identification negotiation with everyday people, the consumer constructs authenticity, that is, in the course of coping with or resolving issues with everyday people, the consumer constructs authenticity through blending each party's experiences to create a form of self-referenced hyper-authenticity (Rose and Wood, 2005). Therefore, if an experience includes everyday people, the consumer will be more likely to attribute authenticity to the experience because everyday people assist the consumer to attribute authenticity to an experience as it would apply to them. Hence:

H<sub>2</sub>. Everyday People positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

2.2.3. Practical/impersonal self-authentication (independent judgement, instrumentality, verification, ubiquity, proximity, communal norms)

Self-authentication is an individual pursuit where self-referential behaviors reveal or produce the true self (Beverland, 2005, p. 701). When conferring authenticity to brands and experiences, Beverland and Farrelly (2010) claim that consumers seek a favorable characterization of their true self. Consumers associate self-authenticity with feeling a sense of personal control over their surroundings and life in general. They can achieve self-authentication through inter-personal enrichment by connecting to a local community that reflects their values. Essentially, consumers on Trademe engage in this process to enhance consumption through clarity in thinking. If, through the consumption of the item or experience the consumer can achieve personal or inter-personal goals of self-authentication, that item or experience will be assessed as authentic. Practical self and interpersonal self-authentication is operationalized through the sub-constructs: first-hand

**Table 1**  
defining authenticity.

Type	Construct	Definition	Consumption	Authors	
Iconic: Authentic reproduction of the original.	Time Origin	A feeling of connection to the original time of manufacture.	Brand	Grayson and Martinec (2004)	
	Everyday People	Consumers connect/identify with everyday people.	Community	Rose and Wood (2005)	
	First Hand Experience	A positive first hand experience of the item assists the consumer to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	Service	Beverland and Farrelly (2010)	
	Independent Judgment	The independent judgment of other consumers of the item assists the consumer to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	Community		
	Instrumentality	Best performing or best value for money item or experience assists the consumer to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	Brand		
	Verification	Testing to establish that required standards are met assists consumers to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	Community		
	Ubiquity	Mainstream, mass brands, or a “market leader” assist the consumer to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication.	Service		
	Brand Proximity	Being close to you or part of your social community assists the consumer to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication.	Community	Leigh et al. (2006)	
	Production/Situation: Consumers blend situations and production to construct authenticity from fantasy.	Communal Norms	Laws that govern the community's Behaviour in everyday life assist the consumer to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication.	Community	
		Scripted Narrative Situation Fantasy	Scripted narrative assists the consumer to construct production authenticity. Fantasy situations provide the consumer indexical elements with which he/she can construct situation authenticity.	Brand	Rose and Wood (2005)
Self-Relevant Goals		Self-relevant goals of a product/experience assist the consumer to construct situation authenticity.	Brand		
Social: Use of product symbolism or self-efficacy to construct authentic personal or social identities.		Objective	Objective authenticity refers to the authenticity of the original article.	Brand	Leigh et al. (2006)
		Constructive	Constructive authenticity refers to the authenticity projected onto objects in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, powers, etc.	Service	
		Consumer Values	Consumer values mirrored in the brand.	Brand	Beverland et al. (2008)
Moral: Iconicity or indexicality to show higher moral status.		Brand Values	Brand values assist the consumer to achieve moral self-authentication.	Brand	
		Commitment to Tradition	Love of the craft, process, or the involvement of the creators in the production process.	Brand	
Pure Indexical: A factual or spatio-temporal connection to history and commitment and feeling to the original place of manufacture.		Place of Origin	A commitment too, and feeling for, the original place of manufacture.	Brand	Grayson and Martinec (2004)
		Guarantee of Being Genuine	An in situ guarantee of genuineness provided by a recognized authority.	Brand	Beverland et al. (2008)
Virtuous Self: Personal goals of virtuosity in self-authentication	Universal Norms	Laws that govern societies, these standards override other considerations.	Service	Beverland and Farrelly (2010)	
	Purity of Motive	Consistent application of a set of morals.	Community		

experience, independent judgment, instrumentality, verification, ubiquity, proximity and communal norms.

First, personal experience helps the consumer to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication. Consumption objects are often judged to be authentic only after personal experience of the reputed benefits, that is, if consumers have a positive first-hand experience of an online service, the service experience will be assessed as authentic (Napoli et al., 2014). For example, as these authors explain, consumers desire a direct experience of rational product performance claims on Trademe before they are able to make informed decisions online on its authenticity (p. 849). Consequently, in consumption behavior, it is assumed that consumers who have experience of an object or experience will attribute authenticity to that article. Hence:

**H<sub>3a</sub>.** First-hand experience positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Second, the independent judgment of other consumers is an alternative opinion from a friend or family member based on their experience (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). These authors show that due to consumer skepticism of marketing claims, consumers require rational evidence of an independent judgment to substantiate these claims. This may have a greater effect online of the rational thinking process and consumption. For example, on Trademe, consumers seek the opinion of previous users of the product before purchasing, for example, hair care products. The consumer values independent user confirmation that the specific hair-care products that claim frizz control perform as stated. This is because in the online community previous consumers are generally impartial and unlikely to be biased or profit driven. Therefore:

**H<sub>3b</sub>.** Independent judgment positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Third, instrumentality is defined as the best performing or best value for money item or experience (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). It provides evidence of the consumers' desire for brand instrumentality, that is, the best performing or best value for money brand. For example, online consumers appreciate brand messages from the Trademe community that enable them to make rational direct and accurate comparisons between competing brands (such as interest rates on bank term-deposits, or the fuel efficiency of vehicles) "thereby increasing the chances of getting the best possible result" (p.849) and engaging in consumption behavior. Consequently:

**H<sub>3c</sub>.** Instrumentality positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Fourth, verification is defined as testing to establish that required standards are met (Morhart et al., 2015). Online consumers desire products and experiences that convey verifiable results and reject more emotive claims. For example, rational verifiable performance benefits, such as information on product ingredients on packaging labels. Possibly, verification may have a greater effect on rational thinking rather than experiential thinking on Trademe. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H<sub>3d</sub>.** Verification positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Fifth, ubiquity is defined as the consumption of mainstream brands (Grayson and Martinec, 2004), this research proposes that a service that has established itself as an icon among consumers remains a part of the fabric of the consumer community even if it loses an indexical form of authenticity. Often these brands online have a greater level of consumption, a higher market share and greater loyalty (Danaher et al., 2003). It is authentic because it is widely adopted by the consumer community (p. 850) and it will enhance both rational and experiential thinking. For example, local consumers may consider Trademe to be an established icon although it has lost an indexical connection to the local context through no longer being a locally-owned brand. However, because Trademe is shared between generations it is still considered an

authentic icon. Hence:

**H<sub>3e</sub>.** Ubiquity positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Sixth, proximity is defined as the closeness to the consumer in a social community (Leigh et al., 2006). Beverland and Farrelly (2010) uncover proximity "as being central to authenticity" because when seeking connection, consumers often look for situations that put them in close proximity to others on Trademe. Being close to each other "up close and personal" and having members of the community "out there sweating and working hard for the people" provides members with an inter-personal authentic experience (p. 849) that positively enhances rational and experiential thinking. Online consumers will attribute authenticity to an article, brand, or community that is in close proximity to them. So it is hypothesized that:

**H<sub>3f</sub>.** Proximity positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Finally, communal norms are laws that govern the community's behavior in everyday life (Leigh et al., 2006). Communal norms provide the conduit for people to connect by bringing community members or loved ones together, and include socialization with members, encouraging new membership, and engaging in community activities (Morhart et al., 2015). They confirm on Trademe that the role of people in the community is to bring individuals together, ensure the vibrancy of the community through socialization, and encourage the introduction of new members. Additionally, members should participate in communal activities because it is considered an attribute of genuine membership. For example, cyclists should partake in annual cycling events because they represent an activity that genuine members of the cycling fraternity engage in. Furthermore, they should also attend from a sense of duty and to support the community and its members (Napoli et al., 2014). Consequently, communities that maintain communal norms will be deemed authentic by consumers:

**H<sub>3g</sub>.** Communal norms positively affect rational and experiential thinking.

#### 2.2.4. Production and situation authenticity (scripted narrative, situational fantasy, self-relevant goals)

Consumers experience authenticity in the balance of spontaneity and manipulated production in, for example, advertising (Stern, 1994) or reality television (Rose and Wood, 2005). Rose and Wood (2005) show how reality television uses scripted narratives and natural spontaneity in a production to satisfy the viewer's curiosity as to how they might fare in that particular situation or against that foe in a genuine fantasy situation. Reality television uses a scripted narrative combined with acting and natural spontaneity to encourage consumers to link indexical elements of the programme with their previously lived experiences (Rose and Wood, 2005). The television programme experience is judged as authentic because of the personal meaning the consumer can take from it rather than a belief that the episode was a legitimate event. In this way the consumer has self-authenticated the experience (Rose and Wood, 2005). Therefore, in online consumption behavior on Trademe, it can be argued that if the brand message provides a scripted narrative that combines with the consumer's natural spontaneity, the consumer will be more likely to attribute authenticity to the brand. Hence:

**H<sub>4a</sub>.** Scripted narrative positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Situation authenticity is consumer-produced by blending fantasy and the consumer's personal self-relevant goals in a form of hyper-authenticity (Rose and Wood, 2005). An individual may look at a fantasy situation and be able to extract indexically authentic elements based on their own experiences and combine them with a strategy for what they would do in the same situation. Situation authenticity is reflected by the sub-constructs fantasy and self-relevant goals.

First, a combination of real and fantastic elements leads to a consumer-constructed, authentic experience (Rose and Wood, 2005). Fantasy locations provide settings and contexts that assist consumers to construct authentic imaginary experiences. If the brand message on Trademe provides a relevant fantasy situation, the consumer will be more likely to attribute situation authenticity to the brand. For example, Rose and Wood (2005) find that the fantasy situations of reality television programmes “are novel enough to be stimulating yet familiar enough to permit an imaginary participation in them by the viewer” (p. 290). Subsequently, it is suggested that in consumption behavior if an item or experience provides a fantasy situation that assists consumers to construct authentic imaginary experiences, the online consumer will attribute authenticity to that item or experience. Therefore:

**H<sub>4b</sub>.** Situational fantasy positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Second, consumers find situation authenticity if the goals of the brand message are consistent with, and relevant to, their own goals (Rose and Wood, 2005). This means that if the brand message on Trademe provides consumer self-relevant goals, the consumer will be more likely to attribute situation authenticity to the brand. For example, Rose and Wood (2005) explain that viewers who enjoy a reality television programme may reject a particular character because they perceive that character's behavior to be inconsistent with their personal standards of conduct (p. 289). Accordingly, it can be argued that in consumption behavior, a product/experience message that shows consumer self-relevant goals will be judged authentic. Therefore:

**H<sub>4c</sub>.** Self-relevant goals positively affect rational and experiential thinking.

#### 2.2.5. Social authenticity (objective and constructive authenticity)

Consumers within a social subculture pursue two different concepts of authenticity: objective and constructive. This is based on product symbolism or self-efficacy assisting in determining authentic personal and social identities (Leigh et al., 2006). In this context, objective authenticity refers to the authenticity of originality (Beverland, 2005) and constructive authenticity refers to the authenticity projected onto objects by consumers in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, and powers (Leigh et al., 2006).

Objective authenticity is explained through the example of the classic car club members who bond through mutual commitment to an objective ideal of the perfect vintage vehicle (Leigh et al., 2006). If the brand displays originality, quality, knowledge and commitment, it will achieve objective authenticity (Beverland, 2005). Beverland et al. (2008) propose that objective authenticity “imbues the product with a set of values that differentiate it from other, more commercialized brands”. The brand must meet an objective ideal, meaning it must be untouched, perfect and genuine in every aspect. For example, a vintage vehicle on Trademe in “showroom condition” and “as it left the factory” would achieve objective authenticity (Leigh et al., 2006). Therefore, the research maintains that in online consumption behavior, an online brand that exhibits originality, quality, knowledge and commitment will be considered authentic by online consumers. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

**H<sub>5a</sub>.** Objective authenticity positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Constructive authenticity is also explained through a member of a car club who maintains and uses an original classic car being deemed an authentic member of the subculture and gaining additional social status (Leigh et al., 2006). It is argued that if the consumption item gives the consumer personal mastery and self-efficacy it will assist the consumer to achieve constructive authenticity. For example, a service desk “technical guru” can talk customers through performing complicated technical procedures. This service shows a willingness to share human

capital with customers as a teacher. For many consumers the participation in cathartic, authentic experiences, with the aid of the service, develops a stronger sense of self (Leigh et al., 2006). As a result, in consumption behavior, if an item or service on Trademe assists the consumer to construct authenticity by developing a stronger sense of self, the consumer will consider that item or service authentic. Therefore:

**H<sub>5b</sub>.** Constructive authenticity positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

#### 2.2.6. Moral authenticity (consumer and brand values)

Moral authenticity involves iconicity and/or indexicality to show higher moral status through some of the following processes. It may be achieved through brand values that show iconic and/or indexical love of the craft, process, or involvement of individual creators in the production process (Beverland et al., 2008). It can be achieved through mirroring consumer values in the brand to assist the consumer to achieve goals of moral authenticity. Or, if a brand, community, or organization provides a feeling that it will help the consumer achieve self-authentication through connecting with personal moral values, the consumer will attribute moral authenticity to that entity.

Moral authenticity is based on congruity between the moral values of the consumer and the moral values communicated by the brand (Beverland et al., 2008). If the consumer finds their own personal values mirrored in the brand on Trademe, the consumer will feel that this brand will connect with those personal values (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). For example, “green consumers” purchase ecologically friendly products that better fit their personal values. Also, through the purchase of fair trade products, western consumers can assist indigenous peoples living in poorer economic conditions, and this strategy can match the consumer's personal ethical position with that of an appropriate organization. Accordingly, in consumption behavior it is proposed that if the consumer finds their own personal values mirrored in the article or experience, the consumer will feel that the article or experience is authentic. Therefore:

**H<sub>6a</sub>.** Consumer values positively affect rational and experiential thinking.

Brand values (BV) that the consumer finds admirable or uplifting assist the consumer to achieve their goals of moral authenticity. If the brand message through iconic and indexical cues displays brand values that gain the respect of the consumer, the consumer will then attribute moral authenticity to the brand. For example, a brand that pursues a traditional craftsman approach, following time-honored production techniques, and it is not perceived as being commercially oriented, it may “fit” the consumer's interpretation of an authentic brand (Beverland et al., 2008). It is therefore believed that in consumption behavior, if the brand values on Trademe serve to uplift the online consumer to a higher moral plain, the consumer will confer authenticity to the online brand. Hence:

**H<sub>6b</sub>.** Brand values positively affect rational and experiential thinking.

#### 2.2.7. Pure approximate authenticity (commitment to tradition, place of origin, guarantee of genuine)

Literal authenticity is associated with genuineness, reality, and truth, and it is used to describe something that is not a copy or an imitation but is an original (Morharta et al., 2015). Pure authenticity is defined by Beverland et al., (2008) as providing an unbroken commitment to tradition and place of origin (a continued connection to the place of founding): “cues that reinforce perceptions of authenticity are those that reinforce a continuance of historic practices, including means of production, place of production, and product styling” (p. 7). Likewise, when an object has a factual, spatio-temporal connection to history in the context of how the individual and the object interact, it is

defined by Grayson and Martinec (2004) as indexical authenticity. Pure approximate authenticity is operationalized by the sub-constructs: commitment to tradition, place of origin and guarantee of being genuine.

First, brand commitment to tradition assists the consumer to achieve goals of pure (indexical) authenticity. If the brand provides the consumer with an unbroken commitment to tradition, the consumer will attribute indexical authenticity to the brand (Beverland et al., 2008). For example, boutique wine and beer makers and other small, craft producing firms on Trademe often claim authenticity through using indexical, traditional, artisan-based manufacturing techniques. These techniques are claimed to be historically accurate and differentiate their niche products from those of the large commercial brands that use mechanized, mass-production methods (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000). Consequently, in consumption behavior, the researcher expects that an item/experience that provides the consumer with an unbroken commitment to tradition will be considered authentic. Therefore:

**H7a.** Commitment to tradition positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Second, place of origin means that through indexical cues, the brand on Trademe shows a commitment to, and feeling for, the original place of manufacture. This assists the consumer to achieve goals of pure (indexical) authenticity (Beverland et al., 2008). Connection to a place of origin is important for a consumer because it affirms authenticity (Beverland, 2005, p. 1007). Indexical cues are strongly and consistently associated with a perceived connection with the place of origin (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). Therefore, if a brand provides an indexical cue that it will assist the consumer's self-authentication through connecting to the place of its origin, the consumer will attribute indexical authenticity to the brand (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). For example, for wine connoisseurs, a wine's relationship to a place of origin or terroir has value because this makes the respective wine label a unique product of its environment. When consuming a wine from a specific place of origin or terroir, the consumer is also experiencing the history or soul of the brand (Beverland, 2005). Thus it is argued that in consumption behavior, an item or experience that provides consumers with a connection to its place of origin will be accepted as authentic. Therefore:

**H7b.** Place of origin positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

Finally, to guarantee the genuineness of a product or experience, typically it will be authenticated in an explicit, often formal or even official act – it is declared to be original. This is achieved by an authenticating agent, who is deemed entitled by their knowledge, personal charisma, institutional position, or social status to perform the act of authentic certification (Cohen and Cohen, 2012, p. 1298). For example, Beverland et al., (2008) describe how an advertisement for Wrangler jeans in Australia projects two slightly unkempt denim clad models under the tag line “Born Authentic”. This advertisement's claim of authenticity is then verified with an in situ guarantee by suggesting that customers visit the Wrangler Web site to read about the brand's history. It is suggested, therefore, that if the product or experience on Trademe provides the consumer with a guarantee of being the genuine article, the consumer will attribute indexical authenticity to the brand. Consequently, in consumption behavior, it is argued that an article or experience that is guaranteed to be genuine will be considered authentic by consumers. Therefore:

**H7c.** Guarantee of being genuine positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

#### 2.2.8. *Virtuous self-authentication (universal norms, purity of motive)*

Virtuous authenticity arises from the sense of a passionate creator being involved in making goods, and being motivated primarily by their

love of craft rather than financial reward. Virtuous self-authentication is a process where the consumer determines the authenticity of an experience based on their values of virtuosity. It is a self-referential act in that it defines their preferred consumption choices, and helps the consumer to gain an overall feeling that the brand conforms to their sense of what an authentic craft product would be like (Beverland et al., 2008, p. 12). Consumers can achieve their personal goals of virtuosity in self-authentication through the sub-constructs: universal norms and purity of motive.

Universal norms are laws that govern societies such as Trademe, and are usually referred to as the standards that override other considerations. Authenticity is applied by the consumer within a socio-cultural context of virtuosity to the service experience. Consumers may focus on choosing organisations that are genuine in their intentions, whether they are truly committed to social programmes or really love their craft (Beverland et al., 2008, p. 12). If there is alignment of the governing laws of the product or service provider with the values of the consumer, the consumer will attribute authenticity to that product or service (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). Therefore, it is believed that in consumption behavior, if consumers can align with the universal norms of a consumption item, that product or service will be assessed as authentic. Hence:

**H8a.** Universal norms positively affect rational and experiential thinking.

Purity of motive is reflected in a consistent application of a set of morals. Consumers attribute authenticity to communities that exhibit purity of motive. For example, it is essential that, in the making of luxury wines, a wine makers' purity of motive is shown through commitment to traditional production methods, stylistic consistency, using history and culture as referents, and appearing to be above commercial considerations (Beverland, 2005). The consumption of these wines then provides the consumer with the feeling that they have consumed an unadulterated, non-commercial experience. Therefore, in consumption behavior on Trademe it is theorized that if the consumer considers the experience to be pure of motive, the brand/product/experience will be assessed as authentic. Hence:

**H8b.** Purity of motive positively affects rational and experiential thinking.

#### 2.2.9. *Consumption behavior*

Authenticity (and its sub-constructs) are positively related to consumption behavior within virtually every subculture and communal consumption context (Leigh et al., 2006). Consumers often consume authentic products and services, while rejecting the fake. They relentlessly seek a lifestyle that is real or authentic (Rose and Wood, 2005) in online and physical markets. It is argued that if the consumer perceives the consumption item to be authentic, or that self-authentication will be derived from the consumption experience, the consumer is likely to use or purchase the item and engage with the community and service (Rose and Wood, 2005). By choosing or rejecting an item online, a consumer is indicating the authenticity of that brand, service and community (Napoli et al., 2014).

However, it is argued that consumers make consumption decisions online if the authentic brand, service and community are affected by experiential and rational thinking (Wang et al., 2007). Botti and McGill (2011) suggest that preferences for experiential thinking are emotionally driven, whereas those for rational thinking are cognitively driven. Hence, these styles of thinking may have both a mediating and moderating effect between the sub-constructs of authenticity and consumption behavior.

Rational thinking is by definition instrumental, efficient, and task oriented (Davis et al., 2013) and has explicit structure and known objectives (Huang and Hsieh, 2011). A consumer using rational thinking endeavors to make an efficient, purposeful purchase in a fastidious

**Table 2**  
Sample characteristics (N = 491) - demographics.

		%			%
Gender	Male	37	Education	Secondary School/College	60
	Female	63		Trade/Professional Qualification	18
Age	19–24	14	Employment	Degree/Diploma (Tertiary)	20
	25–29	15		Post-graduate Degree/Diploma	3
	30–34	13		Student	7
	35–39	17		Full time	63
	40–44	14		Self employed	7
	45–49	10		Unemployed	4
	50–54	6		Homemaker/retired	11
	55–59	5		Part-time	8
Ethnicity	60–64	3	Annual Income	< 10,000	18
	65–70	3		10,000–20,000	7
	NZ Pakeha	49		20,001–30,000	11
	Maori	8		30,001–40,000	11
	Pacific Islander	9		40,001–50,000	13
	Asian	12		50,001–60,000	15
	European	13		60,001–80,000	13
Marital Status	Other	8	≥ 80,000	13	
	Single	32			
	Widowed	2			
	Living with partner	26			
	Married	31			
	Divorced/Separated	9			

manner. As a result, a rational consumption decision is not rewarding in itself but is instrumental to the achievement of a higher-level goal (Botti and McGill, 2011). Moreover, if the consumer makes a consumption decision based on a logical, planned strategy, they will more likely experience an authentic consumption experience (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). It is proposed that in a mediated and moderated relationship between the sub-constructs of authenticity and consumption behavior:

**H<sub>9</sub>**. Rational thinking is positively related to consumption behavior.

Concurrently, it is argued that the buying, selling and use of the service, brand and community invokes an experiential thinking process (Novak and Hoffman, 2009). Online consumers are concerned with being immersed in the experience and being entertained (Wolfinger and Gilly, 2001). The experience is subjective and results in higher levels of satisfaction and positive feelings (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). For example, consumers who shop recreationally may gain greater interaction, pleasure, and involvement from the experience. An experiential approach is intrinsically motivated and inherently rewarding as an end in itself. It is through this experiential process that the authenticity of the item, brand and community is determined by the consumer (Wang, 1999). Therefore, it is hypothesized in a mediated and well moderated relationship between the sub-constructs of authenticity and consumption behavior that:

**H<sub>10</sub>**. Experiential thinking is positively related to consumption behavior.

### 3. Method

Data was gathered through face-to-face interviews with 491 consumers in Auckland, New Zealand, from the general public using a structured survey in 2015. This approach was deployed as it allows for greater control of sampling frame problems, compared to online surveys (Curasi, 2001). In this study control of sample method bias was also important. Face to face survey's respondents are often more

representative of the population when combined with a random sampling approach (Duffy et al., 2005). The number of questions also favored a face to face approach to ensure survey completion (Lavrakas, 2008). Common method bias (Lindell and Whitney, 2001; Bagozzi and Yi, 1991) was controlled through the approaches advised by Lehmann et al. (2011), that is, use of structural equation modeling versus regression and measuring interaction and moderated effects in addition to main effects. The approach to data collection is guided by MacKenzie et al. (2012) procedural remedies to reduce common method bias. For example, (1) the questionnaire was pretested for clear and unambiguous language, (2) only scales already published with high measures of validity were used and 25% of the questions asked were reverse coded.

To measure common method bias, Harman's single factor test showed that only 20–24% of the variance can be explained by the single factor. The test is below the accepted threshold of 50%. The common latent factor (CLF) approach was used to measure the common variance of all the model's observed variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The comparison of the standardized regression weights of the non CLF vs CLF model computed that all were well below 0.200 with the exception of two observed items with differences of 0.253 and 0.212. Therefore, with an acceptable Harman's single factor test and a CLF test with 41 observed variables below the threshold, it is concluded that there is no common method bias.

Random intercept interviews were conducted by a team of 5 people in four locations; east, west, south, north. These locations were approximately 30 km from the Auckland City center. Every potential respondent was asked to participate so that they would have an equal chance to participate in the survey. Interviewers then interacted with the potential respondent and after finishing the interview they would approach the next potential respondent. Those that agreed to participate were asked to respond to a structured questionnaire. Respondents were screened by means of one question: "Do you buy or sell products or services on Trademe personally? (Not as a business) This established that the respondent was a regular consumer (buyer and seller) on Trademe. Table 2 shows the sample demographics which are consistent with the general population (Statistics New Zealand, 2018).

The focus of the study was on the consumers' consumption of Trademe ([www.Trademe.co.nz](http://www.Trademe.co.nz)). According to the company profile, Trademe started in 1999 and is "the place where Kiwis buy and sell online" and it is "the leading online marketplace and classified advertising platform in New Zealand." Product and services bought and sold include auctions to fixed-priced sales for new and used goods as well as other web businesses specializing in accommodation and online dating. Revenue also arises from advertising across the portfolio of online brands.

The referenced sub-construct items with measures of their published Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach Alpha (CA) or Coefficient of Reliability (CR) are provided below. Because of space limits this reports items used only in the final confirmatory factor analysis model, structural equation models and mediation/moderation analysis:

1. Consumption Behavior (Novak and Hoffman, 2009: Ca = 0.87–0.90, Voorhees et al., 2006" Cr = 0.89, AVE = 0.73, Meuter et al., 2005: Ca = 0.96 and 0.94, Hamilton et al. (2011): Ca = 0.96).
2. First-Hand Experience (Psa-Fhe) (Service) (Kwon and Lennon, 2009: Ca = 0.880 and 0.912).
3. Objective Authenticity (Soa-Oa) (Brand Purchased) (Schlinger, 1979a): Ca = 0.96).
4. Commitment To Tradition (Pia-Ct) (Brand Purchased) (Bearden et al., 2006: Ca = 0.78–0.85).
5. Universal Norms (Vsa-Un) (Service) (Vitell et al., 1993: Ca = 0.67).
6. Brand Proximity (Psa-Bp) (Community) (Algesheimer et al. (2005): Ca = 0.60–1.0).
7. Place Of Origin (Pia-Po) (Brand Purchased) (Grayson and Martinec,

**Table 3**  
Model goodness of fit.

Model	N	$\chi^2$	d.f.	CMIN/DF	Sig. (p)	NFI	CFI	TLI	GFI	RMSEA	SRMR
CFA	465	2008.42	812	2.473	< 0.001	0.892	0.932	0.839	0.839	0.056	0.072
SEM – Dual Mediation Model (Original)	465	3252.96	836	3.889	< 0.001	0.820	0.860	0.848	0.719	0.079	0.188
SEM – Dual Mediation Model (Alternative)	465	595.43	261	2.281	< 0.001	0.942	0.966	0.961	0.906	0.053	0.072
SEM - Experiential Mediation Model (Alternative)	465	244.160	98	2.491	< 0.001	0.966	0.980	0.975	0.938	0.057	0.052
SEM - Rational Mediation Model (Alternative)	465	231.399	99	2.337	< 0.001	0.951	0.971	0.965	0.942	0.054	0.060
Moderation Model	292	32.556	33	0.987	0.489	0.993	0.939	1.000	0.994	0.000	0.0107

CFA = Confirmatory Factor Analysis, SEM = Structural Equation Model, CMIN/DF = Chi-squared/degrees of freedom ratio,  $p$  = significance < 0.001, NFI = Normed Fit Index, GFI = Goodness of Fit, TLI = Tucker Lewis Index, CFI = Comparative Fit Index, RMSEA = Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation, SRMR = Standardized Root-Mean-Squared Residual.

2004:  $\text{Ca} = 0.93$ ).

8. Communal Norms (Psa-Cn) (Community) (Melnik et al., (2009:  $\text{Ca} = 0.91$ – $0.93$ ).
9. Time Origin (Aia-To) (Brand Purchased) (Grayson and Martinec, 2004:  $\text{Ca} = 0.93$ ).
10. Brand Values (Ma-Bv) (Brand Purchased) (Wilcox et al., 2009:  $\text{Ca} = 0.89$ ).
11. Situational Fantasy (Sia-Sf) (Brand Purchased) (None reported).
12. Self-Relevant Goals (Sia-Rg) (Brand Purchased) (Sprott et al., 2009:  $\text{Ca} = 0.91$ – $0.93$ ).

To make the completion of questions easier for respondents, a seven-point Likert scale was used. The questionnaire is structured in 4 parts. Parts 1, 2 and 3 are related to aspects of perceived consumption behavior in terms of general buying, usage, and selling behavior as well as experiential and rational thinking when buying. Part 4 measured the perceived sub-constructs of authenticity. In Part 4 consumers were asked to think about their feelings, thoughts and behaviors when they buy on Trademe. Each sub-construct was focused on only one relevant aspect of the consumption mode; service, community or brand purchased. In this way the original scale was adapted to:

1. Service: the site defined as [www.Trademe.co.nz](http://www.Trademe.co.nz) which sells new/used products/services.
2. Community: defined as other buyers and sellers on Trademe.
3. Brand Purchased: defined as the product and/or service bought on Trademe.

This approach uses the consumptions modes advocated by Holt (1995). The service is consumption as the instrumental purpose of interpersonal interactions through shared actions. Brands are purchased and consumed as shared objectives of instrumental purpose and interpersonal interactions. The community as consumption as a common basis for the autotelic purpose of interpersonal interactions as a way of communing shared mutual experiences and socializing to entertain.

#### 4. Results

The analysis adopted a three-stage process of model development and testing (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012) using AMOS 19. First, the measurement model was developed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Second, the hypothesized relationships were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) of 3 models: (1) Dual Mediation Model as Original and Alternative, (2) Rational Thinking Only Alternative Mediation Model and, (3) Experiential Thinking Alternative Mediation Model. In both stages, Goodness of Fit (GoF) was also a determinant of the outcome of the development and testing procedures. Finally, a moderation analysis was completed to measure the effect of the sub-constructs of authenticity by rational and experiential thinking on consumption behavior.

#### 4.1. Confirmatory factor analysis

Before the CFA was implemented the data was cleaned for missing values, outliers and normality to maintain consistency with the assumptions of CFA and SEM (Hair et al., 2010). The appendix shows the original questionnaire with notation of variables removed in all phases of the data cleaning and model modification. Outliers were assessed using the Mahalanobis distance statistic with observations removed where both  $p_1$  and  $p_2$  were significant. Normality was tested with measures of skewness and kurtosis. Variables with a kurtosis and skewness value of greater than  $\pm 2.0$  were deleted (Curran et al., 1996). Multicollinearity was also measured, with variables of a VIF (variance inflation factor) greater than 5 being deleted (Curto and Pinto, 2011). Further model refinements were made to determine the optimal measurement model through deletion of observed variables with a standardized residual covariance of  $> 2.0$  (Hair et al., 2010). Correlations between variables were also determined to ensure that they support single rather than multiple constructs (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). No correlations between error terms have been added to the model to improve GoF.

For the CFA measurement model, the results for discriminant validity, convergent validity and GoF are shown in Tables 2, 3. It is concluded that the model has good discriminant and convergent validity as well as acceptable GoF (Tables 3, 4). The measures of validity and fit are based on Bagozzi and Yi (2012) and others (Hair et al., 2010; Baumgartner and Homburg, 1996; Bacon et al., 1995; Browne and Cudek, 1993; Bentler, 1990):

1. Discriminant Validity: The implied correlations for each construct are less than the corresponding square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).
2. Convergent Validity: Construct Cronbach Alpha and Construct Reliability are greater than 0.70 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1978).
3. Goodness of Fit (GoF): (1) CMIN/DF (chi-squared/degrees of freedom) ratio is  $< 5.0$ , (2) a significant  $p$  value, (3) Normalized Fit Index (NFI), GFI = Goodness of Fit, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) is greater than 0.90 and the (4) root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean-squared residual (SRMR) is less than 0.05, but values up to 0.08 are acceptable.

#### 4.2. Structural equation modeling (SEM)

The SEM focused on the analysis of the structural conceptual model using the maximum likelihood method to test the hypothesized relationships (Fig. 1) for both the original and alternative model. No correlations between error terms have been added to the model to improve GoF. Table 4 show the results of the SEM using the same Goodness of Fit (GoF) as in the CFA, with the addition of the standardized regression weight, path estimate, critical ratio and  $p$  value for

**Table 4**  
Confirmatory factor analysis (discriminant and content validity).

	Service	Brand	Situation fantasy	First Hand experience	Brand proximity	Communal norms	Rational thinking	Consumption	Objective authenticity	Self-relevant goals	Brand values	Time origin	Place of origin	Commitment to tradition	Universal norms
Cronbach Alpha	0.867	0.842	0.888	0.888	0.934	0.917	0.875	0.871	0.866	0.937	0.93	0.975	0.981	0.954	0.828
Construct Reliability	0.861	0.837	0.858	0.858	0.899	0.904	0.882	0.880	0.867	0.930	0.919	0.981	0.982	0.943	0.839
Variance Extracted	0.676	0.632	0.670	0.670	0.749	0.758	0.714	0.652	0.686	0.816	0.792	0.944	0.947	0.845	0.638
Experiential Thinking	0.822														
Situation Fantasy	0.169	0.795													
First Hand Experience	0.082	-0.009	0.819												
Brand Proximity	0.092	0.202	0.331		0.865										
Communal Norms	0.076	0.513	0.021		0.323	0.870									
Rational Thinking	-0.437	-0.127	0.074		0.087	-0.073	0.845								
Consumption	0.130	0.008	0.58		0.159	0.051	0.062	0.807							
Objective Authenticity	0.035	0.155	0.517		0.390	0.139	0.142	0.299	0.828						
Self-Relevant Goals	0.129	0.602	0.191		0.293	0.477	-0.023	0.243	0.198	0.903					
Brand Values	0.132	0.444	0.38		0.444	0.403	0.086	0.377	0.572	0.596	0.890				
Time Origin	-0.050	0.099	0.010		0.222	0.148	0.063	-0.115	0.03	-0.003	0.059	0.972			
Place of Origin	0.097	0.134	0.057		0.326	0.281	0.044	0.066	0.125	0.166	0.248	0.415	0.973		
Commitment to Tradition	0.08	0.091	-0.105		0.293	0.224	0.102	-0.201	0.002	0.001	0.058	0.302	0.404	0.919	
Universal Norms	0.032	0.026	0.097		0.351	0.067	0.177	-0.029	0.185	0.098	0.158	0.154	0.321	0.565	0.799

level of significance. All models satisfy the criteria used to assess the CFA model. Table 6 summarizes the R<sup>2</sup> value for each construct. Cohen (1988, p. 413) notes that an R<sup>2</sup> ≈ 0.0196 is a small effect, 0.13 is a medium effect, and above 0.26 is considered large. For the SEM process, three alternative models are developed:

1. Dual Mediation Model (Alternative): The conceptual model with rational thinking and experiential thinking mediating the relationship between the authenticity sub-constructs and consumption behavior.
2. Rational Mediation Model (Alternative): An alternative model where only rational thinking mediates the relationship between the authenticity sub-constructs and consumption behavior.
3. Experiential Mediation Model (Alternative): An alternative model where only experiential thinking mediates the relationship between the authenticity sub-constructs and consumption behavior.

4.2.1. Dual mediation model (alternative)

Rational Thinking, Time Origin and Brand Values all have a large effect on the Dual Mediation Model (Alternative) (R<sup>2</sup>). The following core hypothesized relationships are significant:

1. Negative effect of:
  - a. Time Origin on Experiential Thinking (H<sub>1(E)</sub>).
  - a. Situation Fantasy on Rational Thinking (H<sub>4b(R)</sub>).
  - b. Experiential Thinking on Rational Thinking (H<sub>11(i)</sub>).
2. Positive effect of:
  - a. Situation Fantasy on Experiential Thinking (H<sub>4b(E)</sub>).
  - b. Brand Values on Rational Thinking (H<sub>6b(R)</sub>).
  - c. Place of Origin on Experiential Thinking (H<sub>7b(E)</sub>).
  - d. Universal Norms on Rational Thinking (H<sub>8a(R)</sub>).
  - e. Rational Thinking on Consumption Behavior (H<sub>6</sub>).
  - f. Experiential Thinking on Consumption Behavior (H<sub>10</sub>).
  - g. Situation Fantasy on Brand Values (H<sub>4b(i)</sub>).
  - h. Place of Origin on Situational Fantasy (H<sub>7b(i)</sub>).
  - i. Place of Origin on Brand Values (H<sub>7b(ii)</sub>).
  - j. Place of Origin on Time Origin (H<sub>7b(iii)</sub>).
  - k. Place of Origin on Universal Norms (H<sub>7b(iv)</sub>).

4.2.2. Rational mediation model (alternative)

Commitment to Tradition has a large effect on the Rational Thinking Mediation Model (R<sup>2</sup>). The following core hypothesized relationships are significant:

1. Negative effect of:
  - a. Situation Fantasy on Rational Thinking (H<sub>4b(R)</sub>).
  - b. Commitment to Tradition on Consumption Behavior (H<sub>7a(i)</sub>).
2. Positive effect of:
  - a. Universal Norms on Commitment to Tradition (H<sub>8a(i)</sub>).
  - b. Rational Thinking on Universal Norms (H<sub>9(i)</sub>).

4.2.3. Experiential mediation model (alternative)

Time Origin has a large effect on the model (R<sup>2</sup>). The following core hypothesized relationships are significant:

1. Negative effect of:
  - a. Time Origin on Experiential Thinking (H<sub>1(E)</sub>).
2. Positive effect of:
  - a. Situation Fantasy on Experiential Thinking (H<sub>4b(E)</sub>).
  - b. Place Origin on Experiential Thinking (H<sub>7b(E)</sub>).
  - c. Experiential Thinking on Consumption Behavior (H<sub>10</sub>).
  - d. Place Origin on Situation Fantasy (H<sub>7b(i)</sub>).
  - e. Place Origin on Time Origin (H<sub>7b(iii)</sub>).

**Table 5**  
Hypotheses – SEM Alternative Models.

R = Rational thinking/E = Experiential thinking			Standardized regression weight	Estimate	Critical ratio	Sig. (p)
Dual Mediation Model (Alternative) (i to iv denote = New Hypotheses)						
H <sub>1(E)</sub>	Time Origin → Experiential Thinking	–	– 0.118	0.038	– 2.233	0.026
H <sub>4b(E)</sub>	Situation Fantasy → Experiential Thinking	+	0.164	0.040	3.103	0.002
H <sub>4b(R)</sub>	Situation Fantasy → Rational Thinking	–	– 0.137	0.048	– 2.523	0.012
H <sub>4b(i)</sub>	Situation Fantasy → Brand Values	+	0.416	0.048	8.348	≤ 0.001
H <sub>6b(R)</sub>	Brand Values → Rational Thinking	+	0.188	0.047	3.633	≤ 0.001
H <sub>7b(E)</sub>	Place of Origin → Experiential Thinking	+	0.125	0.042	2.327	0.020
H <sub>7b(i)</sub>	Place of Origin → Situational Fantasy	+	0.132	0.052	2.627	0.009
H <sub>7b(ii)</sub>	Place of Origin → Brand Values	+	0.193	0.044	4.351	≤ 0.001
H <sub>7b(iii)</sub>	Place of Origin → Time Origin	+	0.415	0.047	9.690	≤ 0.001
H <sub>7b(iv)</sub>	Place of Origin → Universal Norms	+	0.314	0.043	6.594	≤ 0.001
H <sub>8a(R)</sub>	Universal Norms → Rational Thinking	+	0.162	0.048	3.498	≤ 0.001
H <sub>9</sub>	Rational Thinking → Consumption Behavior	+	0.158	0.055	2.746	0.006
H <sub>10</sub>	Experiential Thinking → Consumption Behavior	+	0.203	0.065	3.471	≤ 0.001
H <sub>11(i)</sub>	Experiential Thinking → Rational Thinking	–	– 0.444	0.060	– 8.659	≤ 0.001
Rational Mediation Model (Alternative) (i to iv denote = New Hypotheses)						
H <sub>4b(R)</sub>	Situation Fantasy → Rational Thinking	–	– 0.121	0.047	– 2.316	0.021
H <sub>8a(i)</sub>	Universal Norms → Commitment to Tradition	+	0.562	0.044	11.582	≤ 0.001
H <sub>7a(i)</sub>	Commitment to Tradition → Consumption Behavior	–	– 0.207	0.054	– 4.158	≤ 0.001
H <sub>9</sub>	Rational Thinking → Consumption Behavior	+	0.086	0.047	1.731	0.083
H <sub>9(i)</sub>	Rational Thinking → Universal Norms	+	0.171	0.049	3.341	≤ 0.001
Experiential Mediation Model (Alternative) (i to iv denote = New Hypotheses)						
H <sub>1(E)</sub>	Time Origin → Experiential Thinking	–	– 0.119	0.038	– 2.240	0.025
H <sub>4b(E)</sub>	Situation Fantasy → Experiential Thinking	+	0.160	0.040	3.014	0.003
H <sub>7b(iii)</sub>	Place Origin → Time Origin	+	0.415	0.047	9.692	≤ 0.001
H <sub>7b(i)</sub>	Place Origin → Situation Fantasy	+	0.131	0.052	2.602	0.009
H <sub>7b(E)</sub>	Place Origin → Experiential Thinking	+	0.125	0.042	2.333	0.020
H <sub>10</sub>	Experiential Thinking → Consumption Behavior	+	0.130	0.057	2.550	0.011

4.3. Moderation analysis

Tables 4, 5 show the results of the moderation analysis using the same Goodness of Fit (GoF) measures and standardized regression weights. It is concluded that the moderation model has acceptable fit. The only exception compared to the CFA and SEM model fit is the required insignificant result for the model's p-value (Hair et al., 2010; Byrne and Stewart, 2006; Bollen and Long, 1993). In this case, the null hypothesis is that the default model (estimated model) and the saturated model (observed model) are not different. If they are not different, this implies good fit of our model to the data. So, the alternative hypothesis, that there is a difference, is to fail. If that hypothesis fails, then there is a good fit. If instead the p-value is significant, then there is a low probability of good fit. Fig. 2 shows the results of the moderation analysis. It is concluded that:

1. Rational thinking and experiential thinking diminishes the positive relationship between objective authenticity and consumption behavior.
2. Rational thinking and experiential thinking reduces the negative relationship between commitment to tradition and consumption behavior.

The moderation model resulted in a large effect (R<sup>2</sup>) of Consumption Behavior, Rational Thinking and Experiential Thinking (Table 6).

5. Discussion

This research hypothesizes that the sub-constructs of authenticity, through experiential and rational thinking, have a mediating and moderating relationship to consumption behavior.

The results represent different perspectives on this consumption process, that is, the Dual Mediation Model, Rational Mediation Model and Experiential Mediation Models.

For the Dual Mediation Model it is concluded that time origin has a negative effect on experiential thinking. This negative relationship is

further supported in the Experiential Mediation Model. The consumers' experience of iconic authenticity (time origin) as an accurate reproduction of the original (Grayson and Shulman, 2000; Grayson and Martinec, 2004) is not supported by experiential thinking. The experience of an accurate reproduction of the original is argued to be a rational cognitive process. Further results place greater importance of objective and rational sub-constructs such as place of origin and universal norms. Hence, online the authentic experience is enhanced when objective information in the consumption process is provided that supports goal directed behaviors. Balasubramanian et al. (2005) suggest that this information, linked to the knowledge of the shopper consumption processes, will help consumers form consideration sets.

Situation fantasy also negatively impacts rational thinking but has a positive effect on experiential thinking and brand values. These findings are also supported in the Experiential Mediation Model and Rational Mediation Models. It is argued that combining elements of authenticity and fantasy help consumers to construct a form of hyper-authenticity based on their previous experiences (Rose and Wood, 2005). In the online consumption mode, the consumer can gain authenticity by extracting indexically authentic elements based on their own experiences from brands and other consumption objects and use them to interact with fellow consumers. This means that, based on their own experiences with consumption objects and by sharing those experiences with their community, online consumers can gain an authentic experience. Hence, the positive relationship with brand values and experiential thinking (Balasubramanian et al., 2005). In contrast, the rational thinking process will challenge this hyper-authentic state.

Situational fantasies importance to the authentic experience signals a possible opportunity for managers to create an experience of online hyper-authenticity in order to achieve an increase in perception of brand authenticity. By identifying like-minded consumer target groups, digital managers can create an opportunity for consumers to engage in digital fantasy. Technological advances such as sites like IMVU which use virtual social networks to meet, socialize and play are highly engaging and on the increase. Likewise gaming communities such as Minecraft. An opportunity to revert back to an "original version" of ourselves unhindered by the trappings of everyday life is seen as an

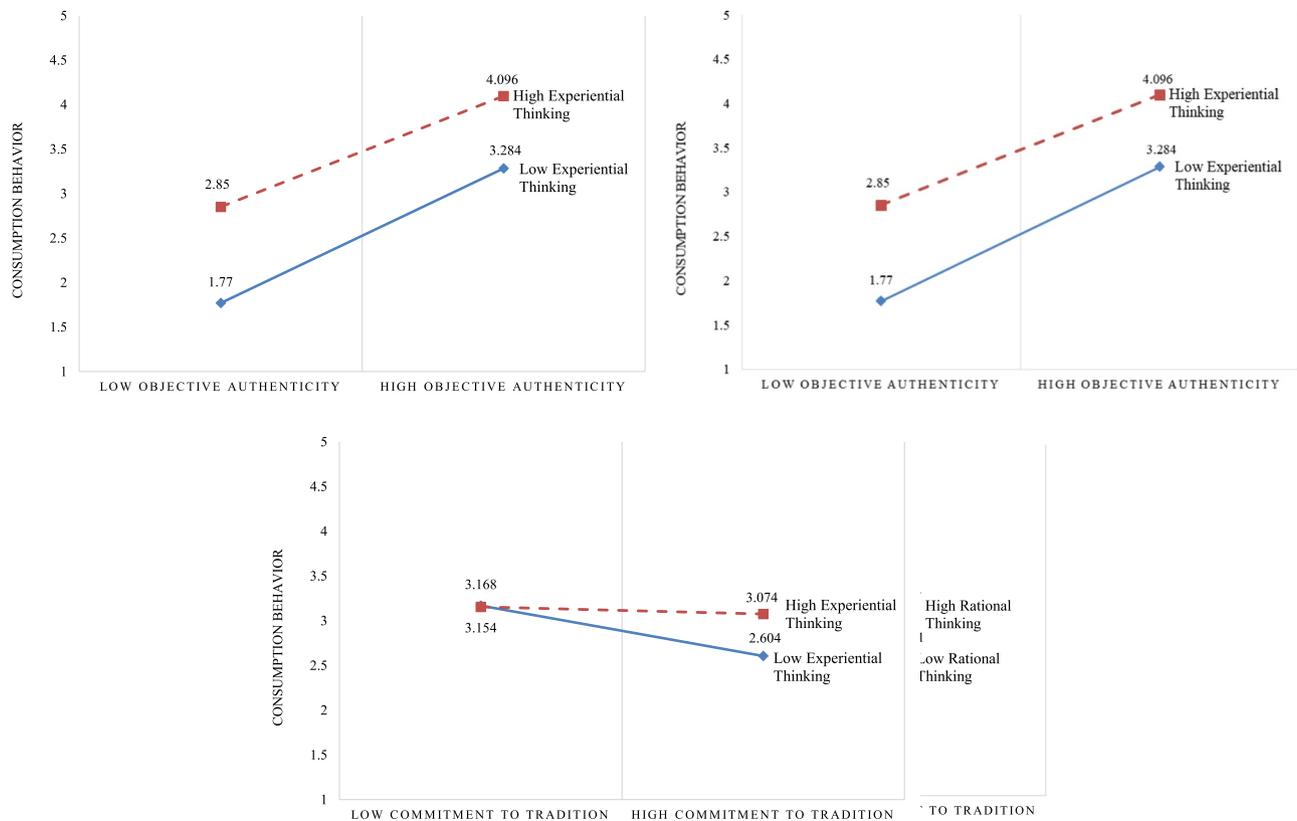


Fig. 2. Moderation analysis.

authentic experience. An example of this is the European travel brand Club 18–30. The antics of this holiday brand are re-enforced with online communities, YouTube videos, competitions and online communities to keep those connections alive once consumers return to the UK, thus ensuring re-purchase and word of mouth marketing via social media. In 2015, UK based content producer ITN launched a partnership with the Club 18–30 brand to provide 24/7 online TV programmes to satisfy FOMO (fear of missing out) to its ‘always on’ target audience.

In the Dual Mediation Model, it is concluded that brand values positively impact rational thinking. Brand values that consumers can relate to, such as the commitment to traditional production methods, will be considered authentic by consumers (Beverland, 2005, p.1017). While the research illustrates that online consumers accept brand messages espousing traditional handmade craftsmanship as being genuine, such messages can also be perceived as being clichés, and consumers are weary of them (Fine, 2003). Sometimes, consumers do not view brand messages as sincere; as Eggers et al. (2013) state: “customers often associate brand-speak with trickery, exaggeration, misdirection and outright deception (p. 341).

Therefore, in the online consumption mode, the consumer will use

consumption objects with brand values that match those of their own as resources to interact with fellow consumers because the consumer does not trust the sincerity of brand communications. Brand values in the brand consumption mode indicate that, for an authentic experience, it is important when online to re-enforce brand values that have been communicated through other touch points. Research has shown that consumers are generally skeptical about the authenticity of brand values online. This research brings to the fore the importance of ensuring that brand values are consistent and serve the consumer in an authentic way. This means presenting consumption objects in an honest and transparent way. Hill (2003) warns against the factory type approach to cognitive thinking and branding, since consumers make most of their decisions subconsciously rather than consciously and rationally.

Place of origin in the Dual Mediation Model has a positive effect on experiential thinking, since it assists the consumer to achieve goals of approximate (iconic) authenticity by providing a commitment to and feeling for the original place of manufacture (Napoli et al., 2014). In the online consumption mode the consumer will gain authenticity from using brands that provide a factual connection between the object and a place as a resource to interact with fellow consumers. Online consumers

Table 6  
SEM Squared multiple correlations (R<sup>2</sup>).

	Dual mediation model (Original)	Dual mediation model (Alternative)	Experiential mediation model (Alternative)	Rational mediation model (Alternative)	Moderated model
Consumption Behavior	0.053	0.038	0.017	0.047	0.512
Rational Thinking	0.083	0.259	–	0.015	0.147
Experiential Thinking	0.090	0.048	0.046	–	0.364
Universal Norms (VSA-UN)	0.000	0.099	–	0.029	–
Place of Origin (PIA-PO)	0.000	0.000	0.000	–	–
Time Origin (AIA-TO)	0.000	0.172	0.172	–	–
Brand Values (MA-BV)	0.000	0.231	–	–	–
Situation Fantasy (SIA-SF)	0.000	0.017	0.017	0.000	–
Commitment to Tradition	–	–	–	0.315	–

will consider a brand to be authentic based on its providing a commitment to and feeling for the original place of manufacture unless this can be independently verified or if consumers have had personal confirmation of this previously. Fuchs et al. (2015) call this the hand-made effect. They found that the presence of a positive handmade effect on product attractiveness was driven largely by the consumers' experience of the product containing 'love'.

Managers that are able to prove an authentic connection between an object and a place (place of origin) are more likely to appear to be presenting an authentic brand. By providing a feeling or representation of the original place of manufacture using accurate imagery or cues, brands will become more valued for their authenticity. An example of this is the highly competitive market of branded vodka. Challenged with engaging consumers and providing them with an entertaining understanding of the place of origin, Absolut created an Absolut app. After installing the app on their phone, consumers scanned an augmented reality code, which was attached to tags hanging on the neck of the vodka bottle. Scanning on the app then proceeded to take the consumer on a "three-dimensional tour of Åhus, a small Swedish village where the vodka is produced" and then on "a tour of the Absolut Factory". This approach supports a move towards establishing authenticity as a unique selling point of the brand.

In the Dual Mediation Model, universal norms positively effects rational thinking because such norms are the service specific laws that govern Trademe (Beverland et al., 2008). The alignment of the governing laws of the online service provider with the rational thinking of the consumer attributes authenticity to that product or service (Napoli et al., 2014). This finding is supported in the Rational Mediation Model. Here, rational thinking positively impacts universal norms. In this model universal norm has a positive effect on commitment to tradition, thus supporting the view that, for a consumer to achieve goals of authenticity, there needs to be a strong linkage between tradition and rules (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; Beverland et al., 2008). Other factors could play a role here in this effect, for example, the consumer's time planning style (Cotte et al., 2006) or creative authenticity (Valsesia et al., 2016).

It was found that rational thinking and experiential thinking have a positive effect on consumption behavior, a finding supported in the Experiential Mediation Model and Rational Mediation Models (Bellman et al., 2006). In the Dual Mediation Model, it is concluded that experiential thinking has a negative effect on rational thinking. Hence, the research confirms that consumers engage in both rational thinking and experiential thinking when making online consumption decisions (Hoffman and Novak, 2009). Interestingly, there is a positive relationship between authenticity and experiential thinking. The online consumers' experience of authenticity in making consumption decisions is based on the subjective hedonic experience (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53) as well as being the result of a rational process.

This suggests authentic consumption is enhanced by experiential thinking. For example, from a branding perspective, there is an opportunity for brands to define their brand values and engage through experiential thinking. An online user-defined experience enables consumers to find their own path through a site based on how they process information, thus facilitating a fit between what consumers expect from their interaction with a brand online. The most successful brand to do this in 2017 is probably Samsung with the launch of their S8 phone. Using emotional cues focused on creating a feeling of empathy and empowerment, Samsung presented the story of an Ostrich. In its effort to achieve the impossible and learn to fly, Samsung very cleverly crafted a strong experience that allowed all media channels to support its brand positioning "#do what you can't". This sparked a very genuine consumer response, with consumers posting social media stories of their own authentic experience of life challenges. The use of augmented reality (AR), which combines experiential marketing and fantasy through virtual reality technology, is increasingly popular. Popular AR marketing campaigns have been launched by Pepsi, Coke, Lynx and

arguably one of the most commercial applications of this, Absolut Vodka. Significant research is further required to explore this exciting aspect of creating brand authenticity through experiential marketing.

In the Dual Mediation Model, place of origin has a positive effect on situational fantasy, brand values, time origin and universal norms. These findings are supported in the Experiential Mediation Model, thus place of origin has a positive effect on experiential thinking. These findings support the importance to authenticity of the commitment to, and feeling for, the original place of manufacture (Beverland et al., 2008). This finding gives importance to this consumption behavior on brands, their values, and relevant fantasies that create for the consumer a possibly accurate reproduction of the original and governing rules.

Connection to a place of origin is important for a consumer because it affirms authenticity (Beverland, 2005, p. 1007). Indexical cues are strongly and consistently associated with a perceived connection with the place of origin (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). Therefore, if a brand provides an indexical cue that it will assist the consumer's self-authentication through connecting it to the place of its origin, the consumer will attribute indexical authenticity to the brand (Napoli et al., 2014). For example, for wine consumers online, a wine's relationship to a place of origin or terroir has value because this makes the respective wine label a unique product of its environment. When consuming a wine from a specific place of origin or terroir, the consumer is also experiencing the history or soul of the brand (Fuchs et al., 2015).

In the moderation analysis where the sub-constructs of authenticity are moderated by experiential thinking or rational thinking, it was found that rational thinking and experiential thinking have a diminishing effect on the positive relationship between objective authenticity and consumption behavior as well as commitment to tradition and consumption behavior.

It would appear that experiential and rational thinking have a diminishing effect on the relationship between the consumer's experience of the genuineness of the original (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). They also do not support the process of consumption fueled by the experience of unbroken commitment to tradition (Beverland et al., 2008). This conflicts with the hypothesized argument. Possibly, when the rational is combined with the experiential, it has a destabilizing effect: in moderation they disrupt each other's effect. Commitment to the traditional is also based on a more rational factual spatio-temporal connection to originality.

It is also possible that not enough attention is placed on cues that indicate genuineness and the criteria that define originality. For example, consumers debate the authenticity of the current Volkswagen Beetle automobile because, even though the brand essence is present in the new design, the car does not have the same physical properties as the original. If the new design matched the physical properties of the original, the current Volkswagen Beetle would have been iconically authentic. To create a positive rather than diminishing effect, it is suggested that more attention needs to be placed on brand related messages relating to originality and its physical properties.

Conversely, a similar result was found with objective authenticity where it is expected to have a positive moderation effect. In this case, objective authenticity is similar to commitment to the traditional in that it is based on a consumption item's degree of originality and assumes that there is an absolute, objective criterion against which to gauge it (Leigh et al., 2006). Objective authenticity is more focused on usage symbolism and self-efficacy as a basis to establish authenticity. Therefore, it may place greater attention on experiential thinking in moderation.

## 6. Managerial implications

The first key implication is the importance of rational and experiential thinking to authentic consumption experiences, as these types of thinking work together. The trick will be to find the balance. This balance is a function of what sub-components of the authentic

experience are important. This will vary of course and this research has focused only on the Trademe online environment. From a practice based perspective, the important sub-constructs of authenticity are split into two groups that are more aligned with rational thinking than experiential thinking. This could be viewed as a brand strategy. To enhance experiential thinking in branding, greater emphasis should focus on the role of brands, for example, to enhance perception of fantasy, and symbolism linked to self. For rational thinking and branding, greater emphasis could be placed on brand-related information linking the brand to the original time of manufacture, some factual connection to history, and a commitment and feeling for the original place of manufacture and its creator. This information can be supported by stated laws and standards that verify this connection.

## 7. Research implications

Firstly, the model conceptualized in the research could be further refined. The initial conceptualization modeled important literature-based constructs. However, new hypothesized relationships from this study and empirical evidence could re-specify the conceptual model. It is also acknowledged that the model development process could have applied alternative approaches advocated, for example, by [Rossiter \(2011\)](#). This approach may help in future research to further establish two or more sides to the notion of authenticity: a rational one and an experiential one and whether there are there some differences between authenticity and the authenticity of consumer experience. This competing approach may also help researchers establish the differences between authenticity and other related concepts, such as credibility. It could also help to determine other questions such as the multidimensionality of the sub-constructs (e.g., proximity). The analysis process could also involve a further robustness test to further reduce the model uncertainty. For example, exploring the indirect relationship between online authenticity and consumption behavior.

Future work could also follow that of [Brakus et al. \(2009\)](#) to measure the relationship between brand experience, authenticity and service loyalty.

We also acknowledge that future research could add additional screening questions to quantify their frequency of transactions. This research asked respondents to self-report usage ([Szajna, 1996](#)). Future work may obtain actual consumption behavior in the online marketplace. This study utilizes a cross-sectional analysis in which 491 participants reflected upon their current and prior online consumption behavior. A longitudinal study approach would capture the nuanced change in perceptions of authenticity over time ([Postrel, 2003](#)).

This research investigates consumer behavior online, but it is anticipated that the findings could be applied to an offline marketplace. The offline marketplace is not such a “high risk” trading place; consumers can meet retailers face-to-face, establish trust relationships, and can contact the vendor if problems arise with their consumption experience. It is therefore envisaged that offline consumers may alter with differing cues to establish authenticity and that the level of authenticity substantiation could be set at a lower threshold accordingly.

Further, future research may wish to extend the model into other samples that are different from the NZ context, since consumers in differing cultures search for different indicators of authenticity ([Holt, 1995](#)). It is likely that authenticity evaluations will vary with different cultures and products or services ([Napoli et al., 2014](#)). Authenticity evaluations and rational/experiential thinking behavior may alter with the relative cost of the consumption object. For example, there may be a positive relationship between authenticity and experiential thinking with low cost consumer items, and rational thinking with higher cost products and services. Further investigation is required to explore the relationship between price and its effect on the authenticity of the brand, the service and the community. The literature proposes that authenticity is often fabricated ([Guy, 2002](#)). Future research may wish to explore the ramifications to brand, community and service

authenticity when claims of authenticity are discovered by the consumer to be fictitious.

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