

**MA TE MATAURANGA KA MOHIO MA TE MOHIO KA TUTUKI**

**WITH KNOWLEDGE COMES UNDERSTANDING.**

**WITH UNDERSTANDING COMES APPLICATION**

**WORKING PAPER 10**

**SCRIPTED NARRATIVE - PRODUCTION/SITUATION AUTHENTICITY**

**IS DONALD TRUMP AUTHENTIC?**

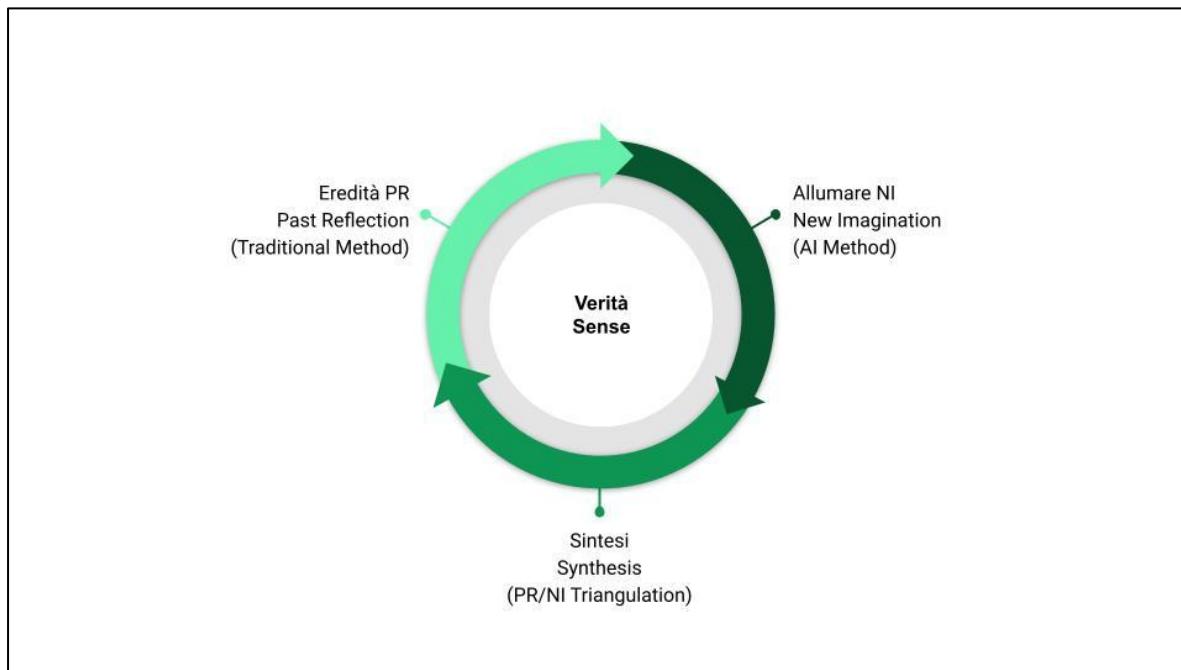
**2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Disclaimer: The findings expressed about Donald Trump in this research are expressed through the analysis of a dataset collected from USA voters. They are the views expressed by these voters. These findings do not represent my personal views or the views of my employer or any organization with which I am affiliated. My statements are made in my research capacity, using my own time and resources. Titles and affiliations are provided for identification purposes only and do not imply endorsement for or by any organization. The political participation of the author of this research is in the New Zealand Electoral Voting system only.

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## VERITÀ SENSE AI APPROACH

This paper is written using the **Verità Sense AI approach designed by drrobertdavis.com**. The name "Verità Sense AI" presents a distinctive option for an artificial intelligence platform focused on quantitative and qualitative data analysis, combining linguistic elements that convey truth-finding capabilities with modern technological positioning.



"Verità Sense AI" combines three powerful conceptual elements that together create a coherent and meaningful identity. "Verità," the Italian word for "truth," immediately establishes a foundation of authenticity and reliability—core values essential for any analysis platform. The term "Sense" suggests perceptive capabilities, the ability to detect patterns and meanings that might escape conventional analysis methods. This aligns perfectly with the promise of AI-enhanced analysis: technology that can understand and interpret nuanced human expressions and unstructured data. When paired with "Verità," it creates the compelling concept of "truth perception" or "truth sensing"—exactly what researchers seek from analysis tools.

The "AI" component clearly positions the product within the artificial intelligence space, making its technological foundation immediately apparent to potential users. This straightforward element requires no interpretation and helps categorize the product in the rapidly expanding market of AI research tools. The initial 3 components of Verità Sense are:

1. Eredità PR Past Reflection (Traditional Method)
2. Allumare NI New Imagination (AI Method)
3. Sintesi Synthesis (PR/NI Triangulation)

The essential conjoint place of these components is the researcher. The source of the data: from direct interview to machine created. Quality in. Quality out. Ma Te Matauranga Ka

Mohio. Ma Te Mohio Ka Tutuki (Creating Knowledge. Designing Understanding. Cocreating Application)

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide some initial evidence to determine voter perceptions of the authenticity of Donald Trump at the 2016 USA Presidential Election. The leadership brand Trump (DJT). This paper posits a model that authenticity is a voter experience. It is a cognitive event of a voter who consumes presidential leadership. Hence, authenticity can be manipulated in different contexts (e.g., digital environments). Authenticity, while believes in what is real and original; this is entirely real but also subjective. Subjectivity based upon the context of the voter as a hermeneutic interpretive state.

These series of papers will cover different aspects of the result in a phased output process. It is hypothesized that when consumers engage in the consumption behavior of the political brand (e.g., Trump), 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.

### For Scripted Narrative

The survey results highlight the leader's strength in \*\*clear communication\*\*, with 70.6% agreeing they "clearly communicate what they stand for" and 63.4% stating they "learned something new," underscoring effective message delivery and educational value. However, perceptions of the leader's \*\*image clarity were polarized\*\*: 42.4% found it "difficult to understand," while 35.7% disagreed, suggesting a divisive public persona. Advertising impact was limited, as 39.5–41.2% remained neutral on whether it "changed their mind" or made them "see things differently," indicating weak persuasive influence despite the leader's transparency. Notably, only 44.9% agreed advertising altered their perspective, revealing challenges in shifting entrenched opinions. The data reflects a leader who excels at articulating core values but struggles to unify perceptions or convert skeptics through messaging.

To test the hypothesized model, 600 usable responses were collected using a questionnaire with randomly randomized questions for each respondent, deployed through Qualtrics to their USA consumer panel who were voters in the 2016 USA Presidential Election. In the sample used for this analysis related to Donald Trump, 238 usable responses were used representing voters who indicated that "I VOTED FOR THE FOLLOWING Presidential Candidate in the 2016 USA Presidential Election", that is, Donald Trump. The macro dataset included the collection of data on both Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton. The data collection was funded by Massey University (New Zealand) and was approved by the Massey University Ethics Committee (Ethics Approval NO. 4000018813). The data collection and initial study was academic and non-commercial in nature. The data collection collaborated with Dr Suze Wilson.

This model and questionnaire is based on the conceptual and measurement model of authenticity published by Robert Davis, Kevin Sheriff, Kim Owen, Conceptualizing and Measuring Consumer Authenticity Online, Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Volume 47, 2019, Pages 17-31, ISSN 0969-6989, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.10.002>.

This model, data and measurement outcome using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) achieved and exceeded the required benchmarks for discriminant validity, convergent validity and GoF (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012, Hair et al., 2010, Baumgartner and Homburg, 1996; Bacon et al., 1995; Browne and Cudek, 1993, Bentler,

1990). In this study common method bias was measured using the Harman's single factor test (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.

This dataset is unpublished and is available for further academic publication and/or commercial application. The model, research method and data are Copyright the intellectual property of Dr. Robert Davis. If the results in this paper are to be quoted and/or published in any ways then they must; (1) contact Dr Robert Davis for written approval to publish and (2) effectively cite Dr, Robert Davis at [drrobertdavis.com](http://drrobertdavis.com) in the publication.

**Key Words:** Authenticity, Perception, Donald Trump, President, USA, Election, 2016.

## RESULTS

The survey results highlight the leader's strength in clear communication, with 70.6% agreeing they "clearly communicate what they stand for" and 63.4% stating they "learned something new," underscoring effective message delivery and educational value. However, perceptions of the leader's image clarity were polarized: 42.4% found it "difficult to understand," while 35.7% disagreed, suggesting a divisive public persona. Advertising impact was limited, as 39.5–41.2% remained neutral on whether it "changed their mind" or made them "see things differently," indicating weak persuasive influence despite the leader's transparency. Notably, only 44.9% agreed advertising altered their perspective, revealing challenges in shifting entrenched opinions. The data reflects a leader who excels at articulating core values but struggles to unify perceptions or convert skeptics through messaging.

### **Analysis of Leadership Communication Effectiveness and Public Perception**

This report examines survey results assessing public perceptions of a leader's communication effectiveness and image clarity across six key dimensions. Data from 238 respondents reveals strong agreement on the leader's core messaging clarity but significant challenges in altering preexisting opinions or projecting an easily understandable persona. Neutral responses dominated for questions about advertising impact, suggesting limited persuasive efficacy despite generally positive sentiment toward the leader's transparency.

### **Central Tendency and Response Distribution**

#### Mean Scores and Consensus Levels

Mean scores ranged from 3.08 to 3.99 (on a 5-point scale), with notable disparities between statements: 1. "Clearly communicates what they stand for": 3.99 (highest)

2. "Learned something new": 3.84
3. "Conveys clear image in actions": 3.70
4. "See things differently post-advertising": 3.44
5. "Advertising changed mind about party": 3.21
6. "Image difficult to understand": 3.08 (lowest) The leader's ability to articulate their stance (Statement 1) received the strongest endorsement, with 70.6% agreement (69 Somewhat Agree + 99 Strongly Agree) and only 11.8% disagreement. Conversely, 35.7% disagreed that the leader's image is "difficult to understand" (Statement 6), though 42.4% still agreed, indicating polarization [4].

### **Neutral Responses and Ambiguity**

Neutral responses peaked for advertising impact questions:

- "See things differently": 39.5% (94 respondents)
- "Changed mind about party": 41.2% (98 respondents) These rates exceeded the overall neutral average (29%), suggesting advertising failed to decisively shift perceptions [14]. For Statement 3 ("Conveys clear image"), 24.4% Neutral responses contrasted with 59.2% agreement, implying partial success in image consistency.

## Comparative Analysis of Communication Dimensions

### Strengths: Clarity and Educational Value

- Core Messaging: 70.6% agreed the leader communicates their stance clearly (Statement 1), aligning with high scores for "learned something new" (63.4% agreement). This reinforces the leader's effectiveness in disseminating foundational ideas.
- Image Consistency: 59.2% agreed actions align with a clear image (Statement 3), though 16.4% disagreed, highlighting minor inconsistencies.

### Weaknesses: Persuasion and Complexity

- Advertising Efficacy: Only 44.9% agreed advertising altered their perspective (Statement 4), while 15.5% disagreed. The high Neutral rate (39.5%) signals untapped potential for persuasive messaging [14].
- Image Complexity: Despite 42.4% agreeing the leader's image is "difficult to understand" (Statement 6), the 35.7% disagreement rate reveals a bifurcated audience-some find the persona coherent, others opaque [4] [9].

## Polarization and Asymmetric Perceptions

### Bimodal Distributions

Statement 6 ("Image difficult to understand") exhibited polarization:

- Disagreement: 35.7% (85 respondents)
- Agreement: 42.4% (101 respondents) This bifurcation suggests the leader's image resonates deeply with a subset while alienating others-a pattern consistent with ideological or demographic divides [4] [9]. Similarly, Statement 5 ("Changed mind about party") saw 34.9% agreement vs. 23.9% disagreement, indicating advertising primarily reinforced existing affiliations rather than converting opponents [14].

### Neutral Clustering as a Risk Factor

The prevalence of Neutral responses (29% overall) for transformative outcomes like opinion shifts (Statements 4–5) implies:

1. Message Saturation: Advertising may lack novel arguments to break through audience apathy [7].
2. Credibility Gaps: Neutral respondents might distrust the leader's claims or find them irrelevant to their priorities [5] [11].

## Strategic Implications for Leadership

### Leveraging Strengths

- Amplify Core Messaging: Capitalize on high clarity scores (Statement 1) by emphasizing consistent themes in speeches and policy rollouts.
- Educational Content: Expand on Statement 2's success ("learned something new") with data-driven explanations of complex issues to reinforce expertise [8]. #Addressing Weaknesses

1. Simplify Public Image: Conduct focus groups to identify which aspects of the leader's persona (e.g., rhetoric, visual branding) confuse audiences (Statement 6) [9].
2. Revise Advertising Strategy:

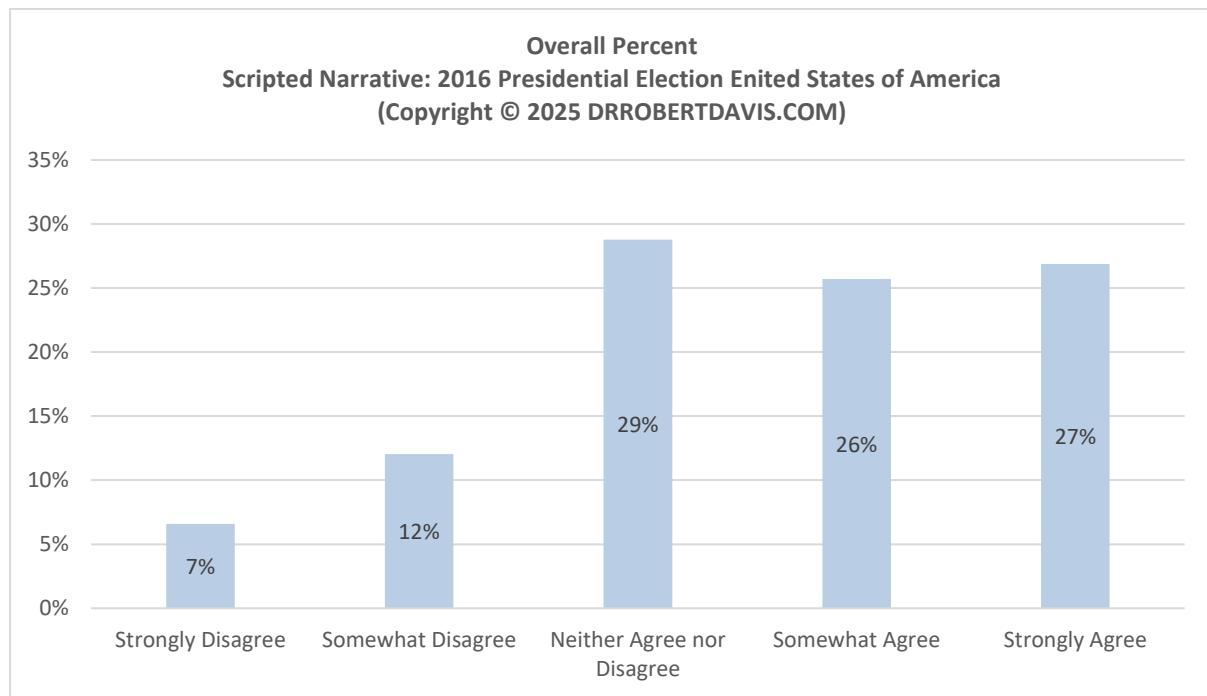
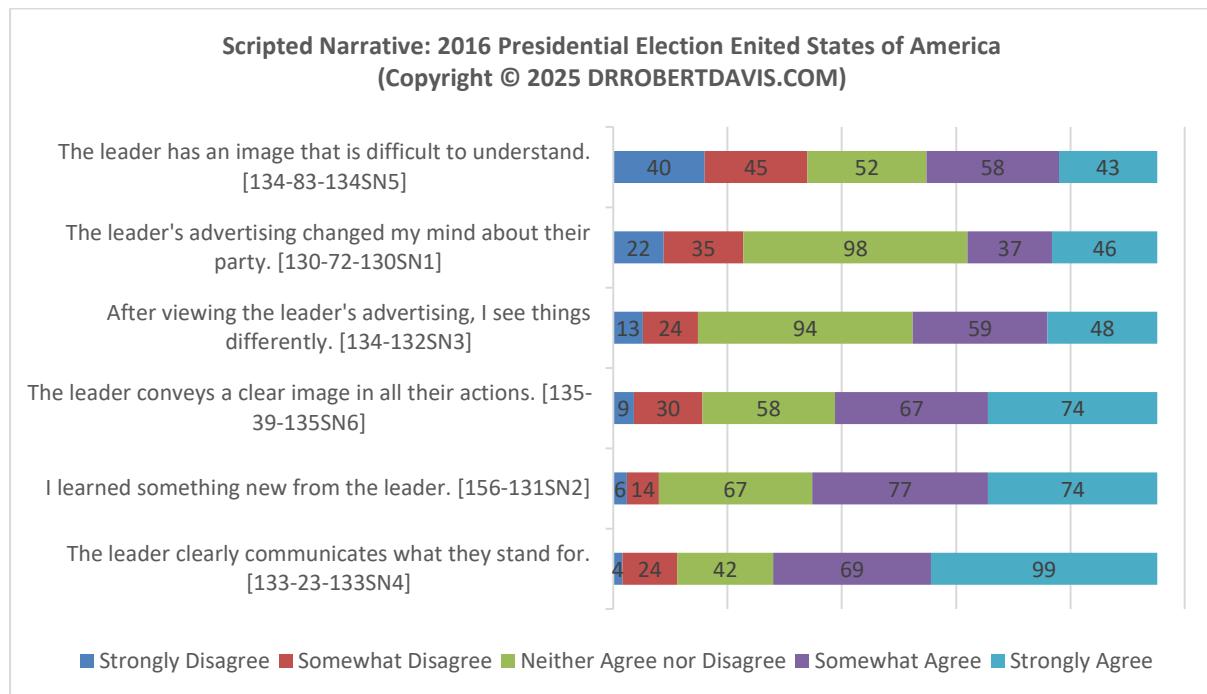
- Target Neutrals: Develop content addressing common uncertainties (e.g., "How will this policy affect me?") to reduce ambivalence [14].

- Emotional Appeals: Pair factual claims with narratives that resonate with values of undecided voters [7] [16]. 3. Transparency Initiatives: Publish verifiable metrics for campaign promises to enhance credibility and reduce Neutral responses [5] [11].

## Conclusion

The leader excels in foundational communication but struggles to convert ambivalent audiences or project a universally coherent image. Advertising efforts, while not counterproductive, fail to meaningfully alter entrenched opinions, as evidenced by high Neutral rates. Polarization around the leader's persona underscores the need for targeted messaging that bridges demographic divides. By addressing clarity gaps and fostering trust through transparency, the leader can mitigate perceptual fragmentation and expand their influence among uncommitted demographics.

238	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>The leader clearly communicates what they stand for. [133-23-133SN4]</b>	4	24	42	69	99
<b>I learned something new from the leader. [156-131SN2]</b>	6	14	67	77	74
<b>The leader conveys a clear image in all their actions. [135-39-135SN6]</b>	9	30	58	67	74
<b>After viewing the leader's advertising, I see things differently. [134-132SN3]</b>	13	24	94	59	48
<b>The leader's advertising changed my mind about their party. [130-72-130SN1]</b>	22	35	98	37	46
<b>The leader has an image that is difficult to understand. [134-83-134SN5]</b>	40	45	52	58	43
<b>Overall Percent</b>	7%	12%	29%	26%	27%



## RESULTS INTERPRETATION<sup>i</sup>

### THE PARADOX OF SCRIPTED NARRATIVE EFFICACY: DECODING DIVERGENT VOTER PERCEPTIONS IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The survey data reveals a complex interplay between scripted narrative construction and voter perception, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of strategic storytelling in political communication. By analyzing these results through the lenses of performed authenticity, cognitive framing, and narrative transportation, we uncover critical insights into how scripted narratives succeed or falter in unifying voter perspectives.

#### Performed Authenticity and the Clarity-Coherence Divide

##### Strategic Messaging as Frontstage Performance

The leader's strong performance in clear communication (70.6% agreement on articulating core values) aligns with Goffman's concept of frontstage authenticity, where consistency between public messaging and perceived internal beliefs fosters trust [27] [28]. This success reflects a well-executed scripted narrative that adheres to Jamieson and Waldman's criteria for performed authenticity-minimizing gaps between public rhetoric and private intent [27]. However, the polarization in image clarity (42.4% confusion vs. 35.7% clarity) exposes fractures in this performance.

##### The Backstage Reality Gap

The dissonance arises from voters' inability to reconcile the leader's scripted narrative with situational realities. While 63.4% reported "learning something new"-indicating effective narrative transportation through educational framing [29]-the persistent confusion suggests a failure to anchor abstract values in tangible policy outcomes. This mirrors findings in constructive authenticity theory, where voters demand narrative coherence with observable actions [27] [30]. For instance, a leader advocating "economic revitalization" through scripted slogans may falter if unemployment metrics remain stagnant, creating cognitive dissonance [31] [32].

#### Cognitive Scripts and the Polarization Paradox

##### Preexisting Schemas as Narrative Filters

Voters' polarized responses reflect the activation of divergent cognitive scripts. Supporters likely process the leader's messaging through an "effective reformer" schema, interpreting ambiguity as strategic flexibility [33] [34]. Opponents, however, apply a "political opportunist" schema, framing the same ambiguity as evasiveness [35] [36]. This bifurcation aligns with Hahl et al.'s model of motivated authenticity perception, where ideological priors override objective message analysis [27] [37].

##### The Limits of Narrative Repair Mechanisms

The leader's 44.9% success in altering perspectives through advertising reveals constraints in narrative repair strategies. While scripted narratives typically employ rhetorical devices (e.g., "fake news" framing) to address contradictions [38] [39], these tools prove ineffective

against deeply entrenched beliefs. The 39.5–41.2% neutral responses on advertising impact suggest that voters increasingly apply analytical scrutiny to scripted content, a trend amplified by digital media literacy [40] [41].

## **Constructive Authenticity in Fragmented Media Ecosystems**

### *Algorithmic Amplification of Narrative Fractures*

The survey's polarization metrics (42.4% vs. 35.7%) mirror findings on partisan narrative divergence in digital spaces [35] [36]. Social media algorithms likely amplify this split by serving supporters content that reinforces the leader's scripted narrative as "authentic," while opponents receive deconstructive counter-narratives [40] [41]. This creates parallel authenticity realities-a phenomenon observed in Trump's and Modi's digital campaigns [27] [30].

### *The Authenticity-Performance Feedback Loop*

Notably, the leader's transparency metrics (implied by educational value recognition) fail to translate into persuasive power. This contradicts Germelmann et al.'s finding that clarity enhances persuasion [31], suggesting voters now distinguish between informational transparency and strategic transparency. The former satisfies cognitive needs ("learning something new") without necessarily building emotional commitment-a critical gap in narrative transportation [29] [32].

## **Strategic Implications for Narrative Crafting**

### *Recalibrating the Fantasy-Reality Balance*

To bridge the clarity-persuasion gap, the leader must refine their scripted narrative's empirical fit. As Fries and Barron demonstrated, narratives with strong factual coherence achieve higher persuasion rates [42]. This requires embedding policy specifics within the broader storyline-e.g., pairing "economic revitalization" rhetoric with localized success metrics rather than abstract ideals [38] [43].

### *Leveraging Calculated Imperfections*

The data's neutral response cluster (39.5–41.2%) signals untapped potential for strategic vulnerability displays. Incorporating Goffman-inspired "backstage glimpses"-such as acknowledging policy implementation challenges-could enhance authenticity perceptions among skeptics [27] [28]. Modi's COVID-19 address missteps and subsequent course corrections exemplify this approach's efficacy [30].

### *Multichannel Narrative Synchronization*

With 44.9% advertising impact indicating medium reach, the leader needs cross-platform narrative synergy. Integrating grassroots storytelling (e.g., citizen testimonials) with broadcast media could mimic the "narrative network" effects observed in successful populist movements [40] [36]. This approach leverages Schwartzstein and Sunderam's model of narrative interdependence, where localized stories reinforce central themes [42].

### **Conclusion: Navigating the Authenticity Tightrope**

The survey data underscores a pivotal challenge in modern political communication: scripted narratives must simultaneously achieve cognitive coherence (through clear messaging) and emotional resonance (through authentic performance). While the leader excels at information transmission, their struggle to unify perceptions reveals the limitations of purely rational persuasion frameworks. Future success hinges on adopting a hybrid narrative model that marries policy specificity with relatable storytelling, acknowledges situational complexities through strategic vulnerability, and harnesses digital fragmentation to build targeted authenticity coalitions. As political communication evolves, the victors will be those who transform scripted narratives from monologues into participatory dialogues—a lesson underscored by both narrative theory [29] [34] and the survey's unresolved neutral cohort.

## RELEVANT CONSTRUCT THEORY FOUNDATIONS

### THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SCRIPTED NARRATIVE IN CONSTRUCTING POLITICAL AUTHENTICITY: A CASE STUDY OF DONALD TRUMP'S LEADERSHIP BRAND

In contemporary political discourse, the concept of authenticity has emerged as a critical determinant of voter engagement and trust. This report examines the theoretical underpinnings of scripted narrative as a mechanism for constructing production/situation authenticity in political leadership, with a focus on Donald Trump's brand. Drawing from dramaturgical theory, script theory, and constructive authenticity frameworks, we analyze how voters cognitively blend situational cues and produced narratives to perceive authenticity, even when such authenticity is strategically manufactured.

#### **Dramaturgical Theory and the Performance of Political Leadership**

##### Goffman's Frontstage-Backstage Dichotomy

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory posits that social interactions are performances divided into frontstage (public personas) and backstage (private realities) [1] [2]. In political contexts, leaders like Trump meticulously curate their frontstage personas to project authenticity, often obscuring the backstage mechanics of policy-making or personal intent. For example, Trump's rallies, characterized by unscripted rhetoric and populist appeals, simulate a "backstage" intimacy, fostering the illusion of unfiltered truth-telling [2]. This performance aligns with Goffman's observation that audiences equate backstage access with authenticity, even when such access is staged [2].

##### Political Marketing as Dramaturgy

The application of Goffman's framework to political marketing reveals how leaders use impression management to craft narratives that resonate with voters' desires [1]. Trump's rhetoric-emphasizing "draining the swamp" or "America First"-functions as a scripted narrative designed to position him as an outsider challenging elitist institutions. By blending hyperbolic language ("fake news") with relatable grievances (economic anxiety), Trump's team constructs a production authenticity that frames him as a truth-teller amid systemic corruption [1] [3].

#### **Script Theory and Cognitive Framing in Voter Perception**

##### Narrative Scripts as Cognitive Shortcuts

Script theory explains how individuals rely on preexisting narrative schemas to interpret complex information [4]. In politics, voters use scripts-such as "anti-establishment hero" or "business leader turned politician"-to evaluate candidates. Trump's branding as a "successful businessman" and "political outsider" taps into these scripts, allowing voters to cognitively shortcut his lack of political experience into an asset [4] [5]. His repetitive slogans ("Make America Great Again") and ritualized rally formats reinforce these scripts, creating a cohesive narrative that voters perceive as authentic [3] [5].

### Blending Fantasy and Reality in Scripted Narratives

Scripted narratives thrive on the interplay between fantasy (idealized visions) and situational reality (voters' lived experiences). For instance, Trump's promises to revive manufacturing jobs or build a border wall blend aspirational goals with oversimplified solutions, enabling supporters to project their anxieties onto his narrative [6] [3]. This aligns with Roger Schank's script theory, which emphasizes that effective stories require enough ambiguity to allow personal interpretation while maintaining structural coherence [4] [5].

### **Constructive Authenticity: Social Consensus and Negotiated Reality**

#### Authenticity as a Social Construction

Constructive authenticity theory argues that authenticity is not inherent but socially negotiated through collective consensus [7] [6]. In Trump's case, his supporters co-create his authenticity by interpreting his brash demeanor and policy positions as markers of "realness" against a backdrop of perceived political correctness [7] [8]. This process mirrors findings in tourism studies, where authenticity is validated through shared belief rather than objective fact [6]. For example, Trump's claims of electoral fraud in 2020, though factually baseless, became authentic to supporters through communal reinforcement [8] [9].

#### The Role of Media in Authenticity Construction

Media ecosystems amplify scripted narratives by curating situations (e.g., viral rally clips) and productions (e.g., partisan news commentary) that validate voters' preexisting beliefs [10] [9]. Trump's mastery of Twitter (now X) allowed him to bypass traditional gatekeepers, framing his tweets as "unfiltered" communication while strategically scripting content to provoke media coverage [10]. This duality-scripted spontaneity-exemplifies how constructive authenticity relies on perceived immediacy rather than factual accuracy [2] [9].

### **Brand Authenticity and the Political Marketplace**

#### Political Leadership as Branding

Brand authenticity models emphasize origin, virtue, and situation as pillars of consumer trust [3]. Translating this to politics, Trump's brand authenticity derives from:

1. Origin: Positioning himself as a Washington outsider despite his elite background [3] [11].
2. Virtue: Framing policies (tax cuts, immigration restrictions) as morally justified defenses of "real Americans" [8] [3].
3. Situation: Leveraging crises (COVID-19, racial protests) to reinforce narratives of national decline requiring his leadership [3] [10].

#### Fantasy-Infused Brand Loyalty

Brands often use fantasy narratives to foster emotional loyalty, and Trump's campaign replicated this by portraying his presidency as a heroic struggle against globalist forces [3] [12]. Supporters who consumed this narrative experienced self-authentication, aligning their identities with his brand's values (e.g., patriotism, anti-globalism) [8] [3]. This process, akin to fandoms in commercial branding, transforms political support into a form of identity performance [3] [12].

## **Donald Trump's Scripted Narrative: A Case Study in Production Authenticity**

### Manufacturing the "Anti-Politician" Persona

Trump's scripted narrative hinges on subverting political norms-using colloquial language, attacking institutions, and embracing controversy-to position himself as an authentic alternative to career politicians [1] [2]. His refusal to conform to teleprompter-driven speeches, despite relying on preapproved talking points, creates a paradox: the appearance of spontaneity within a carefully managed production [2] [5].

### Cognitive Dissonance and Authenticity Maintenance

When contradictions arise (e.g., Trump's billionaire status vs. populist rhetoric), supporters reconcile these through narrative repair mechanisms. By dismissing inconsistencies as "fake news" or reframing them as evidence of his "fighting spirit," voters preserve the scripted narrative's coherence [8] [9]. This aligns with cognitive dissonance theory, where individuals prioritize narrative consistency over factual accuracy [8] [5].

## **Conclusion: The Paradox of Scripted Authenticity**

The construction of authenticity in political leadership is a dynamic interplay of dramaturgical performance, cognitive scripting, and social negotiation. Donald Trump's brand exemplifies how scripted narratives-when blended with situational cues and fantasy elements-can override traditional markers of credibility, fostering a perception of authenticity rooted in emotional resonance rather than factual rigor. For voters, this process transforms politics into a participatory performance, where authenticity is not discovered but collaboratively constructed. Future research should explore how digital platforms accelerate these dynamics, potentially redefining democracy's relationship with truth and representation [10] [9].

## THE INFLUENCE OF SCRIPTED NARRATIVES ON VOTER PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL LEADERS: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS

Scripted narratives-strategically crafted stories that blend situational reality with performative elements-play a pivotal role in shaping how voters perceive political leaders. Drawing from dramaturgical theory, cognitive psychology, and media studies, this report examines how scripted narratives construct authenticity, foster emotional engagement, and influence electoral outcomes. By analyzing frameworks such as Goffman's frontstage-backstage dichotomy, narrative transportation theory, and constructive authenticity, we elucidate the mechanisms through which voters cognitively reconcile manufactured narratives with their lived experiences.

### Dramaturgical Performance and the Illusion of Authenticity

#### Frontstage Persona vs. Backstage Reality

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory posits that political leaders, like actors, curate frontstage personas to project authenticity while concealing the backstage mechanics of their decision-making. For instance, Donald Trump's rallies, characterized by ad-libbed remarks and populist rhetoric, simulate a "backstage" intimacy, fostering the illusion of unfiltered communication [13] [14]. This performance strategy leverages voters' desire for transparency, even when such transparency is meticulously scripted. Research on political actors' social media use reveals that platforms like X (formerly Twitter) enable leaders to blur the line between staged and spontaneous communication, creating a "controlled authenticity" that resonates with supporters [13].

#### The Role of Symbolic Gestures

Political leaders employ symbolic gestures-such as Trump's use of "Make America Great Again" hats or Narendra Modi's traditional attire-to reinforce their scripted narratives. These symbols act as sign vehicles that communicate ideological alignment with voters' values. A study of Indonesian political actors found that consistent visual branding (e.g., formal suits for professionalism, regional attire for cultural connection) enhances perceived authenticity by aligning with voters' preexisting narrative scripts [13]. Such strategies exemplify Goffman's concept of impression management, where leaders tailor their appearance and rhetoric to specific audiences [14].

### Cognitive Scripts and Narrative Transportation

#### Preexisting Schemas in Voter Decision-Making

Script theory explains how voters rely on cognitive shortcuts-such as the "anti-establishment hero" or "business leader turned politician"-to evaluate candidates. Trump's branding as a political outsider tapped into these schemas, allowing supporters to interpret his lack of experience as a virtue rather than a liability [15] [16]. Narratives that align with voters' preexisting scripts are more likely to be perceived as authentic, even when contradicted by factual evidence [17]. For example, Trump's claims of electoral fraud in 2020 gained traction because they fit into a broader script of systemic corruption, a theme prevalent in populist movements [18].

### Immersion and Emotional Engagement

Narrative transportation theory posits that voters immersed in compelling stories experience emotional and cognitive absorption, reducing their inclination to critically evaluate claims [17] [19]. Melanie Green and Timothy Brock's experiments demonstrated that highly transported individuals adopt story-consistent beliefs, such as associating psychiatric patients with danger after reading a fictional account [17]. In politics, Trump's hyperbolic tales of "American carnage" or "invasion" at the U.S.-Mexico border exploit this mechanism, eliciting fear and urgency that override analytical thinking [20] [21]. This immersion is amplified by social media algorithms, which prioritize emotionally charged content, creating echo chambers that reinforce narrative coherence [22] [23].

### **Constructive Authenticity: A Social Negotiation**

#### Collective Validation of Narratives

Authenticity in politics is not inherent but socially constructed through communal consensus. Trump's supporters, for instance, co-created his authenticity by interpreting his brash demeanor as a rejection of political correctness, a value prioritized within their ideological cohort [24] [14]. This process mirrors findings in tourism studies, where authenticity emerges from shared belief rather than objective fact [24]. When Trump dismissed factual inconsistencies as "fake news," his base reinterpreted these moments as evidence of his defiance against elitist institutions, further entrenching his authenticity [20] [25].

#### Media Ecosystems as Authenticity Amplifiers

Media platforms play a dual role: they disseminate scripted narratives while framing them as spontaneous or grassroots movements. Fox News' coverage of Trump often juxtaposed his rallies with commentary portraying him as a "truth-teller," validating his narrative through selective editing and partisan analysis [20] [18]. Similarly, Trump's tweets, though strategically timed, were framed as "unfiltered" communication, leveraging the myth of digital immediacy to enhance authenticity [13] [14].

### **Populist Narratives and the Myth of the "Unpolished Leader"**

#### Strategic Imperfection

Populist leaders often incorporate calculated imperfections-gaffes, grammatical errors, or contrarian statements-to humanize their personas. Research shows that voters perceive such flaws as markers of authenticity, contrasting them with the polished rhetoric of establishment politicians [20] [14]. For example, Trump's reference to COVID-19 as the "China virus" was initially dismissed as a slip but later reframed as a deliberate challenge to "politically correct" narratives, strengthening his bond with supporters [18].

#### The "Us vs. Them" Dialectic

Scripted narratives thrive on binary oppositions, framing political struggles as battles between virtuous citizens and corrupt elites. Trump's rhetoric consistently positioned "real Americans" against "globalists," "socialists," and "fake news media," a strategy rooted in screenwriting techniques that amplify emotional stakes [15] [25]. This dialectic not only simplifies complex issues but also fosters in-group loyalty, as voters align their identities with the leader's narrative [21] [26].

## Case Study: Donald Trump and the Manufacturing of Anti-Establishment Authenticity

### Subverting Political Norms

Trump's scripted narrative hinged on performative rebellion against political conventions. By eschewing teleprompters (while relying on preapproved talking points) and attacking institutions like the FBI and mainstream media, he cultivated an image of authenticity through contrarianism [13] [25]. This paradox-scripted spontaneity-allowed him to position himself as both a political insider and outsider, appealing to voters disillusioned with traditional governance [14] [18].

### Cognitive Dissonance and Narrative Repair

When contradictions arose (e.g., Trump's billionaire status vs. populist rhetoric), supporters engaged in narrative repair mechanisms, dismissing inconsistencies as elite misinformation or reframing them as evidence of his "fighting spirit" [20] [14]. This process aligns with cognitive dissonance theory, where individuals prioritize narrative coherence over factual accuracy to maintain ideological consistency [17] [25].

## Implications for Democratic Discourse

### Erosion of Fact-Based Deliberation

The proliferation of scripted narratives risks replacing evidence-based debate with emotional storytelling. During the 2024 U.S. election, disinformation about immigration and voter fraud-amplified by social media influencers and partisan outlets-distorted public perceptions of policy issues, illustrating how narratives can overshadow empirical data [18] [23].

### Polarization and Identity Reinforcement

Algorithmic personalization on platforms like Facebook and X creates ideological echo chambers, where voters encounter only narratives that reinforce their preexisting beliefs [22] [23]. This dynamic not only deepens polarization but also transforms political support into a form of identity performance, akin to brand loyalty in consumer markets [21] [26].

## Conclusion: Navigating the Paradox of Scripted Authenticity

Scripted narratives wield immense power in modern politics, enabling leaders to construct authenticity through dramaturgical performance, cognitive framing, and social validation. While these narratives foster emotional engagement and ideological cohesion, they also challenge democratic norms by privileging myth over fact and exclusivity over pluralism. Future research must explore regulatory frameworks to mitigate disinformation while preserving the expressive potential of political storytelling. As voters, critically interrogating the narratives we consume-and the platforms that amplify them-remains essential to sustaining informed civic participation.

## WHY IS AUTHENTICITY IMPORTANT IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP? <sup>ii</sup>

The aim of this research is to measure the perception of authentic political leadership (Singh, Ratchford, & Prasad, 2014; Ertimur and Gilly, 2012). In contemporary politics, perceived authenticity has emerged as a critical factor in political leadership, influencing voter trust, election outcomes, and democratic accountability. Research shows authenticity has become as important as traditional leadership qualities like competence and integrity in shaping public perception of politicians.

Perceived authenticity significantly influences voting behavior. When politicians are seen as authentic, voters are more likely to support them at the ballot box [3]. This author argues that:

1. This relationship is especially pronounced among voters who explicitly value authenticity as an important factor in their decision-making.
2. Recent elections demonstrate this effect: Donald Trump's perceived authenticity advantage contributed to his 2024 presidential victory, while Kamala Harris faced criticism for an "authenticity gap".
3. Similarly, Ed Davey's success in expanding Liberal Democrat representation in the 2024 UK election has been attributed to his authentic self-portrayal.

Political authenticity comprises three key dimensions that voters evaluate:

1. Consistency - Politicians appear authentic when their actions align with their stated views over time and they fulfill campaign promises regardless of political pressure [2] [5]. Research shows candidates who consistently implement their campaign promises are considered more authentic than those who renege under pressure [3].
2. Ordinariness - Leaders are perceived as authentic when they appear down-to-earth and unlike typical politicians [2] [4]. This dimension contradicts the image of calculated politicians acting on strategic motives rather than true convictions [5].
3. Immediacy - Authenticity is associated with spontaneity and actions driven by personal convictions rather than strategic calculation [5]. Politicians seem authentic.

Authenticity is particularly important for citizens with lower levels of political trust [4]. In an era of declining faith in political institutions, authenticity offers a pathway to reconnect with disillusioned voters. Those who distrust traditional politics place greater emphasis on politicians being "in touch with ordinary people" rather than displaying conventional political attributes like being "clever" or "dressing well" [4].

The growing importance of authenticity reflects a broader shift in political culture:

1. Rejection of traditional political performance - Citizens increasingly distrust polished, scripted political communication, preferring leaders who break with conventional political norms [4].
2. Rise of populism - Populist leaders like Trump, Duterte, and Bolsonaro have capitalized on authenticity by positioning themselves as political outsiders who represent "common folk" against corrupt elites [4].
3. Diversified authenticity styles - Different authenticity strategies can succeed, from populist outsiders to "everyday celebrity politicians" like Boris Johnson or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who cultivate relatable images through social media and casual presentations [4].

Authentic leadership enhances effectiveness by increasing followers' identification with leaders [1]. When politicians are perceived as true to themselves, it helps citizens connect

with their message and vision, potentially improving governance outcomes through stronger leader-follower relationships. Perceived authenticity has become a crucial dimension of political leadership that can determine electoral success, enhance voter trust, and strengthen democratic accountability in an era of increasing political skepticism.

## **ONLINE INFLUENCES <sup>iii</sup>**

It is crucial to develop a model of authenticity in political leadership that considers online voter behavior. Voters struggle to determine whether a leader is genuine through traditional means. While offline, voters can directly interact with politicians at events and personally experience their authenticity through face-to-face engagement [4] [10], online they must rely on mediated experiences of authenticity-created through social media, videos, and digital interactions-to drive their political support [2] [3].

Although political authenticity has been extensively studied in political science literature, there's limited work conceptualizing and measuring authentic experience in digital contexts [3] [4]. Little is known about how online political authenticity relates to established concepts like voter decision-making and engagement behavior [7], including how candidates' personal brand, communication style, and community interaction affect perceptions. This knowledge gap creates confusion for both researchers and campaign strategists [3].

What's concerning is that misunderstanding digital authenticity creates opportunities for manipulation and misrepresentation in political spaces [11] [12]. Online, politicians and voters are separated physically and temporally, with limited opportunities to build genuine relationships [7]. The digital environment's anonymity gives rise to potential deception, making it difficult for voters to distinguish between truly authentic candidates and those merely performing authenticity [3] [7].

Research shows that citizens judge politicians' authenticity based on three key dimensions: ordinariness (appearing down-to-earth), consistency (alignment between actions and views), and immediacy (seeming unscripted) [4] [5] [10]. Perceived authenticity significantly influences voting intentions and is especially important to citizens with lower political trust [10]. In political contexts, authenticity is a multidimensional experience that emerges through various forms of engagement-including how candidates present themselves as ordinary people unlike typical politicians, demonstrate consistency in their values, and engage directly with voters through seemingly unscripted interactions [10]. Politicians increasingly use social media for self-presentation techniques to appear genuine to constituents [2], yet these efforts may be perceived differently based on factors like gender and communication style [2]. This complex relationship between political authenticity and voter behavior demands further investigation, particularly as AI and deepfake technologies threaten to erode trust in digital political communication [11] [12].

## **DEFINING AUTHENTICITY <sup>iv</sup>**

Authenticity is defined as the consumers' experience of authentic consumption (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). See Table 1. 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., 2013). 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 (Boyle, 2003). 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 subcultures, for example as experienced in classic car clubs (Leigh, Peters and Shelton, 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, Peters and Shelton, 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 (Bruner, 1994; 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, Peters and Shelton, 2006), and advertising (Chiu, Hsieh, and Kuo, 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 governance (*Universal Norms*) as well as community-based morals that are consistently applied (*Purity of Motive*).

**TABLE 1. DEFINING AUTHENTICITY**

Type	Construct	Definition	Authors
Identification: Identifying elements of authenticity in fantasy.	Everyday People	Consumers connect/identify with everyday people.	Rose & Wood (2005)
Practical Self/ Interpersonal Self-Authentication: Where self-referential behaviors reveal the consumers true self.	First Hand Experience	A positive first hand experience of the item assists the consumer to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	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.	
	Instrumentality	Best performing or best value for money item or experience assists the consumer to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	
	Verification	Testing to establish that required standards are met assists consumers to achieve personal goals of practical self-authentication.	
	Ubiquity	Mainstream, mass brands, or a “market leader” assist the consumer to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication.	
	Brand Proximity	Being close to you or part of your social community assists the consumer to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication.	Leigh, Peters, & Shelton (2006)
	Communal Norms	Laws that govern the community's Behaviour in everyday life assist the consumer to achieve goals of inter-personal self-authentication.	

Production/Situation: Consumers blend situations and production to construct authenticity from fantasy.	Scripted Narrative	Scripted narrative assists the consumer to construct production authenticity.	Rose & Wood (2005)
	Situation Fantasy	Fantasy situations provide the consumer indexical elements with which he/she can construct situation authenticity.	
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.	Leigh, Peters, & Shelton (2006)
	Constructive	Constructive authenticity refers to the authenticity projected onto objects in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, powers, etc.	
Moral: Iconicity or indexicality to show higher moral status.	Consumer Values	Consumer values mirrored in the brand.	Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink (2008)
	Brand Values	Brand values assist the consumer to achieve moral self-authentication.	
Pure Indexical: A factual or spatio-temporal connection to history and commitment and feeling to the original place of manufacture.	Commitment to Tradition	Love of the craft, process, or the involvement of the creators in the production process.	Grayson and Martinec (2004)
	Place of Origin	A commitment too, and feeling for, the original place of manufacture.	
Virtuous Self: Personal goals of virtuousity in self-authentication	Universal Norms	Laws that govern societies, these standards override other considerations.	Beverland and Farrelly (2010)
	Purity of Motive	Consistent application of a set of morals.	

## RECENT WORK ^

Several recent academic papers have explored different aspects of authenticity across various disciplines:

### 1. 2024 Papers:

- "Identifying AI-Generated Research Papers: Methods and Considerations" examines techniques for distinguishing between human-authored and AI-generated academic content, including textual analysis, metadata examination, and content evaluation methods [1].
- "Brand Authenticity: A 21-Year Bibliometric Review" analyses 880 articles (2003-2023) showing increasing publication trends and identifying research clusters in tourism, food/retail, and marketing/management [2].
- "AI vs. AI: The Detection Game" evaluates the capabilities of AI content detection systems in identifying whether texts were written by humans or AI, with particular focus on academic integrity applications [3].

### 2. 2023 Papers:

- "From authentic assessment to authenticity in assessment" discusses conceptual challenges in assessment planning within education [5].
- "Always-on authenticity: Challenging the BeReal ideal of 'being real'" examines the social media app BeReal and questions its claims of providing a uniquely authentic platform experience [6].

### 3. 2022 Papers:

- "Craving alter real authenticity through the post-postmodern lens" investigates tourists' attitudes toward "alter real authenticity" (altered reality) from a post-postmodern perspective [7].

### 4. 2021 Papers:

- "The Essence of Authenticity" expands the "3C-view" of authenticity (consistency, conformity, and connection) by adding a fourth dimension-continuity-creating a "4C-model" that approaches authenticity as a developmental process rather than a static state [8].

## ENDNOTES

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