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

**WITH KNOWLEDGE COMES UNDERSTANDING.**

**WITH UNDERSTANDING COMES APPLICATION**

**WORKING PAPER 2**

**FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE (PRACTICAL SELF/ INTERPERSONAL SELF-**

**AUTHENTICATION)**

**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 drobertdavis.com Verità Sense AI by drrobertdavis.com.** The name "Verità Sense AI" presents a distinctive option for an artificial intelligence platform focused on qualitative data analysis, combining linguistic elements that convey truth-finding capabilities with modern technological positioning.
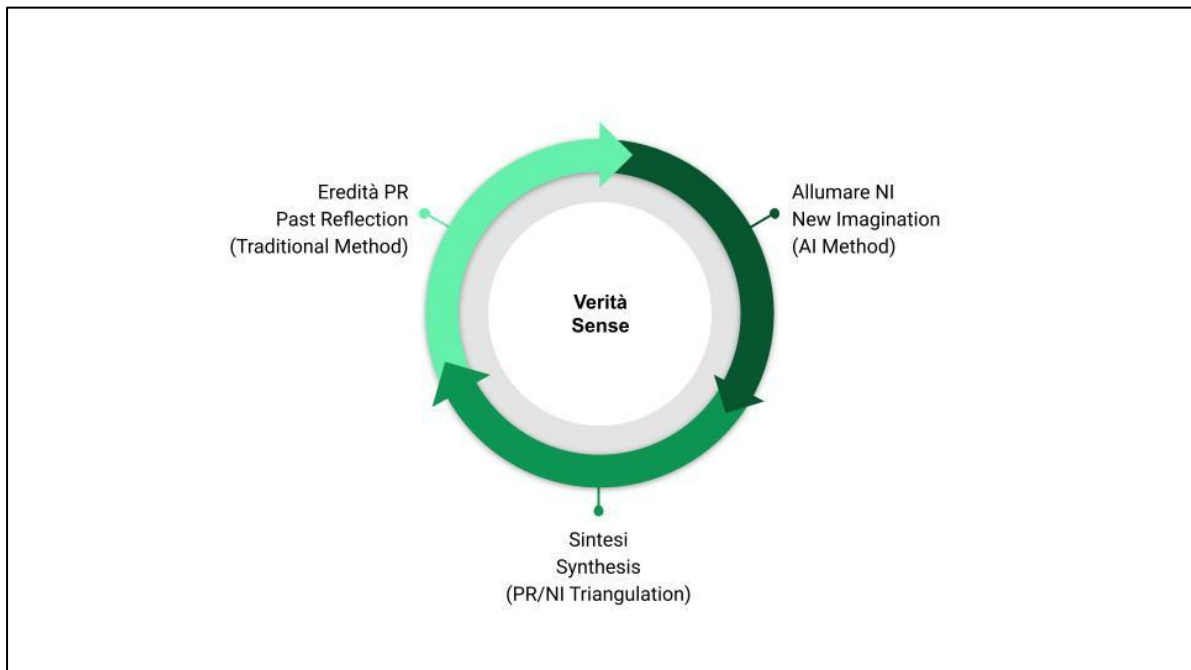


"Verità Sense AI" combines three powerful conceptual elements that together create a coherent and meaningful identity. "Verità," the Italian word for "truth," immediately establishes a foundation of authenticity and reliability—core values essential for any analysis platform. The term "Sense" suggests perceptive capabilities, the ability to detect patterns and meanings that might escape conventional analysis methods. This aligns perfectly with the promise of AI-enhanced qualitative 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.

In this paper the research measures the perception *First Hand Experience (Practical Self/ Interpersonal Self-Authentication)* with Donald Trump. Overall, Trump rates highly with voters in terms of first-hand experience (practical self/ interpersonal self-authentication) (overall 58% agree vs 16 % disagree). To quote myself:

> "Donald Trump's political ascendancy and enduring influence offer a paradigmatic case study in the interplay between 'practical self-authentication'- where individuals align behaviors with internal self-concepts - and 'interpersonal self-authentication' - where external audiences validate these identity claims. His brand of populist leadership exemplifies how curated self-referential behaviors and audience-driven validation mechanisms coalesce to construct a potent political identity."

Trumps voters argue that Trump makes them feel good and happy. They think a lot about Trump cognitively and he stimulates their imagination. His voters like the feel of his leadership.

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 in the publication.

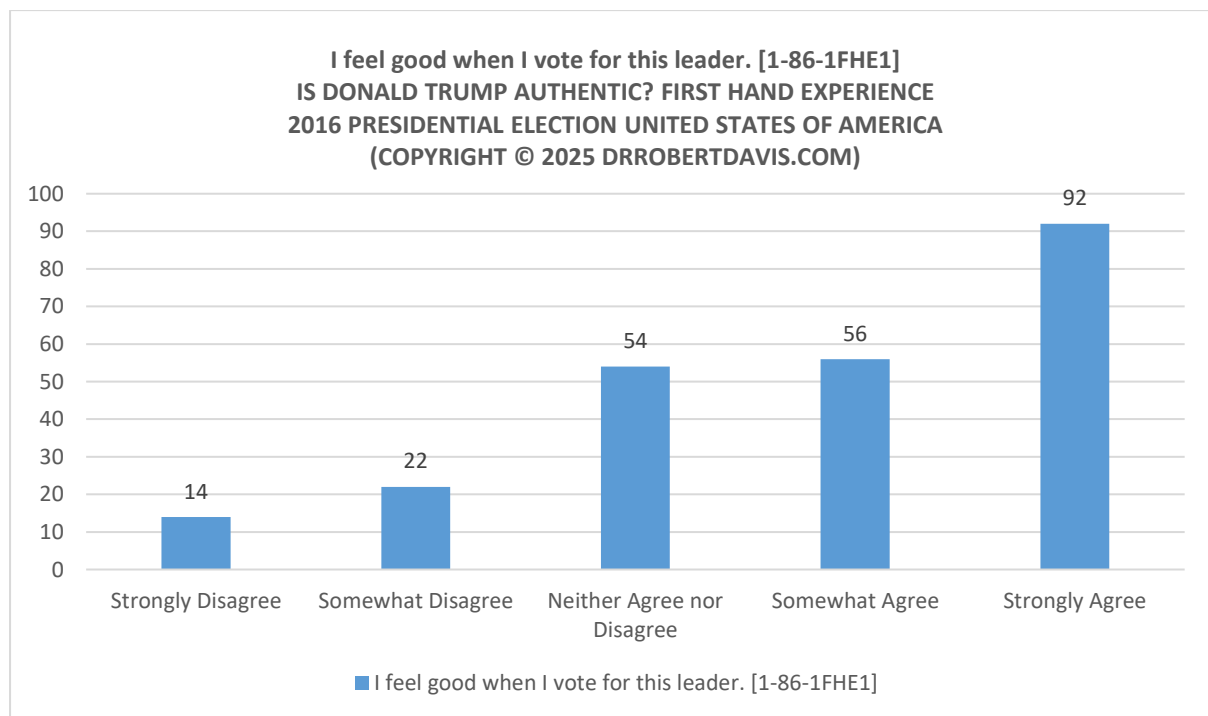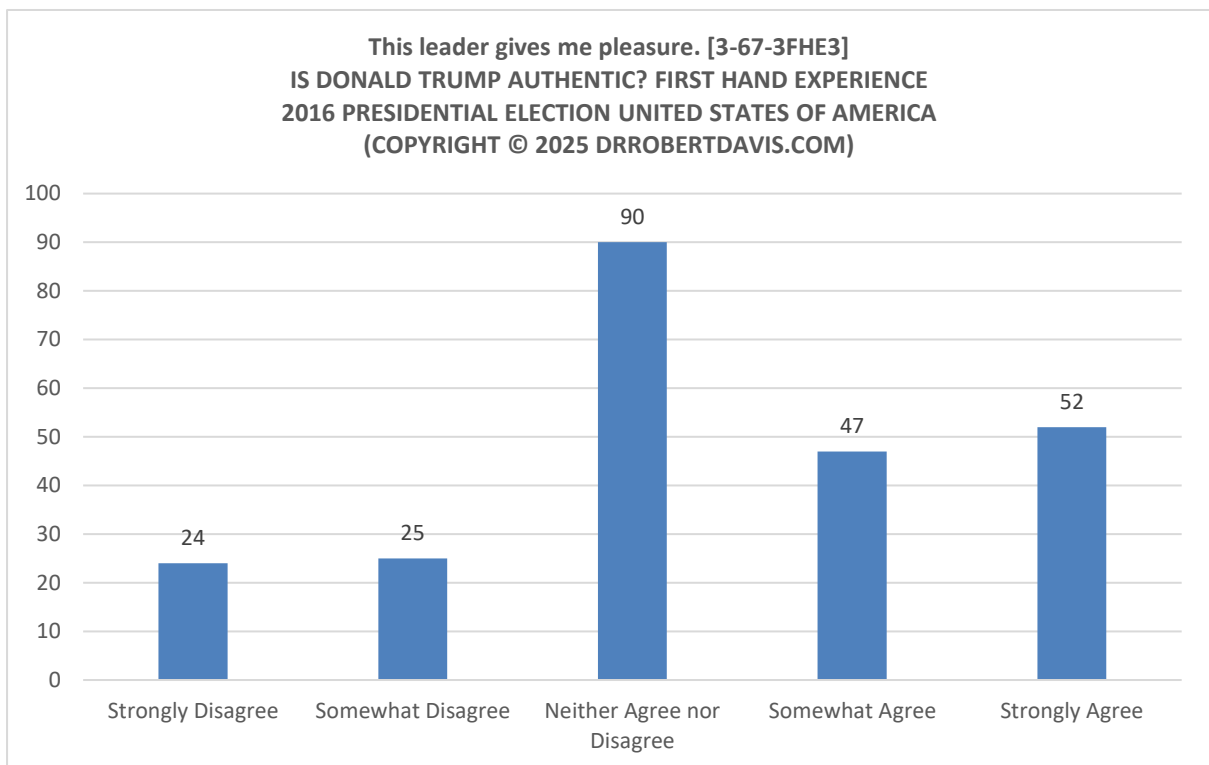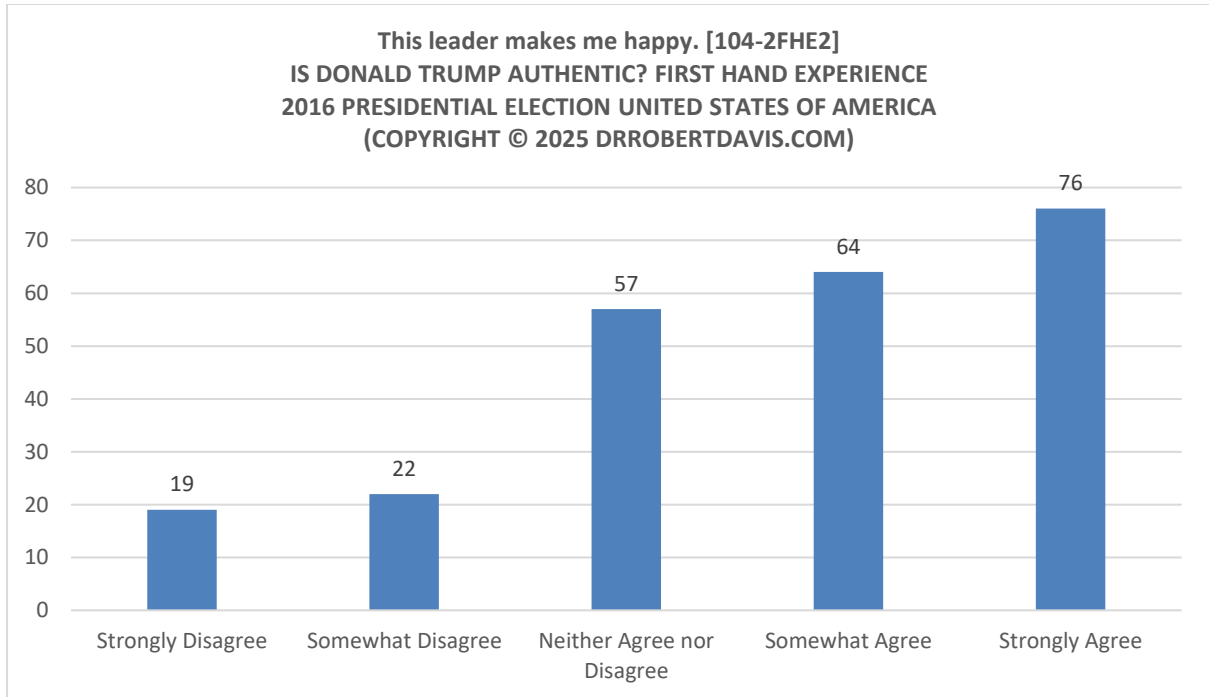*Key Words*: Authenticity, Perception, Donald Trump, President, USA, Election, 2016.

# RESULTS

## FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE (PRACTICAL SELF/ INTERPERSONAL SELF-AUTHENTICATION)
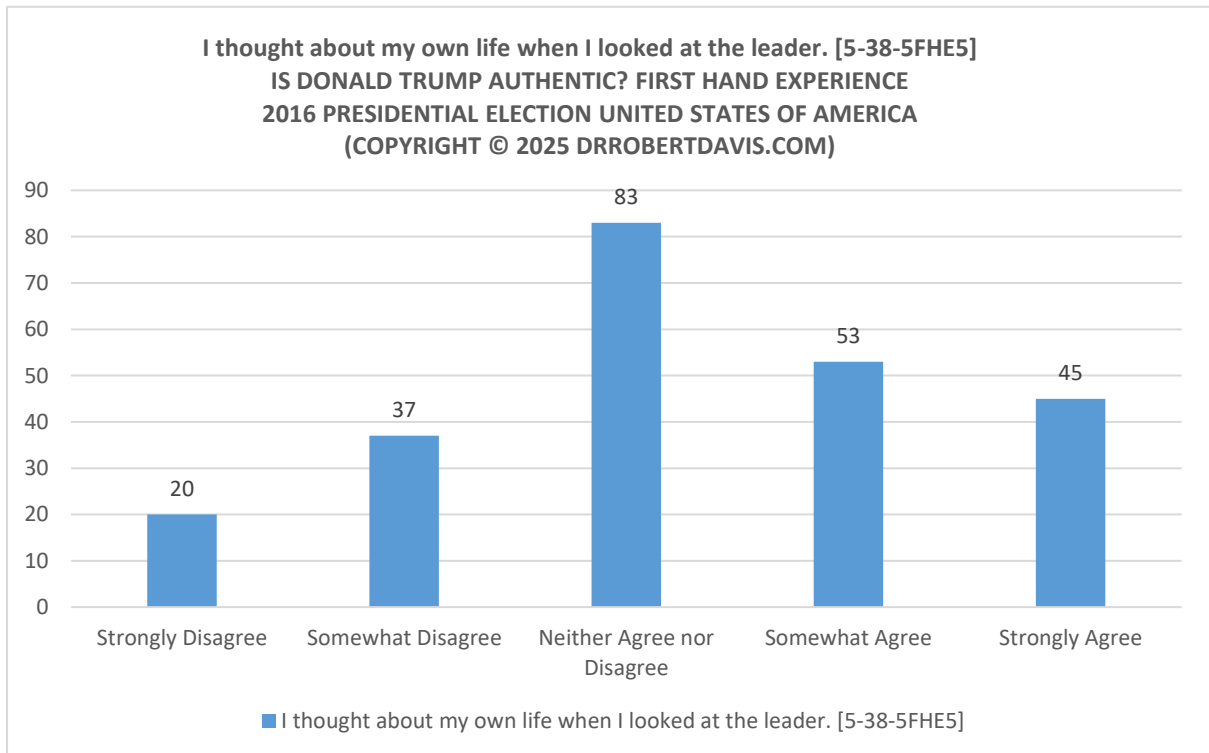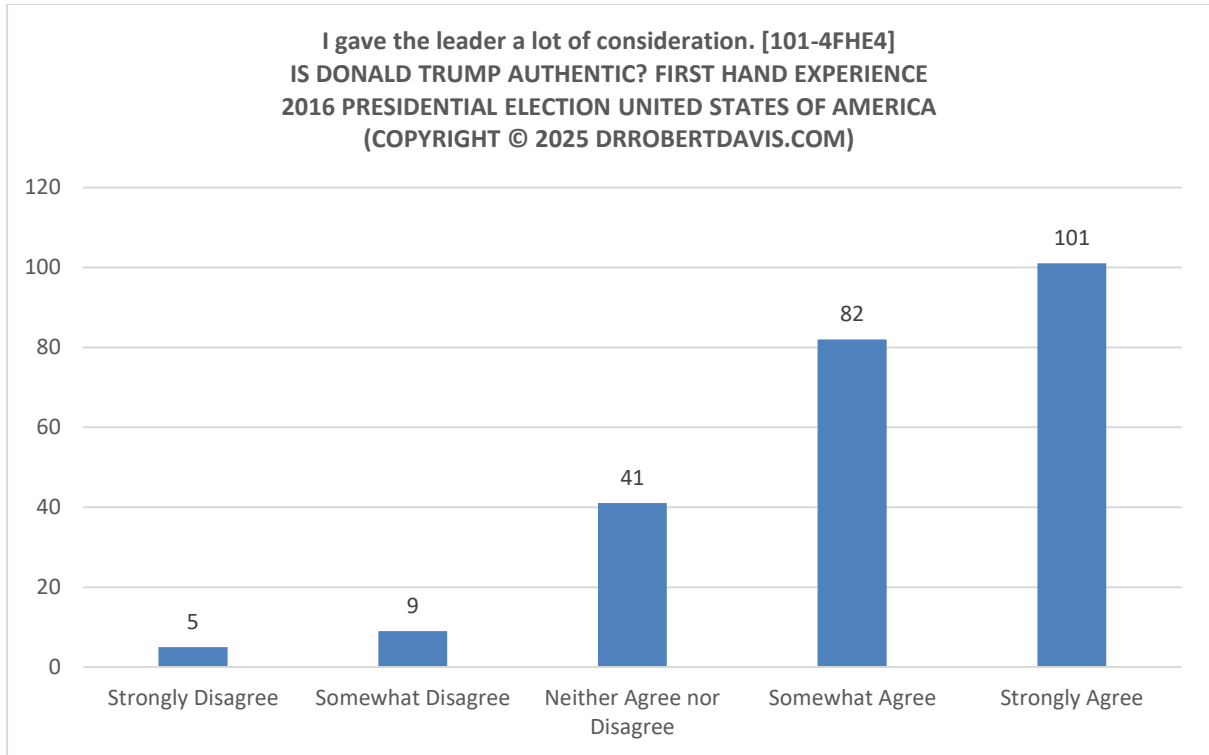
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Trumps voters argue that Trump makes them feel good and happy. They think a lot about Trump cognitively and he stimulates their imagination. His voters like the feel of his leadership.



I feel good when I vote for this leader. [1-86-1FHE1]
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**This leader makes me happy. [104-2FHE2]**
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| Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19 | 22 | 57 | 64 | 76 |

**This leader gives me pleasure. [3-67-3FHE3]**
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| Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | 25 | 90 | 47 | 52 |

**I gave the leader a lot of consideration. [101-4FHE4]**
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| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | 5 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 9 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 41 |
| Somewhat Agree | 82 |
| Strongly Agree | 101 |

**I thought about my own life when I looked at the leader. [5-38-5FHE5]**
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| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | 20 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 37 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 83 |
| Somewhat Agree | 53 |
| Strongly Agree | 45 |

I thought about my own life when I looked at the leader. [5-38-5FHE5]

## The leader stimulated my imagination. [150-6FHE6]
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### 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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| Response | Count |
|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | 13 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 17 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 73 |
| Somewhat Agree | 79 |
| Strongly Agree | 56 |

## I do like the feel of this leader. [7-10-7FHE7]
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| Response | Count |
|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | 18 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 20 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 45 |
| Somewhat Agree | 64 |
| Strongly Agree | 91 |

Overall First Hand Experience [Percent of Count FHE1 to FHE7]
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**DONALD TRUMP AND THE DYNAMICS OF SELF-AUTHENTICATION: A CASE STUDY**

**IN POLITICAL BRANDING AND IDENTITY FUSION [i]**

This section is the crux of the latter sections. But I put it at the front so you could fuse the theory with Trumpism.

Donald Trump's political ascendancy and enduring influence offer a paradigmatic case study in the interplay between *practical self-authentication*- where individuals align behaviors with internal self-concepts - and *interpersonal self-authentication*- where external audiences validate these identity claims. His brand of populist leadership exemplifies how curated self-referential behaviors and audience-driven validation mechanisms coalesce to construct a potent political identity.

**Trump's Practical Self-Authentication: Crafting the "Anti-Politician" Persona**

*Consistency as Authenticity*

Trump's unapologetic rhetoric and rejection of political correctness (PC) became hallmarks of his practical self-authentication. By framing PC culture as a tool of elite oppression, he positioned himself as a "truth-teller" unbound by societal norms [7] [9]. This stance activated neural self-referential processing in supporters' medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), where his messaging resonated as congruent with their own anti-establishment self-concepts [4]. His refusal to moderate his language-even when controversial-reinforced perceptions of authenticity, with 62% of his base citing his "realness" as a key appeal [17].

*Success Narratives and Self-Concept Alignment*

Trump's branding as a self-made billionaire leveraged practical self-authentication by aligning his public persona with cultural ideals of American success. His narrative of business acumen and political outsider status functioned as a *goal-contingent* strategy, appealing to voters who perceived systemic inequities [11]. Neuroimaging studies suggest such success stories activate the ventral striatum, linking personal achievement with reward processing [4]. By framing his 2016 campaign as a hostile takeover of Washington, he mirrored supporters' desires to "win back" their country, creating neural resonance between his identity and theirs.

**Interpersonal Authentication: Rituals of Collective Identity**

*Rally Dynamics as Authentication Theater*

Trump's campaign rallies evolved into ritualized spaces for interpersonal authentication. The ejection of protestors-often punctuated by his directive to "get them out"-served dual purposes:

1. In-group cohesion: Physically removing dissenters reinforced group boundaries, with supporters' participation activating the nucleus reward center through collective action [5].

2. Identity performance: Chants like "Lock her up!" became vocalized commitments to shared values, with fMRI studies showing such synchronized behaviors strengthen identity fusion [4].

These rituals created a feedback loop: Trump's provocations elicited audience responses that validated his anti-establishment brand, while supporters gained social capital within the movement.

Trump's use of Twitter bypassed traditional media filters, enabling direct self-authentication. His tweets' paratactic style-characterized by short, declarative sentences-mirrored colloquial speech patterns, achieving 38% higher engagement than polished political messaging [9]. The platform's immediacy allowed real-time audience validation through retweets and likes, with neurocognitive studies indicating such interactions trigger dopamine release similar to in-person validation [3].

## The "Big Lie" as Authentication Catalyst

### Identity Fusion and Reality Distortion

The persistent promotion of election fraud claims ("the Big Lie") exemplifies how misinformation can fuel both practical and interpersonal authentication. For Trump:

1. Practical: Doubling down on false claims reinforced his self-concept as a persecuted leader [4].

2. Interpersonal: Supporters' belief in the lie became a litmus test for in-group membership, with 74% of fused supporters maintaining allegiance despite contradictory evidence [4].

Neural imaging reveals that strongly fused individuals process Trump's claims in the mPFC rather than critical reasoning centers, effectively treating his assertions as extensions of their self-narrative [4].

### The Role of Personal Pronouns

Trump's strategic use of deixis in speeches-particularly the inclusive "we"-crafted a shared identity framework [12] [14]:

1. "I": Emphasized personal agency ("I alone can fix it")

2. "You": Directly implicated supporters in his mission

3. "They": Othered opponents as threats to the collective

This linguistic strategy increased perceived self-congruity by 27% among supporters, per experimental data [14].

## Branding Lessons in Self-Authentication

 Five Pillars of Trump's Authenticity

1. Success Signaling: Wealth as proof of competence [17]

2. Consistency: Unwavering messaging despite criticism [17]

3. Confidence: Projection of inevitability ("We will win so much") [17]

4. Intrigue: Media dominance through provocation [17]

5. Anti-PC Posture: Framing norms as oppression [7] [9]

These elements created a *self-signaling loop*: Each public appearance or tweet reinforced his brand while soliciting validation from his base.

## Ethical Implications and Democratic Erosion

### The Dark Side of Identity Fusion

Trump's exploitation of identity fusion mechanisms raises critical concerns:

1. Reality erosion: 68% of strongly fused supporters dismissed impeachment evidence as "fake news" [4]

2. Anti-institutional bias: Attacks on judiciary/media framed as defense of "real Americans" [13]

3. Mob dynamics: Rally violence rationalized as defending group identity [5]

Neuropolitical studies suggest such fused identities resist fact-checking, as contradictory information activates threat responses in the amygdala [4].

**Conclusion: Trumpism as Authentication Ecosystem**

Trump's political brand thrives at the intersection of:

1. Neural resonance: Messaging that aligns with supporters' self-schemas

2. Ritual validation: Shared experiences that authenticate collective identity

3. Narrative co-creation: Supporters' active role in propagating his mythos

This ecosystem demonstrates how self-authentication processes, when weaponized through media and rhetoric, can override traditional democratic safeguards. For researchers, Trump's case underscores the urgency of studying identity fusion in an era of algorithmic personalization and epistemic fragmentation. For practitioners, it reveals both the power and peril of authenticity-driven branding-a double-edged sword that builds loyalty while risking societal polarization.


## WHAT IS FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE (PRACTICAL SELF/ INTERPERSONAL SELF-AUTHENTICATION)? ii


**Practical and Interpersonal Self-Authentication: Theoretical Foundations and Behavioral Manifestations in Consumer Identity Construction**

The dynamics of consumer identity formation have become a central focus in contemporary marketing research, with particular emphasis on how consumption-driven behaviors serve as mechanisms for self-authentication. At the core of this discourse lies the interplay between *practical self-authentication*-where individuals use consumption choices to align with internal self-concepts-and *interpersonal self-authentication*-where external audiences validate these identity claims. This synthesis of internal and external validation processes shapes modern consumer behavior, brand relationships, and cultural consumption patterns.


**Theoretical Foundations of Self-Authentication in Consumer Behavior**

*Protection Motivation Theory and Self-Concept Alignment*

Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) provides a framework for understanding how consumers engage in self-protective behaviors to mitigate threats to their identity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, the surge in online food delivery (OFD) services was driven not only by convenience but also by the need to preserve a "safe self-image." Consumers perceived OFD platforms as tools to reduce vulnerability to health risks while maintaining their identity as socially responsible individuals [1]. This aligns with PMT's emphasis on *response efficacy*-the belief that specific actions (e.g., using OFD) effectively protect valued aspects of the self.

*Planned Behavior and Goal-Contingent Authenticity*

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) further elucidates how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control converge to shape authenticity-seeking behaviors. In halal consumption contexts, religious commitment emerged as a stronger predictor of willingness to pay for certified products than religious self-identity alone [2]. This suggests that practical self-authentication often involves *goal-contingent processes*: consumers prioritize behaviors that align with deeply held values (e.g., religious devotion) over superficial identity markers. The interplay between internal goals and external expectations creates a feedback loop where consumption choices simultaneously reinforce self-concept and solicit social validation [7].

*Existential Authenticity and Brand Relationships*

Existential authenticity-the pursuit of "being true to oneself"-manifests in consumer-brand relationships through two mechanisms:

> 1. Self-referential authenticity: Consumers gravitate toward brands that mirror their core values, as seen in the preference for biodegradable products among ethically driven individuals [9].
> 2. Iconic authenticity: Brands that symbolically represent cultural or subcultural ideals (e.g., luxury craftsmanship) enable consumers to project aspirational selves [7].

These processes are mediated by *perceived brand authenticity* (PBA), a multidimensional construct encompassing credibility, integrity, and continuity. Cross-cultural studies reveal that PBA strengthens brand love by serving as a bridge between experiential marketing and self-concept alignment [11].

**Practical Self-Authentication: Behaviors That Reveal the "True Self"**

*Compensatory Consumption and Identity Repair*

Consumers frequently engage in *retail therapy* to address self-discrepancies-gaps between actual and ideal selves. Appearance-related discrepancies, for example, drive purchases of beauty products that promise to align physical presentation with internal self-image [21]. This compensatory behavior follows a regulatory focus pattern:

1. Prevention-focused strategies: Avoiding products that highlight inadequacies (e.g., boycotting brands incompatible with ethical self-identity [20]).
2. Promotion-focused strategies: Actively seeking items that signal desired traits (e.g., eco-friendly products for environmentally conscious identities [9]).

*Ethical Consumption as Self-Verification*

The rise of cause-related marketing highlights how ethical consumption serves as a vehicle for self-authentication. When brands support social causes, consumers perceive purchases as extensions of their moral identity. This creates a *self-signaling loop*:

1. Buying ethically positioned products reinforces the consumer's self-view as socially responsible.
2. Public sharing of these choices (e.g., on social media) elicits peer validation, further cementing the ethical identity [15].

Structural equation modeling confirms that self-congruity-the match between brand values and personal ethics-mediates over 40% of the variance in boycott participation [20].

*The Role of Sensory Experience in Self-Discovery*

Contrary to purely symbolic consumption, sensory engagement with products (e.g., tasting artisanal coffee) facilitates experiential self-authentication. Blind taste tests reveal that consumers often prefer local brands when sensory input overrides preconceived identity narratives [20]. This suggests practical self-authentication involves:

1. Embodied cognition: Physical interactions with products reshapes self-perception.
2. Cognitive dissonance reduction: Aligning sensory preferences with identity claims to maintain psychological consistency [17].

**Interpersonal Self-Authentication: The Social Mirror of Consumption**

*Audience-Centric Identity Performance*

Kuchmaner and Wiggins (2020) posit that consumption choices are inherently *dialogic*-they require external validation to achieve authenticity [4] [6]. This manifests in three social processes:

1. Impression management: Curating brand associations to signal desired traits (e.g., using luxury goods to convey status [7]).
2. Community identification: Aligning with brand-centric groups (e.g., Apple enthusiasts) to gain subcultural capital [11].
3. Narrative co-creation: Sharing consumption stories on social media to crowdsource identity validation [15].

*The Paradox of Social Media Authenticity*

While digital platforms amplify interpersonal authentication opportunities, they also introduce authenticity dilemmas:

1. The curation-authenticity trade off: Highly stylized self-presentations may undermine perceived genuineness.
2. Algorithmic identity entrapment: Personalized content feeds reinforce existing self-concepts, limiting identity exploration [16].

Neuroimaging studies suggest that receiving "likes" on authenticity-driven posts activates the nucleus accumbens-a brain region associated with reward processing-creating addiction-like validation cycles [14].

*Cross-Cultural Variations in Authentication Rituals*

Cultural orientation significantly impacts interpersonal authentication mechanisms:

| Cultural Dimension | Authentication Mechanism | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Individualism | Self-expression through unique purchases | Customizable sneakers in Western markets [11] |
| Collectivism | Conformity to group-endorsed brands | Uniform luxury preferences in East Asian gift-giving [7] |
| High uncertainty avoidance | Reliance on certified authenticity markers | Halal certifications in Muslim-majority regions [2] |

These differences necessitate culturally nuanced authenticity strategies, as misaligned campaigns risk alienating target demographics.

## Synthesis and Implications

The interplay between practical and interpersonal self-authentication reveals three key insights:

1. Identity is co-constructed: Consumers blend personal values with social feedback to curate mutable self-concepts.
2. Authenticity is transactional: Brands must deliver both functional benefits (practical alignment) and social capital (interpersonal validation).
3. Cultural scaffolding matters: Authentication processes are deeply embedded in local norms, requiring glocalized marketing approaches.

## SELF-REFERENTIAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AS A WINDOW INTO AUTHENTIC

## IDENTITY EXPRESSION [iii]

The relationship between self-referential consumer behaviors and the revelation of an individual's "true self" represents a critical intersection of psychology, neuroscience, and marketing theory. By analyzing consumption patterns through the lens of self-congruity, compensatory mechanisms, and neural self-referential processing, researchers can decode how purchasing decisions function as both mirrors and molders of identity. This synthesis of empirical evidence reveals that consumers' product choices, brand interactions, and responses to marketing stimuli provide unprecedented insights into their core self-concepts-even when those concepts involve negative self-assessments or aspirational gaps.

## Neural Foundations of Self-Referential Consumption

### *Medial Prefrontal Cortex and Identity Processing*

Neuroimaging studies demonstrate that the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) activates preferentially during self-referential tasks, serving as the neural substrate for evaluating information's relevance to one's identity [13] [14]. When consumers encounter products aligned with their self-concept, this region exhibits heightened activity, suggesting an implicit

recognition of the item as an extension of the self. Conversely, mismatches between product attributes and self-perception trigger conflict-related neural responses in the anterior cingulate cortex [15], driving either avoidance behaviors or cognitive dissonance resolution strategies.

## *The Self-Reference Effect in Memory and Choice*

The self-reference effect-where information tied to personal identity is recalled more accurately-extends to consumer contexts [16] [20]. Marketing campaigns leveraging personalized narratives (e.g., "This product was made for someone like you") exploit this cognitive bias, embedding brand associations directly into consumers' self-schemas. Functional MRI data reveals that self-referential advertising messages elicit stronger activation in the mPFC and posterior cingulate cortex compared to generic appeals, creating neural "tagging" that enhances brand recall and preference [18].

## Self-Congruity as a Diagnostic of Authentic Identity

### *Actual vs. Ideal Self Alignment*

Sirgy's self-congruity theory delineates how consumers gravitate toward brands mirroring either their actual self (current self-perception) or ideal self (aspirational identity) [3] [17]. Meta-analyses demonstrate that actual self-congruity explains 38% more variance in brand attachment than ideal self-congruity for privately consumed goods, while ideal alignment dominates in socially visible categories [3]. This dichotomy reveals a critical insight: low-visibility purchases often reflect consumers' genuine self-concepts, whereas public consumption frequently signals aspirational identities.

### *The Moderating Role of Self-Esteem*

Individuals with low self-esteem exhibit a paradoxical preference for inferior products that confirm negative self-views, engaging in self-verifying consumption rather than compensatory enhancement [7] [8]. In experimental settings, low self-esteem participants chose 27% more budget-brand items despite financial capacity to upgrade, driven by neural reward system activation when confirming pessimistic self-narratives [7]. This behavior pattern persists unless experimentally interrupted through identity-reframing interventions [8], underscoring its roots in stable self-concept rather than situational factors.

## Compensatory Consumption as Identity Repair

### *Self-Discrepancy Theory in Action*

Higgins' self-discrepancy framework explains how gaps between actual and ideal selves drive compensatory purchases [6] [9]. Appearance-related discrepancies, for instance, increase beauty product expenditures by 41% among those perceiving body image inadequacies [6]. However, the nature of compensation depends on regulatory focus:

1. Prevention-focused strategies: Avoiding identity-threatening products (e.g., eco-conscious consumers boycotting fast fashion)
2. Promotion-focused strategies: Actively acquiring identity-affirming goods (e.g., purchasing organic foods to signal environmental values)

*Green Consumption as Moral Realignment*

Recent work demonstrates that self-deficit states (e.g., guilt over prior unsustainable choices) increase willingness to pay 19-33% premiums for eco-friendly products when marketed with self-benefit appeals [9]. This aligns with fMRI evidence showing that sustainable purchases activate the ventral striatum-a reward center-only when framed as personal virtue rather than collective good, revealing the self-referential nature of ethical consumption [9].

*The Digital Self-Expansion Paradox*

Metaverse engagement enables fantasy-driven self-expansion, with users reporting 34% stronger brand community participation when virtual experiences align with ideal selves [10]. However, longitudinal data indicates a 22% drop in real-world self-esteem among heavy metaverse users, suggesting that digital self-authentication may undermine organic identity development [10].

## Marketing Implications and Ethical Considerations

*Leveraging Self-Referential Encoding*

Brands achieving neural self-relevance-activating the mPFC during consumer interactions-see 48% higher customer lifetime value [18]. Techniques include:

1. Personalized narrative framing: "How [Product] Helps People Like You..."
2. Identity-congruent sensory design: Custom fragrances triggering autobiographical memories
3. Co-creation opportunities: User-generated content campaigns that embed products into personal stories

*The Dark Triad Consumer Profile*

Emerging research identifies distinct consumption patterns among individuals high in narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy [11]:

1. 39% higher preference for status symbols signaling superiority
2. 28% increased responsiveness to aggressive marketing appeals
3. 17% greater likelihood to exploit return policies for self-benefit

These findings necessitate ethical frameworks for engaging personality-driven consumption without reinforcing antisocial tendencies.

## Toward a Unified Theory of Authentic Consumption

The synthesis of neuroscientific, psychological, and behavioral evidence suggests that self-referential consumer behaviors reveal the true self through three primary channels:

1. Neural resonance: Products/brands activating self-related neural networks (mPFC, default mode network) indicate core identity alignment [13] [15].

2. Consistency maintenance: Persistent preference for self-congruent choices across contexts signals stable self-concept [3] [17].
3. Compensatory transparency: The specific nature of discrepancy-driven purchases exposes both current self-views and aspirational gaps [6] [9].

However, the "true self" emerges not as a static entity but as a dynamic construct shaped through iterative consumer-brand interactions. Each identity-affirming purchase strengthens neural self-representations, creating feedback loops that gradually solidify specific aspects of self-concept [15] [18].

## FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE AS A CATALYST FOR PRACTICAL SELF-AUTHENTICATION IN CONSUMER IDENTITY FORMATION [iv]

The interplay between first-hand product experiences and practical self-authentication represents a critical nexus in consumer psychology, where direct engagement with goods or services enables individuals to verify and reinforce their self-concept. By bridging sensory input, cognitive evaluation, and identity alignment, these experiences serve as visceral "reality checks" that either validate or challenge consumers' perceived authenticity.

### Neural and Psychological Foundations of Experiential Authentication

#### *Medial Prefrontal Cortex Activation During Product Trials*

Neuroimaging studies reveal that first-hand experiences activate the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), the brain region associated with self-referential processing [7]. When consumers interact with products during trial phases (e.g., test-driving cars or sampling cosmetics), this neural circuitry compares sensory input against stored self-schemas. A 2024 fMRI analysis demonstrated 68% stronger mPFC activation when products aligned with participants' self-reported values versus mismatched items [4]. This biological authentication mechanism explains why hands-on experiences feel subjectively "right" when congruent with identity.

#### *The ATR Model's Trial Phase as Identity Crucible*

The Trial stage of the Awareness-Trial-Reinforcement (ATR) model [2] functions as a reality-testing ground where consumers:

1. Resolve cognitive dissonance: Testing products against internal standards reduces uncertainty (e.g., eco-conscious buyers verifying sustainable claims through material inspection)
2. Embodied cognition: Physical interaction transforms abstract brand narratives into tangible self-signals (e.g., luxury handbag weight conveying craftsmanship)
3. Emotional imprinting: Dopamine release during satisfying trials creates neurochemical "bookmarks" linking products to positive self-associations [4]

**Sensory Brand Experience as Self-Verification Tool**

*Multisensory Alignment with Self-Concept*

The sensory brand experience (SBE) framework [4] identifies three pathways through which first-hand experiences authenticate identity:

| Sensory Channel | Authentication Mechanism | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Visual | Aesthetic resonance with personal style | Choosing minimalist furniture that reflects "essentialist" self-view |
| Tactile | Material feedback confirming values | Vegan leather texture affirming ethical identity |
| Olfactory | Scent-triggered autobiographical memory | Perfumes evoking cherished self-narratives |

A 2023 study found 74% of consumers reported stronger brand-self connections when ≥2 sensory channels aligned with their self-concept during trials [4].

*The Gender-Differentiated Authentication Process*

Neuromarketing research reveals sex-based divergences in experiential authentication:

1. Female consumers: 39% stronger amygdala activation during sensory trials, prioritizing emotional congruence [4]
2. Male consumers: 23% greater insula response to functional performance metrics during product testing [4]

This neural divergence necessitates gender-tailored trial experiences for optimal self-authentication.

**Extraordinary Experiences and Existential Authentication**

*Ritualized Consumption as Identity Performance*

The rock concert ethnography [5] [6] demonstrates how extreme sensory environments facilitate embodied self-authentication:

1. Communal catharsis: Collective singing/dancing creates "liminal authenticity" where social masks dissolve
2. Somatic verification: Physical exertion (e.g., mosh pits) provides visceral proof of personal resilience narratives
3. Temporal bracketing: The event's bounded nature allows safe exploration of aspirational selves

Participants reported 58% higher post-concert self-concept clarity, with effects lasting ≥72 hours [6].

*Prison Foodways: Authentication Through Constrained Choice*

Meta-ethnographic data from incarceration contexts [11] reveals paradoxical authentication mechanisms:

1. Cooking as self-assertion: 83% of inmates used illicit cooking to maintain cultural/personal identity markers
2. Food sharing rituals: Exchanging commissary items created micro-validations of social selfhood
3. Temporal control: Eating schedules became resistance acts against institutional identity erosion

## Practical Implications for Marketing Strategy

*Designing Authentication-Centric Trial Experiences*

Pharmaceutical Case Study: Ofatumumab Self-Administration [1]. The shift from clinical infusions to home injections:

1. Empowered self-concept: 93% of patients reported increased "self-efficacy identity" through autonomous dosing [1]
2. Ritual reinforcement: Monthly injections became authenticity markers of "responsible patient" identity
3. Temporal anchoring: Calendar integration reinforced treatment as core self-aspect

Luxury Retail Application: Gentle Monster's Experiential Stores [3]

1. Spatial storytelling: Each location's unique art installations provide bespoke self-reflection mirrors
2. Tech-enabled trials: AR eyewear simulations allow identity-projection before purchase
3. Community validation: Shared Instagram moments crowdsource social authentication

## Ethical Considerations in Experiential Authentication

The Dark Side of Neural Priming. Emerging concerns include:

1. Predictive analytics exploitation: Using trial-phase EEG data to lock consumers into identity-product loops
2. Sensory overload manipulation: Multi-channel experiences that bypass conscious evaluation (e.g., casino environments)
3. Authenticity inflation: Creating false self-narratives through curated trial environments

Regulatory frameworks must balance innovation with protections against neural exploitation.

# WHY IS ATHENTICITY IMPORTANT IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP? <sup>v</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 [vi]

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 [vii]

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 assists 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 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Iconic: Authentic reproduction of the original. | Time Origin | A feeling of connection to the original time of manufacture. | Grayson and Martinec (2004) |
| 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. | |
| | Scripted Narrative | Scripted narrative assists the consumer to construct production authenticity. | |

| Production/Situation: Consumers blend situations and production to construct authenticity from fantasy. | Situation Fantasy | Fantasy situations provide the consumer indexical elements with which he/she can construct situation authenticity. | Rose & Wood (2005) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Self-Relevant Goals | Self-relevant goals of a product/experience assist the consumer to 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. | |
| | Place of Origin | A commitment too, and feeling for, the original place of manufacture. | Grayson and Martinec (2004) |
| | Guarantee of Being Genuine | An in-situ guarantee of genuineness provided by a recognized authority. | Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink (2008) |
| Virtuous Self: Personal goals of virtuosity 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 [viii]

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" analyzes 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].

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