

## Exploring for the Cues of Perfumes That Saudi Arabian Consumers Use to Evaluate the Authenticity of Western Perfumes

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**Abstract:** This paper explores for the cues that Saudi Arabian consumers of perfumes use to evaluate the authenticity of Western perfumes. The findings were derived from focus groups and surveys conducted with Saudi Arabian consumers of perfumes. Providing a reliable and valid scale to measure the cues that they use to evaluate the authenticity of Western perfumes, namely endurance of the perfume, naturalness of ingredients and packaging.

**Key words:** Saudi Arabia • Western Perfumes • Consumers

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### INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia is ranked as one of the top world markets for fragrances and is experiencing rapid growth in both volume growth and value [1]. This growth is largely a result of a shift to the consumption of Western perfumes from traditional Saudi essential oils [2]. International firms such as Calvin Klein, Givenchy, Yves Saint Laurent Perfumes and Christian Dior, appear to have been successful in their international marketing strategies in Saudi Arabia, as sales of Western perfumes now attribute for 62% of the market share of perfumes/essential oils in Saudi Arabia [2].

This trend may be attributed to the changing nature of the Saudi consumer. Saudi Arabians are increasingly engaging in cross-cultural interactions both at home and abroad via tourism and educational opportunities. In 2011, there were around 18.6 million tourists to Saudi Arabia and there were more than 28.6 million Saudi Arabian outbound tourists [3] and 93, 000 students studying abroad [4]. In this context, Saudi Arabian consumers have increasingly open to new ideas and experiences) [5, 6]. Indeed, Saudi Arabians may even be thought to be cosmopolitan - becoming “world citizens” in a global culture, in their attitudes and consumption patterns [5, 7].

While Saudi Arabians, both men and women, are strongly attached to their traditional culture around the wearing of fragrances [5, 8], cosmopolitan consumers are more likely to be open to market offering from countries other than their own [9, 10]. Increasing levels of cosmopolitanism in Saudi consumers might help to explain

the growth in the consumption of Western perfumes over locally produced essential oils. What we also know is that consumer seek authentic products [11, 12, 13, 14]. Therefore, gaining insights into Saudi Arabian’s perceptions of the authenticity of Western perfumes will help to understand the changes in market preferences and assist the local market to compete in what is becoming a more aggressive in nature.

Since there are very little or no studies in Saudi Arabia in this field, the aim of this paper is 1) to explore for the cues that Saudi Arabian consumers use to evaluate the authenticity of Western perfumes; and 2) to develop a scale to measure this construct, which we refer to as perceptions of authenticity (PofA) of perfumes.

**Perceptions of Authenticity:** Authenticity has a significant value when building strong unique brand identities [15, 11, 16] as it has potential to builds on the illusion of uniqueness, originality and distinctive images in consumers’ minds [15]. While authenticity is a complex construct creating difficulty in a definitive set of dimensions [15], there a general view that authenticity is about a person or market offering being genuine, real, original and trustworthy [17] and related to being natural, honest and simple [18, 14].

How consumers evaluate the authenticity of market offerings has received considerable attention in the literature over the past decade. Some scholars consider that the authenticity of an object or experience can be evaluated using absolute, objective criteria [19, 20, 21]. Many other scholars, however, highlight the centrality of

the subjective experience of the consumer in creating notions of authenticity [22, 23, 24]. The notion of indexicality comes in to play here whereby a market offering may be evaluated on such objective criteria, such as the precise stitching on a Louis Vuitton bag. Here, the features, or cues, of the market offering distinguish 'the real thing' from a copy [25, 26, 27]. As such, a market offering may be iconic of the original, or the indexical authentic, market offering. In the minds of some consumers, however, the fake Louis Vuitton bag, with iconic attributes, may be as authentic to them as the original Louis Vuitton bag may be to others. As such, there is a view that objective and subjective measures work in a synergistic manner to create perceptions of authenticity e.g. [15, 25, 20, 28].

[29] suggests that any definition of authenticity must be performed with reference to a place, time or product resonates with the quandary that marketers find themselves in when they focus on the notion of authenticity. Similarly, [30] referred the authenticity to four dimensions such as history, space, socialization and naturalization. History, legacy, pedigree and heritage are also important dimensions of authenticity which all enable a market offering to be more valuable than those without these attributes [31, 13].

While it is known that consumers use both intrinsic and extrinsic cues to evaluate market offerings [32], such as the quality of the packaging and its presentation [33, 23, 34, 35]; brand names [36, 14] place of origin [37, 30] and production [38, 39, 40, 41] the current thinking around authenticity suggests that while there may be some common attributes that consumers use to gauge the authenticity of a market offering there may be a need to gain insights into consumer perceptions of authenticity for specific market offerings and contexts. In food markets, for example, [37] identified three dimensions of authenticity: originality, uniqueness and projection. According to [37], the consumer must have information about the place of production. In the case of wines, [15] identified six cues of authenticity: pedigree and heritage, stylistic consistency, quality commitment, relationship to place, method of production and the downplaying of commercial motives.

In the case of perfumes, consumers might refer to the naturalness of ingredients [42], or how long the scent of the perfume lingers [43] to indicate the authenticity of the perfume. In addition, they may refer to the distinctiveness of the scent of a perfume that might comprise an unknown identity, quantity and/or concentration of natural and synthetic ingredients [44, 24].

This paper is premised on the view that consumers will evaluate the authenticity of a perfume using a number of cues. We propose that the individual evaluations of these cues will form a higher order construct: perceived authenticity of perfumes. We test this proposition within the context of the consumption of western perfumes in Saudi Arabia. The paper now proceeds to describe the process and methods used for our study.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In order to develop a scale to measure perceptions of authenticity (PoA) of perfumes, we first explored for the cues that consumers use to evaluate the authenticity of this product category.

This is the first stage of [45], approach to scale development. The required data were collected via four focus groups. Following this, a preliminary set of items was developed and refined and further data were collected using a survey approach Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and tests for reliability and validity of the scale were then undertaken.

Saudi Arabian consumers were recruited for the focus groups in shopping centers in Riyadh and Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The target participants were, both male and female, aged 18 years or over who had purchased perfumes in the last six months. Each focus group consisted of six participants. In total, 24 consumers participated, consisting of 16 females and 8 males, aged between 20 and 40 years. The focus groups were held in professional settings and were undertaken in Arabic and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Each focus group was recorded, transcribed and translated using back translation by a Certified Translation Centre to ensure accuracy and validity [46]. Using NVivo 9 to analyze the data, the data was analyzed following [47] recommended approach.

This resulted in five cues that participants use to evaluate the authenticity of western perfumes: namely endurance, distinctiveness, naturalness of ingredients, packaging and image. The focus group findings were converted to declarative statements and a preliminary set of 32 items was developed to measure the PoA of Western perfumes. These items were assessed by an expert panel of seven males and 13 female adult participants for their content validity. Using a three-point scale, each of the items was assessed for how representative each of the statement were for the cue being described. As 70% agreement indicates that the

items are internally consistent for defining a dimension [48] and any item that did not meet this level was deemed to be redundant. This process resulted in 28 statements being retained for inclusion in the study.

**Stage Three: Item Reduction:** A survey of 400 respondents in Riyadh and Mecca was conducted using the mall-intercept technique. Personal interviews were undertaken in Arabic, lasted approximately 10 minutes and were translated from Arabic to English. The majority of the sample was aged 18–29 years of age (57%), female (59.3%), had a bachelor’s degree (58.3%) and earned less than SR9, 000 per month. The sample profile is representative of the Saudi Arabian population which has one of the youngest communities in the world [5, 6]. The Split-half sample cross-validation approach [49] created two samples of size 200 consisting of one hundred cases from Riyadh and one hundred cases from Mecca for Stage 3 (EFA) and Stage 4 (CFA) respectively.

EFA, using Principal axis factoring orthogonal rotation (varimax), was then used to measure internal consistency of the items. Six items were removed due to high cross-loadings, low loadings, or low communality. A five-factor solution explaining 63% of the common variance was achieved, with factor loadings between 0.55 and 0.88. The largest single factor represented items measuring endurance (14.16%), followed by naturalness (13.36%), distinctiveness (12.3%), packaging (11.17%) and image (10.61%). The item-to-total correlations were above 0.5 and Cronbach’s alpha ranged from 0.73 to 0.87 indicating scale reliability.

**Stage Four: Confirmatory Factor Analysis:** Congeneric models provided evidence that the items fit their respective cues. CFA, using Maximum likelihood estimation, was used to develop a measurement model to verify the dimensionality for PoA. Several models were examined to determine the best fitting model.

Table 1: Measurement Model: Western Perfumes

Cues/Items	SL	CR	AVE	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Variance explained
<b>Cosmopolitanism</b>		<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.61</b>		<b>64.09%</b>
Cos1 I enjoy exchanging ideas with people from other cultures or countries.	0.72			0.71	
Cos2 I am interested in learning more about people who live in other countries.	0.81			0.79	
Cos3 I enjoy being with people from other countries to learn about their views and approaches.	0.74			0.71	
<b>Packaging in relation to perfumes refers to the shape of the package, size, color, texture, graphics, bottle, sealing and overall quality of packaging.</b>		<b>0.88</b>	<b>0.62</b>		<b>7.74</b>
Pack1 An authentic Western perfume is recognizable by the quality of packaging.	0.63			0.77	
Pack2 Authentic Western perfume does not leak from its bottle.	0.68			0.69	
Pack6 Authentic Western perfumes use the correct spelling of the brand name.	0.89			0.74	
Pack7 Authentic Western perfumes have error-free packaging.	0.88			0.75	
<b>Endurance in relation to perfumes refers to the extent to which the scent of the perfume is intense, lingers and does not fade away easily.</b>		<b>0.87</b>	<b>0.68</b>		<b>19.25</b>
End3 An authentic Western perfume has a long-lasting fragrance.	0.86			0.76	
End4 The scent of an authentic Western perfume is consistent even after several hours.	0.87			0.76	
End5 The scent of an authentic Western perfume lasts several hours.	0.75			0.73	
<b>Naturalness of ingredients in relation to perfumes refers to essential plant oils used that do not cause allergies.</b>		<b>0.83</b>	<b>0.60</b>		<b>19.14</b>
Nat2 Authentic Western perfume does not cause sneezing.	0.90			0.70	
Nat3 Authentic Western perfume does not cause headaches.	0.91			0.78	
Nat4 Authentic Western perfumes are made of natural ingredients.	0.55			0.61	
Nat5 Authentic Western perfumes are made in a natural way.	0.52			0.69	
<b>Purchase intentions</b>		<b>0.82</b>	<b>0.61</b>		<b>76.99%</b>
PI1 I intend to buy Western perfume as a gift for someone.	0.64			0.69	
PI2 I intend to only buy Western perfume.	0.86			0.69	

Note: SL - Standardized loading; CR - Composite Reliability; AVE - Average Variance Extracted

Table 2: Correlations among Constructs

	Mean	Std. Dev	End	Nat	Pack	Cosmo	PI
Endurance (End)	5.9	1.1	0.83				
Naturalness of ingredients (Nat)	4.3	1.8	0.39	0.78			
Packaging (Pack)	5.5	1.6	0.38	0.40	0.75		
Cosmopolitanism (Cosmo)	4.9	1.5	0.27	0.51	0.23	0.72	
Purchase intentions (PI)	5.6	1.7	0.48	0.48	0.31	0.29	0.84

\*\* p ≤ 0.01; Square root AVE highlighted in boldface

The proposed five-cue model did not provide a good fitting model to the data. A three-cue model comprising of endurance, packaging and naturalness of ingredients indicated a good fitting model ( $\chi^2/df = 2.37$  ( $p = 0.242$ ); GFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.98; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.06). To test the construct within a nomological model the cosmopolitanism construct consisting of three items (based on Cleveland et al.'s 2009 6 item scale) and purchase intentions consisting of two items (based on Starr's 2011 three item scale) were included in the measurement model which fit the data well (CMIN/df = 2.18 ( $p = 0.00$ ); GFI = 0.952; TLI = 0.960; CFI = 0.969; RMSEA = 0.053; SRMR = 0.049) These two constructs were used to assess nomological validity – which is the final stage of scale development (Table 1).

#### **Stage Five: Assessment of Reliability and Validity:**

All the scales exhibit good internal consistency with alpha values above 0.8 [50, 51], Composite Reliabilities from 0.82 to 0.89 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ranging from 0.56 to 0.69, all above the recommended 0.50 level [2]. Discriminant validity between dimensions was achieved as the estimated correlations among the dimensions did not exceed 0.85, [52] and the lowest square root of AVE was 0.72 compared with the correlation of 0.48 which meets [2] test. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for the constructs. All the cues of the perceptions of authenticity were uni-dimensional demonstrated via the results of the congeneric analysis of each of the cues.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study provides an exclusive cue which is endurance as cue of authenticity of Western perfumes and attempts to provide further insights into the examination of authenticity and to enhance the understanding of this concept. It explored for the cues that Saudi Arabian consumers of perfumes use to evaluate the authenticity of Western perfumes. Further, it extends previous research on authenticity as it verifies three cues that Saudi Arabian consumers of perfumes use to evaluate the authenticity of Western perfumes (endurance, naturalness of ingredients, packaging) that were identified as reliable and valid within the context of Western perfume consumption. The findings also verify that the three cues fit well within a higher order construct of perceptions of authenticity of Western perfumes.

The findings provide a reliable and valid scale to measure the cues that Saudi Arabian consumers use to evaluate the authenticity of Western perfumes including endurance of the perfume, naturalness of ingredients and packaging. The key findings of this study make a significant practical contribution to marketers of perfumes in Saudi Arabia. For example, this research provides evidence that to enhance consumer perceptions of the authenticity of Western perfumes, marketers should focus on a packaging, endurance and naturalness of ingredients. Innovative and forward-thinking marketing tactics could be developed for the Saudi Arabian perfume industry to utilize these cues and produce perfumes that meet the demand of increasingly cosmopolitanism Saudi Arabian consumers. The findings can be used to directly help the Saudi Arabian perfumes industry and more broadly other industries producing local consumer goods in Saudi Arabia. This study provides a platform for further studies. This study presents a scale with three cues of perceptions of authenticity identified which were identified as being reliable and valid in the overall measurement model. It would be valuable to conduct further studies to offer more evidence of scale validity.

It would be useful to investigate the role of perceptions of authenticity in increasingly cosmopolitan countries, like Saudi Arabia, in a number of different industries to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this within the context of consumer behavior. This study is set in the context of the perfume industry in Saudi Arabia. However, it would be valuable investigate the issues of this research with other countries including other Arab and western countries.

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