

## Scale Development for Perceptions of Authenticity: A Case Study of Western Perfumes in Saudi Arabia

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**Abstract:** Present study explores the cues that Saudi Arabian consumers of perfumes use to evaluate the authenticity of Western perfumes. Data collected from focus groups and surveys in with Saudi Arabian consumers of perfumes, provide for a reliable and valid scale to measure this construct. The largest single factor represented items measuring endurance (14%), followed by naturalness (13.36%), distinctiveness (12%), packaging (11%) and image (10%). The item-to-total correlations were above 0.5 and Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.73 to 0.87 indicating scale reliability. CFA was used to develop a measurement model to verify the dimensionality for scale. Several models were examined to determine the best fitting model. The proposed five-cue model did not provide a good fitting model. A three-cue model comprising of endurance, packaging and naturalness of ingredients indicated a good fitting measurement model.

**Key words:** Perceptions of authenticity • Perfumes • Scale development • Saudi Arabia

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### INTRODUCTION

Almost one quarter of the annual global spend on perfumes is in Gulf Corporation Countries with a per capita consumption of \$30 a year with the consumption of perfumes in Saudi Arabia rapidly growing in particular [1]. International firms such as Calvin Klein, Givenchy and Christian Dior, all appear to have been successful in their international marketing strategies in Saudi Arabia as Western perfumes now attribute for 62% of the market share of perfumes/essential oils [2].

Many Saudi Arabians might be perceived as now being "world citizens" - even cosmopolitan with a global culture, attitudes and consumption patterns [3, 4]. This might be a consequence of increasing mobility into Saudi Arabia and by Saudi Arabians [5]. [6] suggest that Saudi Arabian's are becoming increasingly open to new ideas and experiences. As [7] might suggest, Saudi Arabians may be more likely to be open to market offerings from countries other than their own. Such a shift in thinking on the behalf of Saudi Arabians about themselves might help to explain the trend towards the consumption of Western perfumes.

Like other consumers, however, Saudi Arabian consumer are likely to be seeking authenticity in their consumption practices [8, 9]. Therefore, an investigation

into perceptions of the authenticity of western perfumes from the Saudi Arabian perspective will assist: 1) to develop marketing strategies in relation to western perfumes for Saudi Arabia; and 2) for local producers of essential oils who must now compete in what is becoming a more aggressive market place in Saudi Arabia.

This paper reports on the first stage of an investigation into the relationship between cosmopolitanism, Saudi Arabian consumers' perceptions of the authenticity of western perfumes and their resulting consumer behavior: scale development for perceptions of authenticity (PofA) of western perfumes. The paper now proceeds with a review of the relevant literature on authenticity with a focus on perfumes. This is followed by an overview of the research method and the approach adopted for data collection and analysis. The results are then discussed. Finally, the limitations of the research are presented and recommendations for further research on this topic are made.

**Perceptions of Authenticity:** Authenticity has a significant value when building strong unique brand identities [10, 11, 12, 13, 14]. While authenticity is a complex construct creating difficulty in a definitive set of dimensions [15], there is a general view that authenticity is about whether a person or market offering is genuine,

real, original and trustworthy [16, 17] and related to being natural, honest and simple [18]. 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, 22]. Many other scholars, however, highlight the centrality of the subjective experience of the consumer in creating perceptions of authenticity [23, 24, 25].

As a construct, indexicality comes is relevant here whereby a market offering may be evaluated on 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 [26, 27, 28, 29]. However, a market offering may be iconic of the original. Even so, in the minds of some consumers, the fake Louis Vuitton bag, with its iconic attributes, may be as authentic as the original Louis Vuitton bag may be to other consumers. As such, authenticity has a range of meanings [21, 29, 30] suggests that to focus on what is original only is over-simplistic and that in response constructivism treats authenticity as a social construction. In marketing, to reconcile this tension there is a view that objective and subjective measures work in a synergistic manner to create perceptions of authenticity e.g. [31, 27, 25]. Consumption, however, happens in a particular place and time. [32] suggests that these variables and the product itself have a bearing on perceptions of authenticity. Legacy, pedigree and heritage are also deemed to be important dimensions of authenticity [33] all which enable a market offering to be more valuable than those without these attributes [34, 35, 29, 36].

While consumers use cues to evaluate market offerings [37] such as the quality of the packaging and its presentation [38, 39] brand names [40]. [41]; place of origin [42, 43] or production e.g. [44, 45, 46, 47], the thinking around authenticity suggests that that it is useful to consider both attributes of a particular market offering in addition to the context in which they are consumed. In food markets, for example, [48] identified three dimensions of authenticity: originality, uniqueness and projection. According to [48], consumers must also have information about the place of production. [49] note that in relation to food specialties, subjective authenticity is associated with the quality claims relating to the time, space and the product. These findings are similar to those of [11] earlier work on the authenticity when he concluded that in the case of luxury wines there were six cues of

authenticity: pedigree and heritage, stylistic consistency, quality commitment, relationship to place, method of production and the downplaying of commercial motives.

Considering the pervasiveness and significance of the consumption of perfumes around the globe, there has been relatively little scholarly research on the marketing on perfumes. However, [50] examined the marketing of uni-sex perfumes; [51] work on the use of Celtic mythology in perfume marketing; [52] case study analysis of Al-Haramain Perfumes' marketing strategy; the use of sexual imagery in the advertising of perfumes [53, 54] examination of the use of puffery in advertising of perfumes; and using perfumes as the context of their study, [55] analyzed the consumption of older brands. [50] revealed that perfume consumers use a range of intrinsic and extrinsic criteria to evaluate perfumes including the scent, the brand, its color, price, packaging, the season, buyer's mood, free items accompanying the purchase and whether it is European. [54] and [56] focused on the perfume's fragrance when examining puffery in perfume advertising. The literature suggests that consumers of perfumes refer to the naturalness of ingredients [54]; how long the scent of the perfume lingers (Oh, Lee & Kim, 2009) and the distinctiveness of the scent of the perfume [57]. Packaging and its quality is also an important consideration [56, 58, 59], as is place of production [44, 60, 61].

**Method for Scale Development and Results:** [62] identified five-stage approach to scale development was adopted for this study including: item generation and selection, purification, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and test for reliability and validity.

**Stage One: Initial Item Generation and Selection:** A preliminary pool of items was generated to measure PoA of western perfumes. Four focus groups, held in Riyadh and Mecca, were organized to brainstorm for the cues consumers use to assess PoA of perfumes. Participants for the focus groups were aged at least 18 years who had purchased perfumes in the last six months. The protocol for the focus groups was guided by the literature and participants were able to add their views on the topic. The focus groups, which each lasted between 60-90 minutes, comprised of six participants, were held in professional settings and undertaken in Arabic. In total, 16 females and 8 males, aged between 20-40 years, participated in the study. Each focus group discussion was recorded, transcribed and back translated

by a Certified Translation Centre to ensure accuracy and validity [53]. The data were analyzed using NVivo 9 and [64] approach. The analysis identified the cues that Saudi consumers use to evaluate the authenticity of Western perfumes namely endurance, distinctiveness, naturalness of ingredients, packaging and image. Declarative statements for each of these cues were developed resulting in a preliminary set of 32 items to measure the PoA of Western perfumes.

**Stage Two: Item Purification:** An expert panel (seven male/13 female) of adult Saudi Arabian citizens who were living in Melbourne, Australia, assessed the content validity of the descriptions of the five cues and corresponding items. Using a three-point scale, they assessed the extent to which the items represented the dimension to which it was ascribed. Using 70% as the cut-off point [31], 28 items were retained representing: endurance (5), naturalness of ingredients (5), distinctiveness (6), packaging (7) and image (5).

**Stage Three: Item Reduction:** A survey of 400 respondents was conducted in Riyadh and Mecca using the mall intercept technique. The interviews were undertaken in Arabic, lasting approximately 10 minutes. The sample profile is representative of the Saudi Arabian population: 18-29 years of age (57%), female (59%), bachelors qualified (58%) and earned less than SR9, 000 per month. The split-half sample cross-validation approach [66], created two samples of 200 (100 cases each from Riyadh and Mecca). Using Principal axis factoring orthogonal rotation (Varimax), EFA to measure the 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%), followed by naturalness (13.36%), distinctiveness (12%), packaging (11%) and image (10%). 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: CFA:** With the other half of the split sample, congeneric models provided evidence that the items aligned with their respective cues. Using Maximum likelihood estimation, CFA was used to develop a measurement model to verify the dimensionality for scale. Several models were examined to determine the best fitting model. The proposed five-cue model did not provide a

good fitting model. A three-cue model comprising of endurance, packaging and naturalness of ingredients indicated a good fitting measurement model ( $\chi^2/df = 2.37$  ( $p = 0.00$ ); GFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.98; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.06). A higher order reflective model was constructed and fit the data well (CMIN/df = 2.30 ( $p = 0.00$ ); GFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.97; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.05).

**Stage Five: Assessment of Reliability and Validity:** Each of the scales exhibit good internal consistency with alpha values above 0.8 [67, 68], Composite Reliabilities from 0.85 to 0.94 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were 0.56 to 0.84, all above the recommended 0.7 and 0.5 levels respectively [69]. Discriminant validity between dimensions was achieved; the estimated correlations among the dimensions did not exceed 0.85 (Kline, 2005) and the lowest square root of AVE was 0.72/the highest correlation was 0.48, therefore meeting [69] test.

## CONCLUSION

This research responds to the calls for further research on authenticity in marketing. It provides a reliable measure for Saudi Arabian consumers' perceptions of the authenticity of Western perfumes available for further study. While prior research identifies a number of cues of the authenticity of various market offerings (e.g. naturalism and packaging) the endurance of the perfume's fragrance is an important cue on which consumer perceptions of authenticity are based. We contribute knowledge about the marketing of perfumes in Saudi Arabia and provide evidence for strategies to enhance consumer perceptions of the authenticity of Western perfumes. Innovative and forward-thinking marketing tactics could be developed for the Saudi Arabian perfume industry to utilize endurance, naturalism and packaging to offer perfumes that meet the demand of the increasingly cosmopolitan Saudi Arabian market. It would be valuable to conduct further studies to provide further evidence of the scale's reliability. It would be useful to investigate the role of perceptions of authenticity in increasingly cosmopolitan countries, like Saudi Arabia and for different market offerings.

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