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Undertittel *:	Brand authenticity and representation
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BRAND AUTHENTICITY

REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSIVITY

Bachelor thesis – Digital Marketing

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Preface

This thesis is written in relation to our final bachelor's education in marketing management with specialization in digital marketing. Through this thesis we have been given the opportunity to explore the terms brand authenticity, representation and inclusivity. Although these are terms that we both previously have been familiar with, we were excited to be given the opportunity to investigate the effects of them in depth. In addition, we were able to explore the independent entertainment company A24, which we both are fond of. Through our research and study, we had the chance to combine our academic studies to our interest.

Working on the assignment has been an educational process where we have gained insight into the importance of adapting to the ever-changing market. During this period, we have had the opportunity to apply our creative and analytical skills, as well as further develop our skills in statistics and methodology. We found that the academical research on brand authenticity, representation and inclusivity is overall scarce and we hope that our assignment helps you see the potential of the outcomes related to brand authenticity through representation and inclusivity.

We would like to thank Maria Sääksjärvi who has been both a helpful and encouraging mentor throughout the writing whole process. She contributed with encouragement as well as necessary knowledge. In addition, she has motivated us to be more confident in our findings during the research phase. The availability of her mentorship has kept us motivated when we faced challenges along the way. We would also like to thank librarian Toril Sigstadstø who assisted us with accumulating secondary data, as well as all of the respondents of the survey conducted.

Happy reading!

Summary

In recent years we have seen the effects of the pandemic bringing an increasing pressure to accommodate to the rising demand of brand awareness and brand authenticity. Questions circulating the topics around diversity, representation and inclusion have come to the forefront of spotlight and discussion. Therefore, the objective of the assignment is to contribute to a better understanding of what kind of impact brand authenticity and representation and inclusivity have to a brand. The goal is to find if specific aspects of representation and inclusivity can result in positive brand authenticity. The thesis question is: *"How can representation and inclusivity be beneficial for brand authenticity?"*

To answer the thesis statement, we went through an extensive research phase where we assessed several academical articles in connection to brand authenticity, representation and inclusivity. This was done to gather an overview of the topics related to our elaborated thesis statement. The ADO-framework is a conceptual framework that was initially developed by Justin Paul and Gabriel Benito (Paul & Benito, 2018), and used by Jonatan Södergren to examine the different dimensions and characteristics of brand authenticity. The theoretical framework is the basis for our theory, and we find a potential for the new dimension 'representation and inclusivity' to be included.

To gather support around this we used a descriptive design with a quantitative approach through a survey to gather data from 111 respondents. The desired outcome of the survey was to measure the respondent's perceptions of variables *representation, uniqueness, brand activism and brand authenticity*. The gathered data was analyzed through SAS JMP. The analysis tool helped us change the theoretical terms to measurable numerical values. We then performed a descriptive, factor, reliability, and regression analysis.

The study indicated a positive correlation between the variable representation and brand authenticity and contributes to opening doors to future research on a topic with growing relevancy and importance.

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1.0 Intro

In a time where uncertainty and change are prevalent in society, consumers are demanding for more authentic brands (Turner & Manning, 1988). The global pandemic has brought with it an increasing pressure to accommodate to the rising demand of brand awareness and brand authenticity, as questions of inequality, diversity and inclusion have come to the forefront of spotlight and discussion. However, Fleishman Hillard's global report from 2021, "The Power of Authenticity", reveals that many brands are facing an authenticity problem, which proposes that who they claim to be oftentimes collides with who they really are. The research conducted in the report measures the gap between what consumers expect and their actual experience of a brand, and includes a 25-minute survey with 10 000 informed consumers about 200 companies across 20 sectors around the world (Fleishman Hillard, 2021). The study unveils that consumers place the importance of a brand's impact on society higher now more than ever, and that it is no longer about what they sell, but about how the brand engages with society. Knowing this, it is clear that brand authenticity is no longer a topic that brands can overlook to succeed in today's market. It is therefore crucial for companies and brands to explore the term brand authenticity as informed consumers are no longer willing to accept insincere brand behavior (Holt D. B., 2002).

Though there are brands that are incorporating and utilizing the concept of brand authenticity, there are still many companies around the world that are lacking in this field. The reasons for this can be many, but we suspect that it has to do with the lack of knowledge of how exactly brand authenticity can positively contribute to brands gaining success and reputation. The research on brand authenticity is broad, and there are several dimensions that are repeatedly discussed. However, we believe that an important attribution to brand authenticity can be the dimension of representation and inclusivity, and its important outcomes for both the brand and consumer. Thus, our objective of the assignment is to find out how specific aspects of inclusivity and representation can result in brand authenticity.

1.1 Objective of the assignment

The objective of the assignment is to contribute to a better understanding of what kind of impact brand authenticity and representation and inclusivity have to a brand. The goal is to find specific aspects of representation and inclusivity can result in positive brand authenticity. Furthermore, we wish to explore how brand authenticity allows consumers to clearly understand the brand's values and how emphasizing representation and inclusivity can further strengthen consumers' connection to the brand.

In addition to this, we will analyze the case of A24 that in recent years have grown into one of the most influential studios in Hollywood partly due to their brand authenticity and emphasis on representation and inclusivity (Snowden, 2019).

It is desirable that the results provide recommendations on how representation and inclusivity should be implemented to be considered beneficial for brand authenticity.

2.0 Thesis statement

Based on the objective of the assignment, we have curated the following thesis statement:

"How can representation and inclusivity be beneficial for brand authenticity?"

The following research questions are developed to help us answer the stated thesis statement:

RQ1: "What are the outcomes related to representation and inclusivity in regards to brand authenticity?"

RQ2: "What strategic measures can be used to improve brand authenticity?

2.1 The limitation of the thesis

Due to the broad philosophical, sociological, anthropological and psychological aspects of the term authenticity, we have chosen to limit our thesis to purely focus on the marketing and branding aspects. Research on

authenticity by nature focuses on these mentioned relevant angles, and while it is interesting and worth mentioning to better understand brand authenticity, it would be too extensive to go in depth about all the different research disciplines of authenticity.

3.0 Theory

3.1 Introduction to Brand Authenticity

While the concept of authenticity has been around for multiple centuries (Guignon & Varga, 2014), the term brand authenticity has not. Over the last couple of decades, the term has gained more traction not only through media and political debate, but also through marketing practice and academic study (Södergren, 2021). Brand authenticity is now deemed as a key asset in contemporary marketing, but despite this, there is still confusion surrounding the essence and implementation of the concept. To better understand brand authenticity, it is crucial to grasp the cultural definition of authenticity.

The word authenticity is derived from Greek word 'autos', meaning *self,* and 'hentes', meaning *doer,* and implies to someone acting on their own authority (Spiggle, Nguyen, & Caravella, 2018). Authenticity is today often associated with existentialism, and describes to which degree a person's actions are congruent with their internal values and desires, despite outside pressures to social conformity (Guignon & Varga, 2014). As humans have been seeking for authenticity for many centuries, it has only been in recent years that the concept of authenticity has piqued the attention of marketing scholars. Traditional markers of identity such as religion, family and community have lost their influence on the younger generations, resulting in them turning to authentic brands for communal experiences and connections (Beverland, 2009). Brands that manage to facilitate people's desire for collective connections are considered as genuine partners, thus an increase in emotional bonds between customer and brand is established.

3.1.2 The ADO framework on Brand Authenticity

To minimize the definition of brand authenticity to one single definition is to disservice the multifaceted and polysemous nature of the term. By virtue of

this, attempts to unpack the various definitions and the significance of brand authenticity have been made by some marketing scholars. For instance, Jonatan Södergren reviews extensive peer-reviewed published studies on brand authenticity from the last 25 years. He utilizes the Antecedents, Decisions and Outcomes (ADO) conceptual framework initially developed by Justin Paul and Gabriel Benito (Paul & Benito, 2018) to examine the different dimensions and characteristics of brand authenticity. In addition, Södergren also highlights possible research gaps in his research. It is in this framework that we will contribute our new dimension, representation and inclusivity, as part of the antecedents to brand authenticity.
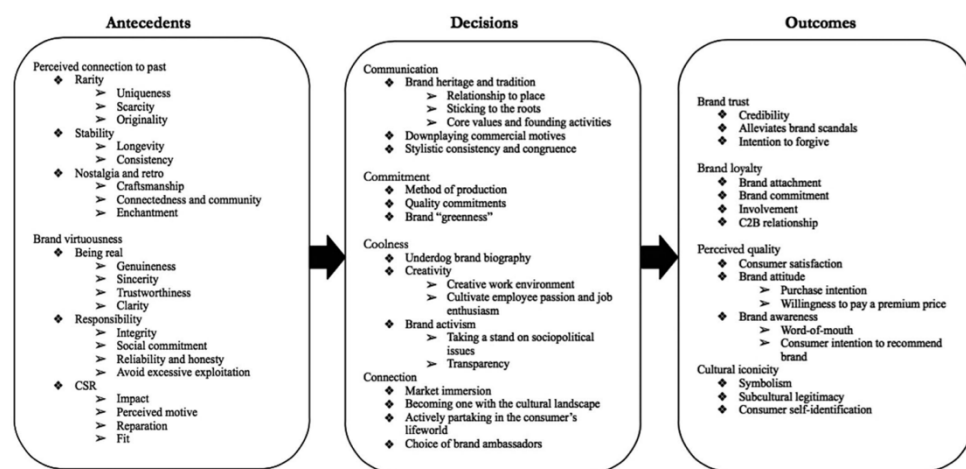
Figure 1: Conceptual ADO framework by Justin Paul and Gabriel Benito (2018) derived from the reviewed literature.

The ADO framework is understood by how the different dimensions are associated with each other. Paul and Benito emphasize that relations between the ADO dimensions are as important as the dimensions themselves, regarding contributing to new information through this framework. For example, referring to figure 1, cultivating employee passion and job enthusiasm (i.e. Decisions) is rooted in the responsibility on avoiding excessive exploitation (i.e. Antecedents), which results in perceived quality (i.e. Outcomes) in relation to brand authenticity.

3.1.3 The Antecedents to Brand Authenticity

The **antecedents** to brand authenticity in the reviewed literature can be divided into two main categories which are 'perceived connection to the past' and 'brand virtuousness'. The first category encompasses the notion that consumers

tend to seek out nostalgic and retro experiences, as it takes them back to a simpler time where the world seemed much less commercial and urbanized. Having authentic experiences for the younger generation can therefore be associated with having the need to fulfill emotional needs for connectedness and community that are scarce in today's world (Freathy & Thomas, 2014).

Adding to this category, two more attributes are often related to brand authenticity, and they are "rarity" (behavior unique to the brand) and "stability" (consistent brand behavior) (Moulard, Raggio, & Folse, 2016). Brands that are seen as authentic also have characteristics of uniqueness and scarcity. Uniqueness speaks to the extent of which consumers perceive the brand as having something that the competitors do not, while scarcity is the extent of which consumers perceive the brand's offerings as something that is not widely accessible. In relation to our thesis statement, representation and inclusivity in branding can be found to be effective for brands to be perceived as unique. The brand consulting company Kantar Group conducted an analysis following the events of May 2020 and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, observing the representation of various ethnicities and diverse skin colors in advertising (Poole, 2021). The analysis found different levels of inclusion across different categories and concluded with that representation can contribute to a brand being positioned as emotionally different, or *unique*. Not only is this new dimension relevant in the extension of uniqueness, but also significant as a stand-alone dimension in the antecedents of the framework. Representation and inclusivity will therefore be our contribution to the ADO-framework, and the effects of the dimension will be discussed further later in the assignment.

The second category 'brand virtuousness' comprehends that important drivers to brand authenticity are being sincere, genuine and trustworthy. Furthermore, CSR initiatives can contribute to alleviating backlash from consumers, as CSR actions instigated as reparation for negative events are seen as authentic if consumers perceive the acts as true contrition. However, the actions are regarded as inauthentic if consumers perceive them as only done to save face (Alhouti, Johnson, & Holloway, 2016).

3.1.4 The Decisions to Brand Authenticity

The second part of the framework consists of the strategic **decisions** that are made to develop brand authenticity, and Södergren condenses his finds into what he refers to as the "brand authenticity mix". The brand authenticity mix consists of the four C's, and these are: *Communication, Commitment, Coolness* and *Connection*. The first dimension, *Communication*, encompasses the importance of the brand's market communication and how it affects the consumer's view on brand authenticity. Communicating and highlighting the brand's heritage, values, and traditions leads to consumers interpreting the brand as more authentic (Fritz, Schoenmueller, & Bruhn, 2014). When brands effectively communicate this, it suggests to the brand's durability and consistency, causing the brand to appear more reliable and consistent. Furthermore, emphasizing on a brand's long history in their marketing communications results in the brand being more perceived as unique because these associations enhance the brand with incomparable and distinct qualities (Hakala, Kantola , & Sjöblom, 2015).

The second dimension, *Commitment,* involves how brands can project their authenticity through highlighting their commitment in the production method is of high quality. An example of this is the American Greek yogurt company, Chobani. Chobani accentuates their devotion to produce high-quality yogurt with only natural, sustainable ingredients (Chobani, u.d.).
Furthermore, their tagline is *"A cup of yogurt won't change the world, but how we make it might",* which emphasizes how sustainable their production method is. Consumers have also shown a tendency to favor brands that offer products that are locally produced, organic and sustainable (Jian, Zhou, & Zhou, 2019). The brand's commitment to having a high-quality method of production has led them to surpass Yoplait in sales and market share, attaining nearly $2 billion in sales in 2016 (Quick, 2021).

The third dimension is *Coolness*, which implicates how coolness is correlated with how the consumers perceive a brand as being authentic. In other words, "cool" brands are often also defined as being authentic, in regards to brands

being effortlessly consistent and true to its roots (Warren, Batra, & Loureiro, 2019). Moreover, brands that are perceived as being "underdogs" manage to cultivate a stronger connection to their consumers (Biraglia & Brakus, 2015). The struggles related to being "underdog" are often defined in a company's description of origin or brand biography, and consumers will recognize the brand as cooler as opposed to when the brand has an advantaged biography (Biraglia & Brakus, 2015).

For instance, even large companies such as Apple and Google are still intent to preserve their underdog disadvantaged beginnings in their brand biographies to garner consumers self-identification on transforming from being the underdog to finally succeeding. Additionally, coolness also relates to creativity in the workplace and how well immersed the employees are in the core values of the brand. Companies that have employees that exude passion and job enthusiasm can expect to sustain performance gains, innovation and resiliency (Hagel III, Ranjan, Brown , & Byler, 2014). The last component for this dimension is brand activism. Consumers are now more than ever demanding brands to take a stand on sociopolitical issues, and when brands participate in activist messaging, they engage with *authentic brand activism* (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020). We are going to elaborate on this subject later in this paper.

The last C in the brand authenticity mix is *Connection.* Brands that manage to immerse themselves in the cultural landscape by dynamically participating in the consumer's lifeworld can be seen as more authentic (Södergren, 2021). One way to connect with the cultural landscape is to select an appropriate ambassador for a brand. Selecting a well-fitted ambassador for a brand can be crucial as it helps the brand stay relevant, but also causes brands to gain inspiration from their environments which further results in innovations. An example of this was when Nike signed Colin Kaepernick as an ambassador for their newest campaign with the slogan *"Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.".* This refers to Kaepernick's lawsuit against the NFL for allegedly conspiring to keep the former football quarterback out of the league due to his protests against police brutality during the national anthem

(Abad-Santos, 2018). Despite that the campaign resulted in the widespread boycott and burning of Nike's products, many also applauded Nike for taking a public stand for social justice and civil rights. Nike's stocks ended the day 7% higher (Youn, 2018), and managed to position themselves as being one with the cultural landscape.

3.1.5 The Outcomes to Brand Authenticity

The third and last part of the ADO-framework is the Outcomes, which encapsulates the different consequences of brands being perceived as authentic. The four consequences of brand authenticity are: brand trust, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and cultural iconicity. In terms of brand trust, brand authenticity can induce an increase in purchase intentions along with trust and commitment towards the brand (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). Brands that match their words with their actions are deemed as more credible, and therefore more trustworthy for consumers. The next outcome of brand authenticity is brand loyalty, which is the positive association that consumers attach to a particular brand, and their commitment to repeat purchases despite the competitor's actions (Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011). The third outcome of brand authenticity is perceived quality. When a brand is considered as being authentic, the expected quality of the product is oftentimes higher than brands that are deemed as inauthentic. Perceived quality positively impacts consumer satisfaction, heightening consumers purchase intentions as well as willingness to pay a premium price. Furthermore, perceived quality also results in consumers being more likely to talk about and recommend the brand to others (word of mouth).

Lastly, the fourth outcome of brand authenticity in the reviewed literature is cultural iconicity. Douglas Holt claims that almost anything can be a cultural icon, such as people, places, brands and even universities (Holt D. , 2004). Examples of cultural icons can be Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, Andy Warhol, Superman, Disney, Apple, Amnesty International and Harvard University. The Oxford English dictionary defines a cultural icon as *"a person or a thing regarded as a representative symbol, especially of a culture or a movement: a person or an institution considered worthy of admiration or respect"*. Consumers identify strongly with cultural icons and often rely on

these symbols in their everyday life that people accept as a shorthand to represent important values (Holt D. , 2004). Moreover, consumers appreciate brands that embody the ideals that they themselves admire, and brands that help them express who they want to be are also deemed as more authentic (Holt D. , 2004).

The ADO-framework works as an extensive conceptual framework to map the different antecedents, decisions, and outcomes of brand authenticity. By going through the different dimensions, we have gained a broad understanding of the term in reviewed literature as it comprehends what dimensions lead brand authenticity. In addition, we have contributed with a new dimension of Representation and Inclusivity as we see that it naturally benefits brand authenticity.

3.2 Representation in brand activism and "woke-washing"

As established earlier, perception of brand authenticity is heavily correlated with brand activism. In addition, with focus on representation and inclusivity, brand activism can be found to be positive for the perception of brand authenticity. When brands are able to match with activist messaging and purpose with prosocial corporate practice, they engage in authentic brand activism, which in turn generates the most potential for social change (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020). However, when a brand's activist messaging is detached from their purpose and values, they are engaging in inauthentic brand activism, also referred to as "woke-washing". The term "woke" is defined in the Merriam-webster dictionary as *"aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)"* (Merriam Webster, u.d.). Moreover, woke-washing is defined as *"brands that have unclear or indeterminate records of social cause practices, but are yet attempting to market themselves as being concerned with issues of inequality and social justice"* (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020). The term highlights the incongruence between the proposed messaging and the actual practices.

In Kantar's article "The 5 habits of highly effective advertisers", it was highlighted that inclusion and diversity is one of the ingredients that brands utilize in their ads to make them more effective and creative (Poole, 2021). The massive rise of call to equality and representation has in the last decade become more apparent, as United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals encompasses both goal 10 (reduce inequalities) and goal 5 (gender equality) (United Nations, 2015). Both goals call for more inclusion and representation of gender, disability, age, ethnicity, religion and more. Poole argues that advertising has the powerful ability to shape and influence society, and therefore it is only socially and morally right to be inclusive in advertisement (Poole, 2021). A report made by Advertising Standards Authority UK found evidence that suggested that harmful stereotypes reinforced in advertising contributes to inequality in society (ASA , 2017). In other words, the report states that these detrimental depictions can play a part in limiting people's full potential. With this in mind, it is only reasonable to conclude that the marketing industry also has a significant role in making a positive societal change.

An example of a brand that manages to align their values with their actions is Tommy Hilfiger and their commitment to socially driven campaigns the past years. The brand recently announced their partnership with the learning platform, FutureLearn, to offer a series free digital learning opportunities covering topics like LGBTQIA+ allyship and community building (Gilliland, 2021). The courses are hosted by Tommy Hilfiger's ambassadors such as the actress Jameela Jamil, who is an activist herself. In addition, Tommy Hilfiger launched the *Tommy Hilfiger Fashion Frontier Challenge* in 2018, as an initiative to discover and support start-up businesses that strive for positive social impact. This

(YouNoodle, 2022)

initiative is based on Tommy Hilfiger's commitment towards inclusion and diversity, as they encourage individuals from historically underrepresented communities such as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), people with

disabilities and women to apply for this challenge. The brand manages to align their activist messages with supportive practices that reinforce their purpose and values.

In contrast to this, inauthentic brand activism (or woke-washing) is defined as when the activist messaging is incongruent with the brand's purpose, values, and corporate practice. Adding to this, brands that only engage with sociopolitical movements out of a sense of urgency and market responsiveness can also result in woke-washing (Georgallis, 2017). Earlier, we mentioned the case of Nike signing Colin Kaepernick as an ambassador which yielded great response as they took a public stand for social justice and civil rights. However, despite it being a successful campaign, many consumers were critical to Nike's purpose and values as the brand continued to sponsor the NFL teams that rejected Colin Kaepernick after the protests (Carp, 2018).

Consumers are getting more critical and aware of brands that are only using societal issues as a marketing ploy, and increasingly better to question the true motives of brand activism. Brands that engage in brand activism but lack in brand purpose and values whilst not displaying any actual supportive practices can be deemed as insincere and deceptive by consumers. The demand for increased transparency in brands is prevalent especially for Gen Z, as study finds that this generation does not hesitate about boycotting companies that they find hypocritical or unethical (Bapna, 2021). Woke-washing can result in negative brand equity through unfavorable brand associations amongst consumers, while also being unethical as the brand's attempt to deliver an activist message can limit the potential for actual social change (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020).

In this part of the thesis, we have identified that representation and inclusivity in brand activism can lead to perceived brand authenticity, and what aspects negatively impact perceived brand authenticity. While the alignment of activist marketing messages coupled with brand purpose, values and activist corporate practice can positively lead to brand authenticity, the lack of this alignment can lead to woke-washing (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020). Further

on, we will discuss the beneficial contributions of representation and inclusivity in both the workplace and marketing initiatives.

3.3 Representation and inclusivity in regards to Brand Authenticity

Representation and inclusivity have in recent years become an important topic in the marketing world. The modern-day work environment values diversity and inclusivity, and when a company has a diverse and inclusive work environment, this reflects positively on both the company and the brand. In addition, the modern-day consumers demand advertisements that better reflect society at large and therefore it has become important for brands to understand what representation means and how it can be equally as beneficial for both the consumers and the brand. With this, we now wish to further examine how representation and inclusivity can strengthen brand authenticity and how representation fits in as a valuable addition to the ADO framework.

Before going further into the subject *"Representation and inclusivity in regards to Brand Authenticity"*, it is crucial to establish a definition of two critical keywords related to the discussion: *diversity and inclusivity.* Later we will also define *representation* in relation to brand marketing in media.

The term diversity is frequently used to describe demographic differences and the composition of work groups. As expected there are numerous definitions of diversity. One example of a common definition is: "The mixture of attributes within a workforce that in significant ways affect how people think, feel, and behave at work, and their acceptance, work performance, satisfaction, or progress in the organization" (Nair & Vohra, 2015). Emphasis on diversity mainly focus on the composition of groups based on factors that differentiates individuals from one another. Generally, these factors can be observable demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion etc., but also non-observable attributes such as socio-economic status and/or education (Nair & Vohra, 2015).

Inclusivity is frequently mentioned alongside diversity. However, diversity and inclusion are not equivalent to the same definition. While diversity primarily

focuses on the demographic makeup of groups and organizations, inclusion emphasizes leveraging and integrating diversity – thus, allowing differences to coexist and be mutually beneficial. One of the more universally accepted and contemporary approaches to viewing inclusion defines it as: "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (Nair & Vohra, 2015). In sum, diversity and inclusion are complementary and depend on each other. Inclusion is the conscious effort organizations implement to support diversity (Resources Workable, u.d.).

Combining diversity, inclusion and representation in the workplace can

(PhysicsWorld, 2016)

provide numerous of potential advantages to organizations. On one side it aids organizations in being able to reach out to diverse costumer groups and markets, and on the other side it allows a variety of perspectives in the workplace which in turn promotes innovation and overall better work results and performance (Nair & Vohra, 2015). A diverse and inclusive workplace naturally comes with a broader set of skills and ideas among the employees. Rendering the ADO framework, this can be linked to the *Coolness* dimension, where coolness relates to creativity in the workplace and how well immersed the employees are in the core values of the brand.

In addition, a diverse range of cultures in the workplace allows companies to deal with different nuances in the global market. For instance, it is beneficial for a company to have employees who are able to communicate in different languages and can understand different cultural business norms when doing business with a partner from a foreign country. Furthermore, companies with a diverse and inclusive workplace are often perceived as better employers, and this makes the company a more desirable workplace. As a result, this increases

marketing opportunities and marketplace awareness (AbilityOptions, u.d.). Rendering the ADO framework, this can be linked to *Connection* dimension, where brands that manage to immerse themselves in the cultural landscape are perceived as more authentic. As previously mentioned, brands that manage to facilitate people's desire for collective connections are considered as genuine partners. This further promotes a positive reputation and increases the emotional bond between the brand and potential consumers or work employees. In return this can helps build and establish brand authenticity.

For a brand, representation in marketing should mean to create authentic and culturally relevant content for their targeted consumers. However, this is hard to accomplish when the people in the workplace lack knowledge on diversity and inclusion. As previously mentioned, an authentic brand is a brand that decides to be transparent and consistent in the message they put out and in branding initiatives (Georgiou, 2021). In today's market, the consumer primarily determines what is authentic, therefore, authenticity is perceptual. Brand authenticity matters because consumers desire it. Consumers' brand choices are an extension of their desired self and in today's market, brands have the ability to connect people. Brands are chosen because traditional markers of identity as race, religion, community and culture are breaking down due to increased globalization. Consumers' brand choices are an extension of their desired self, and the choice of certain brands are to achieve self-authentication (Beverland, 2009), and this is where representation in branding initiatives becomes relevant.

There are numerous definitions of representation and they vary in the context they are used in. An example of a common definition of representation is: "the act of speaking or acting on behalf of someone" (Oxford Learners Dictionaries, u.d.). Media plays a prevalent role in the lives of adolescents and young adults, and these are the consumers that value social media as an opportunity to express themselves and develop one's identity. Media images are significant in identity development, as they can act as a powerful socializing agent and shapes how people view themselves and each other within social systems (Besana, Katsiaficas, & Loyd, 2020). Positive media representation can be

helpful in increasing self-esteem for people of marginalized groups and additionally create a greater emotional bond between the consumer and the brand.

Rendering the ADO framework, this can once again be linked to the dimension *Connection*, where brands that manage to immerse themselves in the cultural landscape are perceived as more authentic. Additionally, this can also be linked to the dimension *Coolness* under 'Brand Activism', where consumers demand brands to take a stand on sociopolitical issues. Consumers look for a reflection of their own identity in the branding initiatives they are presented. Diversity, inclusion and representation should be significant focal points of brand communication whilst remaining authentic to the brand's values (Dennies, 2021).

3.4 How the Pandemic changed our consumer behavior in relation to 'Representation'

The global pandemic has disrupted and challenged every feature of our lives. The change has triggered a major shift in how companies communicate and how brands are expected to hold campaigns as well as issues they are expected to take a stand on (Fleishman Hillard, 2021). The period of contagion, self-isolation and economic uncertainty will likely change the way consumers behave for years to come (Kohli, Timelin, Fabius, & Veranen, 2020). An analysis done by McKinsey, on the consumer behavior post pandemic suggests we have covered a decade's worth of digital adoption in days (Kohli, Timelin, Fabius, & Veranen, 2020). Subsequently, media usage has become a more prevalent part in consumers life during and after the pandemic. This further enabled identity expression, exploration and experimentation through media. As previously mentioned, media plays a critical role in adolescents and young adults lives, especially since young people values social media as an opportunity to express themselves and develop an identity. The dramatic increase in digital adoption as a consequence of the pandemic is relevant to the dimension 'Representation' as in modern-day society media communicates and enforces shared understandings. Media have the power to influence whether the messages shared are positive or negative. Likewise, it can confirm,

perpetuate or resist stereotypes. The content of media representation has the power to shape how society view a certain group of people. Consequently, messages from the media can affect both an individual's sense of self and how society interacts with members of that group (Besana, Katsiaficas, & Loyd, 2020).

In addition to the rapid digital adoption during the pandemic, media consumption also shifted as racial justice, political activism, Covid-19, mental health challenges and the U.S. election dominated headlines. According to a study conducted by Pew Research Center, 70% of Gen Zers believe the government need to do more to solve problems related to racism (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). In addition, there has been an increase by 93% in social media stories discussing political themes tagged with #activism since 2019 (Stefanyk, 2021). Brands are demanded to work towards creating a better future and engaging Gen Z consequently means embracing social change. It is no longer enough to superficially support progressive movement, brands need to actively engage with the movements and be attentive to their goals (Stefanyk, 2021). When consumers demand more representation, brands must be able and ready to deliver. A good example of a brand that has implemented representation and inclusivity to strengthen their brand authenticity in media is the independent entertainment company A24.

3.5 The case of A24

In a time where the movie industry is heavily bombarded with Hollywood franchises and streaming services, the New York-based indie production company A24 has managed to make quite a name for themselves. A24 is an independent entertainment

(JumpcutOnline, 2022)

company that also produces and distributes films and television shows. The company was founded in 2012 by Daniel Katz, David Fenkel and John Hodges, all of which had previously worked

extensively in film and production prior to founding A24 (Pride, 2012). In this part of the thesis, we will explore how A24 has managed to become a *cultural icon* through representation and brand authenticity, adding the essential dimension to the ADO-framework previously elaborated.
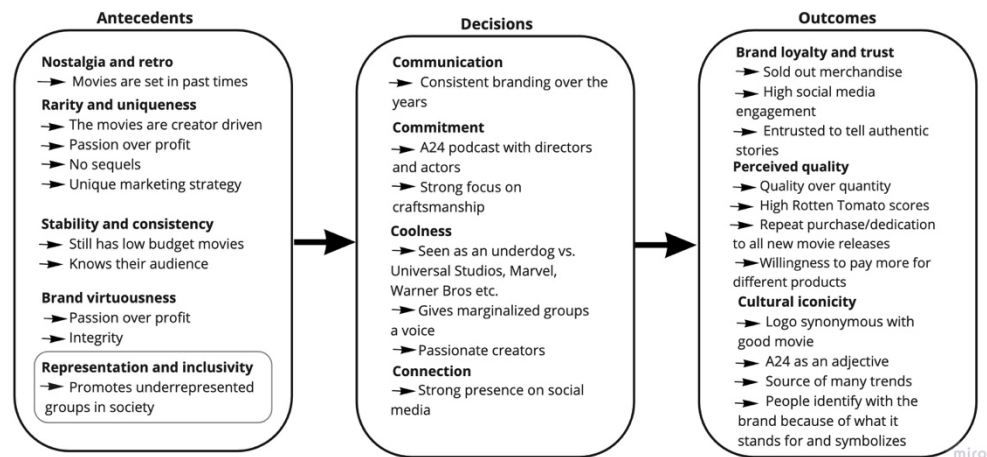

Figure 2: ADO-framework for brand authenticity in A24

We summarize the different antecedents, decisions, and outcomes to brand authenticity in A24 in the framework above, as well as adding the new dimension of *representation and inclusivity,* as we see that it naturally is an extension of the already existing dimensions. This new dimension is what we deem as one of the most important factors to A24's success and is what we will be mainly focusing on in this case.

The key attributes in A24 that makes consumers perceive the company as authentic (i.e. the antecedents) is nostalgia, uniqueness, and representation and inclusivity. The category of nostalgia encompasses the idea that consumers tend to seek out nostalgic experiences, as it takes them back to a simpler time. Many of A24's most renowned movies are set in the past, such as Lady Bird, Uncut Gems, Minari and Mid90s. With focus on original, yet compelling storytelling, these movies retell the lives of a past time that makes consumers deem the movie-watching experience as nostalgic.

In terms of uniqueness, A24 stands out in many ways. Firstly, A24 do not limit themselves to one genre of movies like some production companies do. The company has distributed and produced movies in different genres such as

horror, coming-of-age, thriller, sci-fi and drama (A24, u.d.). However, the common denominator throughout their diverse plethora of movies is that the movies they choose are extremely creator driven. This means that their movies are not targeted to most of the demographic, but movies that are made because they had to be made (Maryanna, 2020). A24 enables filmmakers to tell distinct and emotional stories from a personal perspective, who are driven by passion with a desire to share personal stories over profit (The Age of Ideas, 2022). Franchises, reboots and live actions movies are seen as easy cash grabs, and A24 purposefully shy away from those as they believe that the movies that they distribute are good enough as stand-alone movies (Lingad, 2021). Furthermore, the brand has continued to stay true to itself despite their financial success. A24 has not yet left their indie roots as their movies are still low budget, with limited theatrical releases. The consistent releases of movies that resonate with many, coupled with their unwavering value for passion has resulted in consumers deeming the brand as authentic.

A natural extension of what makes A24 unique, is their unwavering effort to give marginalized groups a voice. The production company has shown over the years that producing and distributing unique stories that resonate with different genders, ethnicities and backgrounds can be beneficial for building brand authenticity. Movies such as Minari, The Farewell, Everything Everywhere All at Once and the

(Indie Wire, 2022)

Oscar-winning movie Moonlight highlights the lives of underrepresented groups in society and are all critically acclaimed in the film industry. Not only does A24 show their efforts through their movies, but also through brand initiatives, as they recently partnered with the non-profit *Made in Her Image.* The production company and the non-profit are planning to launch a new program in support of women and non-binary People of Color (POC) filmmakers (Grobar, 2022). The program called Beyond the Screen has a goal to promote and give support to young people whose advancement in the film

industry has historically been discouraged by gender inequality and systemic racism. Furthermore, the CEO of the non-profit, Malakai, underlines the importance of young women and nonbinary POCs to see themselves as tomorrow's producers and filmmakers, while also continuing the praxis of creating meaningful pipelines for underrepresented communities (Grobar, 2022).

The dimension 'Representation and inclusivity' is a vital part of what makes A24 so special to the consumers and the people behind the scenes. The production company has an infatuating effect through their commitment to representation, inclusivity and diversity, not only in terms of ethnicity, but also in terms of socio-economic background, identity, and sexuality. Hereunder we will discuss the new dimensions influence on the outcomes in the framework by exanimating the effects of two A24 films focusing on representation and inclusivity. In addition, we will discuss the new dimension's contribution to raising A24's brand authenticity and solidify their status as a cultural icon in the film-production world.

The third pillar of the ADO-framework describes the outcomes, which encapsulates the different consequences of A24 being perceived as authentic. In the framework above we recognize three main outcomes for A24 as brand loyalty and trust, perceived quality and cultural iconicity.

An applicable example of the outcomes related to brand loyalty and trust, as well as perceived quality is the producer and director Lulu Wangs decision to turn down a nearly 15 million dollar streaming deal in favor of producing with A24 (Sharf, 2019). The comedy-drama movie "The Farewell" by Lulu Wang was sold to A24 in a deal estimated between 6 million and 7 million dollars, but in an interview with Vulture, Wang reveals a streaming company counter-offered A24 with a deal that was more than double the amount offered. Wang ended up choosing what she believed resonated the most with her and her film, which meant sticking to A24. In the interview with Vulture she stated: "I'm very good at spotting when people are inauthentic. I can always feel when someone's not fully connected'' (Jung, 2019).

Further on, she explained that a streaming service would not compare to A24, as the traditional theatrical release comes with a platform rollout that brings word-of-mouth buzz and help the film break into the cultural conversation. Wang decision to team up with A24 has been a praised by many, including the staff and stars of her movie (Sharf, 2019). The movie is based on Wangs own experiences with her Chinese family, and creates a warm drama about family ties, cultural clashes, and serious illness. Although the cultural descriptions in the movie may be foreign, the family dynamic are as universal as can be (Vestmo, 2020). The distinct, but simultaneously nebulous point of view in the film is what resonates beyond the messaging "representation matters". Although what the audience see is important, the genuine storytelling about diverse perspectives is that leaves a lasting impact (Fang, 2019). The filmed grossed for a worldwide total of 23.1 million dollar against the production budget of 3 million dollar (Box Office Mojo, u.d.).

Another applicable example of the outcomes related to brand loyalty is actor Ke Huy Quans decision to return to acting for the first time since 1996 in the new A24 movie "Everything Everywhere All At Once". Quan was best known as a 1980s child star, but as he got older, he faced the harsh reality of Hollywood's lack of opportunities for Asian actors (Goh, 2022). However, in a new interview with GQ, Quan revealed he was inspired to return to acting after seeing how much success "Crazy Rich Asians" had with a cast of Asian actors in 2018. This shows that representation has the powerful impact of increasing self-esteem for people of marginalized groups and create a greater emotional bond between people and A24. Movies like "Crazy Rich Asians" and "Everything Everywhere All At Once", along with several A24 movies, confirms a major step forward for representation and for the industry. By representing minority groups so vividly, the films set a precedent for similar stories to be told (Ho, 2018).

A24 efforts to continuously involve diversity, inclusivity and representation, not only in their marketing initiatives and workplace, but also in the products they produce is part of what we believe makes their brand authentic. The

production company continue to produce and distribute unique stories that resonate with different genders, ethnicities and backgrounds is what makes them unique in comparison to their competitors. They have managed to gain a status as cultural icons as they aid to pave the way of what is expected from brands in the modern market. In the next part of the thesis, we will combine theory on brand authenticity, and representation and inclusivity with methodological research to further answer our research questions.

4.0 Method

The method segment of the assignment begins with a repetition of the purpose of the analysis, thenceforth a justification of the survey design and finally a review of the method collection and data management.

4.1 The purpose of the thesis analysis

The purpose of the analysis is to obtain data to test the proposed hypotheses, which thereby contribute insight to the answer the thesis statement associated to the research questions.

"How can representation and inclusivity be beneficial for brand authenticity?"

H1: Representation has a positive effect on brand authenticity.
H2: Representation has a positive effect on brand activism
H3: Brand activism has a positive effect on brand authenticity.
H4: Representation and brand activism has a gathered positive effect on brand authenticity

4.2 Research design

After clarifying the purpose of the analysis, a design must be chosen to conduct the analysis. To test the hypothesis related to the thesis statement, a quantitative approach is best suited for the task. There are three central factors that are significant when choosing a design to use when answering the research questions. These are: a) experience in the subject area, b) knowledge of theoretical studies that identify relevant variables, c) the level of ambition with

regards to identifying relationships between variables (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og Dataanalyse, 2018, s. 59).

Based on the thesis' defined purpose, the thesis statement, and a review of the three mentioned factors, we found it beneficial to make use of a descriptive design. When using a descriptive design, the analyst already has a basic understanding of the problem area. The purpose is to describe the situation in a specific area (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og Dataanalyse, 2018, s. 50). The most common way to obtain data for this purpose is by using surveys (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og Dataanalyse, 2018, s. 51), and this is what we have chosen to use for our analysis. Previous research associated to the thesis topic, including the ADO-framework, has provided insight into which variables that are beneficial to include in the survey and provided us an understanding to formulate hypotheses. The purpose of the thesis analysis requires a design that reveals how representation and inclusivity can be beneficial for brand authenticity. Because of this we have omitted using a causal design or an exploratory design to derive the analysis.

However, a present problem with a descriptive design is that it breaks several causal requirements, are variables are measured simultaneously. This means that we will not be able to claim there is a connection between the independent and the dependent variables, but rather refer to a covariation (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og Dataanalyse, 2018, s. 50).

4.3 Operationalization

Operationalization is defined as the process by which theoretical concepts are translated for empirical measure. It is a crucial part of the process of changing the concepts to measurable variables (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og Dataanalyse, 2018, s. 129). To answer questions based on the empirical investigation, we must clarify how the theoretical concepts are to be measure. Variables intended for later analysis, have been operationalized into various questions in the survey.

The basis for the operationalization has been previews research papers on the subject of brand authenticity (the ADO-framework). In the survey this includes

statements that are meant to measure the variables: *representation, uniqueness, brand activism and brand authenticity.* We will combine the terms representation and inclusivity to one variable (representation) to make it easier to measure in the later analysis.

4.4 Composition of the survey

A survey is an instrument used to collect information which makes it possible to make communication between interviewer and respondents standardized (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og Dataanalyse, 2018, s. 51). In our quantitative survey through Qualtrics, questions were asked to a relatively large sample of people (111) with fixed answer alternatives they could choose from (Likert scale). Qualtrics is a web-based survey maker that gave us the opportunities to reach respondents without geographical restraints. In addition, the data collection method is resource-saving and time effective. This overall gave us good analysis possibilities for the data collected.

Question	Measured Value	Variables	Purpose
Q1: How old are you?	Ratio level: Input number	Demographics	-
Q2: What gender do you identify with?	Nominal scale: Female/Male/Other	Demographics	-
Q3: I am more critical of the brands that I choose now, after the pandemic, as opposed to prior.	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Consumer behavior changes post-pandemic	Removed due to relevancy
Q4: I value brands that invoke a nostalgic feeling in me (brands that remind you of the 'good old times')	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Uniqueness	RQ2
Q5: I form a stronger emotional bond to a brand when I see minorities (i.e. race, sexual orientation, religion, age, gender, disability and more) represented in branding initiatives such as in marketing campaigns and ads	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Representation	RQ1, H1, H2 H3
Q6: I value brands that actively fight for diversity and inclusion in the workplace	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Representation	RQ1, H1, H2 H3
Q7: I am more likely to purchase from brands that actively include diversity, representation and inclusion in their branding initiatives	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Representation	RQ1, H1, H2 H3
Q8: I value brands that are socially and politically engaged	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Brand Activism	RQ2, H3

Q9: I value brands that take care of their employees	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Brand Activism	RQ2, H3
Q10: I do research on a brand before I purchase their products	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Brand Activism	Removed due to relevancy
Q11: I am more likely to purchase from brands that are socially and politically engaged	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Brand Activism	RQ2, H3
Q12: I have boycotted brands because their values are incongruent to mine	Nominal scale: Yes/No	Brand Activism	Other findings
Q13: Have you noticed any performative brand initiatives in mainstream media in the last 2 years? Examples of this could be greenwashing, sportswashing etc.	Nominal scale: Yes/No	Brand authenticity	Other findings
Q14: Would performative brand initiatives negatively impact your perception of a brand image?	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Brand authenticity	Other findings
Q15: I value brands that make an effort to stand out in the competitive landscape	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Uniqueness	RQ2, H2
Q16: I value brands that offer products that are perceived as rare or hard to get	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Uniqueness	RQ2
Q17: enjoy actively participating in product drops	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Uniqueness	RQ2
Q18: Unique and scarce brands are more attractive than mainstream brands	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Uniqueness	RQ2
Q19: I am more likely to purchase from brands that I deem as authentic	Ordinal scale: Likert scale (5)	Brand authenticity	RQ2

Table 1 – Composition of the survey.

4.4.1 Scale use

The survey is first built up of two general background questions with the intent to describe the sample later in analysis. Questions on age and gender were asked to get an overview of the demographic and obtain an accurate average age of sample.

Q1-11 and Q14-Q19 include statements the respondents had to assess whether they agreed with or not through a Likert scale using five points. The Likert scale allow the respondents to express how much they agree or disagree with a

particular statement (McLeod, 2019). In our survey this included 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, with a neutral midpoint.

Similar to other surveys, there are limitations related to the Likert scale. The validity of the scale attitude measurement can be compromised due to social desirability. This means that individuals may lie to put themselves in a positive light. Our survey asks questions measuring the respondent's perception of the importance of sociopolitical issues related to representation and activism, therefore we can expect that some people might overestimate the importance of this to make themselves feel better (McLeod, 2019).

Nominal scale is defined as a scale used for labeling variables into distinct classification without an order (Questionpro, u.d.). Q12 and Q13 are measured through the use of nominal scale. These are yes/no questions to prove/disprove two statements related to the variables brand activism and brand authenticity. The questions were composed on the basis to get a better understanding of the impact brand activism and (performative) brand authenticity has on the consumer.

4.4.2 Selection of population for the survey

Before deciding on a selection of population for the survey, it was necessary to know what type of people we wanted to obtain information from and who were most suitable for answering the relevant survey questions. Our choice of method is convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a method of non-probability sampling where researchers will choose their sample based solely on convenience (Simkus, 2022). This provides a basis to not assume the answers collected are statistically correct in relation to reality (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og Dataanalyse, 2018, s. 174). The composition of the sample will possess biases in comparison with the whole population and therefore it cannot be regarded as representative. These consequences will be considered while analyzing the data and none of the conclusion will be seen as applicable to the rest of the population. However, it is desirable the results draw a covariation between the variables and their relevancy in the modern market.

We chose to share our survey to friends, family and acquaintances on the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. This can be problematic, as it can be considered as self-selection and potentially yield results that are not representative of the population. However, this was what was most accessible for us and provided us with quick results. In addition, we were able to collect data from different age groups.

4.4.3 Sources of error

The survey used for collecting data measured the concept using statements the respondents had to address. As previously mentioned, the validity of the Likert scale attitude measurement can be compromised due to social desirability. In addition, the respondents can misunderstand one or more statements which affect the collected data (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og Dataanalyse, 2018, ss. 183-184). The survey questions were written in English because our research paper is in English, but the consequence of sharing this to our predominately Norwegian people can have increased the probability for misunderstanding the survey.

In addition to the sources of error related to the general layout of the survey, we had some issues related to creating questions to each variable. On the basis of our research, we chose variables we deemed as necessary to grasp the concept of brand authenticity. Although we introduced the term in the beginning of the survey, we understand that the term is not general knowledge and is a new concept even in the marketing world. We chose to ask general questions so we could compare the importance of each variable and asses their correlated variation. However, if we could create a new survey we would focus more on the dimension 'Representation and inclusivity' and ask more optimal question to satisfy to each variable.

4.4.4 Research ethics

All the data in the survey were collected anonymously and processed confidential. The respondents were informed on the shared post about this, as

well as what the answers would be used for. In addition, it was ensured that no IP addresses or personal information was collected.

5.0 Analysis and findings

In this part of the thesis, we will examine the findings through transferring the data from Qualtrics to the data analysis program SAS JMP. Furthermore, we will present the analysis through introductory analysis such as the description of the selection, a normal distribution analysis, a factor analysis and lastly, the hypothesis testing.

5.1 Introductory analysis

The introductory analysis is essential as it has to do with preparing the data for later testing the hypothesis. The preparing consisted of getting an overview and knowledge of the respondents through descriptive analyzes. Additionally, it was crucial to find out if the data was normally distributed. As we utilized multiple claims to measure each variable, it was also necessary to implement a factor analysis to reduce the number of variables into fewer numbers of factors. Finally, we did a correlation analysis to measure the strength of the relationship between the variables.

5.1.1 Data cleanup

The survey managed to gather 118 respondents in the span of 2 weeks. However, after going through the results, there were a total of 7 people who did not finish the survey. There were some that only answered the first couple of questions, and some that skipped a few questions later in the survey. We removed this from the dataset to avoid measurement errors, and that resulted in a total of 111 respondents.

5.1.2 Description of the selection

The first two questions asked were to map the demographic of the respondents, and the results can be found in Table 2. The median age of the respondents was 23 years old, and the oldest person to answer the survey was 69 years old while the youngest person was 16 years old. Moreover, the distribution of men and women can also be found in Table 2, and it is important to note that there was a

predominance of female respondents with 65% female and 35% male respondents. This was expected due to the convenience sampling.

	Female	Male	Total value
Number of respondents	72	39	111
Percentage	65%	35%	100%
Age			
Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
	23	16	69

Table 2 – Description of the selection.

5.2 Normal Distribution Analysis

A normal distribution analysis of the various statements was performed as the hypothesis testing requires that the data is normally distributed to be seen as valid (Finch, West, & MacKinnon, 1997). The results are summarized in Table 3 in the appendix. The average number speaks to which values the respondents on average answered each statement with the Likert scale of 1-5, while the standard deviation is a dispersion measure that tells us how much the answers on average deviate from the original mean value in the data (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og dataanalyse 3. utgave, 2016). Furthermore, in the assessment of whether the data is normally distributed, skewness and kurtosis were used as indicators. Within these two measures, a value of the interval +/- 2 is within a normal distribution (Finch, West, & MacKinnon, 1997). The numbers on skewness and kurtosis are seen to be within these interval ranges, and therefore it is reasonable to consider the data as normally distributed, and valid to use in the later hypothesis testing.

5.3 Factor analysis

After confirming that the dataset was normally distributed, a confirmatory factor analysis with the varimax rotation was performed as an attempt to clarify the relationship among the various factors. Table 4 in the appendix summarizes the first attempt at a factor analysis, and majority of the statements are included. The absolute values greater than .300 are highlighted as this is the numerical value that is required by the factor loading to be regarded as convergent validity (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og dataanalyse 3. utgave, 2016). These loadings show us how strong the relationship is between the variable and the factor.

The table above summarizes the first analysis, and we can see that some statements in the variable "Brand activism" are not loaded on the same factors. This can be due to construction of the questions being unclear. It was therefore crucial to remove statements and adjust the data to achieve the desired structure. After adjusting and removing statements from the data, we achieved a satisfactory structure. 7 statements in total were removed, and the results are presented in Table 5.

5.3.1 Final Factor analysis with Reliability test

The results were 4 satisfactory variables that point to good convergent validity, as all the highlighted values are above .300. The table below also includes the reliability test Cronbach's Alpha applied to each factor to measure the credibility of the final factor analysis. A rule of thumb is that the Cronbach's alpha should be larger than .700, but not too close to 1 to be regarded as reliable (Gripsrud, Olsson, & Silkoset, Metode og dataanalyse 3. utgave, 2016). Both the variable Representation and Brand Activism satisfies this rule, but Uniqueness and Brand Authenticity does not. We tested to see if the low reliability was caused by some of the statements related to each variable being removed but found that this did not result in much of a difference. An explanation for the low value for alpha can be due to a low number of questions and poor inter-relatedness. Despite the low value of both variables, they must be included to conduct the later hypothesis tests. We will be noting that the variable uniqueness and brand authenticity can be less reliable compared to the two other variables.

Factor analysis						Reliability
Variable	Question	Factor				Cronbach's alpha
		1	2	3	4	(α)
Representation	Q3	**.655**	.223	.008	.096	.778
	Q4	**.642**	.121	-.079	.227	
	Q5	**.815**	.170	.271	.178	
Brand Activism	Q6	.367	**.595**	.031	-	.838
	Q9	.246	**.936**	.136	.207	
Uniqueness	Q13	.215	.112	**.401**	.373	.609
	Q14	.097	.054	**.752**	.215	

	Q15	.086	.030	**.594**	-.119	
Brand Authenticity	Q12	.159	.148	-.074	**.538**	.551
	Q17	.152	.164	.172	**.646**	

Table 5 - Tabular presentation of the variables' final factor charges after the exclusion of seven statements.

5.4 Indexing

The statements that loaded on the same factor were then transformed to one single concept. This was done by summarizing the statements that were loaded on the same factor and dividing it by the number of statements. That resulted in the variables: Representation, Brand Authenticity, Uniqueness and Brand Activism. These variables are used in the next correlation analysis.

5.5 Correlation Analysis

To observe how the various indexed variables correlated with each other, we conducted a correlation analysis. Table 6 in the appendix displays the results of the analysis according to our data.

The correlation coefficient is the number between -1 and 1 and tells us the strength of the relationship between two variables. The numbers from Table 6 are above 0 and showcases a positive covariation. We can see that the relationship between brand Activism and representation is the strongest with the correlation coefficient being .514. Brand activism and brand authenticity also indicates a strong positive relationship as the correlation coefficient is .435. Uniqueness and Representation however does not show as strong of a correlation, with the correlation coefficient being .184. This signals an unsubstantial relationship between the two variables. This could be due to the weaknesses involved with the measuring of the variable Uniqueness, which can result in the low correlation coefficient.

5.6 Testing the hypothesis

To test H2, H3 and H4, we conducted a simple linear regression analysis to examine the relationship between one independent variable and one dependent variable. Furthermore, a multiple regression analysis was used to test H5, to see if both Representation and Brand Activism has a positive effect on Brand Authenticity.

5.6.1 Regression analysis

The first analysis was conducted to study the relationship between the dependent variable representation and the independent variable brand authenticity. Thus, hypotheses H1 was tested. The coefficient of determination Rsquare Adj states that this model only explains 12% (0.12) of the impact on brand authenticity. This means that the remaining 88% of impact on brand authenticity could be explained by other variables. In addition, the P-value is low (p>.0002) which indicated that representation has a significant effect on brand authenticity. The standardized regression coefficient (β) for this hypothesis is at 0.347.

Hypothesis 2 was tested to study the relationship between the dependent variable representation and the independent variable brand activism. The coefficient of determination Rsquare Adj states that 26% (0.26) of the variation in brand activism is explained by representation. The explanatory power also indicated there are several other motives related to the variation in brand activism, but that is expected as the term is broad. Furthermore, the P-value is found to be p>0.0001, which indicates that representation has a significant effect on brand activism. The standardized regression coefficient (β) for this hypothesis is 0.51.

Hypothesis 3 was tested to study the relationship between the independent variable brand activism and the dependent variable brand authenticity. The coefficient of determination Rsquare Adj states that 19% (0.19) of the variation in brand authenticity is explained by brand activism. This indicated there are other motives related to the variation in brand authenticity. Furthermore, the P-value is found to be p>0.0001, which indicates that brand activism has a significant effect on brand authenticity. The standardized regression coefficient (β) for this hypothesis is 0.436.

Regression analysis			
Simple Regression analysis	Standardized regression coefficient (β)	P-value	Rsquare Adj
H1: Representation has a positive effect on brand authenticity.	0.347	0.0002*	0.12 = 12 %
H2: Representation has a positive effect on brand activism	0.51	0.0001*	0.26 = 26%
H3: Brand activism has a positive effect on brand authenticity.	0.436	0.0001*	0.19 = 19%
Multiple regression analyses	Standardized regression coefficient (β)	P-value	Rsquare Adj
H4: Representation	0.166	0.0986	0.21 = 21%
H4: Brand activism	0.35	0.0007*	

Table 7 – Regression Analysis.

To test hypothesis 4, we conducted a multiple regression analysis to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable brand authenticity and the independent variables representation and brand activism. The coefficient of determination Rsquare Adj states that 21% (0.21) of the variation in brand authenticity is explained by both independent variables representation and brand activism. The analysis also shows that the P-value for representation is p>0.0986, and p>0.0007 for brand activism. The standardized regression coefficient (β) for representation is 0.166 and 0.35 for brand activism.

5.7 Other findings

After the hypothesis testing, it was relevant to summarize the results to Q12 and Q13 as it reflects the responders' consumer behavior regarding performative brand authenticity. Due to the predominance of female respondents, it was reasonable to group the answers by gender, to get an overview of the answers separately.

Have you noticed performative brand initiatives in mainstream media in the last 2 years?	Female		Male		Whole population	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	43	59%	27	71%	70	63%
No	29	41%	11	29%	40	37%

Table 8 – Distribution of answers to Q13 by gender

I have boycotted brands because their values are incongruent to mine	Female		Male		Whole population	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	47	65%	25	64%	72	65%
No	25	35%	14	36%	39	35%

Table 9 – Distribution of answers to Q12 by gender

6.0 The results and practical implications

In this section we will gather all the findings based on the primary and secondary data and use it to create a holistic understanding of the study finding to finally answer the thesis statement. Additionally, we will highlight the weaknesses of the study and the consequences discussed.

6.1 Support found for the hypotheses

Based on the hypothesis testing that was done using the regression analyzes, the hypotheses were assessed. This was done by looking at each of their hypotheses significant levels and the associating standardized regression coefficient (β).

H1 - Representation has a positive effect on brand authenticity
Significant level: <0.0002*   β= 0.347   *Finds support for the hypothesis*
H2 - Representation has a positive effect on brand activism
Significant level: <0.0001*   β= 0.51   *Finds support for the hypothesis*
H3 - Brand activism has a positive effect on brand authenticity.
Significant level: <0.0001*   β= 0.436   *Finds support for the hypothesis*
H4: Representation (A) and brand activism (B) has a gathered positive effect on brand authenticity
a) Significant level: <0.098*   β= 0.166   *Finds <u>partial</u> support for the hypothesis*

b) Significant level: <0.0007* β= 0.35   *Finds <u>partial</u> support for the hypothesis*

7.0 Discussion

H1 - Representation has a positive effect on brand authenticity
Significant level: <0.0002*   β= 0.347   *Finds support for the hypothesis*

The first hypothesis tests the assumption of whether representation has a positive effect on brand authenticity. Table 7 shows an effect of 0.347, but determination Rsquare Adj states that representation only explains 12% of the impact on brand authenticity. The results of this were expected, as we do not anticipate that the dimension representation can strengthen brand authenticity alone. Through previous research on the term brand authenticity, it is clear that there are many dimensions and factors that interrelate with each other that improves brand authenticity. As the thesis question mainly focuses on the dimension of representation and inclusivity, we have chosen to leave out the existing dimensions to achieve a more precise contribution of the effects of the new dimension.

H2 - Representation has a positive effect on brand activism
Significant level: <0.0001*   β= 0.51   *Finds support for the hypothesis*

Research on brand activism indicates that representation and brand activism relate with one another, and therefore we assumed that representation would strengthen the perceived brand activism. Table 7 shows an effect of 0.51, which signifies a strong effect. The determination Rsquare Adj has the percentage of 26 which describes that representation explains 26% of the impact of brand activism. Consumers are increasingly demanding brands to take a stand on sociopolitical issues, which includes that brands make use of representation and inclusivity in their branding initiatives and their work environment (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020).

H3 - Brand activism has a positive effect on brand authenticity.
Significant level: <0.0001*   β= 0.436   *Finds support for the hypothesis*

The results of this hypothesis further confirms that brand activism as a whole has a positive effect on brand authenticity. Table 7 shows an effect of 0.436, and the determination Rsquare Adj states that brand activism explains 19% of the impact of brand authenticity. This hypothesis reinforces that representation and brand activism goes hand in hand, while also seeing that brand activism has a positive effect on brand authenticity on its own.

H4: Representation (A) and Brand activism (B) has a gathered positive effect on Brand authenticity

    A) Significant level: <0.098* β= 0.166   *Finds <u>partial</u> support for the hypothesis*

    B) Significant level: <0.0007* β= 0.35   *Finds <u>partial</u> support for the hypothesis*

Hypothesis 4 tests if the dimensions representation and brand activism have a gathered positive effect on brand authenticity. Table 7 shows an effect of 0.166 for representation and 0.35 for brand activism. The determination Rsquare Adj is 21%, which explains that representation and brand activism together has an impact on brand authenticity. This hypothesis acts as confirming support to our previous hypotheses. However, we observe that representation shows a weaker effect coupled with brand activism, than on its own. This can tell us that representation is an addition to brand activism as a whole and should be regarded when implementing brand activism.

Other findings

The results of Q12 and Q13 can also be interesting to discuss in relation to the hypotheses. As there was a predominance of female respondents, we decided to group the answers by gender to get a clearer overview of the answers separately. Table 9 shows that 65% of the females and 64% of the males answered yes to whether they have boycotted brands due to an incongruence in values. This shows that the majority of the respondents of both genders are critically aware of brands true intentions and values. Moreover, table 8 shows that 59% of the females and 71% of the males answered yes to noticing

performative brand initiatives in mainstream media in the last two years. The whole population of both genders that answered yes to this question was 63%. The results of this reveals again that consumers are more aware over insincere brand initiatives and shows the importance of genuine brand activism.

In conclusion, our thesis finds support to the growing significance of representation and inclusivity in brand initiatives. Furthermore, we believe that this thesis opens doors for possible future research on this important topic, as we have presented results that indicates the positive effects of representation and inclusivity on brand authenticity. It is no longer sufficient for brands to overlook this dimension.

7.2 Limitations and further research

Our study refers to several limitations and weaknesses that were clarified before, during and after implementation. These are essential to present as it lays the foundation for further research. The study we have completed has been on an overall level and the purpose has been to investigate the effects representation and inclusivity has on brand authenticity. This leads to restrains that require further research.

For further research we recommend conducting a similar survey, but with more appropriate questions to each variable and an increased focus on the variable representation. Another suggestion is to split the variable representation into diversity, inclusivity, and representation to measure the effect on their own. In addition, we would recommend several more respondents to get more accurate data. We have previously discussed that the term brand authenticity has gained more traction in the last couple of decades. However, it is a term that the average consumer might not be very familiar with. Therefore, we believe it is essential to educate the respondents on this before conducting the survey.

In the results, we found support for our hypotheses which indicates there is covariation between the variables. We think this is an exciting found, yet we understand the limitations of our survey, and its results. The hypotheses only proved that there was a positive effect between representation and brand

authenticity, but not specific areas of representation that garners the biggest effects on brand authenticity. It is recommended that future research focus more on such specifics to gain a broader understanding of this new dimension.

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Appendix can be found in attached file.