

## ADVERTISING INAUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES BASED ON ATTITUDE FUNCTIONS

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### **Abstract**

While past research has focused on inauthentic (fake, counterfeit or replica) goods and products, inauthentic/ replica experiences lack sound conceptualization and research in the literature. In this research, we provide insights for persuading individuals to engage in inauthentic/ replica experiences. We first test our assumption that inauthentic experiences are related with utilitarian (vs. value-expressive) functions via a preliminary study. Related with that, in our main experiment, we demonstrate that individuals find appeals promoting inauthentic/ replica experiences more persuasive when an advertisement emphasized value-expressive functions rather than utilitarian functions. We supported our predictions using manipulations of experiences, attitude functions, and advertisement appeals.

### **Introduction**

A replica of King Tutankhamun's Egyptian tomb was recently opened with the goal of diverting foot traffic away from the original located only 1½ miles from it. The original tomb was uncovered in 1922 after remaining untouched for more than 3,000 years and has become a major tourist destination. Foot traffic is raising heat and humidity inside the tomb, causing the walls to

expand and contract (Williams 2013). Despite myriad comparable situations worldwide, there is little research on why and how inauthentic and replica experiences are marketed. In the realm of (in)authentic experiences, most research to date is qualitative, interpretive, and theoretical in nature (Salome 2010). Thus, this study is an attempt to empirically demonstrate the relationship between attitude functions, experience types and how these are reflected in effective ad appeals.

### **Attitude Functions of (In)authentic Experiences**

Extant literature on attitudes has largely investigated the four functional bases of attitudes (Katz 1960), namely the knowledge function, the value-expressive function, the social-adjustive function, and the utilitarian function. For consumers, value-expressive function serves for self-expression, self-development, or self-realization purposes (Katz 1960). Furthermore, the utilitarian function of attitudes enables the attitude holder to maximize rewards and minimize punishments of the attitude object (Grewal, Mehta, and Kardes 2004).

Attitudes toward experiences serve utilitarian as well as value-expressive attitude functions (Cannon and Yaprak 2002; Kwornik and Ross 2007; Locander and Spivey 1978), since experiential purchases are highly related to the self (Kwornik and Ross 2007), especially in the pursuit of a true or possible self. While most of the research on experiential consumption focuses on the value-expressive functions of the experiences, research also shows that the utilitarian function of attitudes helps consumers maximize rewards as a result of their consumption experience. For example, if one engages in a fake winter-sport experience, the fake winter-dome setting is designed to enable various benefits to the participants, such as remaining healthy or spending time with friends (Salome 2010). In addition, the suppliers of iconic experiences, such as remade historical caves, emphasize the multiple rewards of their experiences, such as projections,

information stands, and enhanced lighting, as well as decreased punishments, such as shorter waiting times and greater availability.

In our preliminary study, we first test our hypotheses:

**H1a:** Individuals' attitudes toward inauthentic experiences are higher when the utilitarian (vs. value-expressive) attitude functions are salient.

**H1b:** Individuals' attitudes toward authentic experiences do not significantly differ when the value-expressive functions are salient.

### **Preliminary Study: Inauthentic Experiences and Attitude Functions**

We used the prehistoric Lascaux caves to manipulate experience type. The Lascaux caves and the replica are geographically very close to each other. Three-hundred and fifty-one adults were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk and randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (attitude function: value-expressive vs. utilitarian) x 2 (type of experience: iconic versus genuine) between-subjects design. As per manipulation, participants in the value-expressive condition were given 10 core human values (e.g., wisdom, freedom, obedience) and were first asked to rank order the extent to which those values are important for them when they decide on their museum visits or tourist or historical sightseeing experiences. Then, they were asked to elaborate and write about how they decided on the value ranking and its relation to the touristic experiences. Similarly, participants in the utilitarian condition were given 10 benefits (e.g., convenience, efficiency of the visit, value for the money) associated with experiential choices and elaborated on their importance and their benefit ranking.

As per manipulation of the experience type, participants randomly read one of the two paragraphs about the Lascaux caves in France.

A GENUINE CAVE EXPERIENCE (vs. A REPLICA CAVE EXPERIENCE)

"The genuine (vs. replica) cave-paintings experience" consists of a visit to prehistoric Lascaux caves' original (vs. replicated) paintings.



**Figure 1. Lascaux caves image**

According to the results, participants in the authentic experience condition perceived the experience as more authentic than participants in the inauthentic/replica experience condition as intended ( $M_{\text{iconic}} = 3.65, SD = 1.03$  vs.  $M_{\text{genuine}} = 4.39, SD = .92$ ;  $F(1, 348) = 49.42, p < 0.001$ ). An ANOVA with attitude functions and experience conditions as predictors of attitudes revealed the predicted interaction,  $F(1, 347) = 6.27, p < .02$  without any main effects. For the inauthentic/replica experience condition, attitudes were significantly higher in the utilitarian versus value-expressive attitude functions condition,  $F(1, 347) = 6.15, p < .02$ . However, there was no significant difference in the utilitarian versus value-expressive attitude functions conditions for the authentic experience condition,  $F(1, 347) = 1.00, p = .32$ . The results of this study supported our prediction that when utilitarian attitude functions are salient, individuals have more favorable attitudes toward iconic versus genuine experiences. However, attitudes toward experiences do not significantly differ when the value-expressive function is salient.

### **Advertising Inauthentic Experiences**

Advertisements have proven to be very effective in influencing consumer behaviour through attitudinal influence (e.g. Petty and Wegener 1998; Snyder and DeBono 1985; Johar and

Sirgy 1991; Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992). In the realm of persuasion and advertising, the matching hypothesis states that the greater the extent to which the persuasive message matches the functional underpinnings of the attitude, the more persuasive the ad will be (Johar and Sirgy 1991). Although it is often the case that advertisements do well when they feature appeals that match the attitudes, wants, needs, or personalities of the intended audience, it is not always the case. In this research, we suggest that applying a functional match strategy would necessarily not be appropriate. Since an authentic experience itself is already about utilitarian motives, when one makes it salient, it might become unappealing. Reminding the utilitarian benefits of authentic experiences might cheapen the idea and hence might lead to less favorable evaluations of authentic experiences. Consistent with this view, recently, LaBoeuf and Simmons (2010) have shown that in some cases, mismatching communication appeals can also be effective. For example, products linked to utilitarian attitudes at the category level may give rise to brand attitudes that are less utilitarian and more symbolic. While the attitude toward beer category may be utilitarian, an attitude toward Heineken brand can be symbolic. Therefore, they demonstrate that because attitude functions may change with branding, appeals that match the product's category-level function do not have to match the product's brand-level function.

The results of the preliminary study suggest that individuals evaluate inauthentic/replica experiences more favorably when utilitarian (vs. value-expressive) attitude functions are salient. Based on previous research (e.g., LaBoeuf and Simmons 2010), we propose that a mismatch strategy would be effective to differentiate the specific inauthentic/replica experience from the general category. Thus, we suggest that advertising messages that emphasize the value-expressive function (vs. utilitarian) of the experience should be more persuasive. In contrast, based on the results, attitudes toward authentic experiences serve both value-expressive and utilitarian

functions. Therefore, we suggest that persuasiveness of advertising messages for those will not vary with respect to attitude functions. More specifically, we predict:

**H2a:** When an advertisement emphasizes the value-expressive functions of inauthentic/replica experiences, individuals' evaluations of the advertisement will be more favorable than when an advertisement emphasizes the utilitarian functions of these experiences.

**H2b:** Individuals' evaluations of the advertisements will not significantly differ when an advertisement emphasizes value-expressive or utilitarian functions of authentic experiences.

We first showed that individuals' evaluations of inauthentic/replica experiences are more favorable when the utilitarian versus the value-expressive attitude functions are salient. Hence, we argued that inauthentic/replica experiences are associated with utilitarian functions. According to the mismatch hypothesis, in order to differentiate an inauthentic/replica experience, a message's appeal that uses a value-expressive attitude function should be evaluated more favorably, resulting in more favorable evaluations of the experience. The results of this experiment supported this prediction. Furthermore, our preliminary study demonstrated that evaluations of authentic experiences do not vary as a function of the salience of attitude functions. Consequently, both value-expressive and utilitarian appeals were equally effective for promoting the authentic experience.

### **Main Study**

One-hundred and four adults (58 female) were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (message's appeal: value-expressive vs. utilitarian) x 2 (type of experience: replica versus authentic) between-subjects design. They were first required to read a brief paragraph about an authentic or a replica British town to visit:

THAMES TOWN IS AN ORIGINAL (vs. A RE-CREATED REPLICA OF A STILL-STANDING) TRADITIONAL, SMALL BRITISH TOWN, COMPLETE WITH STREETS AND BUILDINGS. MANY OF THE THINGS TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH AN ENGLISH VILLAGE ARE PRESENT IN THIS GENUINE (vs. REPLICA) TOWN, IN THEIR ORIGINAL FORM (vs. IN THEIR RE-MADE FORM. IT'S BEEN RE-MODELED AS PART OF THE "NINE REPLICA TOWNS" PROJECT IN 2006).

Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of two ad copy conditions in which they were shown either a value-expressive or a utilitarian advertisement for the Thames Town.



Figure 1. Ad with utilitarian appeal



Figure 2. Ad with value-expressive appeal

The content has been adapted from Wilcox, Kim, and Sen (2009) for the value-expressive ad and the content of Locander and Spivey's (1978) utilitarian attitude functions scale for the utilitarian advertisement.

Advertisement were evaluated using four semantic differential scales (1 = "not at all likable" and 7 = "very much likable"; 1 = "not at all believable" and 7 = "very much believable"; 1 = "not at all realistic" and 7 = "very much realistic"; "not at all convincing" and 7 = "very much

convincing”) (Wilcox, Kim, and Sen 2009). We averaged these five items to create a message evaluation measure ( $\alpha = .93$ ). Participants then rated the experience using four 7-point scales anchored by very unfavorable/very favorable, very bad/very good, very unattractive/very attractive, a very bad choice/a very good choice to create an attitude measure ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

As a check for our experience type manipulation, participants completed the Place Authenticity Scale, developed by Camus (2010) and adapted by Casteran and Roederer (2013) to the touristic attractions. Respondents reported their age and gender.

### Findings

First, we confirmed that the iconic experience is perceived as less authentic than the genuine experience ( $M_{\text{iconic}} = 3.16, SD = 1.07$  vs.  $M_{\text{genuine}} = 4.28, SD = 1.19$ ;  $F(1, 102) = 25.35, p < 0.001$ ). All dependent variables were analyzed using a (message’s appeal: value-expressive vs. utilitarian) x 2 (type of experience: replica versus authentic) between-subjects ANOVA. In line with our hypothesis, the interaction of message’s appeal and type of experience was significant ( $F(1, 100) = 6.18, p < .02$ ). There was no main effect of experience type ( $F(1, 100) = .22, p > .72$ ) or message’s appeal ( $F(1, 100) = .09, p > .82$ ). The interaction effect was still significant after controlling for demographics of age and gender ( $F(1, 98) = 5.93, p < .02$ ). Planned comparisons revealed that a value-expressive (vs. utilitarian) advertisement was evaluated more favorably for the inauthentic/replica experience ( $M_{\text{value-expressive}} = 4.56, SD = 1.80$  versus  $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 3.56, SD = 1.37$ ,  $F(1, 100) = 4.98, p < .04$ ). For the authentic experience condition, evaluations did not vary as a function of the message’s appeal, ( $M_{\text{value-expressive}} = 4.15, SD = 1.57$  versus  $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.69, SD = 1.57, F(1, 100) = 1.60, p = .21$ ).

An ANOVA with message’s appeal and experience conditions as predictors of attitudes revealed the predicted interaction,  $F(1, 100) = 5.06, p < .04$ , without any main effects. As expected, attitudes toward the inauthentic/replica experience were significantly higher when the

advertisement had a value-expressive appeal than a utilitarian appeal, ( $M_{\text{value-expressive}} = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 1.29$  versus  $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ,  $F(1, 100) = 6.58$ ,  $p < .02$ ). However, attitudes toward the authentic experience did not vary as a function of the message's appeal, ( $M_{\text{value-expressive}} = 4.66$ ,  $SD = 1.45$  versus  $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ,  $F(1, 100) = .34$ ,  $p = .56$ ).

### **Discussion and Future Studies**

This research contributes to the literature by demonstrating how individuals can be persuaded to engage in inauthentic/ replica experiences versus authentic experiences. Previous research suggests that messages will be persuasive to the extent that they match the functional underpinnings of the attitude they target (Shavitt 1990; Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han 1992). In this research, we provide some insights for persuading individuals to engage in inauthentic/replica experiences by demonstrating that individuals find appeals promoting such experiences more persuasive when an advertisement emphasizes value-expressive functions rather than utilitarian functions. Marketers and promoters of replica experiences such as artificial sports venues, 3-d printed art halls or thematic experiences such as Bellaggio or Las Vegas should promote the utilities and rewards associated with these experiences instead of key personal or identity-related values. Theoretically, the results support the mismatch hypothesis of attitude functions advertising. On the other hand, both value-expressive and utilitarian appeals were equally effective for promoting authentic experiences.

A potential future research question is how experts in genuine experiences compared to novices evaluate the advertisements of (in)authentic experiences. One possibility is that although experts may evaluate authenticity more favorably, for novices, the authentic experience may even be a letdown (i.e., having the feeling that what they experience is not worth all the effort that is put in for the genuine experience). Hence, we believe that further research can investigate the different evaluations of ad pieces by experts versus novices in the context of experiences.

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