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In search for something “real”

- consumers' perceptions of authenticity in regional food brands

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- ABSTRACT -

Marketing research has acknowledged the concept of authenticity. It is argued that consumers in modern society increasingly search for something *real*, in contrast to what they perceive as mediated and distorted. Producers of regional food brands has acknowledged this trend, and started to market their products as being authentic. Given the potential practical and theoretical contributions in studying the concept of authenticity in this context, this study aims to explore how consumers perceive these claims of authenticity. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to extend knowledge on how consumers come to perceive a regional food brand as authentic.

The purpose is pursued using a qualitative research strategy including interviews with ten informants. As previous research has made notions that the amount of cultural capital resources held by consumers affect perceptions of authenticity, five informants with high amounts of cultural capital resources and five informants with low amounts of cultural capital resources are included. Using the logic of hermeneutic interpretation, themes are developed from the informants narratives.

Five dimensions of authenticity in regional food brands related to the product and the producer are identified. These are: certification, stylistic attributes, specific product ingredients, sincerity of producer and small-scale production. It is further revealed informants with different amount of cultural capital resources differ in their relation to the concept. It is found that informants with high amount of cultural capital resources seek autonomy in their assessment, whereas informants with low amount of cultural capital resources seek familiarity. Implications for brand management are discussed.

Keywords

Authenticity, regional food, cultural capital, consumer perceptions

- PREFACE -

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- INTRODUCTION -

In the beginning, each region and nation had their own cuisine and specialties (Kuznesof *et al* 1997). Food from a specific region was an expression of the local life; it was an expression of values, skills and was dependent on the soil and climate that gave birth to the specific ingredients available. However, as society changed through colonization and trade, regional dishes started to be consumed in other regions as well, and the image of what was the original expressions of each region became blurred; a process referred to as “food creolization” (Corrigan 1997) . According to Kuznesof *et al* (1997), it is today virtually impossible to define what the original recipe actually is. However, recently, there has been a growing trend among food producers to market food products as “authentic” reproductions of original regional food products. Buzalka (2006) argues that the concept of authentic food is one of the major trends in the grocery retail sector; a trend that is visible for any Swedish consumer when visiting any large food retailer.

The concept of authenticity is not only discussed within the food sector. According to Godin (2006), authentic brands are those that today thrive; Brown *et al* (2003) even claims that “the search for authenticity is one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing”. A key theme underlying this discussion is that consumers increasingly seek for something *real* (Christensen & Firat, 2005). The cultural landscape of modern consumer society is characterized by a myriad of marketing messages. These impose demands for how we are to behave, what we are supposed to do, and maybe most significantly: what we should *consume* (Godin 2001). According to Rumbo (2002), the massive iteration of these messages has resulted in a reluctance to pursue marketing offerings. Holt (2002) argues that the so called “anti-brand” movement advocated by for example Naomi Klein and Adbusters, has not only increased the awareness among the consumers; it has also changed the reality for marketing practitioners. Godin (2006) argues that consumers today search for expression that appear above commercial considerations; instead, they seek messages that speak directly to their heart.

In this reality of skepticism, what do consumers perceive as real? What is considered as fake marketing efforts aimed at manipulating consumers, and what is considered as an authentic expression? And more specifically, what is considered as authentic reproductions of a regional food product, and what is actually reproduced? Limited research exists on these issues. Given the increasing interest in authentic regional food products and the acknowledgement of authenticity, it presents a potentially significant and interesting topic for consumer research.

1.2 Current research concepts

In the Oxford dictionary of English, the word “authentic” reveals associations with “genuineness”, “reality” and “truth”; its antonym is “counterfeit” and “untrustworthiness”. The concept of authenticity has been frequently discussed within the scientific fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology and philosophy. Steiner & Reisinger (2006:a) claims that authenticity is “one of the most complex debates in philosophy”. In the context of marketing research, authenticity has been less explored, however not neglected. For instance, consumer-research studies has shown that consumers seek authenticity in travel souvenirs (Chhabra, 2005), historical sites (Grayson & Martinec, 2004), exclusive wines (Beverland, 2005) and cultural dances (Xie & Wall, 2002). Still, few researchers have explicitly defined the term, and this has allowed the term to be used in different ways to imply different meanings.

Research on authenticity in marketing has focused on the corporate perspective (see Beverland, 2005 and Grayson & Martinec, 2004 for a comprehensive discussion), whereas the consumers’ perceived authenticity has been less explored (Xie & Wall, 2002; Littrell, 1995; Beverland, 2006; Greyson & Martinec, 2004). As indicated in current research, the concept of authenticity is problematic from a brand perspective. A key issue highlighted when branding authenticity is that that the brand must appear remote from commercial motives, yet be profitable (Holt 2002). As indicated by research on brand communities (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001 and McAlexander, *et al* 2002) the balance between authenticity and commercial incentives may prove paradoxical. Moreover, in order for the brand to be perceived as authentic, it must stay true to an authentic core while remain relevant as the market changes (Kapferer, 2001). Research on strategic brand management has acknowledged core values (Urde, 2002), integrated marketing communication (Ind, 2004) and total corporate

communication (Balmer & Greyser, 2003) as possible strategies to handle these potential paradoxes. Conversely, Beverland (2005) challenges the applicability of these concepts when branding authenticity. In his study, the author shows that exclusive wine producers commonly employ so called “decoupling” strategies to create an aura of authenticity that is not reflected in the overall corporate branding process.

The finding that exclusive wine producers merely create a façade of authenticity further raises questions of the very nature of authenticity. Is authenticity an objective reality or a social construct that may be staged? This issue is discussed by Goffman (in MacCannell, 1973), Peterson (1998) and Beverland (2006). As proposed by these authors, authenticity is more often contrived than real, and is socially constructed in dialectic between the marketer and the consumer. For example, connotations of authenticity (such as “genuine” and “trustworthy”) may impose different meanings depending on the individual and the context. (Holt, 2002). When searching the web for an authentic Italian restaurant in two countries (Sweden and USA), different associations (in form of colours, dishes, design etc.) are found. This issue is further discussed by Beverland (2006), who argues that it is possible that some consumers may perceive a mass-market Chianti wine as authentic because of the aesthetics of the bottle, whereas another consumer may perceive the very same bottle as kitsch.

Moreover, some researchers have identified that perceptions of authenticity is contingent on perceived self-identity and social sphere (f. ex MacCannell, 1973; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Holt, 1998; Steiner & Reisinger, 2005). For example, Schouten & McAlexander (1995) identified that perceptions of authenticity among Harley Davidson consumers varied dependent on the consumer’s identification as a “newcomer” or as a “biker”. Continuing on this discussion, Holt (1998) found that consumers belonging to different social classes searched for different cues of authenticity. The author argues that, in particular, people in higher cultural classes perceive the increasing commercialization as problematic, and as such are more inclined to search for authentic goods. However, the author does not elaborate upon what implications cultural class has for perceived authenticity in branded goods. Existing research on authenticity is further limited on how consumers with different demographic variables perceive authenticity. Grayson & Martinec (2004) and Beverland (2006) includes a few number of demographic variables (income, nationality and gender), but do not discuss its implications in more detail.

The above discussion indicates that the concept of authenticity is a potentially interesting and significant issue for consumer research. Yet, the discussion further shows that marketing brands as authentic may prove difficult. The development of society has caused consumers to increasingly demand authenticity, a demand that has been acknowledged by producers. However, the very nature of authenticity seems contradictory to mass-marketing. Since the term implies distance from commercial motives, can a brand that is mass-produced still be perceived as “authentic”? Furthermore, given that authenticity may be contrived, what possibilities do marketers have to claim authenticity? The increasing trend of marketing regional food products as authentic provides an interesting context in which to extend knowledge. Extending knowledge on how consumers come to perceive a regional food product as authentic or inauthentic could provide marketers with valuable insights for future strategic directions. Moreover, since current research has paid little attention to the consumers’ perception of authenticity, this perspective may extend knowledge on authenticity at large.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of the present thesis is to extend knowledge on how consumers come to perceive a regional food brand as authentic.

- RESEARCHING AUTHENTICITY -

2.1 Scientific orientation

Is the world constructed by social interaction between individuals, or is the world something “out there”, present without these individuals? In marketing research, this philosophical question is referred to as ontology, and what position to depart from has significant implications for the outline of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Both gates of departure projects fundamental differences, and will influence the methodological design and how the knowledge derived from the research should to be interpreted. The vary nature of the research problem influences what ontological position to cling to. Current research on authenticity has projected different views on the nature of the term itself. Whereas some researchers consider the term as being “out there” (f. ex Beverland, 2005; Xie & Wall, 1996), others have approached the term as being socially constructed in dialectic between the market offering and the consumer (f. ex Goffman in MacCannell, 1973; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). These different definitions also highlight how the respective research has treated the term from different ontological positions. As discussed in the previous chapter, we cling to the belief that the concept of authenticity is constructed in dialectic between an object and a subject. Given this, the ontological position of social constructivism better serves the nature of this research.

A question that is connected with the ontological position regards how knowledge is produced. According to Bryman & Bell (2003), the majority of marketing research during the last decades has been characterized by a belief that knowledge only could be produced in accordance to principles developed in the field of natural sciences. According to these principles, the quality of the study is dependent on how well the findings in the study can be reproduced using the same methods by other researchers. However, within the sphere of social science, researchers have questioned how appropriate these principles are when studying human behaviour. As a result, interpretivism has been proposed as an alternative, better suited for these purposes. Whereas the positivistic approach (primarily used in natural sciences) aims to explain human behaviour by studying objective forces and how these in turn

affect human beings, interpretivism considers these forces as socially constructed. As a result, interpretivism holds that in order to understand human correlation the reference point must rest in human action and interpretation. (Ibid.).

The idea of interpretivism, as used by Bryman & Bell (ibid), has its roots in the philosophical field of phenomenology. Using this approach, the researcher is allowed to put attention to how action appears and is allowed to let actions speak for themselves. Within the phenomenological school of philosophy, researchers are concerned with the world or human experiences as it is lived. According to Thompson (1997:a), the goal is to disentangle meaning and reach an understanding for a certain phenomena by revealing details that are easily taken for granted. Although this approach may seem appealing at first glance, it's problematic due to the fact that it holds that the researcher can not be influenced by any pre-assumptions or theoretical notions. In order to find the quintessence of a particular phenomenon, these have to be bracketed out. A related yet different approach is hermeneutic phenomenology. The main difference between these two approaches resides in the process in which meaning is attained. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach persists that the researcher does not necessarily have to bracket out pre-assumptions, but stresses the need to make these explicit. Consequently, these pre-assumptions structure how people view their reality, and it is according to this perspective not something that a person (researcher) can step out of or put aside. (Thompson *et al*, 1994)

The ontological position in this research, which implies that there is no such thing as objective forces, together with our view of the nature of authenticity leaves us not to take a positivistic stance. In our view, the present study can instead best be described as hermeneutic phenomenological, as the theoretical inspirations for this research persists that our knowledge of reality is gained through social constructions. According to Thompson *et al* (Ibid.), the researcher can gain access to these social constructions by accessing social constructions such as language, documents and artefacts. As the aim of this study is to explore how social beings make sense of their reality, this approach seems appropriate since it aims to understand authenticity through how this meaning is ascribed to objects by social beings. Moreover, we find the phenomenological approach particularly problematic since we find it necessary to capture the lived actions in some kind of language (verbal or non verbal), which we believe is an interpretative process in itself. Furthermore, the hermeneutic phenomenology holds that there is no such thing as an un-interpreted phenomenon and that the researcher shall

acknowledge that the phenomenological findings of lived experience are always already meaningfully interpreted experienced (Laverly, 2003). Thus, in using this approach, our own pre-understandings can be used and actually work for us instead of against us in the interpretative process. However, it is still needed to make these explicit throughout the research process and it is important that we keep track of our assumptions and that we are reflective in how these may influence the result.

2.2 Methodology

Considering our ontological position and epistemological approach in relation to the research problem, we believe that choosing a qualitative research strategy best serves the need of this study. Underlying this decision is that the aim of this thesis is to gain knowledge from a socially constructed phenomenon. Thus, knowledge is produced through understanding *meaning* of certain behaviour from an individual human beings perspective. Since the qualitative research strategy is concerned with *meaning* rather than measurement of numbers (which quantitative research is) our choice of a qualitative research strategy appears logical (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, there is currently little research on how consumers construct authenticity in food products. Considering this, we judged it hard, to consider a deduction, as there would be only limited research to deduct from. However, we had to a certain degree a conception of the concept of authenticity, which was derived from existing research. In this sense, the work process in this thesis can not be described as following an inductive approach. Moreover, as we will use a hermeneutic interpretative analysis, the process will be characterized by a continuous interaction between analysis of the empirical material and theoretical readings (Thompson, 1997:a). Therefore, this thesis can best be described as following an iterative approach.

2.2.1 Recruitment of participants

The empirical base for this study is in-depth interviews with ten informants. As discussed in the introductory chapter, Holt (1998) found that consumers with different amount of cultural capital searched for different cues of authenticity. However, these findings were not elaborated upon, and later research has called for extending knowledge on this finding (Beverland, 2005; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006:a). Up to this date, this is the only demographic variable that has shown to have implications for what cues of authenticity different people

look for. Considering this, we believed that it may be beneficial to include informants with different amount of cultural capital to better understand the phenomena authenticity. Therefore, five respondents within the top and high middle quintile of cultural capital resources (hereafter referred to as “HCC”) and five respondents whose cultural capital resources are in the lower quintile (hereafter referred to as “LCC”) were contacted and agreed to participate in the study. These two groups were constructed on the basis of cultural capital. Holt (1998) refers to Bourdieu when describing the basis for defining the amount of cultural capital possessed by an informant. These resources are accumulated in three primary sites of acculturation: family upbringing, formal education, and occupational culture. The cultural capital scheme used in this study uses all three of these antecedents, equally weighted. Family upbringing is measured in terms of the father’s education and occupation. In accordance with Holt, five categories were created for each dimension (5 = high resources for cultural capital accumulation, 1 = low resources for cultural capital accumulation). The amount of cultural capital is calculated by adding upbringing (father’s education + occupation)/2 + informant’s education + informant’s occupation. How different occupation and education is weighted is described in figure 1. These principles were developed when Holt (Ibid.) researched the American society, and it may be debatable if the very same principles are applicable for the setting in which this study is to be conducted (Sweden). In particular, it might be found controversial that only the father’s occupation and education is considered relevant for the assessment of cultural capital. However, since no thorough re-evaluation of these principles exists in Sweden, these were chosen to form the basis for this assessment. The concept of cultural capital is further discussed in the following chapter.

The five HCC informants are from the upper middle-class quintile of the Swedish society; all have at least a bachelor’s degree and work in professional, technical and managerial jobs. Moreover, most come from families in which the parents are educated. In contrast, the 5 LCC informants are from a working-class background: predominantly, they have a high school education, do manual labour or service work, and come from families where the father has at most a high school education and did manual labour. The informants were in the age group 25-60. However, the informant’s age was not considered as a factor in the analysis. The reason for not doing so was that we wanted to follow the principles of cultural capital, which do not take age into account (ibid.). The list of participants and their level of cultural capital is provided in figure 1. We have given the participants pseudonyms that we considered as common Swedish names.

FIGURE 1
INFORMANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Informant	Father's education	Father's profession	Education	Occupation	Cultural capital rating
<i>High cultural capital resources:</i>					
Torvald	Ph.D.	Professor	Ph.D.	Professor	15
Gustav	Ph.D.	Professor	Ph.D.	Managerial director	14
Ewa-Britt	J.D.	Lawyer	J.D.	Lawyer	13.5
Jim	Some college	Managerial director	B.A.	Musician	11
Malin	Some college	Technical coordinator	Master	Biochemist	10.5
<i>Low cultural capital resources:</i>					
Karin	J.D.	Lawyer	High school	Housewife	6
Pierre	High school	Salesman	Some college	Bartender	5
Göran	High school	Salesman	Some college	Child-minder	4,5
Lukas	Sixth grade	Carpenter	High School	Technical service	4
Linda	High school	Janitor	High school	Waitress	3

Education ratings. 1 = high school or less; 2 = some college; 3 = B.A.; 4 = Masters/some graduate school; 5 = Ph.D. or elite B.A.)

Occupation ratings. 1 = unskilled or skilled manual labor; 2 = unskilled or skilled service/clerical; 3 = sales, low-level technical, low-level managerial; 4 = high-level technical, high-level managerial and low cultural (e.g. primary/secondary teachers); 5 = cultural producers.

Cultural capital rating - upbringing (father's education + occupation/2) + education + occupation.

The location of the empirical work for this study was Malmö, Sweden. The main reasons for choosing this location were of practical nature. Since our study was both characterized by a small budget (practically none) and limited in time (10 weeks), we considered that informants had to be gathered from our close vicinity. However, it should be emphasized that the study does not aim to represent any larger population (such as Sweden). The informants for the study were recruited in two ways. Initial contact was made with close acquaintances whom we asked if they in their turn had any acquaintances that they believed could be willing to participate in our study. The choice of not including our own close acquaintances was a deliberate methodological choice, as we in accordance with Bryman & Bell (2003) believed that this would most likely lead the informants to take their “normal” role in their interaction with us. Our acquaintances provided us with a number of alternative informants that they believed would be interested in participating in our study. Through information gathered from our close acquaintances, we could calculate the various degrees of cultural capital resources held by the presented alternatives. In doing so, we could identify five potential LCC informants and five potential HCC informants. These informants were then contacted, and after being presented to the general purpose of the study and given time to think it over, they all agreed to participate. Participation was voluntary and no compensation was given.

2.2.2 Interview procedure

Inspiration for conducting the interviews for this study was drawn from McCracken (in Östberg, 2003), Seymour's "Market research using qualitative methods" (1992) and Bryman & Bell (2003). In general, these authors advocate a relatively open interview format. However, as described by Seymour (1992), a questionnaire is advisable to somehow structure the interview. Still, the aim of this questionnaire is not to inflict on subjects approached by the informant. Using this somehow loosely structured interview format, Bryman & Bell (2003) stresses that is crucial to let the informants speak about their perceptions using their terms and thus not overtly given by the interviewee. According to Seymour (1992) another key issue in conducting qualitative interviews is to be aware of the strengths and weakness in using the researcher as an instrument for guiding the interview. It is in this aspect important to keep a balance between obtrusive and unobtrusive questioning and aim to reach a sufficient balance. Prior to the interviews, existing research on authenticity was reviewed in order to be able to illuminate potential interesting aspects related to the issue that might appear during the interviews. This review was further used to guide the formulation of the questionnaire. Still, as acknowledged above, the questionnaire was not considered to be a definitive structure of the interview. Rather, it was considered as inspiration for posing relevant follow-up questions and to make sure that the same general themes were covered in each interview (as advised by Bryman & Bell, 2003). Thus, even though an interview guide was used, our main objective with the interviews was to allow each participant to articulate the network of meanings that is the basis for the informant's construction of authenticity in food products. Our aim was to establish a trust in the informant to achieve a conversational quality. In order to do so, we were cautious to let the informant argue and guide the course of the interview. The follow-up questions posed followed the informant's argumentation, and focused to bring a more thorough description of why the informant came to their conclusions. The interview guide is included in Appendix A.

The interviews were conducted in the informant's home setting. This was considered as beneficial, since we believed that discussions about food were to be more fruitful if it was conducted in a context close to the informants own food consumption. Hence, if the interviews were for example to be conducted in a café or a research laboratory, we believed that the informant would not as naturally come to discuss his or her own experiences of food.

Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and two hours, and was recorded using a minidisk recorder.

Before conducting the actual interviews that were to form the basis for the empirical material used in this thesis, a pilot study consisting of two interviews was held. These interviews proved to further inform us how the actual interviews were to be performed. It was here acknowledged that issues concerning authenticity in regional food were not vividly referred to when holding more general discussions about the informant's food consumption. To elicit this potential pitfall, we decided that a more explicit focus on authenticity in regional food products was needed. Second, the interviews tended to be relatively short. In order to prolong the interviews and to keep the interview within the field of the purpose, brining and presenting regional food products to the interviews was considered as an appropriate technique to ignite the discussions.

When performing the actual interviews, we started off by making it explicit for the informant that he or she would remain anonymous in the actual study. In doing so, we believe (in accordance with Seymour, 1992) that we generated some sense of trust in the interaction with the participation, which in turn facilitated a relaxed conversation. Following this, the informants were asked to describe their background variables that were needed to calculate the informant's amount of cultural capital resources: the father's education and occupation as well as the informant's education and occupation. Even though these had been provided by our close acquaintances (as described above) we did this to make sure that correct information had been provided.

The ensuing part of the interview was divided into four phases, where each phase was initiated by presenting a specific product group for the informant. Each product group presented included three brands that all made claims of being an "authentic" reproduction of a product from a specific region. Moreover, the products presented were similar in their physical attributes (size of package, contents) as well as in their price (as claimed at ICA). The presented product groups were *a)* Italian olive oil, *b)* Italian pasta, *c)* Greek feta cheese and *d)* Mexican tortilla breads. The included brands and some of their specifics are presented in Appendix B. The logic in choosing these product groups was that we believed that informants from the various social classes included in our study presumably had at least some experience of them. Each product group included at least one product that was manufactured

in Sweden and one product that was produced in the claimed origin. This choice was made since we believed that it might provide interesting findings concerning authenticity.

As each product group was presented, the informant was first asked to describe how frequently they consumed products of the product group, at what occasions these were consumed and if they had any particular experiences of consuming or being exposed to the product group. The logic behind this was to encourage the informant to describe actual experiences of the presented products rather than to keep the interviews on an abstract, experience-distant level (as advised by Thompson, 1997:a). As described in the introduction, Oxford English dictionary defines “authentic” with “real”, “genuine” and “trustworthy”. In the existing base on research, emphasis has been put on “real” and “genuine” (f. ex Grayson & Martinec, 2004 and Beverland, 2005). Consequently, we considered these aspects of the terms as the most appropriate, and in the interviews, we used the words “authentic”, “genuine” and “real” (in Swedish “äkta”) interchangeably. In this way, we believed that we to at least a certain extent could avoid misinterpretations of the term.

Following this, the informant was asked to assess what product in each product group that he or she considered as “authentic”, “real” or “genuine” product, in relation to the origin claimed. Thus, for example, the informant was asked which product of those presented that he or she considered as “the most authentic/real/genuine Italian olive oil”. The logic of this was to begin the dialogue in an open-ended manner, and then by staying within this question pose follow-up questions that were aimed to get a richer account of the various categorizations made by the informant in answering the question. This approach followed McCracken’s (in Östberg, 2003) suggestion of venturing into a topic by using a broadly defined question, and then sustain the participant’s accounts by using various types of floating prompts. Commonly, the informants were more or less pushed to pursue *why* they believed that a product was more “authentic” than the other. The reason in doing so was that we wanted to hear more about what sources that the informant relied on when constructing authenticity. However, it should be acknowledged that the respondents of course could not account for exactly *why* they believed that one product was more authentic than another. Still, this approach led to more vivid descriptions of how the informants ascribed the meaning of authenticity to food products.

Although the informant was asked to assess the authenticity of the presented products, the goal in doing so was not primarily to depict what product variables that the informant perceived to signal authenticity. Rather, this somehow obtrusive method (defined as “autodriving” in McCracken, *ibid.*) was intended to fuel the conversation and lead the informant naturally into discussing experiences of consuming “authentic” food products. This approach was further supported by the results of our pre-study. However, the danger in using “autodriving” and explicitly asking the informants what they consider as “authentic” (or inauthentic) is that it may lead the informant to produce an answer that list all the commonsensical knowledge about authentic or inauthentic foods, without any connection to the participants lived lives. Consequently, these answers might only mirror what they are supposed to perceive as “authentic” rather than what they actually believe themselves. However, in our view, “autodriving” proved to be useful, as it often led the informants into discussing not primarily the products presented, but experiences of authentic food that were more closely related to the informants lived life. In many cases, informants showed us (and sometimes even let us taste) food products that the informant was particularly keen about. Moreover, a theme that was covered in each product group presented was about whom the respondent believed would assess each product presented as the most authentic. If the interview had dealt only with what the informant assessed as being the most authentic, the important aspect of social considerations (as related to the degree of cultural capital) might have been missed. Thus, in relation to the purpose of the thesis, the aim of the interviews was not primarily to elicit what products that the informant perceived as the “most authentic”. Rather, the aim was to generate rich empirical data that could be used when analyzing how the informants constructed and attached the concept of authenticity to objects.

As the interview specific entails a social setting, it should be acknowledged that it is guided by same principles as any other social event. Therefore, the stories produced during the interviews may be shaped according to how the informant’s view the interviewer(s). Consequently, it is likely to assume that he or she will aim to communicate in a way that we believe or that he or she thinks that we will appreciate. Thus, it should be made clear that all data attained from this case study is socially constructed in the interaction between us and the participants studied. (Heinz *et al*, 1999)

2.3 Interpreting data

The recorded interviews were transcribed into textual data, which approximately accounted for 250 computer written pages of text. This textual data then formed the basis for the interpretation undertaken in this study. The informants included in this study are coloured by the macro socio-political forces constructing the meaning of authenticity. As such, the informants' accounts of authenticity in food products will be interpreted as narratives in which the meaning of authenticity is negotiated and reinforced. The aim of this study is therefore to both get a holistic view of the individual's construction of authenticity, but primarily to find similarities between the different informant's accounts of authenticity. As discussed earlier, the interpretative technique will follow the very fundamental principles of the hermeneutic circle (Thompson *et al*, 1994 and Thompson, 1997:a). A key feature in this process is that the interpretation of textual proceeds through sequences of part-to-whole iterations. This feature stems from the logic of hermeneutics wherein the whole only can be understood in relation to all the parts and the separate parts only can be understood in relation to the whole. Consequently, when following such an iterative process, it should be acknowledged that the interpretation will be coloured by the interpreter's frame of reference and the textual data being interpreted. In this way, our background, assumptions and specific interest concerning the issue, leads to that the interpretation is coloured by our personal characteristics. Thus, central to the validity of a study following the hermeneutic interpretation logic, is that the researcher continuously revises how the interpretation is coloured by his or hers pre-assumptions.

As described above, the hermeneutic interpretation follows an iterative approach to unravel meaning. In this way, it is not a one-way process as the engagement with the textual data may lead to that the researcher becomes sensitive to new aspects. Consequently, it may lead to that the researcher will revise his or her initial standpoints. (Thompson, 1997:a) In the case of our study, this became apparent, as the initial analysis of the textual data led us to appreciate findings in research that we had prior to this neglected. In this way, a large share of the theoretical inspiration was acquired through the analysis. It is further important to be sensitive to possible biases or systematic misrepresentation in the narratives collected in this case study. To limit this effect, it is advisable to let other persons not related to the study take part of the empirical material and perform their own interpretation of the text. (Ibid.) However, due to the practical restraints characterizing this study, this was not possible.

In correspondence with the above discussion, the initial stage of our interpretation was focused on understanding the separate parts of a text in relation to the totality of the text. Thus, in this case, how specific accounts of authenticity related to the informants overall account of authenticity. Through this process, a holistic understanding of each interview transcript was reached. Still, as the work progressed from the initial texts analyzed to the final texts, it was impossible not also to note similarities in between the texts. Thus, the process gradually shifted from an intratextual level to an intertextual level, where earlier readings informed later readings. Throughout this process, patterns not noted in the initial reading of a text emerged and were further analyzed. To conclude the first stage of the interpretation, we compared notes about possible themes that had occurred in the readings, and developed common themes that possibly could serve to inform us in the next reading of the texts.

In the second stage of the interpretation process, all texts were re-read and reanalyzed to further develop thematic areas and to identify similarities in how the informants constructed authenticity. In concert with our reasoning that the analysis sought to depict the underlying meanings of how informant constructed authenticity in food products, we were particularly concerned with trying to put ourselves out of the box of what we naturally take for granted.

- THEORETICAL INSPIRATION -

3.1 Ascribing meaning

According to the social constructivist approach, meaning is not inherent in objects. Rather, meaning is ascribed to objects in a process between the subject and the object in a certain context. But why do people actually ascribe objects with different meaning? Why is it that that, for some people, to judge a meal as truly Mexican it needs to both prepared and consumed by Mexicans, whereas for others it is sufficient that it hold certain stylistic attributes (Salamone, 1997)? Godin (2006) has proposed that these different processes of ascribing meaning are dependent on the specific worldview held by an individual. The relentless overhauling of various messages, have led individuals to develop effective systems by which messages are accepted, rejected or simply neglected (Rumbo, 2002). Elaborating upon this discussion, du Guy (in Östberg, 2003) claims that these worldviews are formed to make sense of our everyday life; to create a coherency and a sense of trust (Thompson, 1997b). In doing so, individuals form maps of meanings that serves as a lens through which objects are classified.

How can marketing researchers understand these “maps of meaning” that constitutes the worldview held by an individual? According to Thompson (ibid.), one can turn to the language (both verbal and non verbal) as a means to understand how a consumer ascribes meaning to objects. According to the author, language can be interpreted as a chain of signs, wherein meaning is both constructed and communicated. Fairclough (in Svensson, 2001) argues that ascribing meaning through language fills three functions. First, it has an *identity function* which refers to how meaning contributes to the construction of self-identity. Second, it serves a *relation function*, through which social relationships between individuals are withheld through sharing a specific interpretation of meaning. Finally, *the ideational function* refers to how ascribing meaning creates systems of knowledge and beliefs. Consequently, meaning does not stem from a solitary mental process but is assigned in interaction between people. According to Corrigan (1997), gestures may become symbols when they trigger the same kind of response in the person who makes the gesture as in the person to whom it is

addressed. As such, a symbol comes to represent a meaning when it is accepted in the relation between individuals (Brown, in Östberg 2003). As a result of this, the maps of meanings held by an individual are formed within the specific cultural and social context in which he or she is located. Thus, ascribing meaning to an object fills a function, both to create a coherent self-narrative and to sustain and foster social relationships, making the individual an accepted member of a given community.

To understand how meaning is constructed through language, Corrigan (1997) discusses how objects come to represent symbols that are ascribed a certain meaning. These symbols gain their meaning in relation to other symbols, to which they are compared. As such, a symbol consists of a signifier which is a representation of meaning (the language) and the actual meaning, the signified. Thus, symbols (objects) gain their meaning through how they are used in relation to the other symbols present in a certain context. In this perspective, objects and events do not make sense of their own; instead social beings have to make sense of them. Therefore, we need to think of this process of “making sense” or producing meaning as a process that goes beyond the object itself. (Thompson, 1997:b)

However, these meanings often appear so obvious that we take them for granted (Östberg, 2003). To unravel these taken for granted meanings, we need to immerse ourselves in reflections on *why* a symbol has attained a particular meaning. Over time, some meanings acquire an obvious descriptive status because they become widely accepted; they become “known truths”. (Svensson, 2001) An example of such a “known truth” embedded in our society is the concept of what is masculinity and femininity (Padavic & Reskin, 2002). We are so entangled in these concepts that we naturally react when we see something that does not correlate with our conceptions of these meanings (for example, when seeing a man in a dress). However, this example further illustrates that symbols may change with time. For example, in the Swedish society it has become accepted that women dress in jeans, something that would have been unthinkable some decades ago.

3.2 The foundation for the network of meanings

In sociological research, a central issue has been to explore what underlying reason that forms the specific network of meaning, as described above. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is by many considered as a pioneer in this field (Holt, 1998). According to Bourdieu, maps of

meaning appear in individuals in order for them to *distinguish* from other people. As such, in contrast with the initial discussion held in this chapter, Bourdieu focuses on the social values in ascribing meaning to objects rather than how meaning appear through symbolic interaction. In his work, Bourdieu rethinks Weber's account for social distinction developed in the early stages of the 20th century (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2004). According to Weber, people distinguish themselves from others by displaying wealth in various forms. Bourdieu agrees on Weber's argument that status position is expressed by "above all a specific style of life", but then rejects that this is determined purely by economic relations (*ibid.*). In relation to the above discussion, Bourdieu understands status as the symbolic aspect or dimension of the class structure, which is not itself reducible to economic relations alone.

3.2.1 Distinction

According to Bourdieu (in Øygaard, 2000), all social actions can be conceived as a status game in which individuals draw on three types of resources (economic, cultural and social capital) to compete for status (what he calls symbolic capital). Whereas economic capital is a relatively straightforward concept relating to the financial resources held by an individual, social and cultural capital are more subtle and complex. Social capital refers to whom people know (relationships, organizational affiliations and network) and cultural capital consists of a set of rare and distinct tastes, skills knowledge and practices developed. The cultural capital can take different forms, and is by Bourdieu (in Holt, 1998) divided in three distinctive sets: embodied as implicit knowledge and skills; objectified in cultural objects; and institutionalized in official degrees that certify the existence of the embodied form. This form of capital is fostered in the social setting in which the individual is situated, and predominantly based in the upbringing. (*ibid.*) For example, the cultural capital held by the cultural elites is formed through an upbringing in families with highly educated parents whose occupations require cultural skills. This is further reinforced in the educational institutions that attract other cultural elites, studying areas that emphasize abstract thinking and communication rather than the development of particular practical skills and knowledge. Finally, the cultural capital is refined and reinforced through choosing occupations that emphasize symbolic reproductions.

These experiences contribute to the formation of a subjectively embodied form of thinking, feeling and acting, defined by Bourdieu as "habitus". (Wright *et al*, 2001) In similarity with the concept of worldviews (*cf.* above), the habitus is an unconscious, uncontrollable

classification scheme that both classifies the world and structures the behaviour of an individual. In this perspective, habitus is both structured by societal forces, and in itself serve to structure society. Hence, Bourdieu argues both the existence of objective structures in society as well as the participation of people in constructing the social reality. (ibid.) For Bourdieu, the social world consists of various fields in which individuals seek to position themselves. For example, distinctive fields can be politics, arts, music or academia. These fields are the arenas in which actors compete to position themselves through acquiring the symbols of status which are distinctive for each field. In this sense, cultural capital takes on a particular form in each field. (Holt, 1998)

Of particular relevance to the present study, Bourdieu documented that cultural capital is enacted, among others, in the field of food (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2004). Referring to a study conducted in Scandinavia concerning food preferences among Norwegian youths, it was found that the amount of cultural capital resources had impacts on the preferences (Øygaard, 2000). For example, it was found that individuals with a high degree of cultural capital tended to value “healthy” and “exotic” food. In contrast, those with a low amount of cultural capital resources tended to despise these types of foods, and were instead more concerned with whether the food was “inexpensive” and “filling”.

In the field of consumption, the cultural capital springs to surface through a particular conversion into tastes and practices, controlled by the habitus. In this sense, the habitus organizes how an individual make sense of objects to which he or she is exposed, feeling a desire towards valued objects and rejects objects that are not valued in the field. These practices of expressing taste, which serves to reinforce cultural capital and social distinction, results in the construction of distinctive sets of consumption patterns. Thus, common views on objects are found in each field, as it serves to reinforce the individual’s position within the field. (Holt, 1998)

In each field, people with a high degree of symbolic capital are those that have the power to influence the meaning and value of an object. For example, in the field of arts, these may be critics and opinion leaders. Consequently, these so called “gatekeepers”, define what expression of taste that is to be valued in the field. Thus, the meaning of objects is socially constructed and exists only for those that have the means to decipher and understand it. In this sense, objects are never appreciated for what it is in itself but rather for what it represents in

the specific field. (ibid.) Consequently, the worldview that is held by groups of individuals affects how they relate to different marketing messages; if they value them, if they reject them or if they neglect them.

The theories developed by Bourdieu have according to Holt (1998), Wright *et al* (2001) and Chan & Goldthorpe (2004) been widely challenged by researchers in sociology. These authors argue that a common critique that has been put forward is based on the assertion that the technological development has made all types of good widely available, and as such, eroded the distinguishing function of consuming specific goods. Products of all kinds are available to all classes in of the society, and consequently, status can not be obtained by owning specific products. (Wright *et al*, 2001). However, following the very same arguments, Holt (1998) argues that due to the time lag between innovation and diffusion of new styles or products, new strategies to reproduce social distinction has emerged. Rather than distinguishing oneself by the consumed product *per se*, the distinction is made by consuming the product in a specific way. Thus, in modern society, the status game taking place in consumption fields can not be understood through looking at what products that specific individuals choose to consume. Rather, it should be understood in terms of how consumers speak differently about the very same products.

3.3 The socially constructed meaning of authenticity

In the same logic as discussed above, the concept of authenticity can be seen as a certain form of meaning that is ascribed to objects through interaction between the signifier (the subject) and the signified (the object). Looking at authenticity from this perspective, the concept is in similarity to other symbolic meanings, in no way constant and stable, nor something that is universally accepted. As discussed in the introductory chapter, limited research exists on in what manners individuals ascribe authenticity to market offerings. Grayson & Martinec (2004) argues that one of the key findings on this issue is still today Goffman's work on authenticity in tourist settings.

In his work, Goffman (in MacCannell, 1973) states that the "illusion of authenticity depends upon the tourist's feeling to be in an immediate relationship with the sight". As a consequence, if the tourist perceives the site as being altered or mediated in any way, the sight will by many be considered as "inauthentic". However, in order for the sight to attain the

hallmark of “authentic” it must in some way be marked as such, but at the very same time as it becomes marked as “authentic”, there is a risk that it loses its sense of authenticity. For example, once a restaurant is marked as an Italian restaurant it is by the very fact that it is marked no longer quite authentic. The restaurant is marked as special and is therefore distinct from all other “authentic” Italian restaurants (that are not marked as “authentic”). According to Goffman (ibid), this entails the “dialectics of authenticity”, and is similar to the paradox of branding authenticity as described by Beverland (2005; 2006). Thus, for the tourist to assess a sight as authentic, it must not appear what the tourist perceives as “shallow”.

According to Goffman (in MacCannell, 1973), ascribing the meaning of authenticity to a sight is highly dependent on the relationship between the individual tourist and other tourists. As a sight becomes loaded with tourists, the individual may perceive the sight as just a “tourist attraction”, something that is “for the tourist”, which he or she defensively claims that he or she is *not*. This leads the tourist into searching for new sights that are perceived as more authentic. However, this desire for authenticity leads to the marking of new sights as authentic, which eventually becomes inauthentic through the very act of being marked. For example, current visitors to New York might find it fashionable to ignore sights as the statue of liberty and Empire State Building in order to find a more “real” New York by exploring new areas of the city that the tourist believes are unexploited (and hence authentic) parts of the city. However, as witnessed in the lower east side area, this once “authentic” part has now transformed into yet another “mediated” tourist attraction¹.

This discussion follows the same logic as McCracken’s concept of “chase and flight” in fashion (Corrigan, 1997). This concept withholds that new fashions are invented by the upper social class since this members of this group wishes to distinguish from the lower social classes. However, since the lower classes aim to imitate the upper class, they adopt the fashion styles held by the upper class. In the very same instance as these fashion styles are adopted by the lower class, the upper class seeks new ways in which to distinguish themselves; thus, the chase and flight. This leads to a never-ending cycle that drives the fashion industry forward. As discussed above, a cycle following the same logic as chase and flight is present in the search for authenticity. As long as the tourist sees a value in finding authenticity, the dialectics of authenticity goes on.

¹ Author’s own experience of visiting New York together in 2005

But when does a consumer ascribe something as “authentic”? To explain this, Goffman (in MacCannell, 1973) turns to what he calls the “front- and backstage”. According to this definition, the front is the meeting place of customers and service persons, and the back is the place where the actual inhabitants of the region live their lives. For the tourist who aims to escape the other “tourists”, authenticity is found when he or she can gain access to the backstage of a sight or region. He then becomes no longer the “tourist” who finds value in what other believes is “authentic”; rather, he is an explorer who wishes to find the “true” or “real” culture found in a region. When the tourist believes that there is something such as a “backstage”, he becomes immensely attracted to seeking out these regions. As such, notions of backstage generate a belief that there is something more than meets the eye. Paradoxically, even when the backstage does not entail any secrets, the concept of backstage is the places where the tourist believes that the secrets are. This creates a “mystification” in the search of authenticity. Thus, the tourist can never factually *know* when he experiences something that is authentic; what is important is that he or she perceives it to be authentic. This notion has been acknowledged by tourist sight marketers, who deliberately attempt to “fool” the tourist that he or she is actually experiencing something “authentic”. Goffman refers to this concept as “staged authenticity”; something that Beverland (2005) also found was used by luxury wine producers. According to Beverland (*ibid.*), this strategy of “decoupling” involves downplaying commercial motives, and creating a sense that something is both “real” and “sincere”.

Goffman (in MacCannell, 1973) touches upon what Fairclough (in Svensson, 2001) argues are two of the pivotal underlying reasons for ascribing meaning to objects: to reinforce a sense of self-identity and to create social affiliation. Schouten & McAlexander (1995) elaborates upon this when researching consumers of Harley Davidson. The authors found that a consumer’s construction of authenticity was based on the consumer’s identification as an “outlaw” versus an “enthusiast” biker. The newcomers frequently equated authenticity with media-perpetuated stereotypes of what it means to be a “biker”. However, to the “true” outlaws, these newcomers were merely “pretenders”, and consider as “fakes”, thus inauthentic.

3.3.1 Two types of authenticity

Using a slightly different approach, Grayson & Martinec (2004) further illustrate how consumers ascribe the meaning of authenticity to objects and events. Drawing upon

phenomenological philosophy and using a semiotic approach, they describe how visitors to tourist attractions assess authenticity by turning to different cues. In their work, the authors make a distinction between two forms of authenticity: indexical and iconic. In short, indexical authenticity refers to cues that consumers believe provide a spatio-temporal link between the presented object and the original object. On the other hand, iconicity refers to the cues consumers use when assessing the authenticity of an object by comparing the presented object with a mental picture of the original object.

Indexical authenticity is described as factual proof that an object or event is actually the authentic “original”. For example, a Van Gogh painting is authentic if it is perceived as being the original. If the individual believes that a cue, such as the signing of the painter, links the painting with the actual painter, it serves as an indexical cue. These cues are signs that are believed to entail a factual and spatio-temporal link with something else, and are related to the phenomenological experience of fact. To view something as an index, the perceiver must believe that it actually has the factual and spatio-temporal link that is claimed. For example, to judge whether the Vasa ship presented at the museum in Stockholm is indexically authentic, the visitor must have some verification (via certification or a trustworthy context) that it actually is the ship that sank at the 12th of August 1628 (The museum of Vasa’s webpage, 2006).

On the other hand, iconic authenticity refers to something whose physical manifestation resembles something that is indexically authentic. In order to view something as an icon, Grayson & Martinec (ibid.) explains that perceivers must have some pre-existing knowledge or expectations, which create a “composite photograph” in their minds. The perceiver compares this picture with what they sense and make an assessment of similarity. Thus, for individuals visiting “High Chaparral”², the sight is perceived as authentic if it correlates with the individual’s mental image of how the old west used to look. In contrast with indexical authenticity, which is related to phenomenological experience of *fact*, iconic authenticity is associated with the phenomenological experience of *attending to one’s senses*. To return to the Vasa example, to judge whether the ship is iconically authentic, the visitor must have some idea (sketchy or detailed) of how the Vasa ship should look. Paradoxically, Grayson & Martinec (ibid.) found that consumers are not always logical in their assessment of iconic

² Tourist attraction in south of Sweden that depicts the American old west

authenticity. For example, the original Vasa ship was under water for 300 years, and had faded considerably. Thus, the version found in history books on how the Vasa ship looks is produced from painting of the Vasa ship rather than the actual ship. From this perspective, the original Vasa ship is indexically authentic (cause it is the actual ship that sank in 1628) but perhaps not iconically authentic (because it no longer looks like the original ship when it actually sank).

- FINDINGS -

To present the findings of the present research project, we have divided the results into three separate, yet interlinking, parts. First, we will discuss factors that contributed to perceived authenticity that were related to the presented products. Second, we will discuss producer-related factors that enhanced or degraded perceived authenticity. Third, factors that were related to the amount of cultural capital resources held by the informants will be discussed.

In the two first parts of the analysis we will discuss themes that appeared among all informants, and hence, focus will not be put on individual differences, even though these were present. We defined a theme when the majority of informants (six out of ten) had discussed the theme as affecting perceived authenticity. In the third part of the analysis, focus will shift to be more concentrated on the individual differences, as related to cultural capital. To start of the analysis, we will briefly discuss how the informant's approached the issue and what products that were considered as authentic.

4.1 General findings

Figure 2 displays what products that the informants assessed as authentic in relation to the other products presented. As shown in the figure, there was no clear “winner” in any of the product groups, as no product was considered by all informants as being the most authentic. Still, some products were chosen by the majority of our informants. Barilla's pasta, Zeta's olive oil, FAGE's feta cheese and Old El Paso's tortilla bread were chosen by at least six informants. Moreover, although there was no clear winner, there was a clear “loser”: ICA (both in their pasta and their olive oil). As shown, none of the informants perceived ICA:s products as being the most authentic in their respective product groups.

In general, the HCC informants appeared more interested in the topic of authenticity than the LCC informants. The HCC informants held lengthy discussions about details of the products and experiences connected to regional food. In comparison , the LCC informants

FIGURE 2
PRODUCT ASSESSMENT

Product Group	Times assessed as the most authentic
<i>Italian Pasta</i>	
Barilla	6
Zeta	4
ICA	0
<i>Italian Olive Oil</i>	
Zeta	7
Bertolli	3
ICA	0
<i>Greek Feta Cheese</i>	
FAGE	6
Fontana	3
Arla Apertina	1
<i>Mexican Tortilla Bread</i>	
Old El Paso	6
Scandinavian Imports	3
Santa Maria	1

were not as detailed in their assessment of the product. Moreover, our informants seldom spoke in positive terms such as “authentic” or “real”. Rather, they spoke in negative terms of what they perceived as “fakes”, “inauthentic” or “just not trustworthy”. Consequently, to grasp what the informants perceived as authentic, it was often necessary to contrast it with what they features or attributes that they deemed as inauthentic.

According to Grayson & Martinec (ibid.), “even if two things appear alike, the authentic object is the one that is believed to have particularly valued or important physical encounters with the world”. In this study, the usage of products that were physically similar to each other was a deliberate choice in the methodological considerations. This was also reflected in the informants’ descriptions of the presented products. For example:

Karin (LCC): “All pasta is the same. I mean, you couldn’t tell them apart if you would taste them”.

Lukas (LCC): “Olive oil is olive oil. There is no difference in how they taste, and since you use to cook it’s not that important”.

Despite these claims that the products were more or less the same, in most cases, informants had no difficulties assessing whether one product was more authentic than the other.

When the informants came to perceive any of the products presented, they referred both to what they perceived as factual proof or by referring to a mental image of how an authentic example of the specific regional food product “ought to look”. As such, the findings in our study were similar to the two types of authenticity, as described by Grayson & Martinec (2004, see chapter three). What the informants perceived as being a factual proof of authenticity is as such similar to “indexical authenticity”. In this perspective, a certain cue of authenticity functioned as a factual proof that the product had a spatio-temporal link to an authentic product. The mental images were constructed from the informants exposure to fictional narratives, such as movies and recipe books, as well as experiences from visiting the countries. These sources formed a composite picture that the informants used to judge whether a product resembled something that they believed were indexically authentic. As such, these cues can be compared to Grayson & Martinec’s (ibid.) concept of “iconical authenticity”. However, exposure to narratives of the country often resulted in very different composite picture, as illustrated in the following two excerpts:

Göran (LCC): I’ve been to Greece, and this image on the package (Arla) looks really Greek. You know, the blue ocean, Greek salad and a checked table cloth.

Interviewee: So that feels like an authentic Greek feta cheese then?

Göran: Yes, especially when I compare it with this FAGE, who has an image of a flock of sheep. How much Greece is that?

Jim (HCC): A funny thing is that my friend Gojja was in Greece a couple of weeks ago. He’s a real character, works in a tyre warehouse. He went for sun and bathing, and then sure, he was sitting in a restaurant and said “Oh well, I just want to have a Greek salad” and they just replied “A what!?”. So I mean, if you look at this Fontana with that in mind, it feels really inauthentic with this picture of a Greek Salad.

Thus, for the informants Göran and Jim, exposure to cultural narratives about Greece had caused two highly different images of what is authentic Greek feta cheese. However, even though this example caused different perceptions of authenticity, we could as discussed above identify general themes of what constitutes authenticity in regional food products. A summary of the factors that were related to the product or the producer is shown in figure 3. In the following section, we will discuss the product-related factors that were found.

FIGURE 3
EXAMPLES OF INFORMANT'S DESCRIPTIONS OF CONSTRUCT LABELS

Construct label	Description	Example quotations from Italian pasta interviews	Example quotations from Italian olive oil	Example quotations from Greek feta cheese I	Example quotations from Mexican tortilla bread
Certification	Something that is believed to be authentic through certification.	"Made in Italy, then it's Italian!" (Göran)	"They use this at Operakällaren, I know that they would only use real Italian products there." (Ewa-Britt)	"It's only called 'feta' if it is actually made in Greece." (Torvald)	No informant description fit this category.
Stylistic variables	Something that looks like a composite picture, which was constructed based on the consumer's exposure to how authentic regional food products ought to look.	"Authentic Italian pasta must have some Italian language on the package." (Karin)	"This Zeta olive oil feels authentic, because the bottle looks a bit dirty." (Lukas)	"This looks a bit tacky, as if they had no marketing budget. Somehow that feels authentic." (Malin)	"That they put this in a simple package feels authentic." (Göran)
Specific product ingredients	Something that looks like a composite picture, which was constructed based on the consumer's exposure to what authentic regional food products should contain.	"Real Italian pasta should look yellow, that means that there is a lot of egg in it." (Ewa-Britt)	No informant description fit this category.	"If it is real feta cheese, it must contain 100 % goat cheese." (Linda)	No informant description fit this category.
Perceived sincerity	Something that is believed to be authentic through perceived sincerity of actor.	"I know that this guy Fernando di Luca is Italian. I like what he's doing and I trust that he would only sell real Italian products." (Gustav)	"Zeta has a lot of different olive oils, they really care about their products." (Malin)	No informant description fit this category.	"Tortilla breads made in Mexico are made with love." (Jim)
Perceived method of production	Something that looks like a composite picture, which was constructed based on the consumer's exposure to the language of the claimed origin.	"ICA is an industry-product, authentic Italian pasta is made with love." (Torvald)	"Authentic Italian olive oil is handpressed." (Gustav)	"Arla doesn't feel authentic, because real feta cheese is not made in a factory." (Torvald)	"I think real tortilla breads are handmade by a fat mexican lady" (Lukas)

4.2 Product-related factors

When the informants were to assess the authenticity in regional food products, several product-related factors were considered. These could be divided into three main groups: certification, stylistic attributes and specific product ingredients.

4.2.1 Certification

When studying fans of the American singer Barry Manilow, O'Guinn (1991) found that an object, such as a record, touched by the singer was perceived as more authentic. Thus, for example, if a record was signed by the singer it was perceived as more authentic than a record that was not. According to the author, that the singer had touched an object provided the fans with a spatio-temporal link that "somehow proved that Barry Manilow exists for them". For our purposes, this finding can be applied in a wider sense. From the empirical material, we found that when informant's came to perceive a regional food product as authentic, they commonly referred to if the product had been "touched" by a person or institution that for the informants proved that it was authentic. However, the role of Barry Manilow was in our study taken out by various social actors. These can be divided into governmental certification and certification provided by actors at a "lower", i.e. more personal level.

References to governmental certification could be either direct or indirect. For example, when constructing authenticity in the feta cheese, the informants in many cases referred to that they knew that EU had legislated what could be called Greek feta. In this sense, EU had "signed" the product with it's legitimacy, and was by the informants considered as providing a factual spatio-temporal link between the product and it's claimed origin. In other cases, references to legislation took a more indirect form. For example, when constructing authenticity in Italian olive oil and pasta, the informants referred to claims such as "Made in Italy". However, this indicates that the informants indirectly believed that these claims were true.

Certification through social actors was also identified on a, for the informant, more personal level. In similarity with the logic of the governmental authorities, informants perceived that a product became more authentic when it had been certified by someone that the informant considered as an authoritarian voice for the specific issue. In our study, these institutions for certification took the form of restaurants, retailers, acquaintances and commercials. For example, for three informants, Zeta's products were perceived as more authentic as they knew

that this brand was used at the restaurant Operakällaren in Stockholm. In many cases, certification at this level appeared to be an important cue for the perceived authenticity of a product. When the informants were unsure about what institutions that would hypothetically “touch” a product, they became doubtful about the overall authenticity of the product. For example, when assessing the tortilla bread from Scandinavian imports, the informants often asked for where we had found the product. For the informant Göran (LCC), the authenticity of the product would be significantly different if we had found it in a “kebab shop” or a, for the informant, more respected institution, in this case the “bread department at Malmborgs”³. An interesting finding in our study was that company representatives could be referred to as a certificate of the product’s authenticity. In particular, this occurred when assessing Zeta’s products. The company front figure (Fernando di Luca) was often referred to as certifying the authenticity of the company’s products. For example:

Gustav (HCC): I know that this guy Fernando di Luca is Italian. I like what he’s doing and I trust that he would only sell real Italian products.

4.2.2 Stylistic attributes

When the informants assessed authenticity, the stylistic attributes of the product were considered. In particular, products that were perceived as “unprocessed” were considered as being more authentic. For example, products that were perceived as “shabby”, “dirty” or being in a simple package were considered as more authentic. Commonly, the product’s referred to as having an unprocessed look were FAGE’s feta cheese, Scandinavian imports tortilla bread and Zeta’s olive oil bottle and pasta. For example:

Malin (HCC): I’ve never been in Mexico, so I don’t really know, but I have a hard time believing that they would put it in these nice looking packages [pointing at Santa Maria and Old El Paso]. I guess it’s more believable that it should look like this [pointing at Scandinavian Imports]. I mean, it’s their “every day food”, I imagine. You know, In Sweden, we don’t sell potatoes in fancy packages, it’s more simple stuff here. So yes, I believe so... the simple package make it feel more authentic.

Another general stylistic attribute that was discussed in relation to perceived authenticity was the printed language on the package. In general, the more the package included text written in what the informant believed was the “original” language, the more it was perceived as

³ A Swedish grocery retailer

authentic. In particular, the HCC informants questioned the authenticity when they acknowledged that a producer had used mixed languages on the package. For example:

Jim (HCC): Wait... I'm just going to look [holding Barilla pasta product]... French!?... that's a bit humorous. Here they are they are trying to do a cross-over effect with Italian and... it says "cultura al dente" and then it's written in Swedish underneath, that feels like "I'm going to do it in Italian, but... that's really silly!"

As such, using mixed language in a large extent were by many informants considered as half-hearted attempts to be authentic. In general, Zeta's products and FAGE's feta cheese were perceived as more authentic due to their use of "original" language. Other stylistic attributes were also considered, but were individual. Therefore, these will be discussed further in the third part of the analysis.

4.2.3 Specific product ingredients

Another factor of the products that was considered was what product ingredients that were used. In particular, the product groups Italian pasta and Greek feta cheese needed to have specific ingredients to be considered as authentic; durum wheat for the pasta, and 100 % goat milk for the feta cheese. However, the majority of products included in this study met this demand. An interesting exception to this was that several informants mentioned that Barilla had started to market whole grain pasta. Although this was not considered to be connected to authentic Italian pasta, it did not seem to affect the overall assessment of Barilla's authenticity.

The HCC informants appeared to be more concerned with specific product ingredients than the LCC informants. For example, two HCC informants considered that the amount of eggs used was an essential factor for authentic Italian pasta. In these two cases, Zeta was considered the most authentic pasta. No demand for specific product ingredients was mentioned when assessing the authenticity of tortilla breads and olive oil.

4.3 Producer-related factors

When the informants were to assess the authenticity in regional food products, factors related to the producer were often considered. These could be divided into two main groups: perceived sincerity of producer and perceived method of production.

4.3.1 Perceived sincerity

The perceived sincerity of the producer had substantial impact on our informant's perception of authenticity, and served as cue of psychic indexical authenticity. According to Daniel (1996), psychic indexical authenticity often refers to the behaviour of a social actor. Thus, even if two social actors behave in similar ways, the authentic set of behaviours are those that are believed to reflect the actor's true self, and not simulated to achieve a particular effect (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006:b). According to Handelman (2006), brands and producers are increasingly perceived as social actors; a notion that was supported by findings in our study. Discussions whether one actor was acting more "true to itself" than another producer were frequent. For example, ICA was often considered as not being "true to itself". Rather, it was perceived as producing products that were mere reproductions that were put in the market to achieve a particular effect. In particular, this appeared to be the single most influential factor that resulted in that none of our informants considered ICA as the most authentic brand in either of its product group. In many cases, the informants dismissed the product as soon as they saw it, and did not care to look for further cues. An example of how ICA was perceived is as follow:

Linda (LCC): For me, ICA just doesn't feel like a real pasta producer.

Interviewee: Could you elaborate on why you feel this?

Linda: Now we have it again, with ICA – I mean, what don't they do! It just doesn't feel like they really care about the pasta, they make everything, how could they care about anything?

Interviewee: So a producer that only makes pasta cares more?

Linda: They probably don't! But that's the feeling I have. Barilla just feels "pasta" for me. ICA feels more like "jam".

Interviewee: But Barilla also make other products, like sauces.

Yes, but that's something you have *with* pasta, and you don't have jam with pasta. Do you get what I mean?

In contrast, Zeta was often considered as having a "genuine intent", reflected in informant's statements such as "they really care for their products". Discussions on the sincerity of the producer were particularly vivid when ICA was present. In the product groups where ICA was not featured, the sincerity of the producer was less frequent, yet present. For example, the HCC informants questioned the sincerity of Scandinavian Imports (tortilla bread group). They perceived this product as being made without "love" or devotion for the product. In contrast, the LCC informants perceived the very same product as the most authentic, and did as such not seem to consider that Scandinavian Imports was an insincere company.

4.3.2 Perceived method of production

Regardless of product group, when assessing authenticity in regional food brands, informants frequently turned to a mental image of how an authentic product would be produced. In general, the informants had a picture that such products were produced in a small-scale setting using handcraft. In particular, this mental image crystallized when the informants contrasted this to products that they believed were produced a large-scale setting using industrial methods.

Torvald (HCC): This feta cheese absolutely feels like the most fake of all products you've shown! [pointing at Arla Apertina]

Interviewee: Why is that?

Torvald: It really feels like an industry product.

Interviewee: How do you mean?

Torvald: I just think that real feta cheese is not produced in a factory, and for me, Arla is just "factory".

Interviewee: Is this also why you believe that FAGE is the most authentic product?

Torvald: Yes, I think so. It feels as if it could have been produced by a small farmer somewhere in Greece.

These themes predominantly appeared in relation to discussions about the sincerity of the producers. Thus, these two themes are most likely interconnected, yet they are distinct. Interestingly, all products included in this study are to some extent produced in large scale. However, the perceived degree of production volume appeared to have impacts for the informant's assessment of authenticity.

4.4 Cultural capital-related factors

So far, we have described what product- and producer-related factor that had influence on the informants' assessment of authenticity. In this part, we will focus on explaining the individual differences that appeared to have an impact on what products that the informants assessed as authentic. Similar approaches were identified among informants with approximately the same amount of cultural capital resources. The initial notion that cultural capital influenced the assessment of authenticity in regional food brands was that informants with a low level of cultural capital resources (LCC) and informants with a high level of cultural capital resources (HCC) choose different products as being the *most* authentic in each product group. For example, none of the LCC informants chose *Zeta* as being the most authentic pasta in that category, whereas the HCC predominantly (with one exception) choose *Zeta* as the most authentic. Moreover, the two groups appeared to have different relations to the concept of

authenticity in itself. Whereas the HCC informants tended to value authenticity to a large extent, the LCC informants appeared less concerned with this product aspect. For example, for the informant Pierre, authenticity was by no means something that he sought in products.

Pierre: Now I know, that's how it is! [in high spirits]. First, there was the tomato, and then they made the best of it – ketchup! That's how I think about most everything: the tomato is the authentic thing, but I rather buy ketchup.

Following Thompson's (1997) argument that meaning is constructed through a subject-object process, we sought to further depict in what ways the informants with different degree of cultural capital resources came to perceive a product as authentic. The overarching difference was that the HCC informants choose to project themselves as autonomous when ascribing a product as authentic, whereas the LCC informants projected themselves as rather being conformists. Three major differences contributed to project these approaches, and will be discussed in further detail below.

4.4.1 Decommodification versus conformism

When ascribing the meaning of authenticity to regional food products, the HCC informants generally tried to “decommodify” the product. In doing so, they were able to apply a personal meaning to the products presented. In order to decommodify the products, the HCC informants projected a sense of “connoisseurship”, thus emphasizing aspects of the product that they believed were ignored by others. As such, personal autonomy was withheld, even if the product itself is widely available. In contrast to this, the LCC informants did not project a need to decommodify the products, and were instead pleased if they believed that they perceived authenticity in similar manners as others. The two following quotes will aim to illustrate these differences further.

Interviewee: Which of these products do you consider is the most authentic Italian pasta?

Torvald (HCC): ICA is out of the question. It's a mass-produced product.

Interviewee: So is mass-produced an aspect that you consider as inauthentic concerning Italian pasta?

Torvald: Yes.

Interviewee: If you look at the two other products, which do you consider is the most authentic pasta out of these two?

Torvald: The Italians chooses this [pointing at Barilla]. I've read about Zeta in Dagens Industri a couple of weeks ago. They are trying to do this concept-thing, but I think that's it's just too much. No, Barilla is the most authentic Italian pasta.

Interviewee: You said before that ICA is a mass-produced product. Does it matter that Barilla is also a mass-produced when you consider its authenticity?

Torvald: Barilla is “numero uno“ in Italy! I’ve actually been at the factory when I was in Italy a couple of years ago. They have a really big plant, I don’t know how many employees they had, but I sure know that the Italians love their pasta.

The above excerpt projects a number of problems for Torvald. First, Torvald contrasts authentic pasta with mass-produced products (ICA). However, he chooses Barilla as the most authentic pasta out of the three, even though he knows that Barilla is a mass-produced product. Thus, the producer-related factor perceived method of production only applies to ICA in this case. However, he emphasizes an experience of the Barilla product that he believes that few others have had (visiting the factory). By being able to ascribe this personalized meaning to the Barilla pasta, he can defend his choice and still project a sense of autonomy.

Interviewee: Which of these product do you consider as the most authentic Italian pasta?

Lukas (LCC): I believe that I will say what everybody else says, and that is Barilla.

Interviewee: Why do you believe that?

Lukas: Because I believe their products are the most promoted. And you know, the more you know about it, the more you believe that the pasta is the one you should buy.

Intervieww: But is it like that for you?

Lukas: That depends if I’m going to buy it or just look at it. And if I look now, it’s definitely Barilla that feels the most authentic.

Interviewee: What is it with Barilla that makes you think that it’s the most authentic?

Lukas: I guess it’s just that I recognize it from the commercials, nothing else.

Interviewee: But what about the commercial, what is with the commercial that makes it more authentic?

Lukas: I suppose it’s the blue colour.

Interviewee: And that’s something you associate with authentic Italian pasta?

Lukas: Blue?! [laughs] No, I don’t know what to say, but the more you see it on TV, the more you feel that that’s the one. It’s just like with Colgate.

As illustrated by the above excerpt, Lukas narrative approach to assess authenticity in the Barilla pasta is different from Torvalds. It appears as if Lukas has no apparent need to decommodify the product and create a personalized meaning in his assessment of authenticity. He sees no problem in that his perceptions are given to him through commercials, and rather appears to appreciate this ready-given subjectivity. The TV commercial functions as a

certificate that the product is authentic, and his own judgment is not emphasized. He even appears confused when he imposes a personalized assessment (the blue colour as indicator of authentic Italian pasta), but is quick to reject his judgment. Instead, he once again refers to the meaning given to him through the commercials.

Furthermore, the HCC informants in our study often emphasized their autonomy by contrasting their perceptions of authenticity to what they believed were the perceptions of others.

Interviewee: Who do you think would consider Barilla as the most authentic Italian pasta?

Gustav (HCC): Probably those up north, or single mothers. People in Sweden don't know anything about real food, they just care about the price. Just look at this pasta! I bought it at a small Italian specialty store here in the neighborhood. This is authentic pasta!

Interviewee: Why do you think that it is authentic Italian pasta?

Gustav: I mean, where can you find a product like this? It is rare, di Penco imports it directly from Italy.

Gustav's narrative approach to authenticity projects that he is looking for a sense of personal uniqueness in contrast to the "depersonalized" milieu that he perceives Sweden to be. Throughout the interview, he emphasizes his autonomous approach of constructing authenticity by contrasting to others. Thus, this desire for authenticity is not a generic form of uniqueness, but is projected as a specific sign of distinction from particular social beings. For example, he contrasts his perceptions of authenticity with what he believes is the perception among people such as "single mothers", "those up north", "price minded consumers" and "families with a lot of kids". In drawing parallels to these others, Gustav reinforces his perceived self-identity as an autonomous consumer, whose perceptions are different from others. In contrast, the LCC informants did generally not contrast their perceptions of authenticity to what they believed were the perception of others. As such, it appeared that the HCC informants used conceptions of authenticity to distinguish themselves from others, a tendency that was not found among the LCC informants. Thus, the HCC informants projected that their perceptions were *different* from others; whereas the LCC informants projected that their perceptions were *similar* to others.

4.4.2 Critical towards the marketer versus critical towards the unknown

When assessing the authenticity of the products presented, all informants rejected some of the products as being inauthentic. However, we could identify that the LCC and HCC informants rejected claims of authenticity for different reasons. In general, when the HCC informants rejected products, they did so by claiming that the marketer was too “obtrusive” in their marketing, and used “stereotyped images”. In contrast, the LCC informants did not appear to be concerned with such images, and rather tended to reject products for the reason that they were unknown or unfamiliar to them.

Following this, the HCC informants were highly cautious about all overt claims of authenticity made by the marketer. For example, claims on the package, such as being the “original” or being a “genuine” product, were met with suspicion. Instead, they viewed these types of claims as “stupefying” and “for beginners”.

Jim (HCC): “Original? [Looking at Santa Maria tortilla brenda]. Then it’s not original, that’s a known fact.”

Gustav (HCC): “Olive oil can preferably be used for salad dressings” [reading on Bertolli olive oil bottle]. That you don’t want! That’s for those who wonder, “what is olive oil?”

Consequently, the HCC informants were positive about products that did not make any overt claims of being an “original”. In these cases, they could project that they themselves could draw the conclusion that it was “authentic”, rather than being handed the subjective meaning of the product to them. A similar logic was applied when the HCC informants perceived that authenticity was contrived or mediated. When they perceived that the authenticity of a product was contrived, they commonly applied an ironic tone and emphasized how “fooled” the Swedish consumers are by marketers. One example include what the informant Ewa-Britt perceived as a stereotyped image of Italy.

Ewa-Britt (HCC): You know what really bugs me? Have you seen this Barilla commercial that’s been on TV lately?

Interviewee: Yeah...

Ewa-Britt: It’s so irritating! It’s so cliché... You know, “pasta made with mamas recipes” and slick Italians. And as if real Italian chefs would use Barilla! It’s so stupid, it feels outdated.

These perceptions of contrived authenticity abruptly inflicted on the HCC informants assessment of the authenticity of a product. The informant Jim even went as far as rejecting the claims of authenticity made by all products that we presented to him. Drawing upon his experiences gained in his past profession as a chief editor for a magazine, he believed that he knew all the “tricks used by marketers”. Following this, Jim continuously aimed to depict all the tricks used by the marketer to create an aura of authenticity. The only instances in which Jim seemed to ascribe the meaning of authenticity to a product, was when he had seen the actual product being produced.

This cynicism towards marketers was not as present among the LCC informants. They made no comments on claims such as “original” or “authentic”. However, they considered products as inauthentic when they had never before seen or consumed the product and did not know anyone who had talked about or consumed the product. That the product was well established in the Swedish market, and that the informant had experience of it, appeared as central in their assessment.

Göran (LCC): I have been to Italy several times, and If you have been there, you know that Italian pasta is not good, but Italy is pasta. But if I could choose freely, I would say that Kungsörnen is the most authentic pasta. It's the pasta you've have been raised with.

Interviewee: So it fees more authentic if it's been around for a while?

Göran: Yeah, I feel that. New pasta, I just don't know...

Interviewee: So the history aspect is one thing that makes you consider Barilla as a more authentic pasta than Zeta?

Göran: Yeah, if you go into town and meet somebody you know, and say 'I've eaten a package of Barilla', they know what I'm talking about. If I instead would say 'I've eaten a package of Zeta' they would just go 'A what?!'. That might as well be a bad chocolate bar or something.

Even though all LCC informants are not as reluctant to unfamiliar products as Göran, there was a general tendency to disavow products that were unknown for them. When ascribing the meaning of inauthentic to a product, these informants tend to base this on what they perceive as “unfamiliar”, “strange” or “weird”. This springs to surface when the informants contrast these products with products that they have known since long, seen on TV or have an experience of consuming the product.

4.4.3 Novelty versus familiarity

A third narrative factor that differed between the HCC and the LCC informants were their appreciation for new things. Whereas the novelty factor appeared to be central for the HCC informants to ascribe a regional food product as authentic, the LCC informants tended to find authenticity in familiarity. Thus, this aspect is similar to the one described above, yet distinct and deserves further explanation.

In particular, the HCC informant's tendency to perceive something as authentic was visible when they presented their own products, or discussed other experiences connected to the consumption of regional food.

Gustav (HCC): In this eighties, I brought masses of olive oil from my vacations in Portugal. At this time, you couldn't find olive oil in Sweden, so you had to bring it yourself.

In similar veins as Gustav, the other HCC informants frequently state that they are early to adopt new kinds of food products. They actively searched for information about new products, and they become interested when they saw unknown products when shopping for groceries.

Ewa-Britt (HCC): I think that Zeta is a really interesting brand. They constantly introduce new products that shows different sides of the Italian cuisine. I think that's one aspect of why I think that this olive oil [Zeta] feels more authentic.

The HCC informants further expressed that they sought rare regional food products. Products that were not yet available in the major Swedish grocery retailers appeared to be perceived as more authentic.

Torvald (HCC): This is an authentic product! [shows a small bottle of olive oil]. I found this in a little shop here nearby, where they have really exiting products. They take in small amounts of really good products that are not available anywhere else. It's even got the "medial d'or" in France this year, and I know that not just any product will get that reward.

Following this, authenticity for the HCC informants seem to involve finding novelties that has not yet been adopted by the masses. This can further be related to these informants tendency to contrast their perceptions of authenticity to that of others. As these products were described as being hard to find, it can be read that they believe that they have ascribed the meaning of

authenticity to products that few others have. These “backstage” experiences of regional food were frequently discussed. In the following example, Torvald describes such an experience:

Torvald (HCC): I got to know a guy when I was in France. His mother came from a small village in Italy called Casacali. I got the possibility to visit him in this village, which only consisted of ten houses. His uncle grew olives, and he showed the whole production process and all the big jars where they preserved the oil. It was really interesting to see all this, and I brought a lot of olive oil back to Sweden.

In contrast to the HCC informants, the LCC informants appeared less inclined to ascribe the meaning of authenticity to products that were new. Rather, they appeared to ascribe this meaning to products that had a long history in the Swedish market, and were well accepted in their social sphere.

Interviewee: Why do you think that Barilla is authentic Italian pasta?
Linda (LCC): It's what I've known since long, it's what everybody uses, and that's what my mother always bought. I guess it's as simple as that.
Interviewee: But if you more specific, what is about Barilla that makes it authentic?
Linda: Hmm... it's just a feeling I get. I know that it has been in the cupboard at home, and that makes it feel more genuine, more authentic.

Moreover, in contrast to the HCC informants, the LCC informants did not explicitly use experiences abroad as reference points when assessing authenticity. Following this, these new food experiences did not appear to be important, or even appreciated.

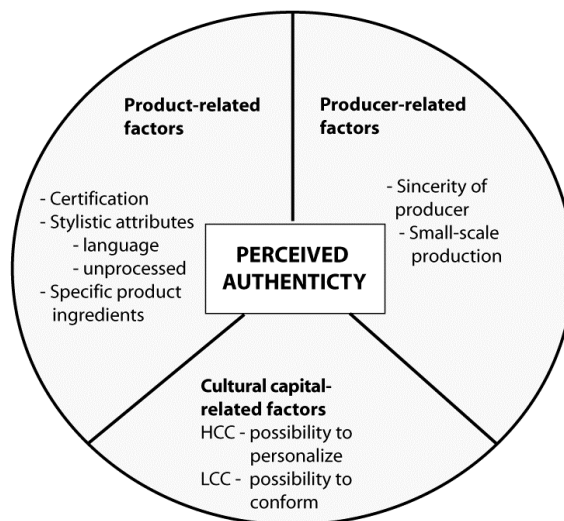
- DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS -

The findings of our study indicate that the concept of authenticity can be related to regional food brands. It shows that conceptions of authenticity does not spring from a single source, but is perceived through a multitude of sources, in dialectic between the subject (the informant) and the object (the product). As such, these findings correlates with other studies that argues for this perspective on authenticity (f. ex Goffman, in MacCannell, 1973; Peterson, 1997; Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

5.1 Dimensions of authenticity

Five general dimensions were identified as significant for perceived authenticity in regional food brands. It is revealed that the dimensions of authentic regional food products are: *a*) Certification, *b*) Stylistic attributes (language and unprocessed appearance), *c*) Specific product ingredients, *d*) Sincerity of producer, *e*) Small-scale production. The dimensions identified project both similarities and differences to studies on authenticity in other contexts. Figure 4 presents how these sources interdependently form the individual perception of authenticity in regional food brands.

FIGURE 4
Consumers' perception of authenticity in regional food brands



Our study indicates that perceptions of authenticity are substantially higher where there is the presence of an authority that provides a certificate of its authenticity. The finding that certification provided by institutions independent of the marketer enhanced perceptions of authenticity was also identified in Bruner (1994), Littrel (1995) and Kuznesof *et al* (1997). However, in contrast to these studies, our study shows that these institutions may take various forms, and do not necessarily need to be governmental institutions, but can take the form of restaurants and acquaintances. Given these findings, we believe that producers aiming to be perceived as authentic regional food products may thrive from establishing their brands within appreciated institution that are trusted in the market segment.

The finding that certain stylistic attributes of the product enhanced perceptions of authenticity was also discussed in for example Chhabra (2005) and Beverland (2005). In similarity with these studies, an unprocessed or old appearance of the market offering enhanced perceived authenticity. One explanation for why an unprocessed look is connected to authenticity is given by Lowenthal (in Grayson & Martinec, 2004). The author suggests that, because authentic things are frequently presented as being old and worn, people have a hard time granting authenticity to new-looking things, even if they are in fact old. “Because we feel that authentic things should look old, we may forget that they originally looked new”, the author argues. However, an explanation for this reference might be that this correlated with the informants’ general picture of the regions that the presented products claimed to origin from. It is possible that if we for example would have included American products, other stylistic attributes would be perceived as authentic.

That small-scale and handcraft methods is considered to enhance perceptions of authenticity has also been discussed by Goffman (in MacCannell, 1973), Littrell *et al* (1993) and Cohen (1998). However, in difference to the context in which these studies have been performed, the present study entails products that are mass-produced in an industrial setting. Still, our informant’s discussed perceived differences in what grade that the product was “mass-produced” or “industrialized”; perceptions that influenced the overall perceived authenticity. Interestingly, these perceptions were often not based on what the informants explicitly knew, but rather from the impression they got from seeing the product. Thus, it is arguable that these perceptions are interlinked with other dimensions of the brand.

The present study further shows that authenticity in regional food brands came in two forms, indexical and iconical. Grayson & Martinec (2004) discusses the relative importance and effects of these cues. The authors argue that neither of the form can be excluded in order for a market offering to be perceived as authentic. Moreover, it is possible that, since iconical authenticity is connected to the phenomenological experience of senses, it might be that these cues are the most vivid for the consumer to perceive authenticity. Our study indicates that both iconical and indexical authenticity are needed for a market offering to be perceived as authentic. In cases where a product was perceived as being indexically authentic, but not iconically authentic, the overall assessment was negative. The opposite was also true. For example, even though the Scandinavian Import's tortilla generally correlated most with the informant's iconical image of authentic tortilla bread, the lack of indexical proof resulted in that several informants deemed it as inauthentic.

The similarities with previous studies indicate that there exists an “authenticity discourse”, thus general conceptions of what constitutes an authentic market offering, which transcends industry context. However, this may be due to that these industry contexts projects similarities with regional food. For example, the logic in wine production (as described by Beverland, 2005 & 2006) appeared to have several similarities with the perceived authenticity in regional foods. Thus, it could be argued that other cues would be found in other industry contexts.

5.2 Implications of cultural capital

Informants with different amount of cultural capital resources were included in this study to further explore Holt's (1998) notion that consumers with different amount of cultural capital resources searched for different cues of authenticity. It was found that our informants did not primarily assess authenticity by using different cues, but rather in their relation to the concept. In this sense, it extends and clarifies Holt's notion. Furthermore, recent research in marketing has proclaimed that the search for authenticity is a salient issue in the “post-modern world” (f. ex. Brown *et al*, 2003; Godin, 2006). Our study indicates that this search is primarily undertaken by the HCC informants and less evident among the LCC informants.

As discussed in the findings, a central aspect for the HCC informants was to project a sense of autonomy in their assessment of authenticity. This was undertaken by decommoifying the presented products, to be liberated from the marketer's claims and by searching for yet

uncommodified products. Holt (1998) argues, that since products are so widely available in today's society, their consumption *per se* does not distinguish the higher cultural classes from the lower. As such, consumers with a high amount of cultural capital constantly apply narrative strategies to project that they are not like others. In doing so, applying a sense of "connoisseurship" becomes central. As such, authenticity appears only when these informants believe that they can apply a personal meaning to the product, and are reluctant in doing so when this opportunity does not exist. This perspective may further help to explain why obtrusive claims of authenticity, such as being the "original", was so rejected by the informants in our study. In relation to findings in Schouten & McAlexander (1995), identification with being "in the know" rather than "an amateur" affected perceived authenticity, and in particular, those "in the know" reject what they believe are stereotyped images. Thus, these claims are in contrast to the characteristics of the HCC informants in two ways. First, the perceived "stereotyped" images contrast with their perceived self-identity. Second, as the subjectivity of the product is already given to these informants, they cannot dictate the meaning themselves.

On the other hand, the LCC informants included in our study projected no apparent wish to be autonomous when assessing authenticity in regional food brands. Rather, they projected a wish to conform to the opinion of the majority, and sought authenticity in what they believed was similar to that of "everybody else". As "familiarity" appeared to be a central aspect of their perceptions of authenticity, they projected no wish to seek for authentic regional food that was not available in the major retailers. According to Holt (1998) subjectivity for consumers with a low level of cultural capital resources does not require asserting individuality in relation to mass culture normative judgements. As such, in contrast to the HCC consumers, the LCC consumers see no contradiction in perceived self-identity in relation to subjectivity, mass consumer goods and the normal conventions. According to Øygard (2000), consumers with a low amount of cultural capital resources are not as critical to marketer's claims, as they are not as concerned with imposing a subjective meaning into products. Moreover, Øygard (*ibid.*) argues that these consumers do not participate in a social sphere where subjectivity is constructed through individuated consumption patterns nor do they strive to become connoisseurs. As such, the aesthetic aspect that "authenticity" seems to entail does not seem to be valued among the LCC informants. Seen from this perspective, developing knowledge and practices to decommodify objects serves no apparent function for these informants. Rather, they seem to accept the products as they are, and instead appreciate

other values found in the brands. However, as noted by Holt (1998), this tendency among the LCC to rely on the dominant discourses should in no means be considered as less important in the construction of a coherent self-narrative. Instead, their identification with the dominant notions of authenticity provides them with a security that they are accepted members of the society. In fact, mass goods and conventions often provide useful resources from which a local identity is constructed (ibid.).

Drawing upon findings by Goffman (in MacCannell, 1973) we argue that similarities can be found between his distinction of the “tourist” from the “traveller” and the concept of HCC and LCC informants. In similarity to the “travellers”, the HCC informants in our study appeared to value and define authenticity in relation to both how many other “tourists” that have discover it, and the sense of “backstage” experience that the market offering entails. As they project a wish to find rare and exotic products, which in turn are labelled as more authentic, it indicates that they continuously seek for authentic experiences that they believe are not yet adopted by the masses. This logic of searching for authenticity in rare and unexploited products was not present among the LCC informants included in our study. They did not project a wish to seek out “backstage” experiences, but rather appeared to appreciate dimensions of authenticity that are generally more accepted and acknowledged. In chapter three, we discussed that the concept of traveller and tourist could be further connected to McCracken’s concept of “chase and flight” (in Corrigan, 1997). Seen from this perspective, we assume that it is important for the HCC informants to ascribe the meaning of authenticity to market offerings not yet available for the masses or accepted by these. As such, they can distinguish their perceptions of authenticity in relation to what they believe are the perceptions of others. However, this perspective also entails the paradox of authenticity. As described by both Goffman and McCracken, as soon as an object is marked as authentic, it leaps a risk of losing it’s authenticity for certain consumers. In our study, this was visible through for example the HCC informants rejection of obtrusive claims of authenticity. Moreover, seen from this perspective, it is assumable that conceptions of authenticity for the HCC informants is highly time bound. As these new marks of authentic market offerings are sought out by consumers in lower cultural classes, the higher cultural classes will move on to products that are not yet exploited and hence, perceived as more authentic. Thus, as long as authenticity is a valuable concept within their field, this chase and flight logic will most likely continue.

The distinction of consumers with various degrees of cultural capital resources can further be explained in relation to discussions on the post-modern consumer, as described by for example Holt (1998: 2002), Firat (1993), Goulding (1998). Holt (2002) argues that the post-modern consumer seek liberation from the commercial sphere by becoming “cultural producers”. In this process, they use brands as cultural resources, from which they create their own meaning. Thus, rather than letting the brands dictate the meaning, they aim dictate the meaning themselves. Drawing upon the findings in our study, these characteristics appear to apply for the HCC informants, but less so for the LCC informants. As the LCC informants included in our study did not project a wish to use the authenticity aspect as a cultural resource in their self-narratives, the characteristics of the post-modern consumer was not as apparent when analyzing these.

5.3 Authenticity in regional food brands

The purpose of the present thesis was to extend knowledge on how consumers come to perceive a regional food brand as authentic. The study advances this knowledge in several aspects, and resulting branding implications can be drawn. An initial finding in this study that deserves attention is that brand managers are not the sole creators of the meaning of authenticity. Rather, it must be understood as created in dialectic between consumers and marketers, influenced by a multitude of disparate sources. Regional food brands making claims of authenticity should continually blend these sources to create rich brand meanings for the market segment. The important thing appears to be that consumers perceive the aspects of authenticity as real, whether those aspects are really authentic or not.

The finding that authenticity is created in a subject-object process, influenced by a multitude of sources, results in that the term authenticity imposes disparate meanings to different consumers. In general, for the LCC informants in our study, it appears as an aspect of a brand not much cared for, whereas it for the HCC informants seems to impose a deeper meaning; a cultural resource that can be used to reinforce and foster cultural capital and social affiliation. Thus, in particular, this study indicates that authenticity as depicted in this study may be of particular value to the consumers with a high degree of cultural capital resources. However, it should be acknowledged that there is a possibility that this study has failed in grasping the whole picture of the phenomena, and that authenticity is valued by the LCC informants as

well, but in another sense. Future studies could benefit from using more open approaches and not impose any pre-given meaning of authenticity.

The finding that fiction influences perceived authenticity further contributes to the research that argues that authenticity is mediated (f. ex Goffman, in MacCannell, 1973; Peterson 1997). This can be further related to Baudrillard's concept of "hyperreality" (in Grayson & Martinec, 2004) who argues that in the present society, there is no point in distinguishing between fiction and reality, as the concepts have become blurred. However, this finding further indicates that marketers have possibilities to claim authenticity as long as they appear real in the market segment, rather than actually being real. It should further be discussed what authenticity that is actually sought by the consumers. Drawing upon the findings in this study, it appears as if the informants have somewhat vague images of what actually constitutes the "original", and constitutes instead a picture that evolves and is mutually adapted over time. Thus, it is debatable if what is sought is actually the "original" or if it rather is a stylized version of the original. Goffman (in MacCannell, 1973) discusses these issues, and argues that consumers seldom search the "true reality". As shown in his study, when tourists perceived that they came to close to the authentic core (for example, being projected to poverty), the authentic experience became more than what they sought for. Thus, there appears to be a balance between "mediated authenticity" and "true authenticity", a balance that needs to be adapted to the needs and wants of the specific market segment. Thus, it is possible that even the most cynical consumers do not seek the "real" regional food (as it is consumed in the country of origin), but rather a stylized version of the original. As such, it is possible that marketing products that in fact *are* real may not necessarily result in them being perceived as such in the new context.

An interesting finding in this study that projects possibilities for marketers making claims of authenticity was that the inherent contradiction between authenticity and mass-production did not always cause all products to be deemed as inauthentic. Even though the informants may have been aware that some authenticity was "contrived", they did accept some of these techniques. What is important is that the informant did not immediately become aware of that the authenticity was staged. Thus, producing regional food brands looking "unprocessed" may enhance the possibilities of the brand to become perceived as authentic. Moreover, the findings in this study indicates that authentic regional food brands do not necessarily have to be brands with a long history, nor products that have their roots in the specific region (as also

discussed by Beverland, 2005 and Grayson & Martinec 2004). In particular, Zeta appeared as an interesting example of a brand that is not rooted in the claimed origin, but nevertheless perceived as being the most authentic brand among the majority of our informants. These findings indicate that other aspects of regional food prove to be as important, and further projects possibilities for marketers. As such, the concept of “staged authenticity” discussed in other contexts (f. ex Peterson, 1997; Goffman in MacCannell, 1973; Littrel, 1995; Xie & Wall, 2002) may be possible to apply within the market for regional food brands.

Drawing upon the above discussion, what is perceived as authentic changes over time. As such, authenticity does not imply “no change”. Managing around an authentic core while remaining relevant in the marketplace (Kapferer 2004) may prove particularly demanding for the consumers with high amounts of cultural capital resources, as this study indicates that these consumers *demand* change. As authentic images represent an interplay between producers, commercial interests, competitors and consumers (as discussed by Peterson 19997), an authentic image need to be constantly adapted and updated. Indications of how producers have failed in updating their image as authentic were present among the HCC informants, who rejected Barilla’s claims as stereotyped and outdated. Moreover, a central aspect for the HCC informants to perceive a brand as authentic was that it’s subjectivity was not given. A lesson for brand managers that can be drawn from this, is that subtlety in claims of authenticity must be made. Brand managers should provide the consumers with a high degree of cultural capital possibilities of using them as cultural resources, and allowing freedom for their own definition of it’s authenticity. However, this task is demanding, and demands insight into the minds of the consumers. Thus, what appears important is that the message draws on attributes that indicate authenticity (such as those outlined in this study), but focus on demonstrating the authenticity through sincerity and devotion.

Consequently, making claims of authenticity towards consumers with a high amount of cultural capital resources demands projecting an image of being up-to-date (novel and exotic), apply subtlety and being able balance between profitability and sincerity. As described by numerous researchers (McAlexander & Schouten, 1995; Beverland, 2005; Muniz & O’Guinn, 1991; Kapferer, 2004), this balance is hard. Further studies could benefit from exploring in what cases consumers with high cultural capital resources perceive that the authenticity is lost, and thus to what extent a brand can extend and what actions that are accepted. However, the case of Zeta projects an interesting example. This brand, which appeared as being highly

regarded by the HCC informants, is the most sold olive oil in Sweden, and can as such not be considered as a “niche” or “exclusive” brand. So how has Zeta gained the trust of being authentic producer among the HCC informants? Holt (2002) argues that for the post-modern consumer to perceive a brand as authentic, it must appear “transparent”. Thus, the consumers must be able to get a glance that what the producer states actually correlates with reality. The usage of Fernando di Luca might therefore be a possible explanation for this success. As the focus is removed from the products themselves, and instead aim to project an image of the company behind the brand, the consumers are able to glance at what goes backstage. As references to Fernando di Luca as an authoritative voice was frequent among the HCC consumers, this might be a possible explanation. Another explanation might be the high degree of product innovation that characterizes Zeta. As the producer has many different brands at different price levels, the HCC informants tended to believe that the brand was continuously seeking for novelty and exoticism. As such, it could be argued that the brand functions as an “extended arm” for their own activities, which involves a high interest to visit small food-producers when abroad. Thus, Zeta gives them a glimpse into the “backstage” regions of Italy, experiences that they can relate to.

As the findings in this study indicates that authenticity is not a brand aspect valued by consumers with a low amount of cultural capital resources, it could be argued whether marketing regional food products as authentic to these consumers is recommendable. Still, the LCC informants were aware of concepts relating to authenticity in regional food products, and as such, it appears to simplistic to neglect that consumers with a low level of cultural capital resources do not value authenticity. As we have discussed in the present thesis, the term can be interpreted in many different ways, imposing different aspects. Perhaps it is that consumers with a low level of cultural capital resources *do* seek authenticity, but not in accordance to the general discourse of authenticity (as described above). Further studies may benefit from using a more explorative approach, where the term “authenticity” is not mentioned at all. Using this approach, the consumer’s own definitions of the term could appear, and such a study may project different results than the present.

The bottom line of this present thesis is that making claims of authenticity in regional food brands appears as a complex task. As the consumers gather their pictures of authenticity from diverse sources, marketers need to be in control and in line with the perceptions held in the market segment. This involves appearing sincere and devoted, providing product attributes

that contribute to the perceived sincerity and adapt the marketing messages to suit the lives of the consumers. Beverland (2005) and Holt (2002) that marketers in this process must increasingly integrate into communities, and spend more time understanding how they use the products. As such, it is argued that marketers making claims of authenticity must consider themselves as being “in the market” as opposed to being “off the market”. Thus, even if consumers may identify with certain attributes of authenticity, the impact of these depends on the attitudes and values within a given community of consumers. Therefore, the marketer must apply “impression management”, projecting an image of the brand that is sought for, and downplaying aspects that are not sought for. As such, they should engage in the dialectic of authenticity, and adapt as the meaning of authenticity evolves.

5.4 Research limitations and future research

An initial question concerning the results of this study is how we have approached the term authenticity, and what it actually imposes. Steiner & Reisinger (2006:b) argues that the term “authenticity” is itself so contradictory that they believe that it’s unusable within marketing research. The authors argue that since the term has been used in many different ways, its implications has been contradictory. Further, since the concept is highly connected to the self-identity, the authors argue that the term has to been redefined in order for it to be practically applied. Following this, the authors argue that the term should be more considered as a philosophical issue that relates to existentialism. Still, drawing upon the findings in our study, we argue that the term may be applicable and result in concrete managerial implications. However, future studies could benefit from researching authenticity in relation to other aspects of the brand that build up the brand equity.

Another aspect not considered in this study is that authenticity must be understood in relation to the positioning of the firm. Does the brand compete on being authentic, or are other brand aspects emphasized? Future studies could benefit from both researching what strategies a brand aiming to establish a competitive advantage through authenticity applies, and how these efforts are perceived by the consumers. It could further be interesting to study how a brand has succeeded in remaining authentic over time, and in what extent adaptations to evolving trends has been made.

Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that an attempt to conceptualize the term, as illustrated in this thesis, may create an illusion that the dimensions of authenticity can be

separated and remain stable over time. As have been found in previous studies of authenticity (Peterson 1997, Grayson & Martinec 2004, Daniel 1996, Beverland 2006), what is considered as an “authentic” representation of some kind changes dramatically over time. Therefore, the results presented in this thesis should be considered as providing a snapshot of the reality, as it appeared for the informants at the time of being interviewed.

Moreover, a limitation in our study concerns the products presented to the informants, and the context that these interviews were undertaken in. As symbolic interactionism proposes, the results generated from such a research situation is dependent on the factors presented. As such, the similarities between the products used in this study may have caused less aspects of authenticity to crystallize than would have been the case if more different products would have been used. For example, including more expensive products might have generated further knowledge on whether this aspect enhanced perceptions of authenticity, either in the price itself or attributes that were a result of the price premium charged (such as quality of ingredients). Further studies could apply such an approach and investigate a specific regional product group. Potentially, this could generate a deeper understanding for what attributes that are considered as enhancing perceived authenticity for that specific product group. Given these limitations, the results presented in the present thesis should not be considered as transferable to other contexts. Rather, we believe that it could function as an inspirational source for future research.

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Appendix A – Product description

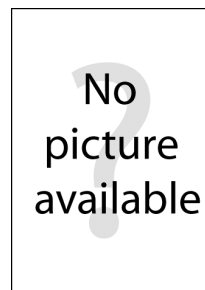
1. Pasta group



Produced by: Barilla
Produced in: Italy
Sold in country of origin: Yes
Net weight: 500 gram



Produced by: Zeta
Produced in: Italy
Sold in country of origin: No
Net weight: 250 grams



Produced by: ICA
Produced in: Italy
Sold in country of origin: No
Net weight: 250 grams

2. Feta cheese group



Produced by: FAGE
Produced in: Greece
Sold in country of origin: Yes
Net weight: 200 gram



Produced by: Arla
Produced in: Greece
Sold in country of origin: No
Net weight: 200 gram



Produced by: Fontana
Produced in: Greece
Sold in country of origin: No
Net weight: 200 gram

3. Tortilla breads group



Produced by: Herdez
(Scandinavian imports)
Produced in: Mexico
Sold in country of origin: Yes
Net weight: 400 gram



Produced by: General Mills
Produced in: Sweden
Sold in country of origin: No
Net weight: 350 gram



Produced by: Santa Maria
Produced in: Sweden
Sold in country of origin: No
Net weight: 380 gram

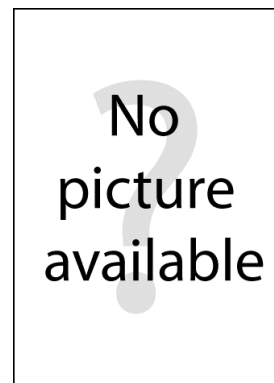
4. Olive oil group



Produced by: Bertolli
Produced in: Italy
Sold in country of origin: Yes
Net weight: 0,5 l



Produced by: Zeta
Produced in: Italy
Sold in country of origin: No
Net weight: 0,5 l



Produced by: ICA
Produced in: Italy
Sold in country of origin: No
Net weight: 0,5 l

Appendix B - Interview guide

Respondents background

1. Age
2. Current occupation
3. Education (type of schools)
4. Father and mother's occupation (level of managerial and/or cultural production)
5. Father and mother's education (type of schools)

(The product group is presented)

Product experiences

1. How often is the type of product consumed?
2. How is the product consumed? (f. ex what dishes prepared)
3. In what occasions is the type of product consumed? (f. ex individual consumption versus social, day-to-day or special occasions)
4. What additional experiences does the informant have about the product group product group? (f. ex travels, restaurants, memories, friends etc.)

Perceived authenticity

1. Which of these products would you describe as the most authentic/real/genuine Italian/Mexican/Greek – Pasta/Olive oil/tortilla bread/Feta cheese?
 - a. Why is it the most authentic?
 - b. What makes it the most authentic?
 - c. Which is the least authentic? Why?
 - d. In what respects do the products presented differ?
2. Is authenticity important for this product group? Why or why not?
3. If a producer would like to claim that they are “authentic ...”, what would you expect from that product?
4. Whom do the informant believe chooses the different product groups as the most authentic/genuine/real?

(repeat from product group is presented)

If the informant has not shown any own products during the interview, ask for him or her to show a product that he or she perceives as authentic. Ask to explain why.