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Authenticity in Cause-Related Marketing

A Case Study of The Estée Lauder Companies'
Annual Breast Cancer Campaign

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Authenticity in Cause-Related Marketing

- *A Case Study of The Estée Lauder Companies' Annual Breast Cancer Campaign*

By Jenny Holthe Rognes

Abstract:

I den moderne forbrugsverden står forbrugerne overfor et overvældende antal brands, der alle forsøger at tiltrække deres respektive målgruppe. På grund af isomorfisme ligner brands mere og mere hinanden, hvorfor de let kan erstattes med substitutter. Ydermere er forbrugerne begyndt at kigge ind bag facaderne hos nutidens brands, og er ligeså begyndt at opdage uønskede faktorer såsom f.eks. miljømæssig uansvarlighed eller udnyttelse af børnearbejde, hvilket fører til bekymringer hos virksomhederne hvad angår det sociale og moralske ansvar, de står overfor. Som et resultat af dette er der sket en stor udvikling inden for fagfeltet *corporate social responsibility* (CSR). Adskillige virksomheder gør derfor brug af *cause-related marketing* (CM) som et kommunikationsværktøj til at differentiere sig på markedet og samtidig tage virksomhedernes sociale ansvar.

Authentic brand communication har udviklet sig til et yderst vigtigt emne i den moderne litteratur om marketing, og behovet for at forstærke det enkelte brand og dets autenticitet er blevet et vigtigt element. Talrige studier har undersøgt, hvordan man udarbejder autentisk brand kommunikation til forbrugeren, samt hvordan brandets kommunikation opfattes. Ønsket om autenticitet ses især i tider med forandringer, usikkerhed og i et stadigt skiftende marked, da forbrugerne søger noget, de kan stole på, som giver dem en form for kontinuitet.

Det overordnede formål med denne undersøgelse er at forstå, hvad der skaber autenticitet i markedsføring. Behovet for at undersøge dette er baseret på moderne markedsføringstendenser og et overvældende antal brands med lignende produkttilbud, der forsøger at indfange forbrugernes

opmærksomhed. Som et kommunikationsværktøj tyer brands til cause-related marketing for at forbedre deres brand image ved at vise virksomhedernes sociale ansvar såvel som at bruge det som et værktøj til at sikre konkurrencefordele. Grunden til, at artiklen undersøger cause-related marketing er baseret på adskillige antagelser i litteraturen om, at der kan være flere faktorer, der bevirker, at forbrugeren oplever en form for modstand eller skepsis over for en sådan markedsføringsindsats. Interessen for at undersøge cause-related marketing i forhold til brand authenticity kom af, at markedsføringslitteratur peger på, at forbrugerene opsøger mere autentiske brands og tilhørende autentiske produkter, da en faktor som autenticitet kan fungere som et værktøj til at afhjælpe forbrugerhensyn såsom pris og produkttilgængelighed. Ydermere kan brand authenticity være med til at skabe dybere tilhørsforhold og affektionsværdi hos forbrugeren.

Introduction

Numerous companies are turning to cause-related marketing (CM) as a tool of communication to differentiate themselves on the market while at the same time taking corporate social responsibility. The concept entails companies communicating their corporate social responsibility through their advertising, packaging, promotion and so on (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001). The idea is to attract consumers wanting to make a difference in society, however, there is a level of consumer skepticism making consumers question and doubt what the company is saying in terms of genuineness and transparency (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001). CM involves businesses linking donation to sales, with the clearly stated goal of mutual benefit, and although CM offers great opportunities for worthy causes (Harvey & Strahilevitz, 2009), it has been considered ineffective for corporations when it comes to sales outcome (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). However, CM serves as an opportunity for brands to stand out from the crowd, take social and/or environmental responsibility and to communicate brand values and identity. Moreover, it is a discipline vastly adopted by companies as a marketing tool to achieve their marketing objectives, while demonstrating a commitment to improving the quality of life in the communities where they operate (Dudovskiy, 2012). Research has addressed the ethical aspects of cause-related marketing, advertising and campaigning, and a potential backlash is that consumers could view an ad campaign as ethically doubtful (Barone et. al. 2000; Chang & Cheng, 2015). Certain consumers perceive a low level of fit between the brand or product and the given cause they support (Chang & Cheng, 2015). Moreover, the potential benefits for a company rely on the assumption that consumers approve of CM and are somehow stimulated to buy the product, and only if new consumers are convinced to buy the product and/or consumers increase their purchase frequency or their purchase quantity, a company will be able to increase sales (Oloko & Balderjahn, 2011), which is why CM is not always considered a sales effort, but rather an exercise to improve or maintain brand image.

Modern marketing literature claim that consumers long for more authentic brands and products (Thompson & Tambyah, 1999; Penaloza, 2000; Holt, 2002; Brown et al., 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Grundlach & Neville, 2012). Thus authenticity has a high value to brand managers as it helps overpowering “consumption considerations such as price and product availability”, offers a “deeper connection with consumers” and simplifies the formation of a “unique brand identity” (Grundlach & Neville, 2012: 486). The desire for authenticity is especially strong in times of change and uncertainty, as consumers search for something to rely on that offers them continuity (Manning, 1988; Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). Additionally, the longing for authenticity is often also seen as a consequence of increasing homogenization of the marketplace (Beverland & Farely, 2010). It can thus be argued

that consumers value authenticity in both the overall brand and the CM campaign itself, and that the CM campaign is in line with the brand.

It is thus of interest to look at how a company communicates CM, and to further investigate what creates authenticity in such a campaign. This research uses Estée Lauder Companies (ELC) as a best practice example and explores how its annual Breast Cancer Campaign operates as CM, and to further understand what components of authenticity is used to create the campaign and how consumers make sense of it.

Focus, Relevance and Aim

The focus is on helping brand managers in answering why running a cause-related marketing campaign can do good for their brand image, and to highlight what it requires in terms of appropriateness and how to match their brand with a cause, and furthermore what factors of authenticity consumers look for in such a campaign. In modern marketing literature, the pressures of companies taking corporate social responsibility is growing, and with a great number of companies practicing CM and in line with consumers becoming more and more brand literate and thus have a growing opinion of how brands should act on the market, it is considered of great relevance that the discipline of CM is investigated in terms of authenticity. The research topic is defined as follows:

The Perception of Authentic Cause-Related Marketing

To investigate on the research topic, three interlinked research questions are presented. Firstly, it is of interest to do a literature review and explore what variables and dimensions of successful brand authenticity exist and to furthermore explore the literature on cause-related marketing. Therefore, the first research question builds on literature and theories, from which presumptions are formulated, and is stated as follows:

Research Question 1 - *What dimensions of brand authenticity and cause-related marketing are known and can be used as a tool to communicate brand identity?*

Secondly, the outcomes of RQ1 are tested on a best practice example from the cosmetic industry, which is chosen because it belongs to the fast-moving consumer goods category, which is identified as products with short life-cycles, which furthermore, accompanied by the fluctuations in consumer tastes, are the reasons why brands need more than just product offerings to stay competitive (Barlett,

2003; Kumar et al., 2006; The Cosmetic Cosmos: A Review of Four Major Players, 2007). A cosmetic brand highly experienced in the discipline of CM is Estée Lauder Companies, which is why their annual Breast Cancer Campaign is used as a best practice example, and has the function to help generalize specific guidelines for the future practice of CM. Additionally, Estée Lauder Companies' Breast Cancer Campaign is the corporation's largest philanthropic initiative, and was founded in 1992 by the late Evelyn H. Lauder along with the iconic Pink Ribbon, which is now a universal symbol of breast cancer awareness (Estée Lauder Companies, 2020). The purpose of research question 2 is to investigate how the best practice example integrates the dimensions that were found as an outcome of RQ1 in their annual CM campaign. The research question reads as follows:

Research Question 2 – *How do Estée Lauder Companies, as a best practice example, integrate the dimensions from RQ1 in their annual Breast Cancer Campaign?*

As a final step of this research, research question 3 is answered, which is concerned with the general deductions and recommendation for the entire field of business. Opportunities as well as challenges and risks facing brands conducting cause-related marketing are discussed and interpreted, and furthermore aims to explain important elements of how to conduct authentic cause-related marketing. This is done by combining the results from RQ2 as well as the findings from qualitative interviews as seen through the lens of Consumer Culture Theory. The research question is stated as follows:

Research Question 3 – *What creates authenticity in cause-related marketing?*

Literature Review

Brand Authenticity

The word 'authenticity' has several definitions, however, it originates from the Latin word 'Authenticus' and the Greek word 'Authentiko' and means that the given thing or concept is 'trustworthy' or 'conforming to an original' (Cappannelli & Cappannelli, 2004). Grayson & Martinec (2004) propose terms like 'reality and truth' to the list of characteristics. Additionally, terms like 'qualities of genuineness', 'not being false or copied' and 'having varied origins' are suggested by Grundlach & Neville (2012). These are all ambiguous terms that are open for interpretation, as mirrored in the literature on the concept brand authenticity.

Furthermore, Grayson and Martinec (2004) argue that few researchers have defined the concept of authenticity in a marketing context in a precise manner, thus it has been used in different ways with different meanings. Hence, authenticity can mean different things to different consumers in different consumption areas. Holt (1998) argues that this is mainly the case since authenticity depends on the consumers' individual cultural capital. Although there is a debate about who and how the terms is to be constituted, where authenticity is generally agreed upon as "a socially constructed concept" and a "co-created phenomenon that resides in the consumer's mind, and in inherent quality" (Gundlach & Neville, 2012: 485). Fritz & Schoenmueller (2016) suggests a definition of brand authenticity as something that can be defined as the perceived consistency of a brand's behavior, reflecting its core values and norms, according to which it is perceived as being true to itself, not undermining its brand essence or substantive nature.

Still, several researchers agree that the quest for authenticity in consumption comes from a lack of "traditional sources of meaning and self-identity that is associated with postmodernity"(Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015: 201). The desire for authenticity is especially strong in times of change and uncertainty, as consumers search for something to rely on that offers them continuity (Manning, 1988; Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). Additionally, the longing for authenticity is often also seen as a consequence of increasing homogenization of the marketplace (Beverland & Farelly, 2010). Authenticity arguably serves as evidence of quality and differentiation to consumers (Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016).

A framework presented by Beverland (2006) addresses factors constituting brand authenticity, and identifies six attributes on how to build an authentic brand: (1) *Heritage & Pedigree*; (2) *Stylistic Consistency*; (3) *Commitment to Quality*; (4) *Relationship to Place*; (5) *Method of production*; (6) *Downplaying Commercial Motives*.

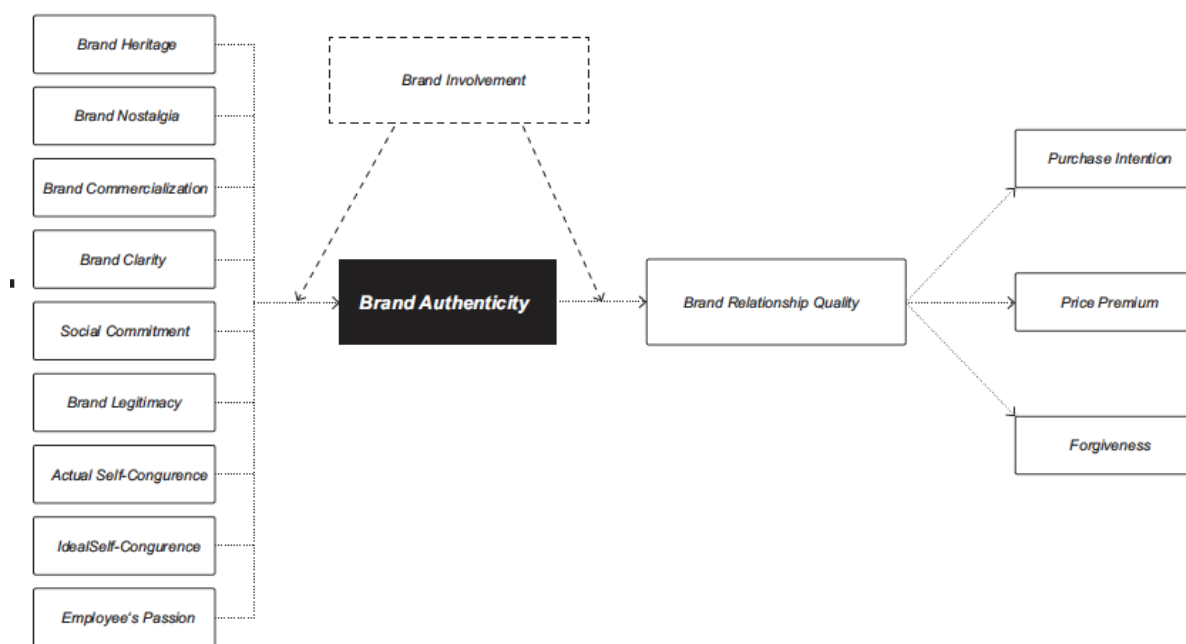
Summarizing the fundamental points of Beverland's (2006) framework, the Heritage & Pedigree attribute should aim to tell a story about the company, its production and history. The second attribute, Stylistic Consistency suggests how brand managers deal with the struggle of changing consumer tastes, and how brands should stay true to their own style, also mentioned by Fritz & Schoenmueller (2016), consumers are longing for something to rely on that offers them continuity. The third attribute, Commitment to Quality, could for instance include investments in research and product development, to help improve the overall quality and experience with the product and thus the brand. Relationship to Place, the fourth attribute, is used as "an association to a region in such a way that consumers infer

specific beliefs and evaluations about it” (Gundlach & Neville , 2012: 487), however, it can be argued that the external communication of this attribute is irrelevant for several brands and product categories, as this could be considered more important in for instance the wine, coffee and furniture industries. The fifth attribute, Method of Production, influences authenticity further, and can be both positive and negative, especially if for instance there are indicators of quality and labor involved. Finally, Downplaying of Commercial Motives describes the marketing or communication of the brand, and should thus present itself without any commercial motives to be judged authentic by consumers. In this framework, Beverland (2006) presents a model that was based on his research of the ultra-premium wine industry, which can bring some limitations to the study. Firstly, the generalizability of the study can be questioned due to its representation of a small percentage of brands and consumers. Secondly, it is not addressed whether or not all the attributes are of the same importance when it comes to building brand authenticity. However, the study is still considered of value due to the limitation of other research providing guidance of how to deliver brand authenticity.

Apart from the points already addressed; how the consumers perceive an authentic brand might be of higher relevance to brand managers within the overall concept of authentic branding. Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann (2015) suggest an integrative four-dimensional framework by analyzing different brands, and furthermore establish four dimensions to serve as guidelines for how to measure consumers’ perceived brand authenticity. Moreover, the framework presented by Fritz & Schoenmueller (2016) integrate nine variables relating to the past, variables encompassing a brand’s virtuousness and the perceived cultural fit, making this a useful framework when analyzing how a brand’s authenticity enhance the quality of consumer-brand relationships.

Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann (2015) established four dimensions of measuring perceived brand authenticity. The first dimension is called *continuity*, and reflects a brand’s historicity, timelessness and ability to overcome trends (Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015). The second dimension, *credibility*, reflect a brand’s willingness to live up to its promise, and thus define the brand’s transparency and honesty (Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015). The third dimension is called *integrity*, and mirrors the brand’s intensions and values in their way of communicating (Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015). Finally, the last and forth dimension, *symbolism*, describes how authentic brands that reflect values that consumers consider important, can help them personally in constructing their identity (Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015).

The second framework of perceived brand authenticity is by Fritz & Schoenmueller (2016) and consist of several interlinked variables and is the framework of choice for the second part of the analysis. The first variable, *brand heritage*, mirrors the brand’s strategic positioning on its heritage. The second variable, *brand nostalgia*, is defined as the consumer’s perception of the nostalgic brand staging and focuses on the brand itself rather than consumer preferences. The third variable is *brand commercialization* and focuses on the process by which brands subordinate their values and norms to interests of profit maximization. The fourth variable, *brand clarity*, depicts the communicated comprehensibility of the brand’s communication style. A company’s *social commitment* represents the company’s assumption of social responsibility. *Brand legitimacy*, a variable describing the consumer brand fit, is the brand’s degree of integration in the set of values and norms shared by a community. The variables *actual* and *ideal self-congruence* refer to the consumer’s actual self-image and ideal self-image. The final variable, *employee’s passion*, refers to the perceived enthusiasm and eagerness of the brand’s employees (Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). Their framework is illustrated as follows:



(Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016).

Finally, brand authenticity is subjectively constructed and how it is perceived can be different depending on the consumers’ cultural capital and require cognitive effort.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Traditionally, companies were expected to behave as economic entities destined to make profits in their accountability to themselves and shareholders, however, there has been a shift towards issues of corporate social responsibility (CSR), and thus alters traditional thinking which suggests that instead, companies are expected to demonstrate levels of accountability towards the whole of society (Cornelissen, 2014). Reinhardt et al. (2008) and Bénabou & Tirole (2009) suggested a standard definition of CSR as sacrificing profits in the social interest. For there to be a sacrifice, the company must go beyond its legal and contractual obligations, on a voluntary basis. CSR thereby embraces a wide range of behaviors such as being employee friendly, environmentally friendly, mindful of ethics, respectful of communities and even investor friendly (Khan, Khan, Ahmed, & Ali, 2012).

Regardless of underlying motives of CSR initiatives, research has found that they are related to reputational returns and an overall better financial performance (Cornelissen, 2014).

Cause-Related Marketing

Cause-related marketing is an interesting discipline and can be considered a manifestation of the alignment of corporate philanthropy and enlightened business interest. Varadarajan & Menon (1988) were the first to define cause-related marketing as the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the company to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue, providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives. In short, this definition refers to a transaction-based perspective, and thus require a consumer's purchase for a donation to be triggered off. The benefits of cause-related marketing rely on the assumption that consumers approve of cause-related marketing, and that they somehow are stimulated by the product that trigger the donation (Oloko & Balderjahn, 2011). The first case of cause-related marketing was registered in 1983, when American Express promised to help renovate the Statue of Liberty by donating a penny for each use of its single charge card and a dollar for each new card issued in the U.S. This led to a 28% increase in card usage and raised a \$1.7 million contribution to the Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation (Varadarajaan & Menon, 1988).

Research has addressed the ethical aspects of cause-related marketing advertising and campaigning, and a potential backlash is that consumers could view an ad campaign as ethically doubtful (Barone et. al. 2000; Chang & Cheng, 2015). Certain consumers perceive a low level of fit between the brand

or product and the given cause they support (Chang & Cheng, 2015). Chang and Cheng (2015) investigated consumer psychographics on skepticism toward cause-related marketing in order to figure out what types of consumers are more prone to be skeptical towards a cause-related marketing campaign. Different motives for participating in cause-related marketing campaign have been distinguished as extrinsic motives (to e.g. increase profits or enhance a brand's reputation) and intrinsic motives (e.g. concern about the social cause) (Cui, Trent, Sullivan, & Matiru, 2003). It can be argued that companies with an extrinsic motive are more prone to consumer skepticism, as their motivations for fund-raising are conducted in self-interest.

New psychological traits including shopping orientation (*hedonistic* vs. *utilitarian*) and mindset (*individualistic* vs. *collectivistic*) are considered antecedents, as these traits are related to personal motives and thus lead to specific purchasing behavior (Chang & Cheng, 2015). A hedonistic shopping orientation relates to the potential entertainment and emotional value of shopping (Chang & Cheng, 2015; Bellenger et. al. 1976). In contrast, a utilitarian shopping orientation is described as rational, task-related and practical (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Chang & Cheng, 2015). However, it is relevant to mention that hedonism and utilitarianism are not mutually exclusive, and that consumers may manifest both types of shopping orientation in one shopping trip (Babin et. al. 1994; Chang & Cheng, 2015). It is suggested that hedonism is estimated to negatively influence consumer skepticism towards advertising, as hedonic consumption is more likely to arouse both guilt and pleasure (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). Moreover, it is suggested that consumers could use a donation to rationalize a hedonic purchase, thus overcoming cognitive dissonance (Polonsky & Wood, 2001). Consumers with a utilitarian shopping orientation are considered to process cause-related marketing campaigns and advertisements in more detail and process information more critically, thus making them evaluate the degree to which the advertiser is trying to manipulate their attitudes, resulting in a more skeptic consumption attitude (Chang & Cheng, 2015). In terms of consumer mindset, it refers to cognitive operations that produce a disposition in a particular manner, which explains human judgement and decision making (Hamilton et. al. 2011; Chang & Cheng, 2015). Individualism is a mindset perceiving personal benefits as more important and a collective mindset emphasizes group goals over personal goals (Triandis, 1995; Chang & Cheng, 2015). People with a collectivistic mindset are more interested in supporting pro-social causes and are thus more likely to be attracted to a charity incentive in a cause-related marketing campaign (Chang & Cheng, 2015).

For a company to profit from cause-related marketing, the given campaign must deliver additional value to the consumers. Other researchers have suggested an accumulation of positive feelings such as

a *warm glow* (Oloko & Balderjahn, 2011; Strahilevitz & Meyers, 1998) or a *feel good factor* (Oloko & Balderjahn, 2011; Ghosh & Posa, 2006). Other researchers stress the reduction of negative feeling, which adds a second perspective to the additional value of cause-related marketing; for example *guilt reduction* (Oloko & Balderjahn, 2011; Strahilsevitz & Meyer, 1998), or *easing of negative feelings* about not contributing directly to the cause (Oloko & Balderjahn, 2011; Gwin, 1997). Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991) distinguished five distinct value dimensions, and state that every consumer's choice is based on three of them as these values are independently standing and make different contributions to the consumer in any given situation. The dimensions are identified as (1) *functional value*, which demonstrates the product's ability to perform to its functional, utilitarian or physical purpose; (2) *conditional value* which illustrates the dependence of the situation faced by the consumer; (3) *the social value*, which is the product's ability to convey an image corresponding with the norms of the consumer's friends; (4) *emotional value*, the product's ability to arise either positive or negative feelings; and (5) *epistemic value*, the product's ability to satisfy the desire of curiosity, novelty-seeking and knowledge-seeking (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991). However, Sweeney and Soutar (2001) challenge Sheth, Newman and Gross' (1991) value dimensions, and suggest that the price of a product is an equally important factor, and thus an economic dimension should be included in the core dimensions. Moreover, they discard the conditional and epistemic value dimensions and a measurement scale based on this conceptualization has proven itself to be valid and reliable (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Orth et. al. 2004). Subsequently, the additional value of cause-related marketing must be within the composite of the functional, economic, social and emotional value.

Narratives

Narratives enable people to make sense of facts, to identify their significance and to accept them; in other words, narratives function as sense-making devices (Gabriel, 2004). Sense-making denotes social and cognitive processes by which people structure the unknown (Jensen, Maagaard, & Rasmussen, 2016). In other words, this means that people interpret ambiguous cues by placing them into meaningful frameworks that enable them to understand and interpret them (Jensen, Maagaard, & Rasmussen, 2016). Jerome Bruner (1991) agrees and argues that the main reason to be interested in studying narratives, is that narratives is a basic human way of making sense of the world; we organize our memories on a fundamental level in story form, and we lead storied lives.

A key characteristic is that a narrative is an account of non-random sequence of events that conveys some kind of action and movement through time (Griffin & May, 2018). All narratives have a narrator;

in many ways, narrators shape their narratives with the intended or actual audience in mind, and thus tend to tell different stories to different audiences, such as a friend, colleague, partner or stranger (Griffin & May, 2018), or in this case, the brand communication.

Counter-Narratives

When considering counter-narratives in a brand or a campaign, it is relevant to define both a *master-* and a *counter-narrative*, because counter-narratives only make sense in relation to something different, of which they are countering (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Jensen, Maagaard & Rasmussen, 2016). It is suggested that counter stories can be defined as a story that expose the construction of the dominant story by suggesting how else it could be told (Jensen, Maagaard, & Rasmussen, 2016). In the context of cause-related marketing and authenticity, it is interesting to look at *sense-giving* and *sense-making* when aiming to define which narrative belongs where (Jensen, Maagaard, & Rasmussen, 2016).

Sense-giving is defined as interpreting and is a position where meaning is made for someone else (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Jensen, Maagaard & Rasmussen, 2016). The narratives used for sense-giving can be viewed as the master-narrative (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Jensen, Maagaard & Rasmussen, 2016).; this is theoretically the most dominant position, as the master narrative appear to naturalize certain events and actions as routines, and consequently limiting storytellers by decreasing the scope of actions and interpretations available to them (Jensen, Maagaard, & Rasmussen, 2016). *Sense-making* denotes social and cognitive processes by which people structure the unknown (Waterman, 1990: 41; Jensen, Maagaard & Rasmussen, 2016). It means that people interpret ambiguous cues by placing them into meaningful narrative frameworks that enable them to understand and interpret (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988: 51; Jensen, Maagaard & Rasmussen, 2016). In other words, sense-making can be considered a ‘translation’ of sense-giving, because translation is to be understood as the process of moving from one language to another; a process of becoming (Kronberger et al., 2006; Hansen, 2018). A translation is never flawless, however, the essence is to recognize the existence of a different language enacting in a different reality (Hansen, 2018). Translations, and thus sense-making, become about exploring the opportunities of communicating one’s ideas or understandings of the realm of another language to enact a new way (Hansen, 2018).

These two positions are closely linked to the classic theory on social semiotics, which in other words is the study of how people design and interpret meanings, and how they are adapted as society changes (Hodge & Kress, 1988). It can be argued that this is a circular process in the sense that the dominant

position first will make sense of something, and then proceed to give sense to those who are listening; and that the listener are making sense of what was given to them, and then deconstruct the meaning and give their own sense-making to the dominant position, making them an indirect sense-giver.

Brand Literacy

Research in consumer culture has provided insights to the role brands play in consumers' everyday lives, and it has been proved that they are meaningful because consumers incorporate them into their lives and add their own idiosyncratic stories to them (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry Jr., 2003; Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). Brand literacy is defined by Bengtsson and Firat (2006) as "the ability of the consumer to decode the strategies used in marketing practices in introducing, maintaining and reformulating brands and brand images, which then, further enables the consumer to engage with these processes within their cultural settings" (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006: 375). Literature on literacy identify three degrees of literacy needed for complete literacy; (1) *reading* is the first degree, and is the ability to decipher words in the systemic unity in order to make sense and understand their complete meaning, (2) *writing* is the second degree, and is the ability to compose signs into a set that transmits the meaning intended, (3) the last degree is identified as *the ability to embed one's reading and writing in particular cultures* (Bernardo, 2000). Therefore, brand literacy is developed in stages influenced by social, educational and marketing variables (Oswald, 2010).

Brand literacy can be acquired through everyday consumption of branded goods, through advertising, social interaction with other people and experiences in cultures in which brands are prominently displayed through multiple media (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). People are seeking to express individuality through what they consume, and brands representing the categories of consumption they find expressive have provided the ground for articulating symbolic meanings, identities and hence individuality (Lears, 1994; Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). It can be argued that brand literacy is closely related to concepts such as *brand awareness*, *brand loyalty*, *brand relationship*, *brand image* and *involvement with branded goods*, however, these all constitute brand behavior but they are not indications that a consumers has acquired brand literacy, although they and are all important components of brand literacy (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). In order for a consumer to play a role in a specific brand culture, which is a context where a particular brand is socially constructed, it is considered of relevance that the consumer has an understanding of what people think and feel about the brand (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). By definition, each consumer who has awareness of a brand has an image of the brand that could be influenced by certain associations, however, while a brand image

commonly refers to the perceptions of the brand held in consumer memory (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990) it does not take into account whether or not this image of the brand cognizant of the cultural meanings the brand has in the specific consumption context (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006).

The table below illustrates the three levels of brand literacy, and on one hand, there are consumers who do not care to care about brands, and thus remain outside of the iconographic culture where brands play a big role; on the other hand, there are brand enthusiasts who are heavily involved with brands and who know how to play effectively with brands in consumer culture (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). The middle level is identified to consist of consumers who are able to read and follow the culture of brands, but they have limited ability to formulate and articulate its meaning to become effective players in it (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). These levels result in different consumer engagement with the culture of the given brand.

Levels of literacy		
Low	Medium	High
Consumer may buy and consume brands but has no or little knowledge of the symbolic meanings brands have acquired in the culture	Consumer has ability to read and understand the cultural meanings and strategies underlying brands	Ability to fully participate in the culture of brands. Consumer does not just follow the cultural meanings, but is able to reformulate and play with them

(Bengtsson & Firat, 2006)

Brand literacy affects several levels of brand semiotics. These levels include denotation, or the literal association of a signifier with a signified, the way logos stand for the company (Oswald, 2010). Another level is connotation, and refers to the association of a signifier with an esthetic signified, such as the association of the logo with the brand's quality, positioning and benefits for consumers (Oswald, 2010). A third level of brand semiotics is symbolism, which is the association of brand signifiers from the logo to for instance celebrity endorsers, along with the brand culture and identity (Oswald, 2010). Therefore, in a market where competing firms have access to the same technological solutions, competition moves to the symbolic domain to differentiate brands through attributes that relate to the consumers' emotional states (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). In this context, brand literacy becomes an important skill, as companies execute their branding strategies and over time some consumers become more educated about the principles of and the techniques for branding processes partaking in the institution and constitution of brands (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). Consumers with a high level of brand literacy are thus able to unmask the branding process that may blur the properties of the product. This is particularly interesting when observing cause-related marketing campaigns and see how the

consumers make sense of them and explains why there might be some skepticism towards brands' true intentions.

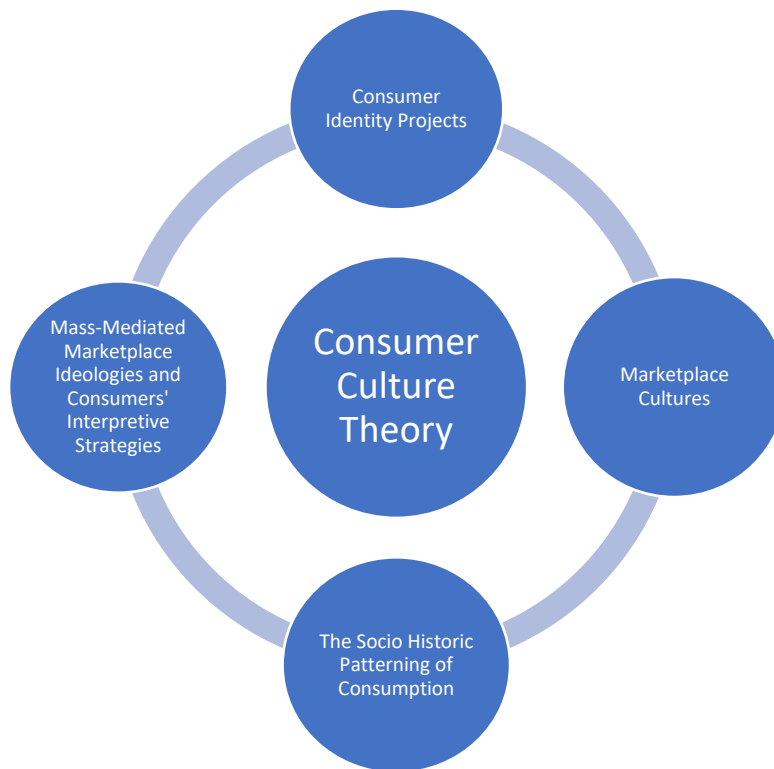
Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) argue that consumers' construction of identities as well as their way of consuming are shaped by cultural and social elements, and that this is a logical result of historical development (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This section uses CCT as the theoretical framework to analyze the research questions at hand.

The Four Research Programs of Consumer Culture Theory

CCT has advanced consumer behavior knowledge by illuminating sociocultural processes and structures related to four different dimensions that form the frame of CCT. They are (1) *consumer identity projects*, (2) *marketplace cultures*, (3) *the sociohistoric patterning of consumption* and (4) *mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies* (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

While CCT is thought of as a more holistic research tradition, specific studies focus on single elements and dimensions, as a 'plurality of distinct theoretical approaches and research goals' (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 868) is better suitable to address the dynamic relationship within modern consumption. For a general understanding of CCT as a theoretical approach, all four research programs are addressed. Furthermore, every consumer experiences brand authenticity in cause-related marketing differently, thus understandings, processes and values of engagement need to be studied to find out how each consumer interact with the brand or the given campaign.



Source: Own illustration based on Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research by Arnould & Thompson, 2005. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (4), 868-882.

Consumer identity projects are considered “the co-constructive co-productive ways in which consumers (...) forge a coherent if diversified and often fragmented sense of self” (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986; Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 871). Therefore, the consumer is an identity seeker and active constructor, expressing a sense of self through consumption, drawing on resources that are offered by the market. Consumer identity projects are typically considered to be goal driven (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Arnould & Thompson, 2005), however, the sense of self that consumers acquire are not coherent, because within postmodernism, the fragmentation and diversification of consumer identities is of interest of consumer culture researchers, including “internal contradiction, ambivalence and even pathology” (O’Guinn & Faber, 1989; Hirschmann, 1992; Thompson, 1996; Otnes et al., 1997; Mick & Fournier, 1998; Murray, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 871). The markets from which consumers actively draw to engage in identity projects is a source of mythic and symbolic resources that produce different consumer types that people can choose to inhabit and construct narratives of identity (Levy, 1981; Belk, 1988; Hill & Stamley, 1990; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The next research program, *marketplace cultures*, builds upon Maffesoli’s (1996) idea of neotribalism. He argues that the forces of globalization as well as the socioeconomic changes that came across in

the post-industrial age have significantly led to a decrease in sociality while instead encouraging a sort of radical individualism where individuals are motivated by the personal distinctiveness and autonomy in lifestyle choices (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Responsively, consumers search for collective identification through participation in rituals of solidarity that are grounded in common lifestyle interests and leisure avocations (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Cova, 1997; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Moreover, the key research question driving this research program is "how does the emergence of consumption as a dominant human practice reconfigure cultural blueprints for action and interpretation and vice versa?" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 873).

The sociohistoric patterning of consumption, the third research program, is driven by the overall question "what is consumer society and how is it constituted and sustained?" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 874). This program is different from a classical marketing approach as it engages in the institutional and societal structures that systematically influence consumption, i.e. class, community, ethnicity and gender (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Furthermore, the relationship between these structures constituting society and consumers' experiences, belief systems and practices are of interest to CCT researchers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Also, it is argued that consumers viewed as enactors of social roles and positions are highly influenced by the institutional and social structures (Otnes et al., 1993; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The fourth research program, *mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies*, examines systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions (Hirschman, 1993; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumers are perceived as interpretive agents whose sense-making activities range from those that tacitly embrace the dominant representations of consumer identity and lifestyle ideals portrayed in advertising and mass media to those that consciously deviate from these ideological instructions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Seen at a macro level, CCT research investigates the influences that economic and cultural globalization exert upon consumer identity projects and identity-defining patterns of social interaction distinctive social contexts (Arnould, 1989; Belk et al., 2003; Bonsu & Belk, 2003; Coulter et al, 2003; Wilk, 1995; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). At a meso level, CCT researchers explore how particular cultural production systems, such as marketing communications or the fashion industry systematically predispose consumers toward certain kinds of identity projects (McCracken, 1986; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). However, this kind of manipulation is not always successful because consumers also exercise resistance, for example, consumers could seek to form lifestyles that defy dominant consumerist norms or directly challenge corporate power (Muerray et al.,

1994; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Dobscha & Ozanne, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Estée Lauder Companies as a Best Practice Example

Estée Lauder Companies

ELC is a multinational manufacturer and marketer of prestige skincare, makeup, fragrance and hair care products headquartered in Manhattan, New York City. Additionally, ELC owns a diverse portfolio of 25+ brands that are distributed in 150 countries through both digital commerce and retail channels. The company was founded by Estée Lauder and her husband Joseph Lauder in 1946. Furthermore, ELC was a family owned business until they went public in 1994, however, the Lauder family still owns 40% of the company today, and the children and grandchildren of Estée Lauder are still to be found working at different positions in the company.

According to ELC's website, its actions are rooted in the core values of respect for the individual, uncompromising ethics and integrity, generosity of spirit and fearless persistence (Estée Lauder Companies , 2020). Building on these core values ELC also abide by the following principles:

- “Unwavering commitment to quality and excellence. From exceptional and breakthrough products to High-Touch services and experiences delivered by our prestige brands.” (Estée Lauder Companies , 2020)
- “Infusing creativity and innovation throughout all aspects of the business, from product development to packaging, sampling to selling, marketing to merchandising.” (Estée Lauder Companies , 2020)
- “Nurturing and developing world-class talent. We look for ways to identify and harness the strengths of our talented employees. Continuous learning happens throughout the organization and “leadership from every chair” is expected and encouraged.” (Estée Lauder Companies , 2020)
- “Cultivating an inclusive and diverse workplace reflects our belief that no one person, group or culture has all the knowledge, skills or information necessary for success. Embracing diversity helps sharpen our focus on cultural relevance — ensuring that our products, messaging and in-store experiences reflect the aspirations and desires of consumers in local markets.” (Estée Lauder Companies , 2020)

- “Acting responsibly and caring for the communities we serve translates into sustainable sourcing practices, efficient operations, green chemistry and bringing awareness and resources to global causes around health, the environment and education.” (Estée Lauder Companies , 2020)

The Annual Breast Cancer Campaign

Founded in 1992 by the late Evelyn H. Lauder with the launch of the iconic Pink Ribbon, the Breast Cancer Campaign is ELC’s biggest corporate philanthropic initiative, and is supported by their employees worldwide (Estée Lauder Companies, 2020). So far, the Breast Cancer Campaign has raised more than \$89 million to support global research, education and medical services, with more than \$73 million funding 293 medical research grants through the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF) (Estée Lauder Companies, 2020).

ELC’s commitment to the cause is a true testament to who they are as a company, the dedication to their people, their family values and the lives they can have a positive impact on around the world through their efforts as a global citizens (Estée Lauder Companies, 2020). Additionally, 19 of the Estée Lauder brands support the corporate mission to create a breast cancer-free world and help raise funds for BCRF with efforts such as selling limited edition products, dedicating a given percentage of the earnings to the cause.

In October 2019, ELC ran the Breast Cancer Campaign with the following official copy:

Breast cancer affects us all. Mothers and grandmothers. Daughters and sons. Sisters, brothers, fathers, friends and families. With breast cancer, every second counts. **Every 15 seconds, somewhere in the world, a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer.** Almost everyone knows at least one person who has been impacted by breast cancer - or has heard those words themselves. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide and is increasing, particularly in developing countries where the majority of cases are diagnosed in late stages. It is the second most common cancer overall and impacts a wide range of people regardless of their age, gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status or lifestyle. Men are also touched by the disease. In fact, their lifetime risk of getting breast cancer is about 1 in 833.

The numbers may tell one story, but people tell another, and around the world unite in hope with the common goal to end this disease. **#TimeToEndBreastCancer**

The 2019 Breast Cancer Campaign was omnichannel, and consisted of several different visuals, banners, videos, events and limited-edition products.

Research Design & Methodology

Scientific Approach

There are several ways to perceive the world and its phenomena which affects the way the data is treated and analyzed. This article uses a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. The topic and presumptions are analyzed as seen through the reality the participants live in, and furthermore how they make sense of brand authenticity and cause-related marketing campaigns, which could be considered to be socially constructed phenomenon. Therefore, the scientific approach is *social constructivism*.

A social constructive view in regard to a given phenomenon claims that the phenomenon that is normally is considered 'natural' and independently existing, in reality is manmade and carries impressions from its human origin (Collin, 2015). The so-called objective reality is the product of social construction processed under the influence of cultural, historical, political and economic conditions (Lee & Greene, 1999). Thus such knowledge and perception of different phenomena can vary historically over time and differs across cultural groups that hold diverse beliefs about human development and nature (Lee & Greene, 1999).

Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviewing is the method of choice due to its way of communicating with different consumers, its interactive and flexible nature. The interviews are aimed to help gain information about how they, as regular consumers understand a cause-related marketing campaign and how they as consumers makes sense of brands when being exposed them and furthermore how they find brands authentic. This method of data collection is considered useful for accessing individuals' attitudes and values (Seale, 2018), as well as their considerations and interpretations on the given topic, because this allows for a more complex analysis (Byrne, 2018). The interactive nature of the qualitative interview can be the basis of many of its advantages as a research tool in that it allows for flexibility (Byrne, 2018). While the nature of communication means that there is no certainty that the interviewer and the

interviewee's understanding of terms and concepts are exactly the same, the qualitative interview offers the possibility of exploring the interviewee's understanding in a more meaningful way than would be allowed by a less flexible survey questionnaire (Byrne, 2018).

The interviews are conducted through an interview guide. The interview guide is semi-structured, meaning that this research have defined what topics the interview should revolve around, and some questions have been prepared in advance and serve as a guide to the interviewer to get the interviewee going (Seale, 2018), and allow them to explore the issues they feel are important (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The pre-defined interview topics are defined based on the literature review. The interviews are conducted virtually, over either Skype, FaceTime or Facebook Messenger depending on the preference of the interviewee. It has been argued that conducting interviews this way can present an emotional barrier, partly due to technological hitches, but also to the physical distance the technology introduces (Byrne, 2018), however, due to the circumstances in society and most of the world being in a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic when the study was conducted, virtual interviews are considered the safest method for both interviewer and interviewee.

Analysis

The analysis is divided into two parts. Firstly, it organizes the study's findings with the help of existing literature to demonstrate how consumers perceive an authentic brand and what makes a CM campaign authentic in their eyes. It furthermore explores how consumers use brands to create personal identity as well as using them as tools to find collective belonging. This is demonstrated and elaborated in the context of *Consumer Culture Theory* framework. While the four research programs of CCT are helpful in organizing and for analyzing the findings, they are not equally important to the research. The analysis of this research is primarily concerned with applying the programs *Consumer Identity Projects* (1) and *Mass-Mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies* (4) to the findings, which explains why they are described more detailed in this section. The second part of the analysis uses Fritz & Schoenmueller's (2016) suggested brand authenticity framework on the Estée Lauder Companies' 2019 Breast Cancer Campaign. This is done to illustrate how Estée Lauder Companies integrate the different variables of brand authenticity into a cause-related marketing campaign, and furthermore aims to point out how and why Estée Lauder Companies receive the good feedback and results for this campaign. Furthermore, this part of the analysis is important in order to present Estée Lauder Companies as a best practice example and is relevant when discussing implications.

Consumer Identity Projects

As elaborated in the Consumer Culture Theory section, “*Consumer Identity Projects* are co-constructive, co-productive ways in which consumers (...) shape a sense of self» McCracken, 1986; Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 871). These ‘ways’ are processes through which consumers actively construct identities, which involves a development of identity expression, where consumers can use tools such as consumption, because the choice of brands and products is influenced by the question of personal taste. Especially for the cosmetic industry, identity expression through consumption is a central concept.

The cosmetic industry is fed by consumers’ ambiguous search for a state of eternal youth and beauty. Furthermore, the concept of cosmetics and beauty consumption is profoundly rooted in human tradition and cultures and has therefore become a powerful industry with numerous brands competing for market share. Brands offer the consumers a variation of different topics and identity projects, and it can be argued that through the consumers’ selection of brands and their products, there is an active selection and personalization of the resources offered on the market. Thus, despite brands offering products and the different topics and image that comes with it, it is ultimately the consumers’ motivation and yearning for constant identity construction and expression that influence the brands and its decision-making process in terms of product offerings and brand communication. The market is ever-changing and thus the brands are required to listen to target group trends in order to stay relevant.

Central to this research, consumer identity projects also relate to consumers’ perception of their environment, and therefore also how brands are taking social and environmental responsibility and how they offer more than just products, but how the brand help make the world that we are all living in a better place. It is the consumers’ perception of the brand and the cause it has chosen to support that determines the approach and behavior by the consumers, as well as the brands’ success with the particular consumer. In this research, the respondents all choose brands based on a certain style or their values, and how they appeal to them as consumers, which is all influenced by personal taste and thus in alignment with the consumers’ identity projects. This supports the statement in the Cause-Related Marketing section, stating that a brand should be as clear as possible when it comes to their brand identity, purpose and the cause chosen for cause-related marketing; this way, it is an advantage to the brand to express their overall brand as accurately as possible, which lets the consumers make decisions and judgements in line with their own individual identity projects.

Taking the Estée Lauder Companies' Breast Cancer Campaign as an example, the brand manages to transport and communicate its identity, which is deeply rooted in the company values, and as mentioned, a dedication to their people, their family values and the lives they can have a positive impact on around the world through their efforts as a global citizens. Furthermore, the Breast Cancer Campaign is in line with the company values (mentioned in the Estée Lauder Companies section), and thus help create a clear connection between brand and cause, making the consumers' perception of this campaign clearer and furthermore makes it easier to incorporate into their own personal identity projects. Moreover, the respondents actively perceive this identity accordingly:

“I think with Estée Lauder, it's also such a great fit with breast cancer and the pink ribbon, because Estée Lauder is a brand founded by a woman, owned by a woman, now owned by the Lauder family, who come from a family with generations of strong women... so with breast cancer mostly affecting women, again that is a reflection of who they are as a company and their customers, which also mostly are women, and that is why this also is such an organic and authentic fit!” (R1).

“...but well since it's about cosmetics, it is somewhat related to the cause, not just because I guess the main customers are female, but I also guess if you are diagnosed with breast cancer, their products can make you shine and feel good, like with skincare and like the wellness feeling that comes with it when you take good care of your skin....” (R5)

“ Like you said for MAC (An Estée Lauder Brand), it's great that they have been doing it the whole time and are staying consistent, but it also makes so much sense for them to support a cause like that, because they know that a lot of the customers are in that community and concerned with that cause. So that makes a lot of sense” (R4).

In connection with this, when asked about Estée Lauder Companies and their Breast Cancer Campaign, all respondents could see a clear line when it came to connect the cause with the brand and its identity. The statement by respondent1 is considered to be a representation of how a trusted brand like Estée Lauder and its campaign can play a part in identity projects:

“So if I feel like the one that I had was missing something in terms of results, then I would be more inclined to look at other serums, and then I would be even more inclined to get the one

from Estée Lauder, if that one supported breast cancer, and especially because Estée Lauder is such a trusted brand, and I've already tried other products from Estée Lauder, so for me to get something from them, while they are also campaigning, it wouldn't take a lot of convincing until I'm at the counter buying it!" (R1).

The respondents were generally critical and possessed some awareness when it came to a brand's general marketing strategy and thus had a rather high level of brand literacy, and that they all to a certain level consumed brands that were in line with their own values and could help strengthen and construct their personal identity. Furthermore, the respondents had a general expectation that in this day and age, brands should take social or environmental responsibility and that this is an influential factor when they research and consume brands. It can be argued that there is an alignment of the consumers' identity projects, the ELC brand identity along with their Breast Cancer Campaign, where all respondents considered the correlation between ELC and the campaign to communicate and thus transport brand identity to the market.

Mass-Mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies

The market from where consumers actively draw to engage in identity projects is a source of symbolic and mythic resources, which produce different consumer categories that people can choose to inhabit and to construct narratives of identity (Levy, 1981; Belk, 1988; Hill & Stamey, 1990; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Moreover, the market is an active influence on peoples' lives because it facilitates the shaping of both individual and collective identities, as well as the social relations and culture.

The media communicates different kinds of images and stories about the cosmetic industry. This makes the consumers interpretive beings who analyze and decode these messages, and furthermore makes sense of them. Thereby, the marketplace ideologies actively influence identity projects, due to their systematic aim to move consumers to think or act in a certain way. Although, consumers can also form critical responses to the messages communicated by the media; thus, leading to consumer resistance. This form of consumer behavior ignores the norms of the industry, while following a lifestyle that defies dominant consumerist norms or that directly challenges corporate power (Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Muerray et al., 1994; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Kozinets, 2002; Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

In the interviews, it was clear that brands affect the respondents in different ways, however, it became obvious that Instagram was a medium where they found themselves most active and thus most influenced; both through their own friends and celebrities/influencers they look to for inspiration. It was important to them that the people who inspire and influence was a match with their personal identity and someone that they looked up to. However, when confronted with brands' cause-related marketing that they considered to be an inauthentic fit, they showed a form of consumer resistance, that resulted in doubt and skepticism and expressed a wish for a better match between cause and the brand's target group or a more obvious promotion throughout the year and not just during the limited campaign period, as this provoked a feeling that the brand used the cause purely for commercial reasons. It can be argued that when consumers form this resistance it is based on their own translation of the brands' communicative message, and they create a counter-narrative to brands' own perception of themselves and their identity, which could affect the brand negatively.

Estée Lauder Companies as a corporate brand acts as if it is aware of the effect of consumer resistance. The Breast Cancer Cause is not random and is in line with several of the company values as well as their consumers' main demographic. As demonstrated by R1, the same statement as in the previous section, yet still applicable to this research program:

And I think with Estée Lauder, it's also such a great fit with breast cancer and the pink ribbon, because Estée Lauder is a brand founded by a woman, owned by a woman, now owned by the Lauder family, who come from a family with generations of strong women... so with breast cancer mostly affecting women, again that is a reflection of who they are as a company and their customers, which also mostly are women, and that is why this also is such an organic and authentic fit! (R1).

The impression of ELC and the Breast Cancer Campaign that R1 has is well observed and based on basic brand knowledge and advertisement exposure and is relatively accurate considering the official campaign copy. It can be argued that the ELC Breast Cancer Campaign's role is to communicate brand values and identity as well as showing responsibility to the one of the issues the world is facing and to furthermore position the overall brand in a more authentic way.

Translating Brand Values into an Annual Campaign

Estée Lauder Companies can be interpreted as a corporate cosmetic brand consisting of several beauty brands, offering different symbolic and social resources to consumers. Apart from cosmetics being an ancient tradition of embellishment, a part of different cultural identities and a tool for consumers to express distinctiveness and identity, Estée Lauder Companies are able to incorporate several of their brand values into the Breast Cancer Campaign and translate them into a relevant cause-related marketing campaign.

“Infusing creativity and innovation...” (Estée Lauder Companies , 2020) is one of ELC’s corporate values and can arguably be translated to the Breast Cancer Campaign because the campaign can be considered a creative way to sell more of their donation-triggering products in order to infuse innovation when it comes to breast cancer research. Furthermore, “Cultivating an inclusive and diverse workplace...”)” is relevant because as mentioned in the official campaign copy, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide and every 15 seconds, someone in the world is diagnosed with breast cancer. This can be considered a statement to their employees, considering ELC has a worldwide female workforce of 84% (Estée Lauder Companies , 2020). Finally, “Acting responsibly and caring for the communities we serve...” (Estée Lauder Companies , 2020) is self-explanatory as helping the breast cancer cause is relevant for most communities around the world.

Based on these interpretations, it can be argued that with ELC’s cause-related marketing campaign being this closely linked to the company’s overall values, bringing authenticity to the campaign and underlines how this cause is embedded in both the company culture and in the communities where they operate. Additionally, this link between brand values and the chosen cause allow consumers working on their identity projects to quickly decode what kind of brand ELC is, thus making it an easier decision if the consumer feels like there is a fit between them as consumers and ELC.

Conclusively, it is clear how research program (1) and (4) within Consumer Culture Theory are interlinked. The market influences how people construct their identities, although the identities being constructed influence how consumers perceive and react to standards and norms being communicated by the market and transmitted to consumers, and can thus be considered a circular process where research program (1) and (4) affect each other equally. Especially with the cosmetic industry, a \$532 billion industry (Biron, 2019) with numerous brands offering the similar products, is the concept of brand authenticity becoming more and more important. This is the reason why Consumer Culture

Theory is considered as an appropriate theoretical framework for this research as it allows for a different perspective on the concept of authenticity in cause-related marketing.

Applying Brand Authenticity Framework to Estée Lauder Companies' Breast Cancer Campaign

As the CCT framework offer useful interpretations of the findings from the qualitative interviews, this section aims to merely analyze the ELC Breast Cancer Campaign of 2019, using the brand authenticity framework by Fritz & Schoenmueller (2016). *Brand heritage* (1) is a mirror of the brand's strategic positioning on its heritage. Brand heritage can be defined as a dimension of a brand's identity found in its track records, longevity, core values, use of symbols and its history (Urde, Greyser, & Balmer, 2007). Applying this variable to the ELC Breast Cancer Campaign, it has a documented track record of how long this campaign has been running and how they are trying to change the world. Additionally, the international symbol of breast cancer was co-created by Evelyn H. Lauder together with then SELF magazine's Editor-in-Chief, Alexandra Penney, and has been the chosen symbol for this campaign since the campaign's commencement. The second variable, *brand nostalgia* (2), focus on the consumers' perception of the nostalgic staging, arguing that a brand becomes more authentic if their communicative products involves 'former' values and a tie with the past (Peterson, 2005; Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). Although this campaign does not directly communicate nostalgia, it can be argued that by emphasizing the use of rhetorical devices such as pathos, it provokes an emotional connection to the cause, for instance in the official campaign copy: Breast cancer affects us all. Mothers and grandmothers. Daughters and sons. Sisters, brothers, fathers, friends and families. With breast cancer, every second counts. Every 15 seconds, somewhere in the world, a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer (Estée Lauder Companies, 2020). *Brand commercialization* (3) focus on the process by which brands subordinate their values and norms to interests of profit maximization, and can be mirrored by a brand's aggressive marketing actions (Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). It can be argued that ELC's marketing is targeted correctly, as the male respondents in the qualitative research do not recall seeing the campaign, and furthermore the female respondents expressed a positive attitude when asked how they felt after seeing the Breast Cancer Campaign. It can thus be argued that ELC execute the campaign carefully targeted at their main demographic. *Brand clarity* (4), depicts the communicated comprehensibility of the brand's communication style and furthermore the consistent marketing quality (Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). Applied to the ELC Breast Cancer Campaign, it shows great consistency both in terms of how it is run annually, but also when it comes to the campaign purpose being the same every year and furthermore, how the visual expression using the color pink and the pink ribbon is as consistent as the campaign. The brand's *social commitment* (5), defined as

how a brand approach their chosen social commitment in terms of naturalness, sincerity and reliability (Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). This variable is arguably one of the most important variables when it comes to analyzing the authenticity of a cause-related marketing campaign. As discovered in the qualitative interviews, the respondents, whether they were positive or indifferent towards the campaign, all agreed on how ELC supporting this cause every year and considering their customer base, that the social commitment appeared as sincere and appropriate. *Brand legitimacy* (6), a variable describing the consumer brand fit, is the brand's degree of integration in the set of values and norms shared by a community (Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). It can furthermore be explained as a brand's representation of the values and norms considered important to the consumers (Rose, et al., 1994; Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). In relation to ELC Breast Cancer Campaign, the official campaign copy emphasize how breast cancer affects everyone:

“Mothers and grandmothers. Daughters and sons. Sisters, brothers, fathers, friends and families (...) Almost everyone knows at least one person who has been impacted by breast cancer - or has heard those words themselves. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide and is increasing...” (Estée Lauder Companies, 2020),

Thus, fighting to find a cure for a disease affecting so many people is a ground to be considered a fit between the cause and the consumers, and furthermore, campaigning to end a global disease can be considered a value important to consumers. The variables *actual-* (7) and *ideal self-congruence* (8), refer to the consumer's actual self-image and ideal self-image; consumers prefer brands whose promotional appearance is consistent with their self-concept, in line with this, brands whose communication style fits with the consumer's actual self-perception are expected to be perceived as a reflection of an individual's self and therefore are interpreted as unique, genuine and reliable (Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). Relating this variable to the ELC campaign can be connected to ELC communicating this campaign to the right consumers, thus knowing your target group is essential. Moreover, this variable relates to the brand's consistency in communication style and living up to its promises; ELC does this by visually appealing to the female demographic and uses the same font and colors in all communicational products, and if consumer are interested in the details of how the donated money is spent, a simple Google search will take them to ELC's corporate website, showing transparency reports. The final variable, *employee's passion* (9), refer to the perceived enthusiasm and eagerness of the brand's employees (Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016), and is not visible to the naked eye only looking at the campaign posters, however, for consumers interested in the campaign, a lot of employee engagement can be seen in the ELC corporate Breast Cancer video. Although this variable

can be difficult to show consumers through just one campaign, it can be argued based on the qualitative interviews that the brand and its employees showing engagement towards the cause throughout the year and not just during the campaign period is relevant for the authenticity of the campaign.

Discussion and Implications

To outline how the findings of this study influence the research area, it is placed back into its initial context. Hence the deductions derived from the analysis is placed into the brand authenticity framework of Fritz & Schoenmueller (2016), and further adjusted to fit the topic of understanding authenticity specifically in cause-related marketing. This section answers RQ3:

Research Question 3 – *What creates authenticity in cause-related marketing?*

The CCT analysis provided a great foundation and understanding of the findings from the qualitative research. It enabled the researcher to understand and explain how the respondents perceive authentic brands and furthermore explore their attitudes towards brands with social or environmental commitments. The brand authenticity analysis functioned as a best practice example, illustrating how and where ELC incorporate the different variables into a successful campaign. The following paragraphs aims to combine the Fritz & Schoenmueller (2016) framework with the insights provided by the CCT analysis, providing an explanation of ELC's approach to CM, and to furthermore create a general framework other companies can look to when running their CM campaign.

The next page presents an integration of the insights based on the findings of cause-related marketing together with the learnings from the Fritz & Schoenmueller (2016) framework:

Market Skepticism of the Rognes

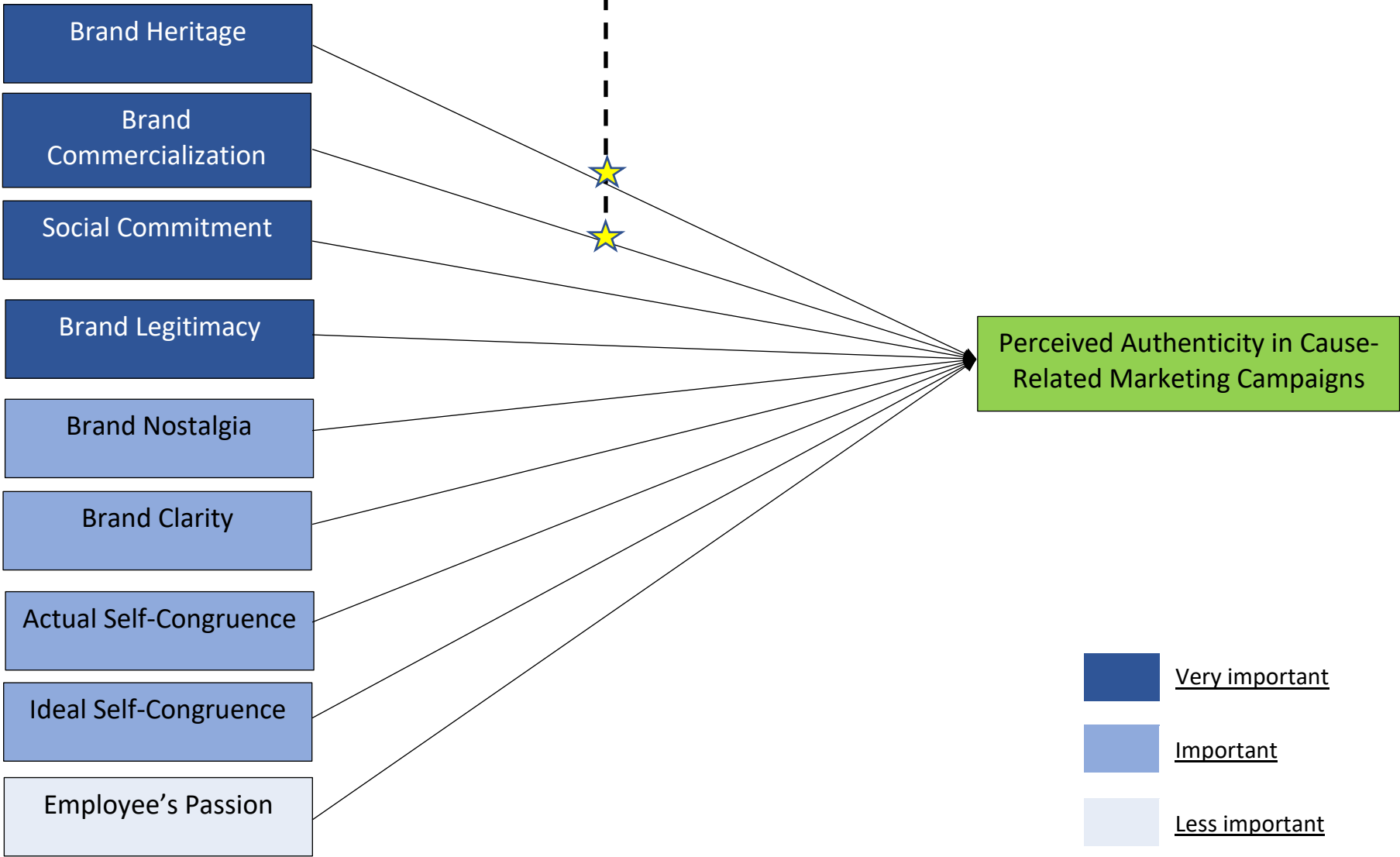


Fig. 7-1: Integrative Framework of Perceived Authenticity in Cause-Related Marketing

This model explains the learnings from the findings and analysis and includes variables which brand managers should consider when creating and managing cause-related marketing campaigns. As illustrated, the variables in the model are color coded according to importance and is based on insights and interpretations from the qualitative interviews.

The first four variables are considered of *high importance* and are marked accordingly. Furthermore, the first two variables, *brand heritage* and *brand commercialization*, are identified to be where possible market skepticism can occur. *Brand heritage* is of high importance because of its connection to the brand's core values, history and track records, which all respondents emphasized was a factor that could cause confusion if the CM campaign felt random in relation to the brand. Furthermore, in order to comply with *identity projects*, it is of advantage to the brand if the campaign is in line with the brand heritage, as this communicates the brand as clearly as possible, allowing the consumers to make decisions and judgements in line with their own personal identity projects. *Brand commercialization* is of equal importance, as aggressive marketing actions and a too obvious interest in profit maximization can, according to the qualitative interviews, create skepticism and an impression that the campaign is dubious. However, in ELC's case, the respondents found the campaign visually pleasing, and the campaign focus on the cause, rather than marketing their products, hence the campaign does not appear aggressive to the consumers. The third variable, *social commitment*, is also of high importance as it relates to how a brand approaches its social commitment. Although it can be argued that all variables revolve around the social commitment, this variable is still considered of relevance, as none of the other variables approach the cause this directly. It can thus be argued that this variable is important, as it literally investigates whether or not the cause is a match, if it is sincere and reliable. When approaching this variable, it is important to consider the brand identity as well as the brand's customer base. The qualitative interviews found that consumers appreciate when the cause is a reflection of their customers and their main demographic, rather than supporting a cause that is trendy at the moment. *Brand legitimacy* is also of high importance as it reflects the brand's degree of integration in the set of values and norms shared by a community. In order to be successful in this variable, the local communication of the campaign is vital. If the brand is global and operates in different countries, it is important to acknowledge the cultural differences in the different countries, and appeal to the local market, whether that is focusing on transparency, family values, diseases, environmental benefits or efforts etc.

Moreover, there are four variables identified as *important*. *Brand nostalgia* is important as it emphasizes the brand's nostalgic staging and involvement of former values and tie with the past. This variable is not of the highest importance and is not crucial when it comes to market skepticism nor the most important aspects stated by the consumers, although it is considered a valuable add-on that enables the brand to create emotional ties between consumers and the cause, which can increase consumer interest in the campaign. The second variable of importance is *brand clarity*, as it depicts the communicated comprehensibility of the brand's communication style and furthermore the consistent marketing quality. This variable is relevant when it comes to visual impression and communication style, because when the CM campaign is communicated in the same visual format at the regular marketing products of the brand, it creates more clarity to the consumer who the sender of the campaign is, which again makes it easier for consumer to choose the brand that is in line with their personal identity projects. The variables *actual-* and *ideal self-congruence*, are important when it comes to the consumers' identity projects, as they refer to the consumer's actual self-image and ideal self-image. Consumers prefer brands whose promotional appearance is consistent with their self-concept, in line with this, brands whose communication style fits with the consumer's actual self-perception are expected to be perceived as a reflection of an individual's self and therefore are interpreted as unique, genuine and reliable (Fritz & Schoenmueller, 2016). Again, this goes back to brands focusing their CM communication to their target group and having extensive knowledge about their target audience.

Finally, the variable of *less importance* is *employee's passion*. This variable refers to the perceived enthusiasm and eagerness of the brand's employees. In the qualitative interviews, none of the respondents were concerned with how the employees of a brand and their passion towards the cause. It can be argued that this is a less visible feature that consumers do not notice in the marketing material. Consumers showing great engagement with the campaign can follow the brand's social media channel, and discover employee passion there, however, it is not considered to be crucial for the success of a CM campaign.

The Integrative Framework of Perceived Authenticity in Cause-Related Marketing (fig. 7-1) should function as an overall guide for brand managers of how to approach a CM campaign and include important factors to consider in order to avoid skepticism and to ensure authenticity at all communicative levels. This recommendation is considered relevant for all companies using a CM strategy in their marketing practices. Furthermore, when companies are supporting a cause while

making money on it themselves, an authentic approach is considered important as there might already be skepticism connected to the practice.

The consumers are important to this study. They are interpretive beings, and as stated in the analysis, they are constantly constructing and adjusting their identity while seeking collective identification based on impressions from the media and society. This emphasizes the importance of a company's knowledge about their consumers and target audience, where the theory of counter-narratives becomes prominent. As mentioned, counter-narratives are suggested counter stories, defined as a story that expose the construction of the dominant story by suggesting how else it could be told (Jensen, Maagaard, & Rasmussen, 2016). Here, the campaign should communicate as authentically as possible, as well as remembering how their target audience makes sense of reality, as it can be different depending on the demographic. Consumers are sense-makers of the communicational products exposed to them, sense-making can be considered a 'translation' of sense-giving, because translation is to be understood as the process of moving from one language to another; a process of becoming (Kronberger et al., 2006; Hansen, 2018). A translation is never flawless; however, the essence is to recognize the existence of a different language enacting in a different reality (Hansen, 2018). Translations, and thus sense-making, becomes about exploring the opportunities of communicating one's ideas or understandings of the realm of another language to enact a new way (Hansen, 2018). However, as the brand is able to control the 'master' narrative of the story and thus hold the dominant position, it is its task to naturalize the narrative being communicated and make the message as clear and authentic as possible, consequently limiting the consumers by decreasing the scope of actions or interpretations available to them (Jensen, Maagaard, & Rasmussen, 2016). Although the brand holds the dominant narrative position, sense-making and sense-giving can be considered a circular process, in the sense that the dominant position first will make sense of something, and then proceed to give sense to those who are listening; and that the listener are making sense of what was given to them, and then deconstruct the meaning and give their own sense-making to the dominant position, making them an indirect sense-giver. This means that even when limiting the consumers' interpretations, they will never be completely dismissed, hence the brand is never completely able to kick back and relax knowing for sure their narrative is decoded as intended, illustrating the complexity of cause-related marketing.

Conclusion

The overall purpose of this study was to understand what creates authenticity in a cause-related marketing. The need for this research was based on modern marketing tendencies and an

overwhelming number of brands with similar product offerings trying to catch the attention of consumers. Due to a process of isomorphism and homogenization, brands are becoming increasingly alike, making it easier for substitutes to replace each other. As a communicational tool, brands are turning to cause-related marketing in order to improve their brand image by showing corporate social responsibility as well as using it as a tool to secure competitive advantage. The reason for exploring cause-related marketing was based on assumptions in the literature that there can be several factors for consumers experiencing a form of resistance or skepticism towards such marketing effort. Based on marketing literature stating that consumers long for more authentic brands and products (Thompson & Tambyah, 1999; Penaloza, 2000; Holt, 2002; Brown et al., 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Grundlach & Neville, 2012) as it can function as a tool to overpower consumption considerations such as price and product availability and furthermore offer a deeper connection with the consumers (Gundlach & Neville, 2012), it raised the interest in investigating cause-related marketing in relation to authenticity.

The scientific approach of this article was defined as social constructivist, a perspective acknowledging that the so-called objective reality is the product of social construction processed under the influence of cultural, historical, political and economic conditions (Lee & Greene, 1999). It further maintains that we experience things to be real, true and factual because our minds have been socially patterned through cultural practices toward particular beliefs (O'Leary & Wright, 2005). Social constructivism emphasizes that our generation of knowledge and ideas of reality is sparked by social processes rather than individual processes (Lee & Greene, 1999), hence the relevance of the Consumer Culture Theory as a framework of structuring the findings from the qualitative interviews. Therefore, the research topic was explored, and the findings were analyzed as seen through the reality the participants live in, and furthermore how they make sense of brand authenticity and cause-related marketing campaigns, which are considered to be socially constructed phenomena.

The overall research topic was defined as *'the perception of authentic cause-related marketing'*. Moreover, to investigate the research topic, three interlinked research questions were presented, which also laid the foundation for the structure of the article. The first research question was presented as follows:

Research Question 1 - *What dimensions of brand authenticity and cause-related marketing are known and can be used as a tool to communicate brand identity?*

This was answered in the literature review and explored which variables and dimensions of successful brand authenticity exist and the literature on cause-related marketing. Here, several interesting theories and frameworks were presented. Within brand authenticity, three highly relevant frameworks were introduced: Beverland (2006) address factors constituting brand authenticity, and identifies six attributes on how to build an authentic brand: (1) *Heritage & Pedigree*; (2) *Stylistic Consistency*; (3) *Commitment to Quality*; (4) *Relationship to Place*; (5) *Method of production*; (6) *Downplaying Commercial Motives*. Furthermore, Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann (2015) established four dimensions of measuring perceived brand authenticity and finally Fritz & Schoenmueller (2016) also presents a framework of perceived brand authenticity consisting of nine variables. They all presented interesting ideas and aspects of brand authenticity. Moreover, the literature on cause-related marketing presented several interesting aspects of the discipline, suggesting several reasons why some consumers might be more prone to be skeptical. Chang and Cheng (2015) explores how consumer psychographics on skepticism toward cause-related marketing in order to figure out what types of consumers are more prone to be skeptical towards a cause-related marketing campaign; traits including shopping orientation (*hedonistic vs. utilitarian*) and mindset (*individualistic vs. collectivistic*) are considered antecedents, as these traits are related to personal motives and thus lead to specific purchasing behavior. These were interesting aspects of investigation in relation to the research topic.

The answer to research question 1 enables research question 2, which was formulated as follows:

Research Question 2 – *How do Estée Lauder Companies, as a best practice example, integrate the dimensions from RQ1 in their annual Breast Cancer Campaign?*

This question was raised, as it was of interest to look at how a company communicates cause-related marketing in a practical sense, and to further investigate what creates authenticity in such a campaign. This research question used Estée Lauder Companies as a best practice example and explored how their annual Breast Cancer Campaign is used as a marketing practice. This research question was answered in the analysis and used Fritz & Schoenmueller's (2016) brand authenticity framework in order to place all communicational components into the relation of authenticity. It was found that all variables of the brand authenticity framework were integrated into the Breast Cancer Campaign. This was tested by looking at the 2019 Breast Cancer Campaign banner, official copy and corporate video. Moreover, the narrative aspects and the overall perception of the campaign and fit between cause and brand was examined through qualitative interviews and furthermore included in the brand authenticity framework analysis.

The results from the analysis enabled deductions to answer research question 3, which read as follows:

Research Question 3 – *What creates authenticity in cause-related marketing?*

This research question was answered in the discussion. This question had the purpose of making general deductions and recommendations for the field of business. This was done by combining the brand authenticity framework and the results from the analysis with the findings and results from the Consumer Culture Theory based on the qualitative interviews. This combination was presented by illustrating an integrative framework, emphasizing what components of authenticity a brand should be concerned with when running cause-related marketing campaigns, as well as a color indicating the importance of the variables and stars markings where consumer skepticism is more likely to occur. The importance of the different variables was justified based on what the respondents in the qualitative interviews stated on the topic. Thus the Integrative Framework of Perceived Authenticity in Cause-Related Marketing (fig. 7-1) should function as an overall guide for brand managers of how to approach a CM campaign, how consumers perceive an authentic CM campaign and include important factors to consider in order to avoid skepticism and to ensure authenticity at all communicative levels. Therefore, the framework consists of nine variables of perceived authenticity, outlining the different components of a brand that play together and make of the perceived authenticity of the cause-related marketing campaign, answering research question 3.

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