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How do authenticity dramas develop? An analysis of Afterhours fans' responses to the band's participation in the Sanremo Music Festival

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Abstract

Building on Giesler's (2008) concept of marketplace drama, I introduce the idea of an authenticity drama. I view an authenticity drama as a sequential process through which, owing to an object's authenticity being undermined as a result of external market forces acting upon the object, or due to internal changes in the object itself, opposing groups of subjects (e.g. consumers and producers) interact dialectically in order to negotiate and transform their contradictory views of authenticity and inauthenticity over time. Specifically, I focus on popular music and use netnography and in-depth interviews to investigate consumers' reactions to an independent band's decision to participate in a commercial, mainstream festival. The findings show that consumers play an important role in both the deconstruction and reconstruction of the band's authenticity. However, I also provide evidence that brand (in this case, the band) narratives play a fundamental role in orienting this process. I also discuss the theoretical implications of the findings.

Keywords

Authenticity, social drama, consumption communities, popular music, netnography

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Introduction

Authenticity has traditionally been associated with individuals' capacity to freely express their feelings and inclinations and not be preoccupied with other people's perceptions of them (e.g. Potter, 2010; Trilling, 1972). Research, however, has noted that individuals also find authenticity in common market offerings, such as brands (Holt, 2002), tourist attractions (Grayson and Martinec, 2004) or reality shows (Rose and Wood, 2005). Although many definitions and approaches have been proposed, most scholars agree that authenticity is generally related to 'truth', 'genuineness' and 'reality' (Grayson and Martinec, 2004: 297). Nevertheless, many researchers have acknowledged that not everyone agrees on what is or is not authentic (i.e. true, genuine or real). They consider that authenticity is subjective and socially constructed (e.g. Bruner, 1994); hence, an object might be considered either authentic or inauthentic by two individuals with different experiences or different levels of expertise in a particular context (e.g. Lu and Fine, 1995).

Although many authors agree that authenticity is a social construction, few have considered how different stakeholders negotiate their different views of authenticity. More sociologically-driven analyses (e.g. Peterson, 1997) maintain that authenticity results from interaction between many stakeholders (e.g. producers, distributors, media) who influence

individuals' perceptions of objects. However, they do not fully acknowledge consumers' significant roles in this process (for an exception, see Grazian, 2003). Consumer researchers (e.g. Beverland and Farrelly, 2010), on the other hand, mainly focus on an individual's ability to (re)interpret consumption objects' meanings without fully addressing the 'institutional, historical, ideological, and sociological shaping of consumption and the broader market and social systems, which situate consumers' identity projects and consumption practices' (Thompson et al., 2013: 4). Moreover, only a few authors have investigated the interesting, longitudinal processes through which authenticity is socially constructed or deconstructed over time (e.g. Arsel and Thompson, 2011); instead, they tend to consider consumers' perceptions of authenticity (and inauthenticity) statically (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Rose and Wood, 2005).

Furthermore, while several recent studies have recognized the existence of continuous tension between authenticity and inauthenticity as crucial in the consumption field (Chalmers and Price, 2009), most articles focus on the positive side, seeking to define the meanings that consumers attach to authenticity (e.g. Beverland and Farrelly, 2010) and to determine how marketing should change in order to satisfy the need for authenticity (e.g. Beverland, 2009). However, as Trilling (1972: 94) notes in his seminal work, 'authenticity is implicitly a polemical concept' that tends to emerge especially when it is somehow

undermined, contested or called into question. Starbucks's authenticity, for instance, has been questioned due to the emergence of a 'doppelgänger brand image', which is defined as 'a family of disparaging images and meanings about a brand that circulate throughout popular culture' (Thompson et al., 2006: 50). The internet's development, in general, has increasingly led to the emergence of issues related to companies', brands' or celebrities' authenticity (e.g. Holt, 2002). I look at popular music, a context in which such issues are fairly common (Potter, 2010: 82). Disputes regarding authenticity emerge, for example, when hip-hop artists are accused of not really living the *gangsta* life they rap about, when pop artists are accused of *lip-synching* during performances or when independent (indie) bands are accused of *selling out* when an album achieves popular appeal (see Barker and Taylor, 2007).

Specifically, by developing Giesler's (2008) concept of 'marketplace drama', I introduce the idea of an 'authenticity drama'. Building on Turner's (1987) theory, Giesler (2008: 740) shows that the metaphor of social drama – which Turner (1974: 37) uses to define 'units of harmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations' – may also be employed to show 'how the economic and competitive characteristics of specific market structures are transformed'. I use the same metaphor to illustrate how a particular type of social drama, which I label authenticity drama, evolves. An authenticity drama may be

viewed as a sequential process through which, owing to an object's (e.g. a company, a brand, etc.) authenticity being called into question as a result of external market forces acting upon the object, or due to internal changes in the object itself, opposing groups of subjects (e.g. consumers and producers) interact dialectically to negotiate and transform their contradictory views of authenticity and inauthenticity over time.

Fans' sociocultural sensitivity to music led me to select the object of my case study: an Italian indie band called Afterhours. In February 2009, Afterhours decided to attend the LIX edition of the Italian Sanremo Music Festival (SMF), a very commercial Italian song contest (i.e. a music festival in which there are a winner and losers) with a historically bad image among rock fans. This unexpected decision led to fierce criticism from many of its followers, accusing the band of selling out and totally losing its authenticity as an underground indie band. This event, which marked the beginning of an important crisis for the band, makes Afterhours an ideal case to understand how authenticity dramas might develop over time. Before discussing Afterhours's authenticity drama in detail, I turn my attention to the literature associated with authenticity.

Theories on authenticity

Psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists have discussed the authenticity concept extensively. In particular, an interesting debate has arisen in the field of tourism, with scholars arguing whether authenticity should be considered ‘a property of toured objects and events, or a state of mind or a mode of being toward tourism’ (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006: 65) – that is, an objective or a subjective concept. Certain authors (e.g. Boorstin, 1961; MacCannell, 1973) define authenticity as objects’ (e.g. artefacts, events, culture, etc.) intrinsic value. They believe that an objective criterion would enable people to establish an object’s authenticity; thus, its compliance could be assessed with a standard that is deemed authentic (Trilling, 1972). Accordingly, commoditisation (i.e. ‘the process by which things come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in a context of trade, thereby becoming goods (and services)’; Cohen, 1988: 380) would end up undermining local products and cultures’ objective authenticity. In this case, a form of ‘staged authenticity’ (MacCannell, 1973) would emerge, allowing objectively inauthentic products to be ‘“staged” for tourists and decorated so as to look authentic’ (Cohen, 1988: 372). By creating ‘pseudo-events’ (Boorstin, 1961), the tourist industry would thus deceive tourists, who would ‘become the victims of staged authenticity’ (Wang, 1999: 353). Their need for authentic experiences would therefore rarely be met (MacCannell, 1973).

On the other hand, other authors criticize this *modernist* approach because it does not take into account that different individuals have different ideas of what is authentic or inauthentic. Cohen (1988: 374), for example, argues that an object's authenticity is a relative concept that strictly depends on how the individual who is valuing it (e.g. a tourist rather than a social analyst) perceives the object itself. Bruner (1994: 408) similarly maintains that authenticity should be seen as a 'struggle, a social process, in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation of history'. Consequently, a more *constructivist* approach has been developed, which states that authenticity judgments should not depend on objects' intrinsic properties; instead, authenticity should be viewed as a subjective concept that is inherently negotiable (Lu and Fine, 1995), context-bounded (Bruner, 1994) and dependent on the interpretation of history or time (Handler and Saxton, 1988). Unlike the previous perspective, these authors posit that individuals might have authentic experiences 'not because they find the tour objects are authentic but simply because they are engaging in nonordinary activities, free from the constraints of the daily life' (Wang, 1999: 352). Therefore, tourists might even be able to have authentic experiences by relying on objects that are not necessarily genuine (Daniel, 1996), such as Disneyland or Disney World.

Building on these theories, consumer researchers have proposed different approaches to understand the notion of authenticity and showed that it plays a major role beyond tourism.

Authenticity in consumer research

The authenticity of consumption products and experiences is an increasingly important topic in consumer research studies. In this domain, it is also possible to identify distinct perspectives on the nature of authenticity, which, in large part, echo the main discourses that have emerged in tourism studies. The inspiring work of Grayson and Martinec (2004: 298), for instance, distinguishes between indexical ('something that is thought to have a factual and spatio-temporal link with something else') and iconic ('something whose physical manifestation resembles something that is indexically authentic') authenticity. The concept of indexical authenticity reflects that of MacCannell (1973), viewing authenticity as objects' intrinsic property. Conversely, iconic authenticity resembles the perspective of constructivist theorists (Bruner, 1994; Peterson, 1997), who argue that authenticity is not intrinsic to an object, but the result of social construction. According to these authors,

consumers would only associate authenticity with objects they perceive as being indexical or iconic.

Rose and Wood (2005), however, challenge the idea – which many authors (e.g. Trilling, 1972) share – that ‘authenticity necessarily depends on a judgment of genuineness’ (294). Building on Arnould and Price’s (2000) theory of authenticating acts and authoritative performances, Rose and Wood show that consumers may even find authenticity in artificial products such as reality shows. ‘Authenticating acts’ are ‘self-referential behaviors actors feel reveal or produce the “true” self’, while ‘authoritative performances’ are ‘collective displays aimed at inventing or refashioning cultural traditions’ (Arnould and Price, 2000: 140). Consumers may engage in authenticating acts and authoritative performances to ‘authenticate the self and important social spaces’ (Rose and Wood, 2005: 287). Through these two important rituals, a reality show’s viewers would be able to negotiate the various paradoxes inherent in it. That is, owing to their interpretation of, participation in and identification with the fantastic stories told in the show, and regardless of its indexicality or iconicity, consumers would actively contribute to the show itself to co-construct its authenticity (see also Belk and Costa, 1998; Wang, 1999).

A further important contribution in this direction is that of Beverland and colleagues (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Beverland et al., 2010) who explore why different

consumers perceive authenticity in different ways. They demonstrate that individuals do not assess an object's authenticity by evaluating its intrinsic properties but by considering its capability to satisfy their identity goals (e.g. feeling in control, connected or virtuous). Therefore, consumers may even deem a product such as a reality show authentic if it allows them to satisfy specific personal goals. Individuals would thus 'seek the same thing' (i.e. truth, genuineness, reality) but 'in different objects, brands, and events' and – above all – 'for different reasons' such as to feel in control, connected or virtuous (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010: 853).

Other authors share this point of view, considering authenticity a process in which value is co-created with individual consumers and consumption communities and not as an object's exclusive intrinsic property (see Arnould and Thompson, 2005). For instance, they evidence that goods, services and brands may be considered authentic because people can use them like media, enabling the construction of authentic relationships with members of social groups such as Harley Davidson owners (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), Star Trek enthusiasts (Kozinets, 2001) or gay communities (Kates, 2004). Leigh et al. (2006), therefore, view authenticity as a multidimensional concept that may have multiple meanings, which depend on objective (e.g. brand heritage), constructive (e.g. consumers'

driving experiences) and existential (e.g. person-to-person communal interactions) elements that may coexist within the same community setting.

The literature also mentions that authenticity may be threatened (i.e. an object's authenticity may be called into question), especially due to commoditisation (e.g. Holt, 2002; Leigh et al., 2006). That is, consumers would be critical if they were to discover that something originally produced for intrinsic, noncommercial motivations is being produced for primarily commercial reasons. Group members of subcultures of consumption, brand communities and consumer tribes especially tend to consider themselves 'guardians of a brand's authenticity' and do not easily accept companies' actions that they deem inconsistent with these companies' identity, history and culture (Cova et al., 2007: 22). Nevertheless, few researchers (e.g. Arsel and Thompson, 2011) have investigated the evolution of the conflict between authenticity and inauthenticity over time. Furthermore, many studies mainly focus on how consumers solve authenticity paradoxes (Chalmers and Price, 2009; Rose and Wood, 2005) without necessarily considering other subjects' (e.g. brands) role in this process. To contribute to this research stream, I introduce the notion of an authenticity drama and analyse the social construction of authenticity as a dialectical process that follows various stages (e.g. beginnings, middles and ends; Turner, 1987), through which several subjects (e.g. producers and consumers) struggle to negotiate their

different views and perspectives on authenticity and inauthenticity. I carried out empirical research in the field of popular music with this objective in mind.

Authenticity and popular music

There are two dominant schools of thought concerning the relationship between authenticity and popular music. They also share traits with primary discourses in tourism and consumer research. The first perspective argues that a work of art should be produced for more exalted reasons than mere profit. Hence, since popular music is often conceived as an ordinary product to be sold, it may not be considered authentic. Adorno and Horkheimer (1997), for example, rejected the notion that a work of art could be a product; they undertook a very detailed analysis of the concept of popular music, ultimately considering it commercial and completely *inauthentic*. As many other scholars have also noted (e.g. Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007, 2008), these two authors' thoughts remain relevant because, nowadays, music recording and representation tend to be organized in companies through interactions between managers, artists, agents and many other intermediaries (Negus, 1992). In addition, popular music is sometimes created as *muzak* (Bradshaw and Holbrook,

2008), i.e. composed and used to create comfortable environments in which consumers move (e.g. supermarkets, stores and shopping centres). This view thus tends to consider popular music inauthentic and to conceptualize consumers as ‘passive and blinded by seduction of consumer goods and discourses of consumer culture’ (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010: 306).

The second school of thought does not fully agree with Adorno and Horkheimer’s critical theory. Lash and Lury (2007: 3), for instance, argue that although the culture industry is often used to exert control and domination over individuals’ habits and behaviours, various types of phenomena – such as subcultures (e.g. punk, hippie, etc.) – show that the culture industry might also be deemed a place of resistance or site of struggle. According to this view, the popular music scene is a context in which individuals may resist meanings imposed from above and rework them within social movements (Hall and Jefferson, 1976). Moreover, as noted for other objects of consumption (e.g. Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Wang, 1999), music is also an important part of individuals’ life and of the formulation and expression of their self-identity (e.g. Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Shankar et al., 2009). Accordingly, music may be understood as a *resource* that people use creatively to enrich their lives and make connections (e.g. Frith, 1996). De Nora (2000), for example, claims that listeners may use music to satisfy their personal needs and to fulfil their identity

projects. Therefore, as Hesmondhalgh (2008: 232) notes, many music scholars strongly emphasize the ‘active and reflexive agency of consumers’ (see also Venkatesh and Meamber, 2006).

In terms of authenticity, this means that consumers would also attribute authenticity to music depending on who they are and how they use it, while music’s properties (e.g. its indexicality or iconicity) may not even be important in this evaluation (see Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). Moore (2002: 215), for instance, has revealed that authenticity may be legitimated within a specific community regardless of its intrinsic quality. In his study of Chicago blues clubs, Grazian (2003) also demonstrates that performers, club owners and listeners socially negotiate the authenticity of these clubs’ blues experiences, and consumers often view these experiences as authentic simply because they represent something unusual that helps them escape everyday life (similar to Wang, 1999).

Hence, although producers and mass media often *package* authenticity in order to position their market offerings as genuine (Peterson, 1997) or anti-commercial (Thornton, 1996), consumers still seem to pay attention to this value. Especially rock musicians are often intentionally *positioned* as rebels or alternative (e.g. Holt and Thompson, 2004). Yet, Keightley (2001) notes that – compared to pop – rock fans, critics and musicians tend to constantly evaluate rock in terms of its honesty, sincerity, originality or as being

uncorrupted by commerce, which authentic rock music *should* be. Notably, within the indie genre, issues of authenticity are even more relevant, since this specific genre was born in a utopian attempt to resist the common trend of ‘bands being co-opted/corrupted by the mainstream’ (Dolan, 2010: 459).

Research on popular music has thus found that authenticity plays a major role in it. Specifically, most scholars agree that, rather than being viewed as an object’s intrinsic property (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997), authenticity should be conceived as a subjective and socially constructed concept (e.g. De Nora, 2000). The literature, however, has paid scant attention to how consumers react to the process through which authenticity evolves (and may be threatened) over time. In his longitudinal study on the ‘fabrication’ of authenticity within country music, Peterson (1997) conceptualizes authenticity as a rhetorical resource that performers, producers and marketing executives employ and continuously renew in order to maintain the music’s appeal over time. Nevertheless, he does not fully analyse how an audience reacts to this continuous authenticity renovation process. Similarly, Glynn and Lounsbury (2005) investigate how critical reviews of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra performances respond to the orchestra’s development of more ‘mainstream’ or ‘pop’ interpretations of classic music. However, by mostly focusing on critics, they leave several questions open regarding how the final consumers may react to

the process through which authenticity (and its continuous conflict with inauthenticity) changes over time: How do consumers react when the market appropriates authenticity? Do they respond critically or do they defend their favourite consumption object? What does this tell us about the consumption of authenticity in general?

While I will elaborate on these aspects below, I first describe the methods used in this empirical research.

Methods

The empirical analysis is based on a netnography and nine in-depth interviews.

Netnography was applied for two important reasons. Firstly, this method is mostly based on the analysis of internet content, such as blog or forum posts. This made it possible to read how Afterhours's fans regarded the band before its decision to attend SMF as well as how they reacted to its participation in SMF. Secondly, since netnography provides information on consumer groups' 'symbolism, meanings and consumption patterns' (Kozinets, 2002: 61), it was a suitable method to analyse consumption communities' role in both the deconstruction and reconstruction of authenticity.

Specifically, my data collection and analysis followed five steps: (a) community identification; (b) observational netnography; (c) participant netnography; (d) in-depth interviews; (e) data analysis and member checks. In the first stage, I identified the most appropriate blogs or websites for this study. In December 2008, I began monitoring several Afterhours blogs or websites to find those offering better content and posting frequency (Kozinets, 2002: 63). The data sources were also selected according to the goal of realistically representing Afterhours's followers, without focusing on specific targets (Kozinets, 2002: 64). Several forums and bulletin boards were thus analysed, as described in Table 1. The downloaded text amounted to approximately 1,500 pages (double-spaced, 12-point).

Table 1. 'Online sources' about here

In February 2009, I began the data collection. Paying attention to Langer and Beckman's (2005) concern about people's potential lack of spontaneity when they are aware that they are being observed, I decided not to reveal my identity in the first part of my netnography, which thus started as a covert study (see Brown et al., 2003). After a couple of months of analysis, however, I disclosed my presence to Afterhours's fans, moving from mere observational netnography to more active netnography. Kozinets (2010: 140) suggests that,

to guarantee research ethics, important rules should be followed, such as researchers identifying themselves and providing their informants with details about the research project, asking appropriate permission, gaining consent where needed and ensuring informants' anonymity. Accordingly, I contacted the blog or website administrators to ask them for permission to use direct (anonymous) quotations for nonprofit research. Upon being granted permission, I introduced myself to the community and started participating more actively in the discussion by also asking questions related to my research project.

Owing to my more active participation, I could establish more direct relationships with members who were extremely involved, which was very useful as a few agreed to be interviewed or helped me identify other members to interview. Specifically, I followed two main criteria when choosing my respondents. Firstly, I was interested in members whose volume of posts in forum discussions was high compared to that of other members. Secondly, I wanted to interview members who either criticized or defended Afterhours fiercely in their forum discussions. Therefore, while analysing my data, I identified a group of 28 individuals whose participation in the discussion was important. In keeping with their attitude towards the band, I divided them into either a group of *defenders* and one of *critics*, and invited them to be interviewed. Nine, five of whom were defenders and four critics (see Table 2), agreed to be interviewed on Skype.

In part one of the semi-structured interview, I asked them to describe their relationships with Afterhours (how long they had been listening to the band, what they thought of it, what it represented for them, etc.). In part two, I asked them to discuss the band's authenticity. Finally, I asked the interviewees to comment on Afterhours's participation in SMF and to reassess the band's authenticity in the light of this event. The interviews were conducted in the summers of 2009 and 2010 and ranged between 15 minutes and an hour; they were recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 78 pages of text (double-spaced, 12-point).

Table 2. 'Informants' demographics and attitudes towards the band' about here

The application of these techniques made it possible to triangulate the data across different methods, which informed my final interpretations. That is, by using two distinct methods (i.e. netnography and in-depth interviews), I could examine the same phenomenon from different viewpoints, cross-check my results and facilitate a more comprehensive understanding (see Denzin, 1970). Specifically, I read, coded and interpreted my data using Atlas.ti, mirroring the approach proposed by Spiggle (1994: 493) for qualitative data analysis. After the first round of coding, I generated more complex second-order codes

following an interpretive hermeneutical approach. That is, I used an iterative approach in which a ‘part’ of the data (e.g. an emergent code) was continuously ‘reinterpreted in relation to the developing sense of the “whole” ’ (Thompson et al., 1994: 433). In this regard, it is worth noting that although analytic coding and hermeneutic interpretation are sometimes considered different approaches (e.g. Spiggle, 1994), the netnographer often ends up using both to provide a more sensitive interpretation (Kozinets, 2010: 120). This helped me develop a more holistic understanding of the temporal relationships between the various codes that emerged in the period prior to the band’s announcement of their participation in SMF, after the announcement and after participating.

To achieve this important result, the nine informants I interviewed were also employed in the procedure of ‘member checking’ (Kozinets, 2002: 66). They were asked to comment on my final interpretation of the data; their views were particularly useful to better understand some of the dynamics through which opposite and competing meanings were negotiated within the community.

The evolution over time of Afterhours’s SMF participation conflict

Afterhours's SMF participation provides a unique opportunity to understand the evolution of an authenticity drama over time. Similar to the social dramas defined by Turner (1987), authenticity dramas also seem to have a recognisable narrative that follows four main phases (see Figure 1): an initial 'breach' in which a paradoxical situation occurs that potentially undermines an object's authenticity (e.g. an alternative band such as Afterhours announces it will attend a mainstream festival such as SMF); a subsequent 'crisis' in which critical and defensive consumers try to negotiate their different views of authenticity (e.g. while most fans tend to be critical, a few may start searching for explanations for the situation); a phase of 'redressive actions' through which other subjects (e.g. producers) try to limit the spread of the crisis (e.g. the band tries to provide consumers with new cues to reinterpret the situation); and a final stage in which, if the redressive actions are successful, there may be a 'reintegration' (e.g. new forms of authenticity may be co-created that replace the old ones). Interestingly, although this last step may be a solution to the crisis, it is worth considering that, after the reintegration, the way in which the actors (e.g. consumers and producers) interact with one another and the way in which they come to perceive authenticity and inauthenticity may differ (even significantly) from that before the crisis. Indeed, as Turner (1987: 26) highlights, 'every social drama alters, in however minuscule a fashion, the structure of the relevant social field'.

Figure 1. ‘Dialectical model of authenticity and inauthenticity’ about here

I will now explore the most recurrent contradictions and conflicts through which Afterhours’s authenticity drama developed and was eventually reintegrated.

The breach

SMF is an extremely popular week-long televised event that is rarely attended by *true* rock or independent bands, since the bands associated with this festival are generally considered more commercially driven than creatively driven. SMF became a mainstream TV show many years ago, and many believe that the quality of music presented is not a key consideration. Certain older musicians use SMF as an opportunity to rekindle their careers, while some emerging bands use it to draw more commercial attention, since SMF has millions of viewers. However, the fans of these emerging bands frequently criticize them, since SMF participation is often considered a signal that a band will become more commercial. Indeed, according to the festival’s ground rules, each band must present an

unreleased song. Hence, to please the show's typically mainstream audience, most artists present a more accessible *pop* song.

The Afterhours case is an emblematic one since, prior to its SMF participation, it was a typical independent band whose music was characterized as hard rock with provocative and strong lyrics. The band's unexpected decision was thus an important breach that might have undermined its authenticity. As previous studies highlight, authenticity tends to be especially threatened when consumers perceive an attempt to sell out or corrupt (Arnould and Price, 2000; Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2001). When this happens, many individuals generally feel that their favourite company, brand or – in my case – band is losing its integrity. That is, it may be perceived as no longer adhering to the relevant or acceptable principles and standards (e.g. Xie and Peng, 2009). Furthermore, its actions may be seen as mere attempts to become more popular or make more money, which means that it is losing its authenticity (Grayson and Martinec, 2004: 297).

Since popular music can be considered a cultural product, listeners care about its integrity (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008; Dolan, 2010). This is especially an issue in rock music. As Keightley (2001: 109) notes, rock often tends to be defined as the (authentic) opposite of (inauthentic) pop. Playing *rock* music would thus mean rejecting all aspects of mass-distributed music that are believed to be soft, safe or corrupted, and can be related to

pop music. Accordingly, an important paradox emerged when a band such as Afterhours, which its fans deemed a genuine *rock hero*, agreed to perform at a commercial contest with pop musicians whom its fans considered *pop (anti)heroes*.

Therefore, as I will show, as soon as its fans learnt of Afterhours's intention to attend SMF, many criticized the decision because they considered the festival a commercial operation. In other words, they thought the band had sold out and started to dislike it. However, after a number of posts criticizing the band, an important discussion seeking to make sense of this unexpected decision developed between community members. These discussion threads sought to reconcile the decision in ways that might render it more acceptable. For example, a common thread was to argue that other *genuine* artists had also attended SMF. Some posts sought to preserve the band's identity by arguing that venues are unimportant and that bands should be judged according to the quality of their music, not by where they play. Not all the provided explanations can, however, be considered plausible. Nevertheless, many fans attempted to imagine and provide new elements that might potentially justify the band's actions and might preserve its authenticity (see Belk and Costa, 1998; Rose and Wood, 2005).

As I will now highlight, two competing discourses emerged between fans who attacked Afterhours and those who found reasons to defend it.

The crisis

As anticipated in the previous section, critical fans viewed the participation in such a famous and commercial festival as a mere promotional operation for musicians seeking to launch a new song, to stage a revival after many years or – even worse – to expand its fan base in order to sell more records. All the supporters who shared this view were particularly disappointed and accused the band of being inconsistent, as the following sarcastic comment illustrates:

After the 2008 May Day concert, Manuel [Agnelli, Afterhours's lead vocalist] said that everyone should be free to spread their own music however they wish. Afterhours chose not to use TV but alternative ways. Now it has decided to attend SMF. This is the death of music! The worst thing the band could do. What a delusion! Congratulations to Manuel and company for being

consistent. (Netnography – forum: Afterhours at Sanremo. What do you think?, Facebook, 9 January 2009)

Most of the critical fans argued that the band's SMF participation should be rejected, because it was merely an attempt to gain *illegitimate* listeners. These fans sought to distinguish themselves from the mainstream (Thornton, 1996); hence, they saw the commercialisation of their favourite music as a potential threat to alternative culture (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Moore, 2005):

I want to explain that alternative people are people who follow an underground style in music, art, clothes. They are attracted to discovering something new and appropriating it. Of course, everything is doomed to be conveyed to a larger audience sooner or later, but at that moment the true alternative person automatically stops being interested in it. Afterhours will be a great loss, but there are other good musicians and I simply need to discover them. I'll find them and enjoy them until, one day, they also decide to sell out. At that point, I'll leave them to

people who don't like to search and are always influenced by others. By the way, I'm really sorry to say that I'll lose my interest in Afterhours. But Sanremo is shit! I don't understand why the band decided to muscle in. Have you thought of the people with whom we will now share the band's concerts? Can you imagine an Afterhours concert with Laura Pausini [an Italian pop icon] fans in the audience? I'm sorry, but good music, as with every good thing, is meant for only a few people!

P. (Netnography – reply to the article *Even Afterhours at SMF*, 8 February 2009)

P. thus clearly believes that alternative people differ from ordinary people, since they create an own, unique style, which includes choosing particular products in certain categories, such as music, art, clothes, etc. However, authenticity implies that only a few alternative people consume specific products; when ordinary people begin to use these products, they lose their original, distinguishing power and become mere mainstream objects. Afterhours's SMF participation is a typical situation that leads a person such as P. to become critical of and detach from a band.

A few months after Afterhours's announcement, an increasing number of enthusiasts nevertheless started rejecting this logic, which *ghettoizes* the independent scene. As mentioned in the following post – a direct response to P.'s post (quoted above) – some members believe that music should not be judged by the size of its potential audience. In this new view, 'alternative' and 'commercial' are considered nonsensical terms:

I am sorry P., but there's something I don't understand. Do you like Afterhours, but you won't like the band if it became more 'commercial'? So what if more people listen to it? From your perspective, 'alternative' people should only see or listen to what is not 'commercial'. They should therefore be very elitist! I think you judge an Afterhours's song more by the number of listeners than by the song as such. 'Alternative' or 'commercial' are two nonsensical words. I think everyone should listen to what he or she likes, not because a few or many people do.

(Netnography – reply to P.'s response to the article *Even Afterhours at SMF*, 9 February 2009)

Specifically, many defenders thought that Afterhours's SMF participation might be acceptable because it would expose the band to contamination by new styles and new listeners, therefore allowing it to emerge from its habitual and limited context. Indeed, only by breaching or crossing genres and formats could it produce something new, original and – thus – authentic. In this regard, there was an interesting Facebook discussion between two members – the first is a critical member and the second is a defender who responded to the former's critical stance. Notably, they both agreed to be interviewed on Skype as subjects 5 and 3 (see Table 2):

I've just learnt the sad and dramatic news of Afterhours's presence at Sanremo... This reminds me of the day when, as a mere boy, I entered my town's record shop to buy my birthday gift: Afterhours's Germi [Germs] and Hai paura del buio? [Are you afraid of the dark?]... two of the few Italian alternative rock masterpieces. And now, what's up? Where has Italian alternative rock gone? Wasn't it born to subvert market rules, to provide people who really had something to say scope to do so???

If it really ended up performing on that stage, all the efforts made to create an alternative scene would not amount to anything!

Can Sanremo really become Afterhours's objective? I ask the band this question directly: you guys've always fought against mainstream music and major companies... so, what are you doing now at Sanremo, which is their symbol! Wasn't the desire to distinguish yourself from bad music your primary motivation?! Let someone talk to me. Now! (Netnography – forum: SMF, Facebook, 14 January 2009)

My opinion is the opposite of yours... As a listener, I come from the metal scene... as you know, a marginalized music genre... and do you know who places it on the margin??? Metal people themselves... they always want to struggle with anyone who tries to make the best music ever known! They always criticize people who sell out, but this way they send the music they love (and I love) toward a dead-end street!

I believe we should stop thinking that mainstream people can't listen to the music we love... music should connect and not divide! Besides, the best things seem to come from the mixture of various things... Popular music has always been a collage of genres, styles and cultures. The greatest ones arose through this process of musical styles meeting and being blended and meshed together. So, there should not be any division.

Conversely, there should be contamination! If Anthrax's trash hadn't met Public Enemy's rap, we would never have had crossover! (Netnography – forum: SMF, Facebook, 14 January 2009)

According to certain members, Afterhours's surprising actions could be perceived as an attempt to experiment and do something new, such as entering new contexts and breaching or crossing formats. This perspective is not necessarily consistent with Afterhours fans' traditional views of SMF. By adopting this approach, however, they might even accept the notion of the band entering a mainstream context, and might deem it a genuine effort to integrate with other music genres and to create new styles (Rose and Wood, 2005).

To sum up, a notable conflict between *alternative* and *mainstream* cultures emerged (Thornton, 1996). Consequently, depending on the lens used to interpret Afterhours's SMF participation, the band might be deemed authentic or inauthentic (Cohen, 1988), and – importantly – these opposing discourses were discussed in the community (Beverland et al., 2010; Kates, 2002; Leigh et al., 2006) in order to understand and somehow justify the band's behaviour. Nevertheless, these conflicts seemed to only begin to resolve after the band's performance at Sanremo. As described in the following section, a few days before its performance at SMF, Afterhours communicated directly with its fans to provide them with useful interpretive keys or cues to understand its actions and its aims with SMF participation. Furthermore, the song presented at SMF was typical of Afterhours's style and many fans deemed it *authentic*. Hence, an increasing number of supporters started to share a new perception of Afterhours.

The redress

After an initial period during which Afterhours did not explain its behaviour, it deemed it necessary to interact directly with its supporters and to provide them with clarification.

Specifically, a few days before SMF, the band gave interviews in which it responded to many of the criticisms it had received. Afterhours explained its decision on its official website as follows:

For us, SMF participation means continuing in line with the discourse of also conveying our music outside of our natural environment. Some years ago, we organized a festival, *Tora! Tora!* [a festival established in 2001 by Afterhours and other alternative bands to promote their music] that sought to increase awareness of the independent scene, help it to structure itself, and to overcome the silly aesthetic and stylistic barriers that continue to divide music – much as we have always divided our country into municipalities and districts. The project would also serve to reach a larger audience and expose them to a new, talented scene. We will tackle SMF in the same spirit. We do, of course, have promotional objectives, but we are also doing it because we want to be free to do whatever we want! We have the right to showcase our music anywhere – without barriers or

ghettos or being dictated to by anyone. (Netnography –

Afterhours's official website, 8 February 2009)

Interestingly, the band introduced the idea that participating in SMF would mean being free and independent from anyone, including its fans. This argument is particularly important, since many followers fully embraced this justification of the band's actions. That is, many fans began to agree that real artists should be free to express themselves as and where they wish. Therefore, this stance stimulated a new vision of authenticity. While most Afterhours fans initially only perceived musicians as authentic while they remained consistent with their original image (for instance, see the first, sarcastic comment in the 'crisis' section), a growing number of defenders began to assert that only musicians who were free to change over time, without necessarily conforming to their fans' likes and dislikes, could be deemed authentic (see Keightley, 2001: 135).

This represents the myth of the *anarchic* artist – who, unlike *compliant* and subservient artists – needs to be rebellious, unmanageable and revolutionary (Barker and Taylor, 2007; Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007; Holt, 2002). Accordingly, several Afterhours fans began to agree that, since it is normal for people to change, when artists think and behave only in one way, this could mean that they have a particular interest in doing so, such as that it

helps them maintain a (good) relationship with their fans and to earn money. Even independent and alternative artists who never change their style might thus be considered inauthentic because their behaviours are probably also the result of intelligent marketing strategies. They are merely positioned as oppositional to mainstream music to satisfy the needs of those consumers who want to listen to something *cool, trendy* or *hip* (Dolan, 2010; Holt and Thompson, 2004). Consequently, only those artists who can change independently should be considered *true* artists:

Afterhours is authentic because it did not cease to change over time. It started as a pure rock band, then it tried to sing in English and began to use less distortion. Finally, it started playing less aggressive ballads and returned to singing in Italian. Sanremo is just another step. If a band or a singer does not develop over time and, merely to be faithful to its original credo, keeps doing what it has been doing for ten or 15 years, this shows that it is unable to go beyond this. So, I wonder if they can really be considered artists. (Skype interview, Subject 6 (defender), 28 June 2009)

By participating in Sanremo, Afterhours would therefore demonstrate that it was genuinely free and spontaneous (Oakes, 2009). That is, the band showed that it had the courage and the ability to change how and when it wanted to showcase its music and to be independent not only from the mainstream, but also from indie-music lovers.

Furthermore, many fans considered Afterhours's performance at SMF authentic because the band refused to follow traditional SMF *habits* and presented its typically alternative (uncommon for Sanremo) rock song – as opposed to a pop song. *Il paese è reale* (*The country is real*) is a complex and unusual song for SMF and, as exemplified in the following quotation, this showed that the band had no intention of selling out:

I was one of many upset fans... Still, I wanted to watch its SMF performance... You know, I was also curious about that... I don't know how much our criticism influenced it... To be honest, I believe it didn't really mattered... Anyway, I now think it won! Its song was a real Afterhours one... almost an 'unrealistic' song in that context... Its message couldn't be clearer! (Skype interview, Subject 4 (critic), 4 July 2010)

Notably, this interview was with a fan who was initially very critical. As he explains, however, he completely changed his mind when he ascertained that the band had simply brought its music to the SMF stage, had not allowed its fans to influence it, had not adapted its music to the context or compromised its alternative image.

Finally, the band carried out other important actions after SMF that led its fans to develop another – slightly different – view of its behaviour. The following section addresses this change.

Reintegration

After performing at SMF, Afterhours – surprisingly – refused to allow its song to be used in the usual Sanremo compilation. It decided to rather launch an alternative project in which it involved other lesser-known Italian underground artists, thus giving them an opportunity to be heard. Specifically, the band put together a collection that, together with *Il paese è reale*, contained 18 other songs by artists from Italy's indie scene. In other words, instead of featuring the traditional Sanremo collection or publishing a new album, as SMF participants generally do, the band chose to help showcase other deserving bands generally

ignored by the mass media because they are not commercial. The project was then transformed into a tour that, notably, was called *I want to do something that serves* (a line from the Afterhours song for SMF) and during which these independent bands shared the stage with Afterhours. Finally, Afterhours's participation in SMF, the release of this unconventional indie compilation and this live concert tour stimulated an important debate in *XL*, a prominent Italian music magazine. In several issues of *XL*, representatives of major and indie companies, the mass media, promoters and various musicians (including Afterhours) discussed the problem of the limited showcasing of independent music in Italy.

Hence, Afterhours's indie actions seemed to have definitely resolved the conflicts within the community. In particular, the final interpretation of Afterhours's actions – now shared by many of its supporters – was that the band participated in SMF in order to expose the independent scene as a whole to a larger audience, since, especially in Italy, the mass media only broadcasts mainstream music. This is well exemplified in the following conversation between two supporters:

In such a context, it was able to retain its identity. In particular, it sought to let people know about its [the indie] scene. It heroically represented a scene that is, unfairly, under-

represented. It showed great COURAGE! Viva Afterhours!

Forever, love :) (Netnography – Sallon bulletin board, 22

February 2009)

I absolutely agree with you... When I heard of the SMF participation I couldn't believe it, but then, what did I discover?

The band participated in SMF by performing an uncommonly nice piece of music; it was true to itself, even in that damned context... and then? Then it launched a compilation to also recommend the emergent bands worth listening to, to an inexpert public ... It's a really nice way to promote indie-music!

By the way, I also heard the price of the CD is really low... :) It [initially] seemed impossible that everything could end this way! Now I see that this is simply not true! Thank you After ;)

(Netnography – Sallon bulletin board, 23 February 2009)

Consequently, performing in Sanremo could be interpreted as an attempt to educate uninitiated listeners and show them that there is another kind of – more authentic – music. Accordingly, even using a mass medium such as TV is no longer considered *wrong*,

because Afterhours used it to reach more people for its ambitious project to represent other indie musicians:

To be honest, I was pretty disappointed. As you can read on Facebook, I strongly criticized it. I'm not the only one, since many others expressed very negative feelings toward it. Then, when I heard about the *Il paese è reale* collection, I understood what the band actually sought to do: to promote indie music via a pretty commercial medium. I then understood that the band had great courage to fight for a just cause on a stage that it certainly did not love. In other words, although it used a medium that alternative people don't like, it sought to help underground bands emerge! And I am sure this will be especially useful for people who don't understand good music and need some help to appreciate it! (Skype interview, Subject 5 (critic), 28 June 2009)

Notably, people who shared this perspective considered Afterhours even more authentic and respectable than before, because by attending an inauthentic festival it would have sacrificed its image for the sake of a social cause: helping the Italian independent scene

emerge. In other words, Afterhours came to be seen as a sort of *metonym*; that is, as an iconic band (Grayson and Martinec, 2004) that represented all true bands through their battle to gain recognition for alternative music in a world dominated by commercial and mainstream music. Therefore, several months after Afterhours announced its SMF attendance, new forms of authenticity were constructed that led this authenticity drama to a conclusion. Before its SMF participation, the band was considered authentic but for different reasons: for instance, because it was viewed as a typically indie band that refused to follow the market rules and performed a unique type of alternative rock (Holt, 2002). After SMF, Afterhours was no longer perceived as an *ordinary* (irrelevant) indie band. Conversely, people started considering it as a significant *icon* of all less popular indie bands (Brown et al., 2003; Holt, 2004):

THEY HAD SPUNK!!! LYRICS WERE TRULY
AFTERHOURS... WITH AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE
INSIDE: IT REALLY DID ‘SOMETHING THAT SERVES’...
FOR US, FOR OTHER INDIE BANDS... BY THE WAY, IT’S
NOT JUST ANOTHER INDIE BAND: IT NOW IS ‘THE’
INDIE BAND! ALL THE ALTERNATIVE BANDS’LL BE

BEHOLDEN TO IT FOR ALL IT DID FOR THEM.

(Netnography – Facebook bulletin board, 28 March 2009)

Clearly, because authenticity is a social construct that is continuously transformed and negotiated (e.g. Glynn and Lounsbury, 2005), other moments of crisis will probably arise in future (Holt, 2002). Still, by longitudinally observing the evolution of an authenticity drama from beginning to end, it is possible to shed more light on the processes through which items are socially authenticated or disauthenticated. I subsequently discuss this study's main implications.

Discussion

This study's findings show that, as other authors illustrate (Aaker et al., 2004; Huber et al., 2009), brands' *transgressions* – such as Afterhours's SMF participation – can be perceived as a breach that can severely damage their relationship with their fans. This empirical context, however, provides evidence that defending authenticity can also be an important response when authenticity is undermined. This result is consistent with consumer culture

theory, according to which consumers are considered co-producers of culture (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 873) as well as important actors in both the social deconstruction and reconstruction of authenticity (Arnould and Price, 2000; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Rose and Wood, 2005). Moreover, analogous to the literature on value co-creation (e.g. Cova and Dalli, 2009), this article maintains that consumers are able to co-create value through their individual and, above all, communal consumption practices (e.g. Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2009).

However, I also provided evidence that, while consumers play an increasingly important role in the authenticity co-creation process, other subjects (e.g. producers, media, etc.) still seem to determine the direction of this process (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2006: 32). While reconstructing authenticity, consumers may for instance be influenced by brand narratives that, if appropriately developed, may lead them to resolve the crisis (see Figure 1). In this case, two brand narratives were particularly important. Firstly, when Afterhours explained to its fans that it wanted to be totally free and independent, including from indie-music lovers, it introduced an important cue that allowed its followers to reinterpret its decision. This allowed the band to be viewed as an anarchic, free – and thus *truer* – artist (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007). Secondly, because the band successfully established a direct link between its SMF participation and its past attempts to increase awareness of the

independent scene (e.g. by organizing festivals for alternative bands), this enabled its followers to deem its SMF participation consistent with the history of an iconic band interested in representing and promoting independent Italian music. Afterhours's history could therefore be interpreted as a classic myth in which the hero may struggle, fail and even fall, but then, owing to his extraordinary passion, is resurrected and triumphs by accomplishing almost impossible tasks (Belk and Tumbat, 2005; Beverland, 2009) – in this case, the band risking losing its followers in order to *battle* the mainstream world and show that indie-music is more authentic than pop music (Thornton, 1996).

Consequently, in partial contrast to other studies on the authenticity concept, which often show consumers' ability to decode objects of consumption's cultural meanings and to develop alternative interpretations (e.g. Arnould and Thompson, 2005), I hold that an object's authenticity should be viewed as the product of various elements. On the one hand, it is important to examine how certain individual factors, such as the projection of consumers' fantasies on the object (e.g. Belk and Costa, 1998; Rose and Wood, 2005), the life projects linked to the object (e.g. Beverland and Farrelly, 2010) or the object's role in facilitating the construction of true and sincere bonds with other people (e.g. Cova et al., 2007) affect the authenticity co-creation process. On the other hand, it is necessary to more deeply investigate the 'historical, sociological, ideological, and institutional shaping of

consumption and marketplace phenomenon' (Thompson et al., 2013: 4). In this case, for instance, individuals' interpretations and projections were significantly influenced by the competing discourses that took place within the community (e.g. the conflicts between notions of integrity and corruption, alternative and mainstream cultures, etc.) and – above all – by the band's (and other subjects') actions and expressions.

This insight may also extend our view of marketplace dramas. Holt and Thompson (2004: 438) demonstrate that, beyond the risky consumption domains, dramatic narratives may also be employed to interpret 'the more mundane and improvisational consumption domains found in everyday life'. Giesler (2008: 751) further shows that 'consumption does not only provide a resource for dramatic self-construction'; consumer dramatic performances also play a 'formative role in directing the historical process of market evolution'. In my view, the social construction of authenticity processes may also be better illuminated if metaphorically read through a social drama lens. In this regard, certain authors have already noted that authenticity emerges as a particularly important topic when it is called into question (Trilling, 1972). Other scholars have maintained that the co-creation of authenticity is derived from the negotiation of a set of paradoxical elements inherent in it (e.g. Rose and Wood, 2005), while other researchers have argued that authenticity is transformed over time (e.g. Peterson, 1997). The majority of these

contributions, however, discuss the conflict between authenticity and inauthenticity in a static way (e.g. Grayson and Martinec, 2004), pay little attention to inauthenticity (e.g. Leigh et al., 2006) and – above all – focus mostly on consumer interpretations without carefully analysing other subjects' (e.g. brands') role in the process of co-creating authenticity (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Rose and Wood, 2005).

Instead, I maintain that in an authenticity drama, a recognisable, dialectical process is generally set in motion by an initial (perceived) breach or transgression (e.g. Afterhours's SMF attendance). Through this dialectical process, consumers, together with producers and other important subjects, may firstly deconstruct and then resolve authenticity paradoxes (e.g. the conflicts between integrity and corruption, distinction and contamination, etc.). By negotiating their conflicting views, consumers, producers and other important subjects would then come to perceive authenticity (and inauthenticity) in (significantly) new ways. This view is thus consistent with previous contributions, in which other authors (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Shankar et al., 2009) criticize the idea that consumers are always able to develop interpretive strategies to create critical or oppositional readings of meanings encoded in the products they consume (De Nora, 2000; Slater, 1997). Conversely, as the Afterhours case exemplifies, producers (and other subjects, such as cultural intermediaries) still play a key role in providing consumers with

appropriate cues to develop their (personal and social) readings of consumption objects' meanings (see Lu and Fine, 1995); moreover, in many cases, consumer activities are merely responses to producers' initiatives (Giesler, 2008: 751).

To better understand the creative approaches by which consumers manage the tension between the authentic and inauthentic, it is therefore central to employ a dynamic, longitudinal approach rather than a static one. It is also essential to adopt a more sociocultural, holistic perspective that examines how various important actors deal with the ambiguity and contradictions related to the authenticity social construction rather than focusing on single subjects (e.g. consumers). Beyond looking at fans' and Afterhours's behaviour during this authenticity drama, I barely mentioned that the magazine *XL* contributed to the development of the debate on the band's SMF participation, which helped resolve the crisis. However, I strongly recommend further research and analyses of the role of strategic subjects, such as cultural intermediaries, in the co-construction of authenticity (see Izberk-Bilgin, 2010; Thompson et al., 2013).

This study may also be discussed within the context of crisis management literature. As the cases of Martha Stewart, Tiger Woods, Starbucks and others show, crisis management is an increasingly important issue for companies (Aaker et al., 2004; Thompson et al., 2006). Accordingly, many types of response strategies have been proposed to limit the

crises' negative effects, such as brand avoidance, brand boycott, negative word-of-mouth, etc. (Huber et al., 2009). A few authors (e.g. Dutta and Pullig, 2011), however, argue that a single type of response strategy should not be applied to all crisis types. Conversely, the efficacy of response strategies (e.g. denial, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action) depends on the specific brand crisis. Xie and Peng (2009: 586) thus believe that, to better understand which strategy is best suited to a particular situation, more studies are required that analyse specific, *real* crises and *real* consumer responses. In this regard, this article deals with a *real* crisis (i.e. a sort of natural experiment) emerging from a cultural object of consumption's authenticity being threatened due to its potential attempt to become more commercial; hence, its results might be relevant for other market offerings – such as cultural products (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2006), tourist attractions (Grayson and Martinec, 2004) or cultural brands (Holt, 2004) – that may face similar types of crises.

Specifically, two interesting issues arise here. Firstly, meanings associated with authenticity tend to change over time, emerging from a continuous dialectic between several subjects (e.g. consumers and producers), who contribute to its co-creation. Notably, important transformations occur when authenticity is threatened or called into question. When this happens, an authenticity drama may develop, through which the meanings of authenticity and inauthenticity are discussed and may come to be perceived in different

ways by consumers. Therefore, although an important threat such as commoditisation may undermine authenticity in the short term (e.g. MacCannell, 1973), this is not necessarily true in the long term (e.g. Cohen, 1988). Attempted commercialisation might indeed represent an important stimulus for a discussion of a brand's authenticity (or inauthenticity) that lead to the definition of new ideals of authenticity (and inauthenticity). The result of this discussion certainly depends on how consumers negotiate their different interpretations of a paradoxical situation, but it is also significantly determined by a company's capability to provide its consumers with the right cues to allow them to co-create new definitions of authenticity (e.g. Peterson, 1997). Accordingly, even a brand that is becoming more commercial might still be deemed authentic if a company manages to build its legitimacy on new (alternative) sources; for instance, it shows that, although it has become more popular, it may now be perceived as an *anarchic* brand that had not even allowed its fans to influence it, or it may now be considered an *icon*.

Finally, being involved in captivating stories may – paradoxically – help a company to be perceived as authentic. Indeed, facing a crisis and being able to ride it out (as Afterhours did) contribute to humanizing a brand and often teaches important moral and other lessons (Beverland, 2009: 48), which may have a positive effect on consumers. Apple (Belk and Tumbat, 2005) and Harley Davidson (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), for instance,

faced several crises in their histories (e.g. Harley Davidson fought a difficult struggle against Japanese imports; Apple had to cope with its fans' criticism of various new products, such as the iPad, etc.) but the dynamic fluctuation between rise and fall, as well as important failures and successes, somehow contributed to the association of these brands with *magic* stories, the development of their *myths* and the emergence of almost *religious* (Oakes et al., 2013) brand communities.

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Table 1. Online sources

Main sources	Material analysed	Period of analysis
Official Afterhours website (www.afterhours.it)	Bulletin board	July 2008 to present
Unofficial Afterhours website (www.sallon.it)	Bulletin board; forums: Are you new?, News, Come in, Let's chat, and Not only After	July 2008 to present
Afterhours's Myspace page (www.myspace.com/weareafterhours)	Bulletin board; blog	July 2008 to present
Afterhours's Facebook main page	Bulletin board; forums: Afterhours's songs, After HYENAS, let's think about I Milanesi [the album <i>I Milanesi</i> <i>Ammazzano il Sabato</i> followed <i>Ballads</i> <i>For Little Hyenas</i>], In your opinion, who or what is the 'little hyena'?, Welcome, little hyena, 20/12@palasharp Milano, Dec13HouseOfTheMusic Naples,	March 2008 to present

	MODUGNO12/12, NewTour2008, and Live concerts' covers	
	Forums: <i>Il paese è reale</i> 's lyrics, Televoto, SMF, shall I spit on SMF?, I'm done with Afterhours, Still on SMF, and Here's the secret of Sanremo!!!	January 2009 to May 2009
Afterhours's Facebook group	Your favourite song?, and Afterhours at Sanremo. What do you think?	January 2009 to May 2009
http://indiemusic.blogosfere.it/	Comments on the article <i>Afterhours at Sanremo. Fans without mercy for Manuel</i>	January 2009 to May 2009
www.rockon.it	Comments on the article <i>Even Afterhours at SMF</i>	December 2008 to May 2009

Table 2. Informants' demographics and attitudes towards the band

Subject	Gender	Age	Occupation	Attitude towards the band
1	F	22	Student	C
2	F	22	Student	D
3	M	36	Receptionist	D
4	M	21	Student	C
5	M	25	Writer	C

6	M	34	Clerk	D
7	M	37	Clerk	D
8	F	25	Student	D
9	M	29	Musician	C

D: defender; C: critic

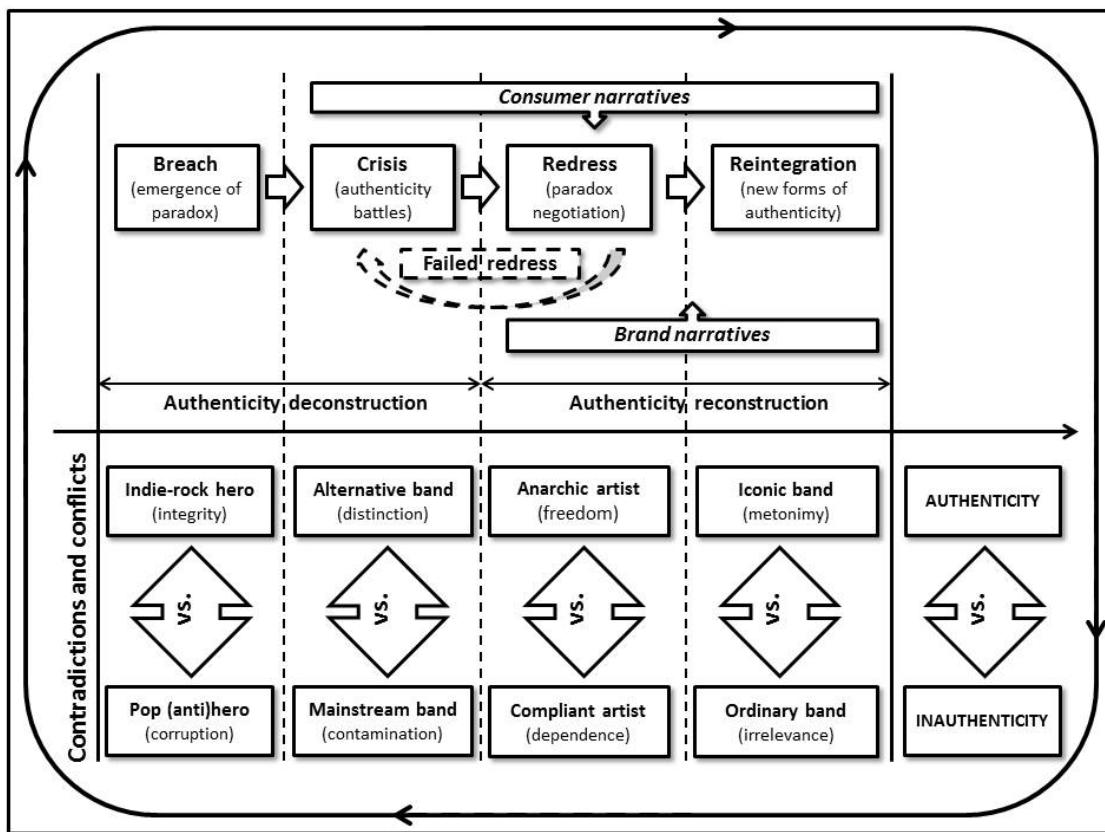


Figure 1. Dialectical model of authenticity and inauthenticity