



**BREAKTHROUGH
RESEARCH**

How To Build (And Measure) An Authentic Brand



Age of Artifice

We live in a world filled with inauthenticity.

Misinformation pervades the internet, and trust in media is at an all-time low. Deepfake technology makes it impossible to believe what we see and hear.

We see distorted versions of people's lives on social media, filtered through favorable lenses that make our lives seem drab by comparison. "Reality" shows depict a world that does not really exist, but still influences how we think. So many of our social interactions are mediated, altered, and made more remote by technology.

In an age of artifice, being authentic - being real - is more important than ever.



The Importance of Being Real

When we meet people, one of the first things we look for is whether they are being honest with us. Psychological research has shown that being **authentic** drives both positive first impressions and long-lasting connections.

We want people to be **genuine, not deceptive; present, not distracted; vulnerable, not guarded**. We crave real interaction and connection, the sense that the person we are seeing is who they really are.

We believe that authenticity matters for brands and products too.



We Know That Authenticity Matters

Why An Authentic Brand Is A Successful Brand



Mark Sutherland Forbes Councils Member
Forbes Communications Council
COUNCIL POST | Membership (Fee-Based)

Jul 21, 2022, 07:15am EDT

Mark Sutherland is CMO of Missouri Partnership, an economic development organization that assists businesses with expansions or relocations.



Taylor Swift's 'Anti-Hero,' Prince Harry's 'Spare' and the art of celebrity authenticity



Edward Segarra
USA TODAY

Published 12:51 p.m. ET March 3, 2023 | Updated 10:21 a.m. ET March 7, 2023

Authenticity in Marketing

How Your Brand Can Start Benefiting Today





Why Authenticity Matters in the Digital Experience

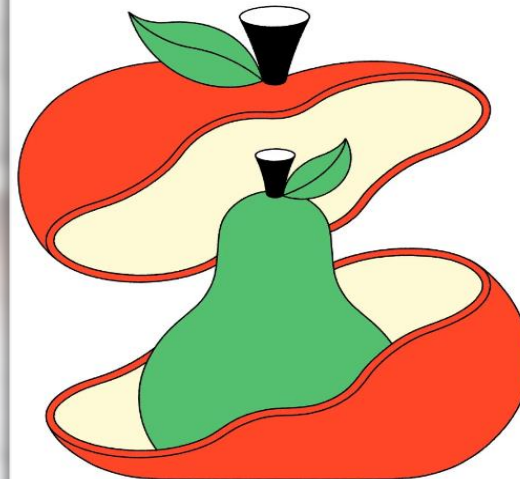
Consumers today don't just buy products—they also buy experiences.

Defining “Authentic” For 2023: What It Really Means To Be Who You Really Are

The Fine Line Between Helpful and Harmful Authenticity

When we express ourselves, let's not forget to think of others.

 Give this article  



How And Why To Build Brand Authenticity



Michael Georgiou Forbes Councils Member
Forbes Communications Council
COUNCIL POST | Membership (Fee-Based)

Mar 15, 2021, 07:10am EDT

Co-Founder at Imaginovation, overseeing the company's global creative and strategic marketing, branding and advertising initiatives.



But How Do We Measure It?

Based on the academic literature on authenticity in both people (Wood et al., 2008; Topper et al., 2020) and brands (Moulard et al., 2016; Nunes et al., 2021), we defined authenticity as **being true to yourself – being genuine**. This means doing what you will say you will do, being open and transparent, and acting according to your values.

Guided by this definition, we created our measure of authenticity.



Measuring Brand Authenticity

Our proprietary measure consists of three different pairs of concepts, each of which captures a different aspect of authenticity.

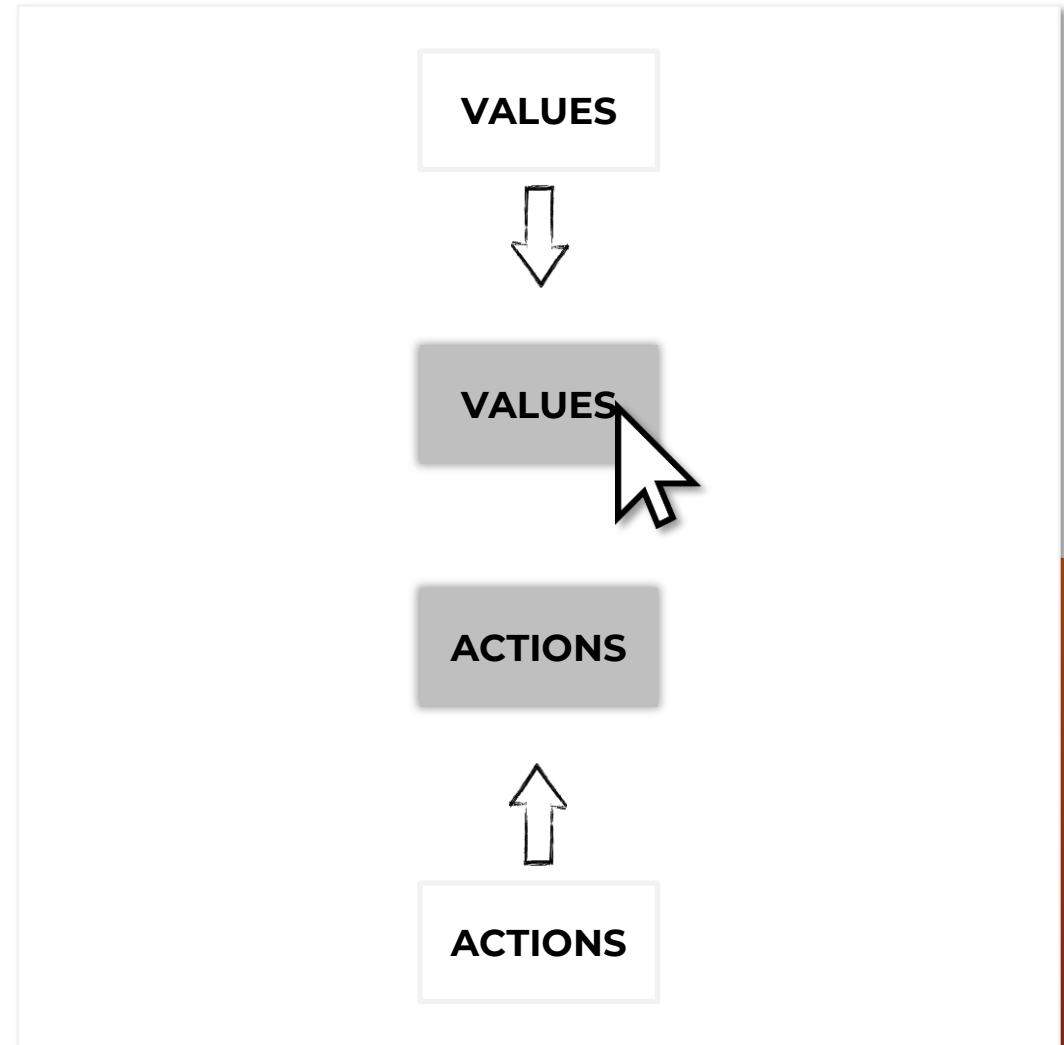
For example, one pair is “Values” vs “Actions.”

Respondents read:

Think about **[brand's] core values – the set of morals or principles that are central to them.**

Now consider **[brand's] actions – the things they actually do.**

Drag the word “Values” to show how close or far it is from “Actions.”



Measuring Brand Authenticity

Respondents drag each of these pairs closer together or further apart, using physical distance to show how close they are to one another. This leverages the psychological principle of **embodied cognition** – physically pulling things has been shown to be linked to trust.

We then combine and transform these distances to create a brand authenticity score.

What They Do

vs.

What They Say

Private Actions

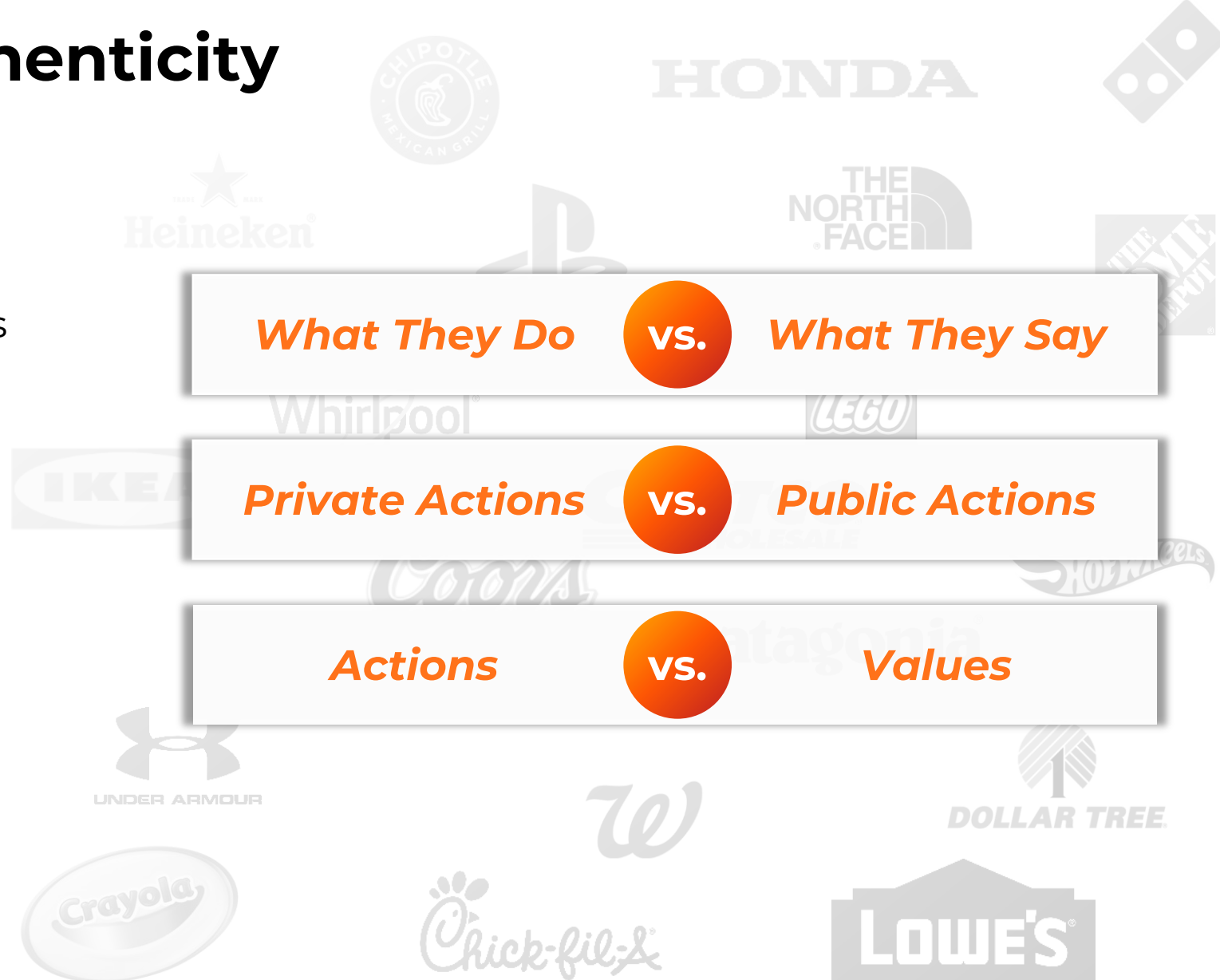
vs.

Public Actions

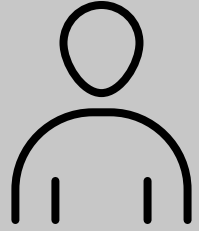
Actions

vs.

Values

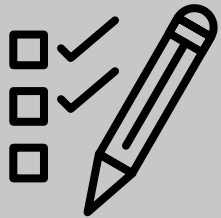


Methodology



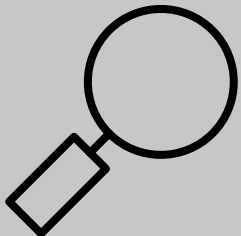
5,000

Respondents surveyed



100+

Brands tested



20

Categories studied



Measuring Personal Authenticity

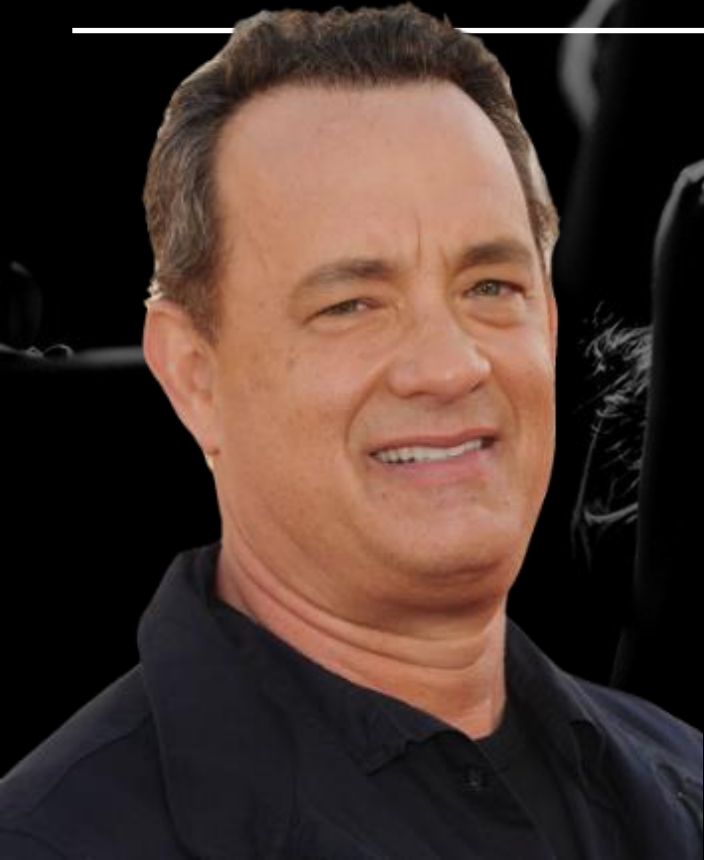
Our proprietary approach has been designed to measure **brand authenticity** but can also be used to measure **personal authenticity**.

Our benchmark study included authenticity assessments for a range of different actors, athletes, and other celebrities.

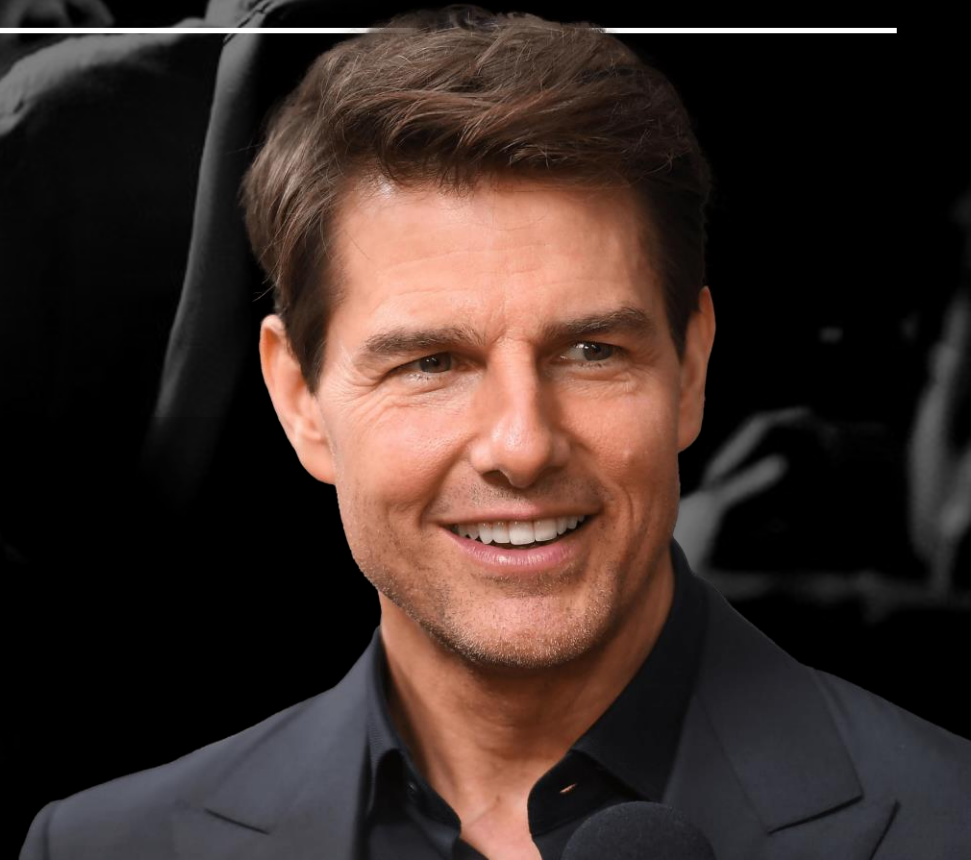


Who Is More Authentic?

Tom Hanks



Tom Cruise



or

Who Is More Authentic?

Tom Hanks

Tom Cruise

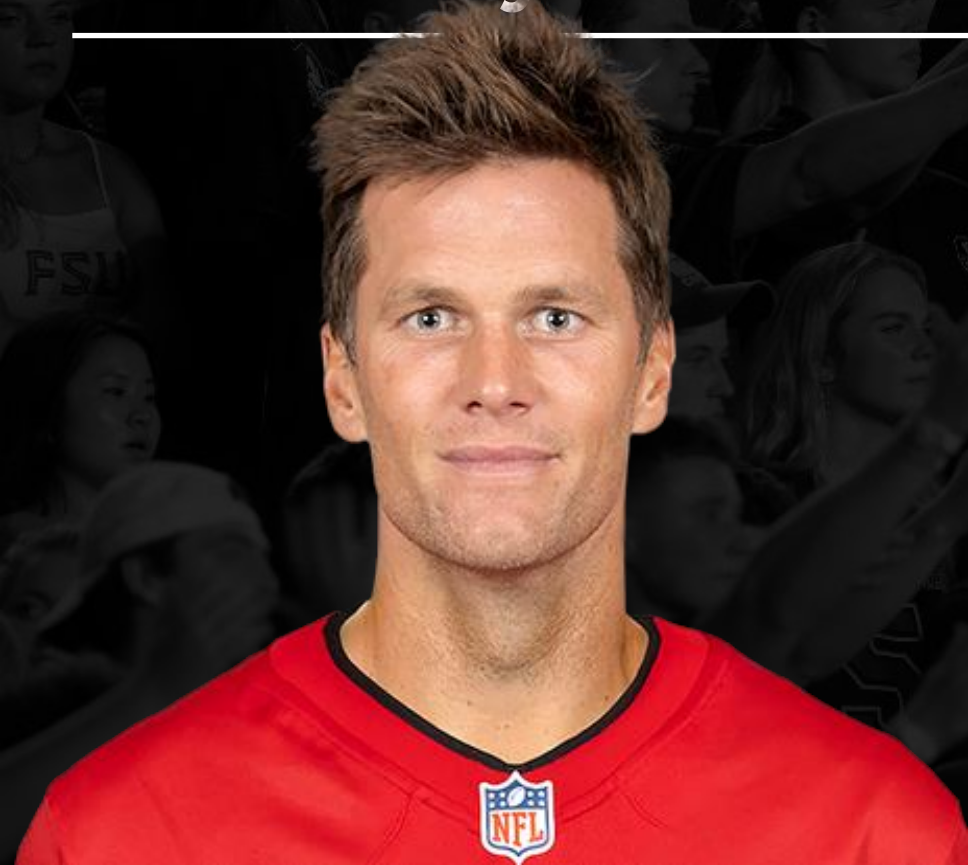


or



Who Is More Authentic?

Tom Brady



or

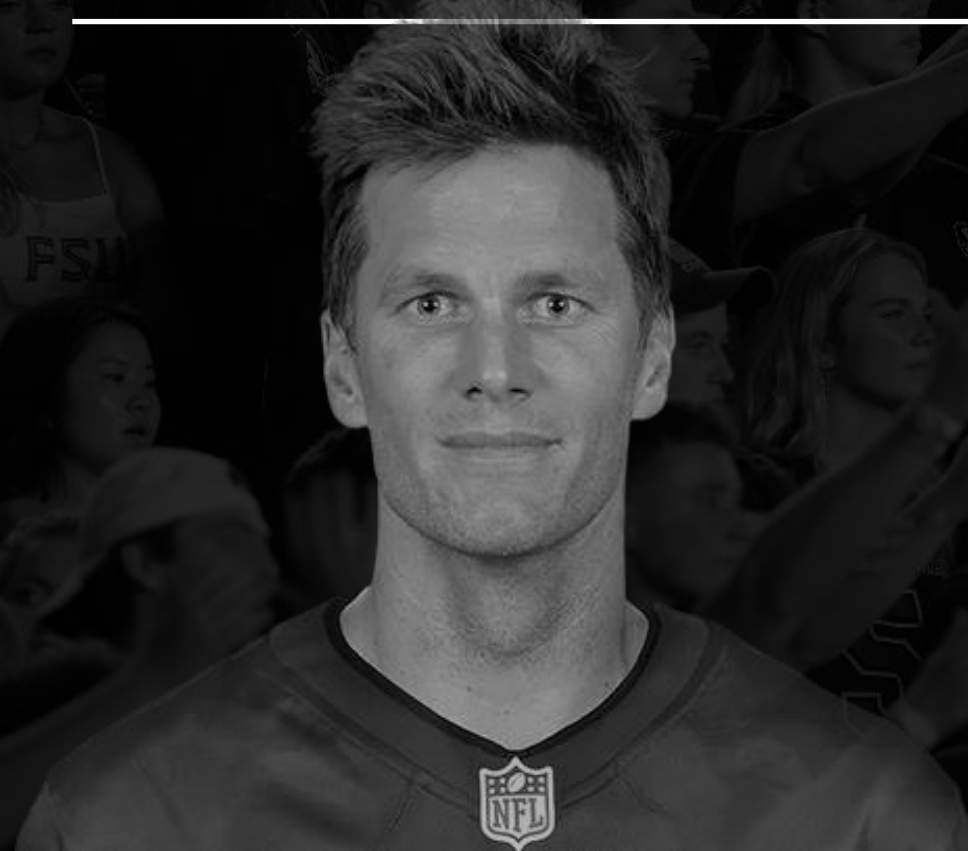
LeBron James



Who Is More Authentic?

Tom Brady

LeBron James



or



LeBron James is the most authentic person for **Gen Z**. (He is in the 85th percentile overall.)



Who Is More Authentic?

Taylor Swift



Oprah Winfrey



or

Who Is More Authentic?

Taylor Swift



Oprah Winfrey



or

AUTHENTIC

A

Who Is More Authentic?

Joe Biden

Donald Trump



or



Who Is More Authentic?

Joe Biden

Donald Trump



Joe Biden is seen as quite authentic (77th percentile) by **Democrats** and the least authentic person by **Republicans**.

or

A

AUTHENTIC



Donald Trump is the most authentic person for **Republicans** and the least authentic for **Democrats**.



Who Is More Authentic?

Elon Musk

Mark Zuckerberg

or



Who Is More Authentic?

Elon Musk

Mark Zuckerberg

A

AUTHENTIC

or




Elon Musk is seen as the 2nd most authentic person by **Republicans** and the 2nd least authentic by **Democrats**.



Mark Zuckerberg is seen as inauthentic (slightly higher than Musk) by **Democrats**, and the 2nd least authentic by **Republicans**.


Impact of Brand Authenticity

Stock price change since April 2020
(after COVID-19 shutdowns)

59% 

Top
Authentic
Brands

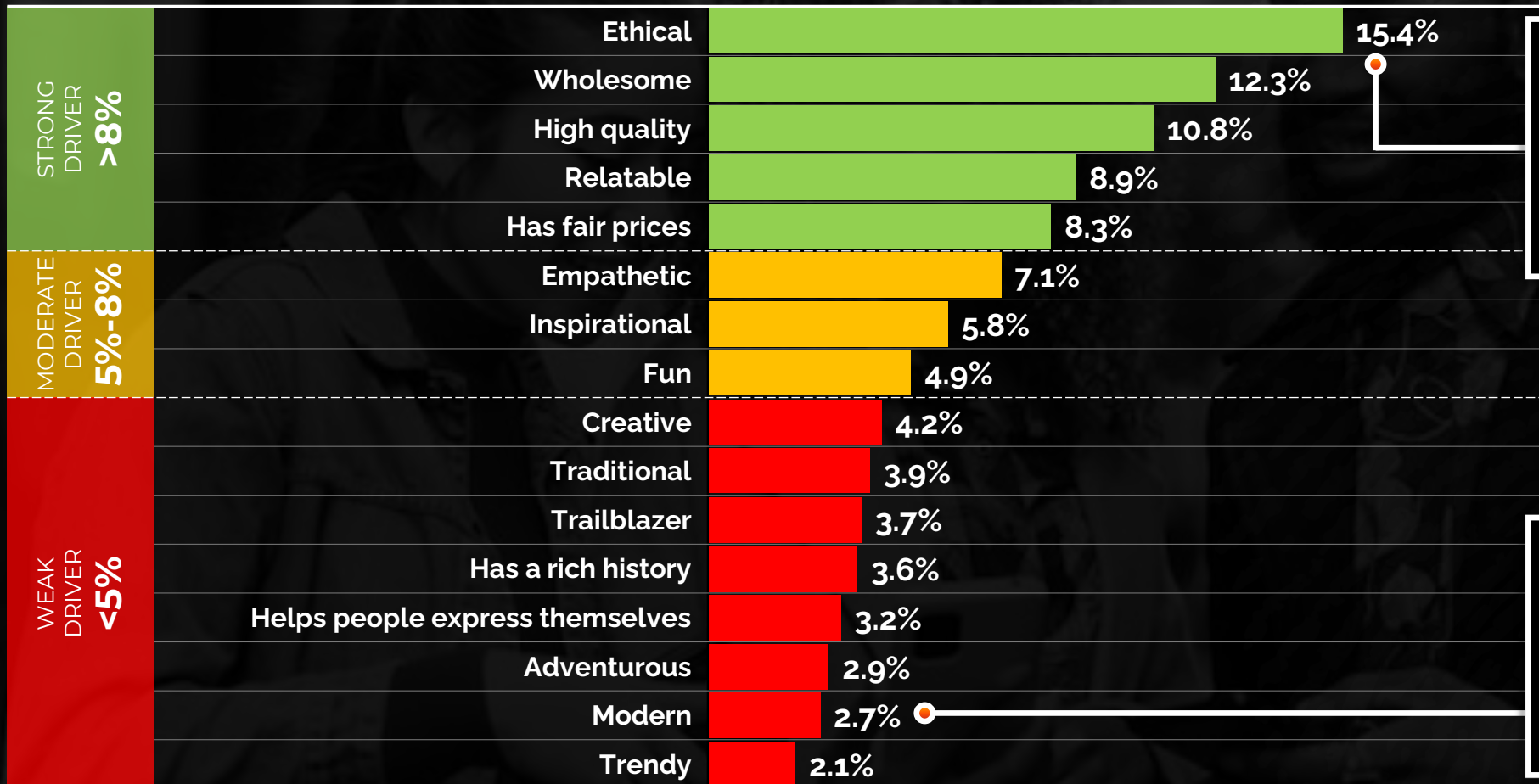
S&P 500

-25% 

Percentage shown is aggregated across the brands within the top 20 that are publicly traded from April 2020 – December 2022.

What Makes Brands Authentic?

Brand Attributes



!

The top drivers show the importance of integrity to authenticity, as well as forging connection via relatability and accessible pricing.

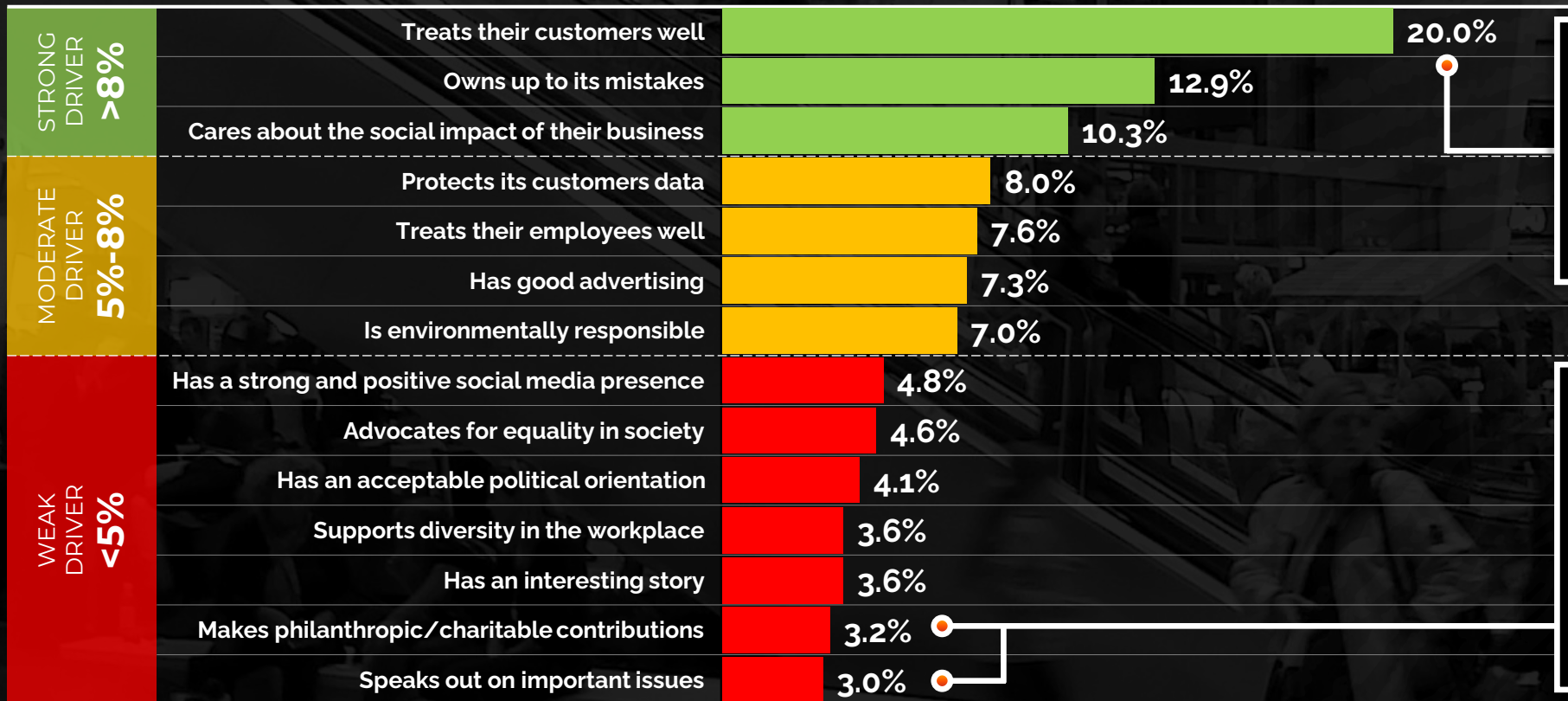
!

Being adventurous, modern and trendy are weak drivers, suggesting that more contemporary, cutting-edge brands may have trouble conveying authenticity.

A Relative Importance Analysis was used to derive importance by accounting for dependence on orderings of predictors by averaging beta values across all orderings.

What Makes Brands Authentic?

Brand Actions



Brand actions showing customer care and social responsibility are key drivers of authenticity.

Conversely, some actions such as charitable contributions and speaking out on issues may be seen as performative, and do not drive perceptions of authenticity.

Top Brands: The REAL 20



The REAL 20

1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12



13



14



15



16



17



18



19



20





LEGO, the iconic Danish toy brand, is celebrating its 90th anniversary with good reason. Not only has the company become a beloved household name, but it continues to thrive and innovate in a rapidly changing industry.

With steady growth in revenue, including an impressive 17% increase in Q4 of 2022, LEGO has maintained its position as a leading player in the toy industry, and continues to capture the hearts and minds of children and adults alike.



**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

#1

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Creative
- Helps people express themselves
- Trendy
- Fun



Crayola has been a household name for over a century. Its rich history, tradition, and creativity have all contributed to its reputation as one of the most authentic and reliable brands in the market. Crayola's most known product, the humble crayon, has become a symbol of childhood, artistry, and imagination.



AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:

#2

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Creative
- Traditional
- Relatable
- Has a rich history



Whirlpool®

Whirlpool is a leading manufacturer of home appliances for over a century. With nearly \$20 billion in revenue in 2022, the company continues to innovate and meet the ever-evolving needs of its customers. Maytag, which is also part of the Whirlpool brand, may contribute to the brand's authenticity with its iconic Maytag Man ad campaign.



AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:

#3

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Owns up to its mistakes
- High quality
- Ethical
- Traditional



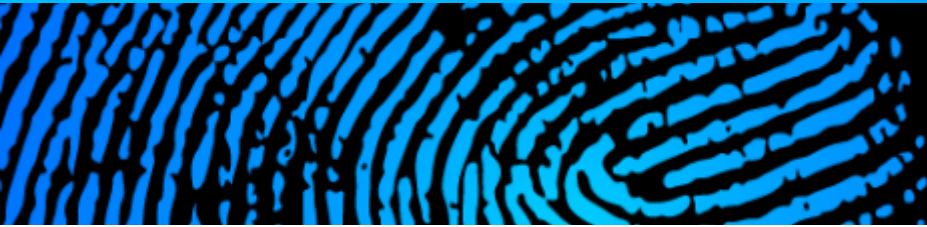
Hot Wheels has been a staple in the toy industry for over five decades. The iconic brand's fun, wholesome image and rich history have all contributed to its global success and authenticity. In 2022, Hot Wheels generated a billion dollars in revenue globally, a testament to its enduring popularity and appeal.

AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:

#4

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Traditional
- Fun
- Wholesome
- Has a rich history



Known for offering unbeatable prices without sacrificing quality, Costco continues to exceed expectations. Despite rising inflation, Costco retained its \$1.50 hot dog and soda combo, demonstrating its commitment to fair prices.

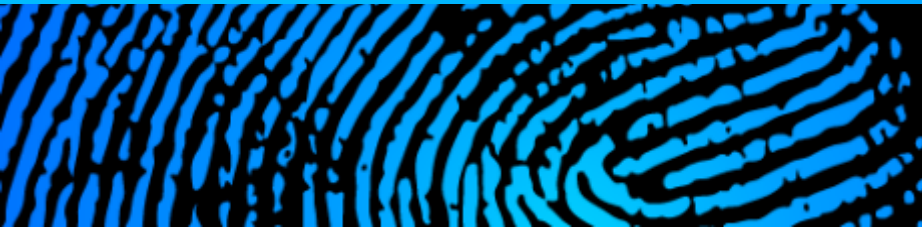
Costco is also known for treating its employees well, with generous benefits packages including healthcare, retirement plans and paid time off.

AUTHENTICITY RANKING:

#5

ASSOCIATED WITH:

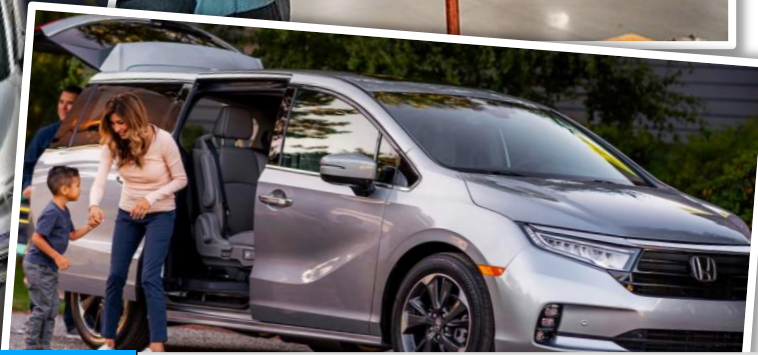
- Treats their customers well
- Treats their employees well
- Has fair prices
- Supports diversity in the workplace



HONDA

For decades, Honda has been at the forefront of producing reliable and high-quality automobiles that prioritize the needs of drivers and passengers. Their dedication to quality and reliability has earned them a reputation for building cars that will stand the test of time and outlast other brands.

Another aspect of Honda's authenticity is its commitment to sustainability, as the company has made significant investments in electric and alternative energy vehicles.



**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

#6

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Has an acceptable political orientation
- Owns up to its mistakes
- Is environmentally responsible
- Treats their customers well



Despite changing its standard price point from \$1 to \$1.25 in 2022 (and including even higher price point options), the discount retailer Dollar Tree pulled in nearly \$8 billion in revenue.

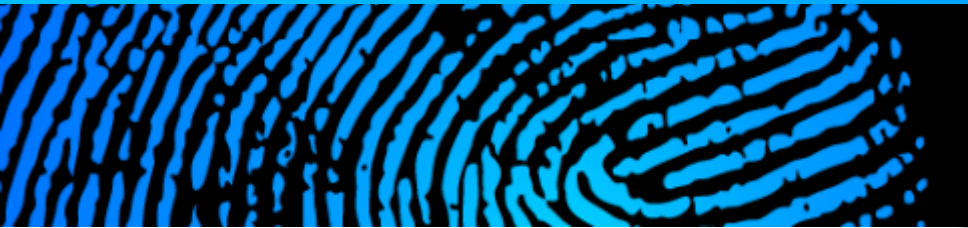
One of the key elements of Dollar Tree's authenticity is its commitment to its customers. The brand's value-driven approach has made it a popular destination for shoppers looking to save money, and has helped to build trust and loyalty among its customer base.

**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

#7

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Has fair prices
- Is seen as particularly authentic by low- and middle-income people



IKEA's focus on modern, trendy, and inexpensive furniture drives its authenticity. Its designs are sleek, functional, and often incorporate the latest trends in home decor. And regardless of budget, IKEA has something to fit your style.

In addition to its focus on modern design, IKEA is also committed to sustainability. They use eco-friendly materials and manufacturing processes, and they offer recycling programs to help reduce waste.

**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

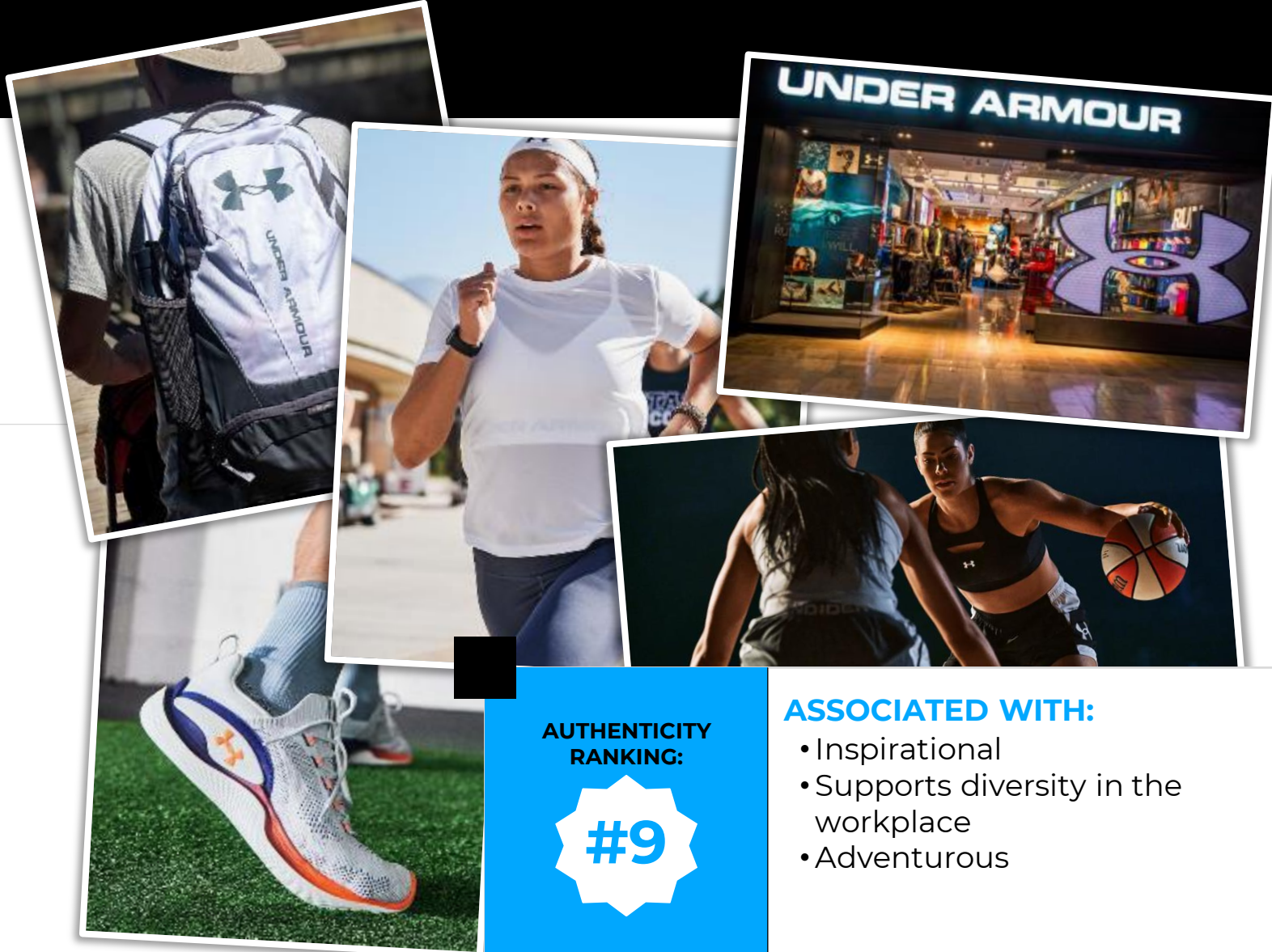
#8

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Modern
- Trendy
- Creative
- Cares about the social impact of the business



Under Armour has been dedicated to creating high-performance athletic gear that empowers athletes to push their limits and achieve their goals. A newcomer relative to the other sports apparel giants, Under Armour's commitment to quality and innovation has led to its authenticity, which may be reinforced by endorsements from beloved professional athletes.



**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

#9

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Inspirational
- Supports diversity in the workplace
- Adventurous



For over 50 years, The North Face has been known for creating outdoor gear that enables people to explore and push the limits of their own abilities. The North Face's commitment to quality, sustainability, and innovation has earned them a reputation as a brand that truly cares about its customers and the environment.

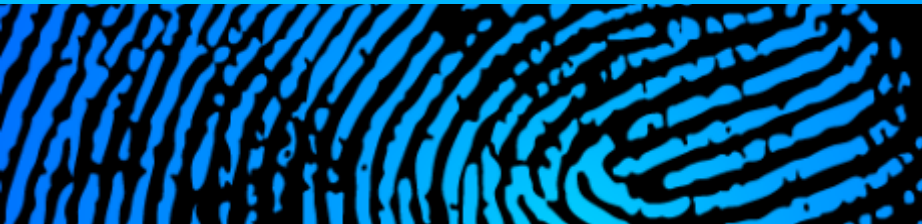


**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

#10

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Adventurous
- Empathetic
- Trendy
- Cares about the social impact of their business



For years, The Home Depot has been a go-to destination for home improvement. Beyond helping both Pros and DIY-ers, the company's dedication to reasonable prices and helpful staff contributes to their authenticity.

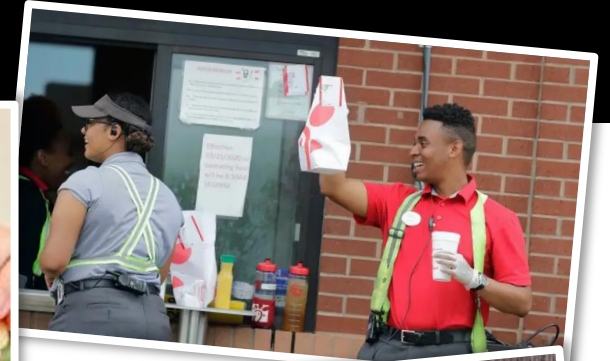
The Home Depot's authenticity may also be boosted by its community involvement, as it supports a number of charitable organizations and initiatives, and encourages its employees to get involved in their local communities.

**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

#11

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Empathetic
- Has fair prices
- Treats their customers well
- Supports diversity in the workplace



For decades, Chick-fil-A has been a go-to destination for people looking for delicious chicken sandwiches and exceptional customer service, with their staff having a reputation for being friendly, efficient, and going above and beyond to make sure that customers have a positive experience.

The company is known for its Christian values, most notably closing on Sundays in spite of lost revenue.

**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

#12

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Treats their employees well
- Treats its customers well
- Is environmentally responsible
- Makes philanthropic contributions
- Is ranked #1 by Republicans (and #79 by Democrats)



patagonia®

Patagonia, the outdoor clothing and gear company, is the market share leader for outdoor apparel.

But Patagonia's success is not just measured in financial terms. The company has consistently lived its values through actions like using recycled materials in its products, having its US facilities powered with renewable energy and donating \$1 million to fight restrictive voting-rights laws in Georgia.

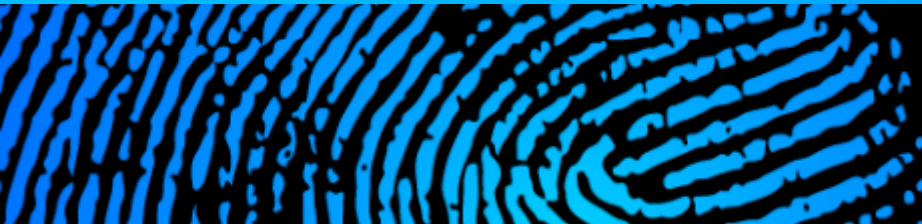


AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:

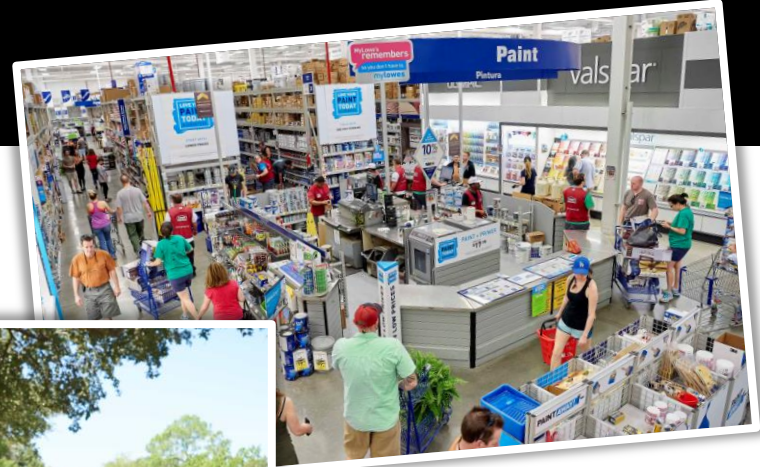
#13

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Ethical
- Environmentally responsible
- Speaking out on important issues
- Caring about the social impact of their business



The other major home improvement retailer, Lowe's also strives for great prices and customer service. Not only is Lowe's viewed as authentic, but it also saw over \$96 billion in revenue in 2022, nearly a 7.5% increase from 2021.

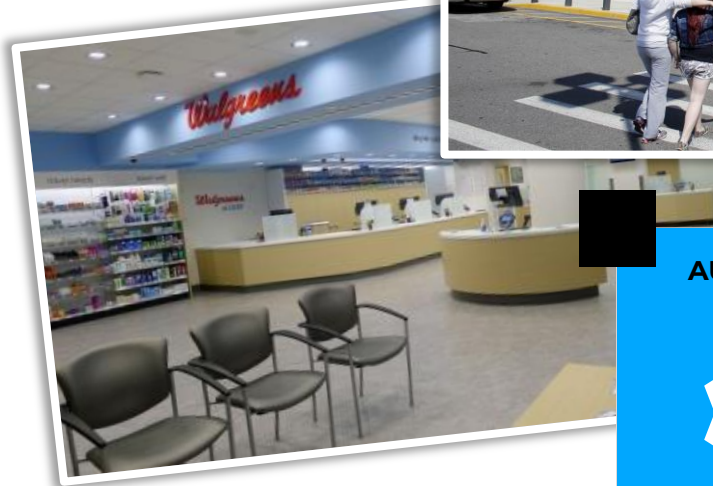
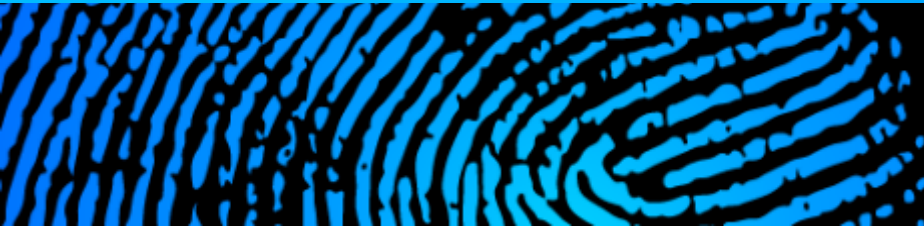


AUTHENTICITY RANKING:

#14

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Treats their customers well
- Ethical
- Has fair prices
- Treats their employees well



The long-standing pharmacy chain has established a history of trust and reliability among its customers. With nearly 9,000 locations, Walgreens is an integral part of many communities across the country.

A major pillar of that trust is the customer service Walgreens provides. The strong emphasis on treating its customers well and the efforts put into optimizing its customer experience have contributed to them being considered an authentic brand.

AUTHENTICITY RANKING:

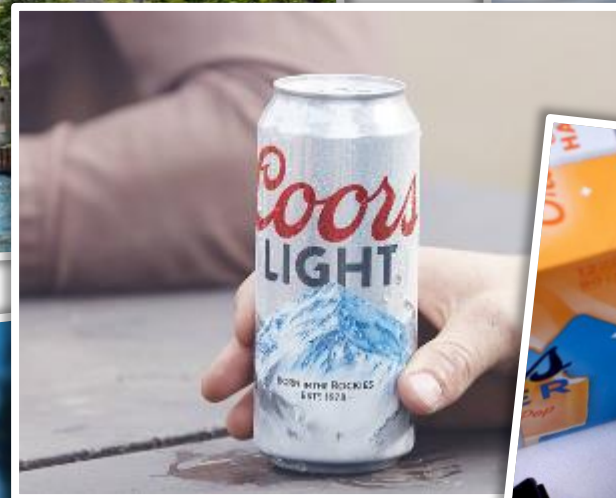
#15

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Owns up to its mistakes
- Protects its customers' data
- Treats their customers well



Coors



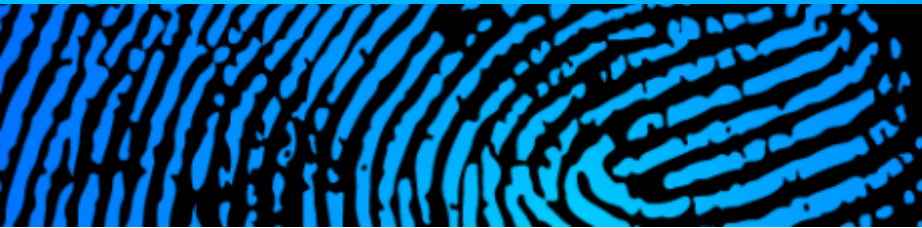
For over 150 years, the Colorado-based company has been brewing reasonably priced beer that has earned them a loyal following of customers. Coors has become a part of American culture, with authentic and straightforward advertising that often focuses on its commitment to quality and its connection to America. Its parent company, Molson Coors, grew its revenue by over 10.8% from 2020 to 2022 despite challenging economic headwinds.

**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

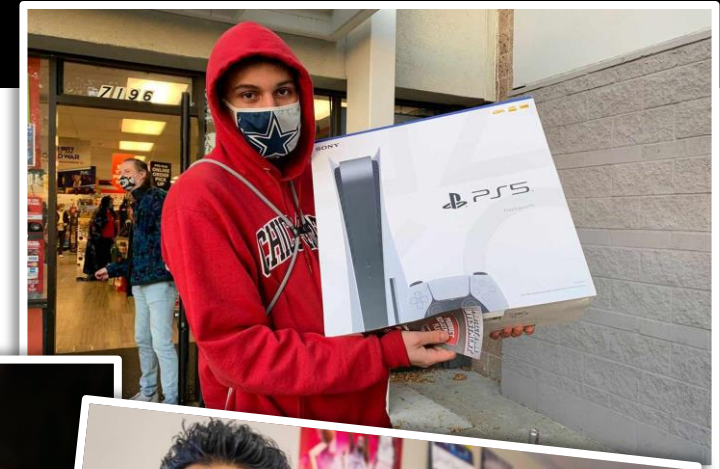
#16

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Has fair prices
- Has a rich history
- Has an interesting story



PlayStation is an authentic brand that has captured the hearts of gamers around the world. With a legacy that spans nearly three decades, PlayStation has consistently pushed the boundaries of technology and innovation, delivering unforgettable first party gaming experiences like The Last of Us, God of War, and Horizon that keep players coming back for more.



AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:

#17

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Modern
- Trendy
- Fun
- Creative



Chipotle revolutionized the fast-casual dining experience with its commitment to fresh ingredients, sustainable sourcing, and authentic Mexican flavors. Chipotle's transparency about its sourcing practices, including sharing information about where its ingredients come from and how they are prepared, has helped to build authenticity among its customers.

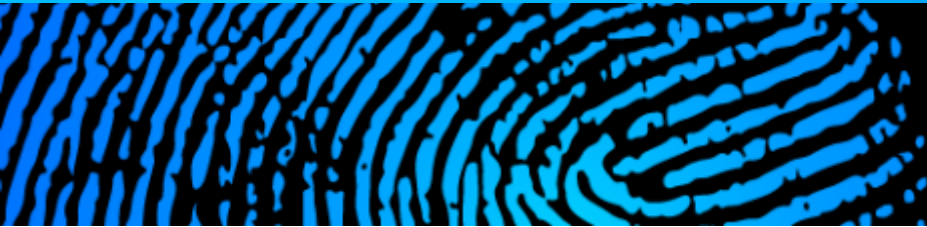


**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

#18

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Has an acceptable political orientation
- Cares about the social impact of their business
- Has fair prices
- Treats their customers well



The authenticity of Domino's is likely linked to owning up to its mistakes in recent years. Domino's explicitly acknowledged its past shortcomings and committed to making significant improvements to its product quality and customer service. The brand overhauled its pizza recipe, improving the quality of its crust, sauce, and toppings. It also invested heavily in employee training to improve the customer experience.

The brand has also invested in innovation, offering operational transparency through its unique Pizza Tracker.

AUTHENTICITY RANKING:

#19

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Owns up to its mistakes
- Treats their customers well
- Has fair prices
- Supports diversity in the workplace



Heineken has a long and rich history that dates back to 1864 when the brand was founded in Amsterdam. The brand has been able to maintain its authenticity and heritage over the years while adapting to changing consumer preferences and market trends. Heineken is known for its iconic green bottle and red star logo, which are instantly recognizable to consumers around the world.



**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING:**

#20

ASSOCIATED WITH:

- Traditional
- Has an interesting story
- Has a rich history

Brand & Category Effects







Toys & Crafts

Toy and children's brands can be seen as highly authentic, as Lego, Crayola and Hot Wheels all fall within the top 5 most authentic brands in our study. These brands are recognized for their creativity and wholesomeness, **suggesting that childhood associations and nostalgia can play a large role in authenticity.**

However, not all children's brands are seen as authentic. Barbie is also an iconic toy brand, but falls far below the others for authenticity, as the brand has faced criticism in the past for perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards.







	AUTHENTICITY RANKING	APPEAL RANKING	"Traditional" RANKING	"Has a rich history" RANKING
	1	4	3	7
	2	1	1	3
	4	9	2	5
	49	73	43	14

Energy Companies

Then there are brands that just perform poorly on all metrics. **Oil and gas companies score poorly for authenticity**, likely due to their environmental impact. While many of these brands are claiming commitments to renewable energy, consumers still see them as being inauthentic.



	AUTHENTICITY RANKING	APPEAL RANKING	"Environmentally responsible" RANKING	"Ethical" RANKING
	97	85	99	92
	100	98	104	101
	101	95	108	105
	106	99	107	103

News/Media

Many of today's news/media brands are frequently accused of lacking authenticity, as they are criticized for having partisan viewpoints and for pandering to their viewers.

While they are recognized for speaking out on important issues, this is not a driver of authenticity.

For Republicans, while Fox News is only ranked 77th in authenticity, it ranks 1st in **having an acceptable political orientation** and **speaking out on important issues**.

For Democrats, CNN ranks 1st in **having an acceptable political orientation** and **speaking out on important issues** while ranking 38th on authenticity.



**AUTHENTICITY
RANKING**

**APPEAL
RANKING**

*"Speaks out on
important issues"*
RANKING

*"Cares about the
social impact
from business"*
RANKING



89

91

1

48



102

96

2

87



104

108



17

103

Elon Musk Brands

Elon Musk has been a polarizing figure of late. His acquisition of Twitter has been chaotic, leading to a drop in users and advertising revenue. His highly public clashes about Twitter policy may be impacting the perceived authenticity of his other brands, like Tesla.



	AUTHENTICITY RANKING	APPEAL RANKING	"Trailblazer" RANKING	"Treats their employees well" RANKING
	92	105	1	102
	108	109	102	109



Outdoor Apparel

Outdoor apparel is another category that features highly authentic brands.

What can be more authentic than hiking a rugged trail or camping in the wilderness?

While The North Face is seen as trendier, both brands have achieved their authentic brand perceptions by delivering quality goods that are created through sustainable manufacturing, showing that they care about their customers and about the environment.



	AUTHENTICITY RANKING	PURCHASE INTEREST RANKING	"Ethical" RANKING	"Trendy" RANKING
	10	22	3	3
	13	40	1	33




Gaming

PlayStation makes for an interesting case study about **how to build an authentic brand within a hotly contested category.**

PlayStation has built a reputation for having a strong lineup of exclusive games and content. It is known as a more premium console with a strong emphasis on storytelling and immersive experiences.

This has helped the brand to achieve greater authenticity than rivals Nintendo (despite that brand's ties to nostalgia and wholesomeness) and Xbox (despite its slightly more modern perception).







	AUTHENTICITY RANKING	PURCHASE INTEREST RANKING	"Modern" RANKING	"Wholesome" RANKING
	17	29	4	58
	29	13	21	7
	30	72	3	51

Tech Companies

Purchase interest does not necessarily amount to authenticity. Tech companies demonstrate this very well. These companies are viewed as inauthentic for their ethics and for not owning up to mistakes (among other things). However, purchase interest is high for them, as they fulfill an important need for many people.





	AUTHENTICITY RANKING	USAGE INTEREST RANKING	"Ethical" RANKING	"Owns up to its mistakes" RANKING
 amazon	73	2	79	51
 Microsoft	76	11	31	71
 YouTube	79	3	49	66
 Google	95	4	94	89

Home Improvement

Both The Home Depot and Lowe's are seen as highly authentic brands, with their commitments to high quality products and reasonable prices, **though they achieve their authenticity in different ways**. The Home Depot may get the edge over Lowe's in authenticity due to the brand's charitable acts and community initiatives.



	AUTHENTICITY RANKING	PURCHASE INTEREST RANKING	LOYALTY RANKING	"Makes charitable donations" RANKING
	11	15	12	19
	14	9	18	63

Beer

Beer brands are an example of how **being authentic does not always equate to brand loyalty.** Coors and Heineken both fall within the REAL 20 authentic brands, but also fall within the bottom 20 for loyalty. The category as a whole is viewed as authentic and is likely tied to the tradition and rich history of these brands.



	AUTHENTICITY RANKING	LOYALTY RANKING	"Traditional" RANKING	"Has a rich history" RANKING
	16	105	31	26
	20	103	26	29
	36	99	8	8
	38	71	13	16



BREAKTHROUGH
RESEARCH

Contact Us!

Dan Braker

President

dbraker@bthrough.com

Abe Rutchick, Ph.D.

Chief Innovation Officer

arutchick@bthrough.com

