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**The Meaning of Authenticity in the Experience Industry**  
-An exploratory study of Swedish concept restaurants

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Master of Science in Tourism and Hospitality Management  
Master Degree Project No. 2009:58  
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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

First and foremost, we would like to thank our respondents for inviting us to their restaurants and for taking time to answer our questions. Their openness and sincerity was very valuable for the outcome of this thesis. We would also like to thank the consultants at Stylt Trampoli AB. Their expertise gave us inspiration and valuable insight in our chosen field of research. Finally, a special thanks to our supervisor, Maria José Zapata Campos, PhD, for the guidance and inspiration she given us. Her support and thorough critique has been very appreciated and useful in the process of completing our thesis.

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Gothenburg May 27 2009

## **ABSTRACT**

The experience industry is booming and for restaurants to be a part of this industry they must offer more than food and common services. To be competitive in the experience industry companies are told to render authenticity. However, the meaning of authenticity remains rather unexplored in academic literature. The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning of authenticity in the experience industry, with its main focus on concept restaurants.

This research has a practitioners' focus by analyzing four concept restaurants, perceived as authentic, as case studies. The cases are selected from a constructivist viewpoint where authenticity is identified as being true to oneself and being who you say you are to others. Qualitative interviews were conducted with consultants and restaurant owners.

The empirical findings indicate the importance for businesses to stay close to their personal interests and passion in order to be perceived as trustworthy. It is also necessary to express the concept and act out reality and truth through the food, interior and ambience. To render authenticity, companies must communicate their own identity. This can be done by expressing clearness, uniqueness and commodification, which should be based on the consumers' common perception and already established truths. Our theory suggests that authenticity must be considered when the goal is to create a memorable experience.

**Key words;** experience industry, authenticity, concept restaurants, hospitality marketing.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

*This thesis aims to study the meaning of authenticity in the experience industry. In the following chapter the reader will be introduced to our chosen area of research. We will identify why it is relevant to conduct further research and how authenticity relates to the experience industry and discuss the problem linked to the topic. This chapter does also include the research question and the purpose of the study.*

## 1.1. Experience! – The rise of a new economy in need of something real

In 2008 ‘experiences’ was nominated as the number one Christmas gift in Sweden by the Swedish Retail Institute. They claimed that experience represents what today’s consumers look for - products that enable them a rich and meaningful spare time. However, the opportunity of selling experiences has not been overlooked and there has been a significant increase of companies offering experiences (The Swedish Retail Institute, 2008).

Pine and Gilmour (1999) believe experiences are the main driver of a new economy – the experience economy. In their pioneering book, *The Experience Economy*, they argue that there has been a shift from industrial and service economy to experience economy. Sundbo and Darmer (2008) agree that consumers are moving towards the experience economy, yet they point out that service economy still exist as well as the industrial economy.

Researchers claim that an experience can add more value to goods and services (Sundbo and Darmer, 2008; Mossberg, 2001). Take a cup of coffee; few people would buy it for premium price at the gas station. In contrast people are willing to buy a similar cup of coffee for a premium price, if it is served at the Spanish Step in Rome. Thus, when customers receive more value, firms are able to charge more. This opportunity also creates an increase of competition among firms (Sundbo and Darmer, 2008). To stay competitive, firms must be innovative and carefully revise how experiences are being developed and communicated. Or perhaps more important in order to attract and keep valuable customers, firms must provide customers with ‘authentic’ experiences.

In tourism several authors have suggested that authenticity plays an important part in the overall experience (Huxley, 2004; Richards and Wilson, 2004; Shaffer, 2004). In a case study of budget

travellers it was shown that their search for authenticity is rather subconscious, but nonetheless important. It was also found that the important characteristic of a destination is the 'realness' and the 'genuineness' (Bryon and Derre, 2008). However, in the book 'Authenticity - What Consumers Really Want' by Pine and Gilmore (2007), the authors claim that *all* consumers look for experiences that are authentic. They argue that authenticity should not be limited to a specific segment of consumers (e.g. budget travellers). Instead they believe the appeal of real is something universal: 'Practically all consumer desire authenticity' (Pine and Gilmore, 2007: 4).

To render authentic experiences one first needs to understand the concept of authenticity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines authentic as something genuine, with undisputed origin (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). As mentioned above, the concept of authenticity is of special interest in the tourism industry. In the 1970's MacCannell identified a change in society towards an increasing fascination of the 'real'; people were longing for the genuine. The modern man has developed an interest for the real life of others due to globalisation and the increased information available (MacCannell, 1999). Since then authenticity, in relation to the tourism industry, has been a debated topic; criticised by some, redefined and praised by others.

Furthermore, the social definitions of 'truth' and 'untruth' are seldom clear cut. It is no longer sufficient to just be something in order to be perceived as that. It is often necessary to act out reality and truth. Firms might have to create a role in order to sustain the image of being genuine. What is taken to be real might just be a show, constructed in accordance to people's perceptions of real (MacCannell, 1999). Lewis and Bridger (2000) point out that the authenticity of a product or service is shaped and exists in the eyes of the beholder. Thus, authenticity is not a quality of the object but something created by social processes. Authentic and inauthentic is consequently not exact counterparts (Olsen, 2002).

But how does it work in practise and why does a sense of authenticity capture the attention and win the trust of the consumers? Design, quality and perceived value for money might be the same as something authentic. However, a product, service or experience perceived as authentic offers something else; self identity. By this we mean that consumers search for the identities they aspire to be, they are seeking for credibility and authenticity (Lewis and Bridger, 2000). Similarly, Pine and Gilmore (2008) argue that people consume in relation to how well the offer correlates with their self image and how the person perceive the world. If no match is found, the person will view the offer as inauthentic from her or his point of view. Of course, another person may well

take the opposite view. The producer must try to understand what authenticity means to different customers.

## **1.2. The restaurant industry – serving an experience**

The Swedish restaurant industry did have a turnover of 50 billion Swedish crowns in 2006 and employed 64 000 people. The industry has grown with over 8 billion in just five years. Despite industry growth the gross profit margin is only 0,8 %, which indicates the competitiveness of the industry (SHR, 2009). To remain competitive it is essential for restaurants to differentiate themselves.

Restaurants are traditionally considered to be part of the service industry, the offering of a non physical product such as deeds, processes and performances (Zeithaml et al, 2006). In the service industry the personnel delivering the service and the physical setting are important parts of the product package (Zeithaml et al., 2006). Kotler et al. (2006) do also emphasise the importance of service. They argue that one of the most important tasks of a hospitality business is to develop a strong service culture, the focus on serving and satisfying the customers. Grönroos (2002) goes even further and claims that the total service offering will determine a companies' success or failure. It appears that service is important for restaurant, but what if customers want more than just service?

Many restaurants offer more than just food and service; they aim to offer an experience by using a theme or a concept (Pine and Gilmore, 2002; Mossberg, 2001). The Hard Rock Café is one example, a world-wide restaurant chain and the world's leading collector and exhibitors of rock 'n' roll memorabilia. At Hard Rock Café guests can experience a sense of rock 'n' roll while they are eating a hamburger (Hard Rock Café, 2009). Pine and Gilmore (2002) argue that when restaurants use a theme they will automatically turn a service into an experience. They define theme as 'the dominant idea or organizing principle, devotion to which creates a coherent experience for guests' (Pine and Gilmore, 2002: 92). By using a well-define theme, restaurant are more fit to charge a higher price since customer will receive a higher value - they receive more than food and services.

However, a successful experience needs to be trustworthy. Mossberg (2001) argue that experiences should engage and involve customers rather than entertain them. She also underlines

the importance of having a well defined theme where every detail is considered - from food and interiors to the appearance of staff. Pine and Gilmore (2007) argue in a similar way. They claim that experience must feel authentic; 'what they buy must reflect who they are and who they aspire to be in relation to how they perceived the world - with lightning-quick judgment of 'real' or 'fake' hanging in the balance' (Pine and Gilmore, 2007: 5). Thus, eating is no longer a matter of satisfying a basic human need, it is a way of socialising and expressing identity (Jacobsen, 2008).

### **1.3. Problem discussion**

Scholars indicate that there is a consumer need for something more than products and services. They think that consumers increasingly look for experiences. The term 'experience industry' was first introduced in the 1990's and has since then been widely used and perhaps misused to attract customers. To experience is much about engaging people's mind, create good feelings and memories. Consuming experiences may also be a way for people to 'escape' or express their own identities. With this in mind, what should companies consider when they create experiences?

To compete in the experience industry, companies are recommended to render authenticity. It is argued that in the experience industry, consumers are more sensitive to authenticity compared to price and quality. The new consumers are searching for the 'real', the 'genuine' or the 'authentic'. Words such as those are common and often used when marketing tourist attractions and restaurants.

However, the relevance of authenticity in the experience industry is rather unexplored in the academic field. The concept of authenticity has achieved little consensus among researchers and thus the meaning of authenticity remains unclear. For these reasons we find it very relevant to conduct further research on authenticity.

### **1.4. Research question and the purpose of the study**

In order to increase the understanding of authenticity this research aims at answering the following question;

*What is the meaning of authenticity in the experience industry?*

The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning of authenticity in the experience industry. In order to do that the research focus on how restaurants, as part of the experience industry, render authenticity. Our hope is to contribute with knowledge to the existent academic research relating to the experience industry. By studying previous definitions of authenticity in tourism we are trying to determine their existing relevance and if they can be applied on other parts of the experience industry. This study may be seen as a complement to the already existing research in the field of marketing and guest experiences in the restaurant industry. Our goal is to conduct academic research, highly related and understandable for the practitioner. By having a practitioners focus we hope the findings will be of interest for entrepreneurs starting a restaurant business, or current restaurateurs wanting to develop their already existing business concept.

A further purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of the notion of authenticity in the experience industry. The knowledge gained by studying restaurants can be transferred to other related field within the experience industry since restaurants are characterised by the same factors as many other businesses in the industry such as; service, relaxation and pleasure. It may be argued that since the restaurant industry is related to one of our basic human needs and not purely to pleasure the results might not be entirely transferable. However, we believe that restaurants, which are parts of the experience industry, are aiming at offering something more than just its core product (i.e. food), why the results will be applicable also to destinations, museums, amusement parks etc.

The motivation and idea behind this research is our own interest and knowledge in the field. We have a strong interest in the growing experience industry and the complexity, challenges and opportunities it offers in terms of customer experience, marketing and concept development. Thus, we hope to develop our own understandings of the chosen topic during the research process and gain knowledge useful in our future careers.

The study will be conducted in Sweden; however we do believe that the findings will be transferable to other similar societies and contexts. Culture is a strong factor affecting the perception of authenticity but the meaning of the concept and how it is rendered can be applied in different settings and cultures.

## **1.5. Outline of the study**

In the first chapter we have introduced the research topic, provided a problem analysis and presented the research question and the purpose of the study. The important role of the topic for the restaurant industry has been explored and the academic relevance for further research in the field has been highlighted.

The following chapter contains the literature review, where key concepts and previous research will be presented. The notion of the experience industry is explained and three different academic approaches towards authenticity are outlined, aiming at clarifying the concept. Furthermore, previous studies on authenticity in the restaurant industry will be presented as well as studies on adjacent industries such as heritage sites and museums.

The third chapter, the Methodology, gives the reader a profound view of how the empirical material was collected. We will present our case studies, the selection process and how our content analysis was conducted. A discussion regarding the validity and reliability of our material can also be found.

The findings gathered from the different sources of information will be presented and analyzed in the fourth chapter, using knowledge obtained from the literature review.

At the end, we will conclude with our main findings and the answer to our research question. We will also discuss the transferability of the findings and the implication for practitioners of our study. Recommendations and suggestions for further research are thereafter presented. References and appendixes can be found at the end of this thesis.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW – Previous findings of authenticity**

*Based on previous literature, this chapter will first introduce the experience industry. The concept of authenticity is thereafter presented and explored from three different scientific approaches. Finally, we will present previous research of authenticity in the heritage industry and in restaurant contexts, in order to study other researchers' findings and viewpoints.*

### **2.1. The experience industry**

People's attraction to experiences is nothing new but was traditionally mostly talked about in relation to entertainment and theme parks. However, the notion of experiences in a broader sense was first introduced in Pine and Gilmore's book 'The Experience Economy' (1999). The concept is identified as a fourth economic offering, separated from commodities, goods and services. Pine and Gilmore (1999) points out that, businesses are what they charge for. Only companies charging for the time customers spends with them are in the experience industry. Mossberg (2001) is less strict in her definition. She defines the experience industry as the companies' main attraction and something beyond the usual (Mossberg, 2001). Darmer and Sundbo (2008) points out that experiences both can be a core product, like a vacation trip, or a supplement to a core product, such as employees, ambience or interior design in a restaurant.

The Knowledge Foundation (1999) reports a significant economic growth of the Swedish experience industry. Technology, entrepreneurship and the characteristics of the post modern consumption<sup>1</sup> are some reasons explaining the recent development. People have more time and money to spend and they want to be entertained and experience new aspects of life. In the developed world where there are almost unlimited supplies of goods and services, a demand for something different and interesting occurs (Darmer and Sundbo, 2008). The ever expanding middle class cares about what and how they consume and they use consumption to communicate their identity. Companies offering experiences can not only differentiate themselves from other businesses but also charge a higher price for the product (Mossberg, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> Post modernism is characterized by distrust of theories and ideologies and by the drawing of attention to established standards (The Oxford Dictionary, 2009).

Experiences occur when a company, intentionally, uses goods and services to engage the consumer. It is formed by the staged environment and the consumers prior experiences and being. Experiences are memorable, individual and inherently personal. Thus, two people cannot have the same experiences. The value of an experience lies within it but also in the memory it creates (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). If a couple celebrates their wedding anniversary at a restaurant, the goods will be consumed when they have finished their meal and the service will be vanished when they leave the restaurant. However, the experience will not only be consumed during the dinner but also a long time afterwards in conversations, when the couple shares their memories with each other.

Mossberg (2001) points out that experiences is about engaging oneself in something and about the emotional aspects that are related to an event. The wish for an experience is closely related to something joyful and positive but also the need to escape from the everyday life. It is a mental journey providing people with the feeling of being part of something special or to learn new things (Darmer and Sundbo, 2008).

As mentioned before, staging experience is about engaging people, but customers can be engaged at many different levels. Pine and Gilmore (1999) have presented a model identifying two of the most important dimensions of engagement; guest participation and environmental connection. When the two ends of each dimension interact, four kinds of experiences is created; entertainment, education, aesthetic and escapism<sup>2</sup>. Today, entertainment might be the most common form but as the industry develops, people will start demanding new and different forms of experiences.

Companies can also intensify the experience by blurring the boundaries between the different realms. The customer will then remember the experience longer since it is strongly distinguished from what we normally experience in the everyday life. The richest experience is composed of parts from all four realms (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Mossberg (2001) adds a third dimension to experiences; movement in time and place. She argues that time and place are important when defining an experience. All experiences should be seen as something extraordinary and a temporary movement from the daily life. For the experience to be so memorable it also has to be packaged and produced right. This can be done through theming and conceptualizing; creating an

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<sup>2</sup> Escapism can be described as the escape from the everyday life by entertainment and recreation. Jensen (1999) talks about a 'dream society'; stories behind products become more desirable than the actual product. His research indicates a growth in nonmaterial products and that the market will increasingly become more emotionally driven.

environment where personnel appearance, product design, ambience and artefacts are consistent and a part of the overall experience. The construction and the packaging of the experience are also important when the competition increases (Darmer and Sundbo, 2008). However, it is important to remember that it is the experience seeker, the consumer, which sets the bar for the experience concept.

## **2.2. Authenticity - a need for something real**

Lewis and Bridger (2000) have identified a new consumer group in the past four decades with financial power that highly influence the market. While old consumer often bought out of habit, influenced by mass marketing, the new consumers are more individual and involved. What distinguishes them most are the latter's desire for authenticity. The Oxford Dictionary (2008) refers to authenticity as something 'genuine', 'original' or with 'undisputed origin'.

Pine and Gilmour (2007) give three key drivers behind the demand for authenticity. First, they acknowledge the growing supply of commercial experiences, from birthday parties given at local restaurants to extreme adventures such as exploring the wreck of the Titanic. When consuming experiences, consumers are sensitive to whether the experience is 'real' or not. A 'fake' experience would likely be remembered as a waste of time while the truly authentic experience can be remembered for life. Second, they argue that the service economy becomes increasingly impersonal as people are being replaced by machines. In the revolution of technology, people long for something that is genuine and authentic. Third, the deceit of major corporations such as Enron has made many consumers to lose faith in institutions. As a reaction consumers look for organisation that takes a genuine social responsible; who are what they say they are.

MacCannell (1999) thinks that the evolution of modernity is causing a quest for authenticity. He believes that modernization has separated and displaced cultures and objects from its origin, for example can Egyptian obelisks be found in London, Paris and in Central Park in New York City. MacCannell argues that when modern man loses his social and cultural attachments, he will become more and more anxious about the authenticity of himself and at the same time develop an interest of the 'real life' of others. This, according to MacCannell, explains why tourists find

'back regions'<sup>3</sup> so interesting. He claims that back regions show how life really is, compared to front regions where staff often are required to act in a specific and perhaps unnatural manner.

Lewis and Bridger (2000) give further explanations why the 'new' consumers have demand for experiencing the authentic. They believe the most obvious answer is that authentic products and services give most value for money as they are superior in quality and more reliable. However, quality and reliability does not guarantee authenticity. What makes one thing authentic and the other inauthentic are the small differences.

### **2.3. The concept of authenticity**

Authenticity is foremost researched in the context of tourism. Early tourism researcher as MacCannell was concerned about the exploitation of 'authentic' communities. Culture, history and communities were commodified<sup>4</sup> into tourist products; something that could be bought and sold. Authenticity was then defined in a similar way as museums think of authenticity where 'persons are experts in such matters test whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked for them\*or, if this has already been paid, worth the admiration they are being given' (Trilling, 1972: 93).

Today the concept of authenticity is much diverse with little consensus among tourism scholars. Bruner (1994) illustrates well the conflicting meaning of authenticity in his research of New Salem, a town where Abraham Lincoln spent some years in the 1830's, which later became an 'authentic reconstructed' village. This example shows that authenticity may have four different meanings. First, it can be a reproduction that is not original but tries to give an appearance of being authentic by being credible and convincing. Second, it can be authentic in a sense that the site has the appearance similar to what the town looked like in the 1830's. Third, it can be an original; New Salem claims to have one original building conserved from the 1830's. This would, however, mean that every other building is inauthentic. Forth, authenticity may be authorized, certified, or legally valid; New Salem was approved by the state of Illinois. Lack of consensus has made some scholars to question whether the concept of authenticity should be used or not.

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<sup>3</sup> Back regions are explained by Goffman (1959). While hosts and guests interact in front regions such as lobbies, and front office, back regions are locations where staff can relax and prepare their work without being seen or interrupted by customers. Back regions are for example kitchens and staff rooms.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen (1988) describes commodification as the process when culture, history and ethnic activities are transformed into goods and services. The commoditized culture will then lose its intrinsic and significant meaning.

Reisinger and Steiner (2006) argue that without a shared understanding, the concept of authenticity should be avoided in tourism research. To avoid the concept is not recommended by Belhassen and Caton (2006), who explain that tourism is best understood as a multidisciplinary social research discourse. To understand social phenomena and their consequences, they think we are best suited using multiple theoretical approaches.

## **2.4. Authenticity from three theoretical viewpoints**

As mentioned earlier, the concept of authenticity has been primarily researched in the field of tourism. In tourism, the meaning of authenticity has been conceptualized from three different approaches: modernist/objectivist, constructivists and postmodernist (Wang 1999; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006).

### **2.4.1. Modernist/objectivist approach**

Modernist refers to authenticity as something of originality that is possible to evaluate objectively. Such an approach is given by McLeod (1976) when defining 'genuine' (i.e. authentic) African arts; '...any piece made from traditional materials by a native craftsman for acquisition and use by members of local society' (McLeod 1976 in Cohen 1988: 375).

MacCannell (1999) suggests that some experiences are truly authentic while others are inauthentic or staged ones. He uses a concept of 'staged authenticity', which refers to tourist settings that impose to give an impression of being authentic by letting customers peek in and see companies' inner operations. The concept is also applied in the restaurant industry. MacCannell mentions a restaurant, located in Copenhagen, where guests basically needed to go through the kitchen to enter the restaurant.

Boorstin's (1992) concept of 'pseudo-events' shows a different view of objective authenticity. Pseudo-events are described as a happening which is not spontaneous, instead it is arranged in order to be reported or reproduced. Such happening are highly used in the tourism industry.

For example the hula dance performed in Hawaii, a traditional dance which became commodified by Kodak for a commercial purpose. In opposite to the concept of staged authenticity, Boorstin (1992) does believe that people prefer illusions of authenticity rather than 'the real life other'. He

thinks that images have become ‘more vivid than originals’ (Boorstin, 1992: 204) and therefore people find it more interesting than reality.

The objective view of authenticity, given by MacCannell and Boorstin, has been received as a critique against western modern society including westerners’ (i.e. tourists) exploitation of primitive societies (Cohen, 1988). Tourists are being blamed to devalue peoples’ notion of authenticity by intrusion into people’s lives and turning tradition into commerce. However, there are constructivists who argue that authenticity is not something given and objective. They believe authenticity is socially constructed which can be found in any kind of setting, including staged ones (Urry, 2002).

#### **2.4.2. Constructivist approach**

Cohen (1988) criticizes MacCannell for taking authenticity as something given and objective. In contrast Cohen suggests that authenticity is constructed socially and therefore ‘negotiable’. Or as described by Gottlieb (1988) who thinks authenticity only exist in one’s own head: ‘...the vacationers’ own feelings and views about vacations are ‘authentic’, whether or not the observer judges them to match the host culture’ (Gottlieb 1982 in Cohen 1988: 378). This means that people can find authenticity despite something is staged as a ‘tourist trap’.

Berger (1966) uses the term ‘subjective reality’ to describe an individual’s perception of reality. He argues that reality is a process, created in people’s own minds and constructed by interacting with other people and social structures; ‘what is real outside corresponds to what is real within’ (Berger, 1966: 153).

Wang (1999) puts it similarly and argues that authenticity is in the eyes of the beholder and influenced by one’s own beliefs, expectations and stereotyped images. He claims that tourists care more for symbolic authenticity (i.e. stereotyped images) than objective authenticity.

### **2.4.3. Postmodernist approach**

Advocates of postmodernism, the third approach, criticize any attempts to define authenticity. Postmodernists such as Eco and Baudrillard think it is irrelevant to categorize something as authentic or inauthentic and real or fake. Instead they think people live in **'hyperreality'** which refers to the inability to distinguish reality from fantasy (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006).

Eco (1998) uses Disneyland to exemplify the meaning of hyperreality. Disneyland aims to give visitor a 'magic experience' with toy houses in full scale and actors dressed up in spectacular uniforms. With the use of advanced technique and convincing presentation Disneyland appears as authentic despite its being totally fake. Eco argues that faked nature may correspond more to our daydream demand. For example, the crocodile robots at Disneyland are acting out more spectacular than real ones and therefore they can provide visitors with more reality than 'real' nature can.

Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum is another postmodernist view of authenticity. Butler (1999) explain simulacrum as something which is 'real' without origin or reality, a hyperreality. According to Baudrillard is simulacrum an effect of the modern society which has replaced the meaning of reality by the use of symbols, images and industrial mass-production. The result is that people are being more familiar with the copies than the real thing. Or put by Butler: 'It is not the territory that precedes the map, but the map that precedes the territory' (Butler, 1999: 41).

### **2.4.4. Chosen theoretical approach**

Authenticity has previously been described from three different approaches. In our research we have chosen to define authenticity from a constructivist approach; as something which is socially constructed and exists in the eyes of beholder (Bruner, 1991; Berger, 1966; Wang, 1999). The constructivist view has become widely accepted among today's scholars. The modernist/objectivist approach is criticized for turning something subjective into something objective or absolute and postmodernism is neglecting the need for authenticity which today has become widely acknowledged (MacCannell, 1999; Urry, 2002; Pine and Gilmore, 2008; Lewis and Bridger, 2000). Nonetheless the advocates of modernist/objectivist and postmodernist approaches have introduced many interesting concepts which will be considered in our analyses.

If authenticity lies in the eyes of the beholder, how is authenticity then rendered? Advice can be taken from William Shakespeare’s Hamlet:

*This above all: to thine own self be true  
 And it doth follow, as the night the day,  
 Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

Pine and Gilmore (2007) identify two principles on how to render authenticity: (1) Being true to oneself. (2) Being who you say you are to others. The first principle refers to the importance of being earnest, consistent and ‘self-directed centres or one on one’s perception of one’s self’. The second principle is about being trustworthy, honest and compassionate; to be aware of one’s own action towards others.

When authenticity lies in the eyes of the beholder it means that something ‘fake’ can appear as ‘real’ and vice versa. To render the ‘real’ (i.e. authentic) a matrix can be used. Pine and Gilmour (2007) have constructed a matrix from the words fake and real (see figure 1.). The X-axis describes the relationship between the company and what its output is. The ideal is when the offer is true to itself and the company. The Y-axis describes the relationship between the company and the customers: the offers should be what they say they are and not false to any customer. The matrix result in four modes of authenticity: real-real, real-fake, fake-real and fake-fake. In order to be teal-real, companies must be true to themselves and at the same time be what they say they are. Only then are they truly authentic.

<i>Is what it say it is</i>	<b>Real-fake</b>	<b>Real-real</b>
<i>Is not what it say it is</i>	<b>Fake-fake</b>	<b>Fake-real</b>
	<i>Is not true to itself</i>	<i>Is true to itself</i>

Figure 1. (Pine and Gilmore, 2007)

### 2.5. Previous studies on authenticity

This chapter will introduce previous research on authenticity in the restaurant industry as well as research made on museums and heritage sites. Heritage sites and museums are much related to

the tourism industry and in recent years they have been more experience-oriented in order to attract visitors (Leighton, 2006).

### **2.5.1. Studies of authenticity in museums and heritage sites**

Museums and historical sites have been described as a new industry; the 'heritage industry' (Goulding, 2000). By exploring the past the heritage tourism provides visitors with a sense of identity and attachment. The issues of original and reproduction is very evident in these places, which makes it appropriate for research (Bruner, 1994). Bruner (1994) sees authenticity from a constructivist viewpoint where cultures are constantly invented and reinvented. He believes that all cultural heritage sites are copies of a prior ideal but each is also an original in that it adapts to new circumstances and conditions. Based on this, Bruner (1994) argues for abandoning the distinction between copy and original.

Gable and Handle (1996) have studied another historical museum namely the Colonial Williamsburg. However, even if they are constructivists and study the same phenomena as Bruner (1994) they interpret them in very different ways. Bruner sees the natural attraction of authenticity as a sign of the human behaviour to construct culture. Gable and Handle (1996), on the other hand, criticize the obsession with creating an authentic past since it only will create a false image of the history. They assume an original pure state that is truly authentic. Furthermore they point out that museums are committed to expose historical truth in every detail. This can be explained by the responsibility that follows with being real and purveying education and history. They compare this to Disneyland that can make up anything they want since they are 'fake' (Gable and Handle, 1996).

It has also been argued, in research based on the heritage industry, that the experience always is authentic even if the site in itself is inauthentic. Consumers might not explicitly search for authenticity when visiting a museum or an historical site but the perceived feeling of authenticity can trigger the consumers' imagination and connect them to the past.

Consumers are an active part of the construction of the experience by interpreting the environment with their past knowledge and experience. The 'truth' of the historical site is therefore determined by the visitors and the producers (Chronis and Hampton, 2008).

The criteria visitors use when evaluating the authenticity at heritage sites has also been studied. Three different visitor behavioural types were identified by Goulding (2000). The first group was concerned about the details which were seen as certification that the reproduction was real. The second group was more concerned with artefacts, images and situations that triggered the imagination to create the experience. The third group puts large emphasis on the development of social and entertaining experiences and on the uses of the resources to get a feel for the past. Goulding (2000), in accordance with other researchers, points out that most visitors perceive the historical site in accordance to their own perceptions. The challenge in heritage sites is to offer accurate yet stimulation information. We live in an age dominated by 'hyperreality', especially in the leisure industry. Even if this also is true in heritage sites, where the past is based on pastiche (i.e. a mostly respectful imitation), visitors have little desire for sensationalism (Goulding, 2000).

The commoditisation and authenticity issues are less straightforward in cultural heritage than in some other contexts. Since most professionals behind museums are very concerned with the archaeological accuracy and reliability of evidence they strongly reject the idea that authenticity is in the mind of the consumer (Halewood and Hannam, 2001). This indicates that Halewood and Hannam (2001) have a similar viewpoint on authenticity as Gable and Handle (1996). Furthermore, even if the providers are presenting the past in a certain way, visitors still have a great scope of personal interpretation. Halewood and Hannam (2001) have studied the European Viking heritage which consists of heritage sites, museums, theme parks, trading fairs etc. In their study they recognise that the authenticity is not necessarily diminished even if the experience moves away from 'pure' truth. Commodification can be both resisted and encouraged when exposing and spreading knowledge of a culture.

McIntosh and Prentice (1999) have the idea that what is presumed to be authentic depends as much on the presented interpretation of the displays as that of the viewer. This is the base for their study on visitors' experience of authenticity at three theme parks. The aim is to determine to what extent personal meanings are part of the perceived authenticity. Their findings show that visitors often connect authenticity with gaining insight into the past or when something makes them appreciate their present lives.

Furthermore, the affirmation of authenticity is described through the visitors own reflection of empathy or critical engagement. Three processes were identified in this study; the processes of reinforced assimilation, cognitive perception, and retroactive association. Consumers search for authenticity in heritage sites or museums can be characterised as 'mindful'. This is a cognitive

concept which refers to active visitors; people are interested, questioning and open to learn something new. This indicates that visitors are active producers of the environment and their experience of authenticity.

Previous research on the heritage industry identifies, as shown above, the significance of the visitors' role in the experience. Even if the site is constructed around a pastiche it is still the consumers' knowledge and imagination that ultimately determines how the site will be perceived. Authenticity is seen as a significant factor in the experience but the meaning of the concept is varying among researchers.

### **2.5.2. Studies of authenticity in the restaurant industry**

Previous research on authenticity in the restaurant industry is mainly focusing on culturally themed restaurants and consumers' perception of authenticity, the frames of references used when developing a restaurant concept and different methods used to create authenticity.

The research by Munoz, Wood and Solomon (2006) and Lego, Wood, McFee and Solomon (2002) shows that popular culture and media has strong influence on the framing of culturally themed restaurants and used as people's frame of reference when determining if something is authentic. In their research they also found that both managers and pub guests were aware that the environment was not entirely authentic, however; they did not see this as a problem even if authenticity was highly valued. Both Munoz, Wood and Solomon (2006) and Ebster and Guist (2005) study whether or not patrons' are able to distinguish between authentic and themed restaurants. They do a distinction between 'real' and 'fake' authenticity. An Italian restaurant in Italy is thus more authentic than one in Sweden. Their findings indicate that consumers have the ability to distinguish the real from the fake even if restaurant and pubs are using stereotypical artefacts.

Ebster and Guist (2005) are pointing out that the culturally experienced respondents to a higher degree could identify a themed Italian restaurant from the restaurant located in Italy.

Their study also indicates that authenticity in theme restaurants is less important for this group of customers, then for culturally naïve patrons. However, both groups of respondents indicated that they preferred the restaurants located in Italy. This indicates that guests' cultural experience and awareness influence their evaluation of an ethnically themed restaurant. Thus, it is important for

practitioners' to consider their target customers' background and experience when designing and planning a concept restaurant in order to meet the customers' expectations (Ebster and Guist, 2005).

Also Munoz, Wood and Solomon's (2006) research shows that respondents' previous experiences and culture determined how they experienced and described authenticity in Irish pubs. People who for example had visited an Irish pub described authenticity as a representation of the original while the respondents who had not visited an Irish pub described it as 'one of a kind', 'genuine', and 'original'. Respondents' country of origin is also affecting their way of describing a themed restaurant or pub. Respondents originating from Ireland tended to describe an Irish pub with intangible artefacts, such as the relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Furthermore, respondents from Australia and the US were to a larger extent using objects and stereotypical images when describing a typical Irish pub. Irish pubs located outside Ireland are also using large amounts of market-generated artefacts which indicate that the authentic Irish pub had no need to prove its 'Irishness' (Munoz, Wood and Solomon, 2006).

Giradelli (2004) researches how foreign cultures are commoditized and stereotyped. His study discusses communicative strategies and the representation of the food package in Italian themed franchise chain restaurants. It is found that several communication strategies are used by the restaurants in order to increase the Italian feeling. The strategies can be categorized as verbal strategies; Italian words describing the food or words such as 'authentic' and 'family' used in slogans and marketing material, and nonverbal strategies; such as green, red and white colour combination, vegetables, old photos and a kitchen/bistro feeling. Giradelli (2004) is critical to the phenomena that construct standardized ethnic identities since they create a false image of the other. At the same time he points out that consumption of other cultures can create curiosity and acceptance.

Bell, Meiselman, Pierson and Reeve (1993) are having a somewhat different approach in their research. They examine the change, when adding an Italian theme to a British restaurant in terms of perceived ethnicity, acceptability and selection of food.

However, their findings are similar to other researchers; artefacts such as décor and names of food items are important for the overall experience. When they added Italian artefacts to an ordinary restaurant the guests' perception of Italian identity increased on almost all dishes and the overall experience (Bell, Meiselman, Pierson and Reeve, 1993).

By studying previous research on authenticity in the restaurant industry it becomes clear that guests' previous experiences and their cultural background determine how they perceive authenticity. Themed restaurants, located outside the country of origin, are to a high extent commoditized and using stereotyped artefacts to create a specific theme. Some patrons recognize this but do not see it as a problem even if authenticity is a desirable feature of restaurants. The researchers have used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies including video clips, photographs, interviews and observations.

## **2.6 Summary**

In literature, the concept of authenticity has been primarily researched in the field of tourism. The meaning of authenticity has been conceptualized from three different approaches: modernist/objectivist, constructivists and postmodernist. After reviewing literature and previous studies of authenticity we found that the constructivist approach was most suitable to answer our research question. Authenticity is, according to the constructivist viewpoint, something subjective and individual. Thus, one person may perceive authenticity different from the other. Constructivist research indicates that consumers' knowledge and cultural background will influence how they perceive authenticity. Previous research also indicates that the perceived feeling of authenticity can trigger the consumers' imagination.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

*Our research adopts a qualitative method approach following an abdicative research process and a qualitative data collection method. This chapter will follow a chronological order and starts to explain the scientific approach and the reasons behind our chosen research method. Thereafter the data collection is explained and motivated. In the end we will discuss the validity and reliability of the research in order to assess the quality of the collected data.*

#### 3.1. Scientific approach - choosing a qualitative method

Authenticity has previously been described as something that exists in the eyes of the beholder. This approach is mainly taken from a constructivist point of view; where reality is a process, created in people's own minds and constructed by interacting with other people and social structures (Berger, 1966). Qualitative methods are recommended when studying a social phenomenon, such as authenticity. 'The stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants' (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 402). Some researchers believe that qualitative methods provide a deeper understanding compared to quantitative methods (Silverman 2007).

Similar to constructivism, qualitative researcher think of reality as something socially constructed. Qualitative research is trying to understand how social experience is created and its meaning while quantitative research is more concerned with causal relationships between variables. By using interviews and observations it is claimed that qualitative researchers can get closer to the respondents' perceptions. This is in contrast to quantitative research, which has difficulty to capture the respondent's inner feelings and perceptions since the researcher has to rely on more 'distant' methods such as questionnaires (Silverman 2007). Thus, to choose qualitative research appears to be a natural choice for this study.

Different kinds of qualitative methods can be used to obtain data, such as observation, text and documents analysis, interviews and audio and video recording. The most suitable method depends on the nature of the research topic. If the researcher wants to understand a phenomenon, case studies can be used. Case study's aim 'is to seek to understand the phenomenon by studying single examples' (Veal, 2006: 108). The data gathering, when using case studies, does often include a number of data sources and gathering techniques: secondary data

sources, in-depth interviews, observations and participant observation. The technique of gathering this data is yet the same as in any other research process (Veal, 2006).

In our research we have used three different kinds of data sources: secondary data, in-depth interviews and observations. More time and effort was put on the in-depth interviews compared to the other data sources, as we believe that talking to restaurant owners would gain more insight than any other data collecting methods. Since we had some background knowledge in the field and a clear focus of our research, semi-structured interviews were preferred over totally unstructured interviews. This allowed us to address specific issues or themes (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

This research will have a practitioners' focus by analyzing four restaurants as case studies, representative of authentic concept restaurants, to further explore the function of authenticity. Consumers' attitudes towards the studied restaurants or the effects that authenticity has on guests' experience have not been researched. Thus, a consumer perspective on authenticity in concept restaurants is left to be studied in future research.

### **3.2. Literature and previous research - understanding the concept of authenticity**

A literature review was conducted as a first stage of this research. The literature review helped us form a general understanding of authenticity and the experience industry; and how the two concepts are related to each other. In the next stage of this research, the analysis, the literature review was used as a mirror in order to scrutinize the findings from the interviews.

We started to do a general information search in the field of authenticity, which resulted in both academic work and non-academic articles from business and trade magazines. This information search indicated the topics' relevance and helped us identify some of the important researchers in the field. By examining these researchers' references we managed to identify the most prominent authors in the field. Our literature research was primarily limited to research concerning the experience industry. However, the experience industry includes several sub-industries. When researching among these sub-industries, we found that authenticity has been mostly studied in tourism, heritage sites and restaurants. However, the existing research is not comprehensive.

For this research it was most relevant to study previous research on authenticity in restaurants. A few articles on authenticity and commoditization in relation to ethnic theme restaurants were identified. We wrote summaries on each article and conducted a content analysis. Previous studies gave us ideas of how to research authenticity and the different findings were used to compare with our own data. Previous studies have used both quantitative and qualitative methods to research authenticity. For the qualitative research a variety of different approaches were used; focus groups, ethnographic studies and interviews.

### **3.3. Interviews with consultants at Stylt Trampoli AB**

The primary data collecting began with interviewing three consultants at Stylt Trampoli AB (hereinafter Stylt)<sup>5</sup>. Stylt is a concept developing firm specializing on the hospitality business. We found it very relevant to interview them due to their long experience of working as identity consultants in the hospitality industry. Stylt is one of the few companies in Scandinavia within their niche; coordinating all parts of the experience. We have personal contacts within the company, since one of us had previously done an internship at Stylt, why we easily could arrange and carry out interviews. The main purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into how concept restaurants are developed and the benefits of using a theme as we believe it is highly related to authenticity.

Three interviews were conducted with consultants working at Stylt. Each consultant had a specific area of expertise: project management, copy writing and interior design. This helped us see concept development from different viewpoints. Interview guides with broad and open questions were used for all three interviews. The face sheet questions were limited to; how long the respondents had worked at the company and their current professional role and previous background. The answers are supposed to conceptualize the respondents' answers, why we did

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<sup>5</sup> **Stylt Trampoli AB - a concept developer firm**

Stylt was formed in 1988, by a group of artists with the vision of having their own gallery. They were asked to develop a restaurant concept for a restaurant with a very small budget and have since then worked with development of restaurant, hotel and destination concepts. Stylt's working method is storytelling, which is a tool for developing an identity and concept. Today they are one of the few companies in Scandinavia within their niche; coordinating all the signals the client sends out to its customers. The feeling and clearness of the ambiance is just as important as the marketing; everything has to be coordinated in order to create the desired experience. Stylt develops everything from concept idea to interior design and marketing material, which gives them a unique opportunity to control the whole concept development process. This means that the company's employees have wide variety of backgrounds and professions. The Stylt office is situated in Gothenburg but they conduct consultancy jobs all over Sweden and internationally. In 2008 the company won The European Hotel Design Awards for best conference hotel interior design.

not found it necessary to ask any additional personal questions (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Our first interview was conducted with ‘the copywriter’. He has worked at Stylt for nine years and has also the role of concept developer. The interview guide (Appendix I) covered the topics; industry trends, trustworthiness and experiences. These topics are, according to literature, closely related to authenticity and the experience industry. Authenticity was not mentioned in the questions in order not to influence the respondents’ answers. The interview was conducted in a small library at Stylt’s office. The room was quiet and furnished with comfortable chairs placed in a circle, which created a relaxed atmosphere. The interview lasted for about one hour and before ending we asked if the respondent wanted to add something, in order to give an opportunity to raise any overlooked issue.

The second interview was conducted with ‘the project manager’ who has been working for Stylt for two and a half years. We used the same interview guide as we used during the interview with the copywriter since the two respondents were estimated to have a similar knowledge. The interview was conducted in the same room as the previous interview. This interview did also last for one hour.

The third interview was conducted with ‘the interior designer’. At the time of the interview she was an intern at Stylt but she had prior experience as set designer. The interview was conducted at a restaurant in Gothenburg; one of the most known and successful concept restaurants in Sweden, which Stylt helped to develop. Both the respondent and the location were chosen in order to get a practical example of how a concept restaurant can be developed. For this interview, we used an interview guide with fewer questions compared to our previous interviews (Appendix II), since we had less knowledge in this respondent’s professional expertise. Instead we focused on asking follow-up questions during the interview. The interview was conducted while eating lunch and lasted for one hour. Thus, the environment was quite noisy and we were interrupted a few times by the waitress. However, the chosen location gave the respondents the possibility to relate her answers to the surrounding environment. It also created a very open and relaxed atmosphere allowing the respondent to talk freely.

Tape recorders were used during all three interviews and we transcribed the material the day after the interview was conducted. By using tape recorders we limited our own influence in the transcription process and it allowed us to be more alert during the interviews, asking follow up

questions and probing when necessary (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Due to practical reasons we divided the transcribing between us.

### 3.4. Case study research

The previous literature review and the consultant interviews indicate how complex authenticity is and how to study this phenomenon is not given. Authenticity appears to be a wide concept, which includes many aspects of a business; from owners' background to what kind of food they serve. Or as put by Lewis and Bridger (2000), what makes one thing being perceived as authentic and the other inauthentic are the small differences.

To capture the complexity of authenticity, case studies can be used. Case study is the idea '...that one case (or perhaps a small number of cases) will be studied in detail, using whatever methods seem appropriate' (Punch, 1998 in Silverman 2005: 126). The purpose with a case study is to get as much understanding from one case as possible. If researching a phenomenon, such as authenticity, a 'collective case study' is recommended. The collective case study uses a number of cases to research some general phenomenon (Stake, 2000 in Silverman, 2005). Since case study research often only uses a small number of cases, they must be chosen carefully in order for the result to be somewhat transferable. To obtain transparency, this study has used a criteria model (see figure 1. in chapter 2.4.4) which can help to motivate our choice of case studies.

If researching authenticity we needed to find restaurants (i.e. cases) that could be described or categorized as authentic. Our aim was to find cases that can illustrate the phenomenon of authenticity. This type of study is called 'illustrative case study' where cases are deliberately chosen to illustrate a certain proposition (Veal, 2006).

For our primary data collecting method; the case study research, we started out with a selection criteria in order to increase the representativeness and to generate relevant data for our analysis. To find authentic restaurants we used the matrix presented in chapter 2.4.4. and illustrated below (see figure 1.) Referring to the matrix, a company can only be perceived as authentic when the offering is *true to itself* and when the offering *is what it says it is*. The matrix shows how we define authenticity; something which is socially constructed and therefore subjective. Thus, the matrix allows the researcher to interpret, why we believe it can be applicable in studies with a constructivist approach. The matrix does not pretend to be an objective tool for deciding

whether something is authentic or not, but just an instrument to select our case studies, being aware of its weakness and potential disadvantages.

<i>Is what it say it is</i>	<b>Real-fake</b>	<b>Real-real</b>
<i>Is not what it say it is</i>	<b>Fake-fake</b>	<b>Fake-real</b>
	<i>Is not true to itself</i>	<i>Is true to itself</i>

Figure 1. (Pine and Gilmore, 2007)

Based on the matrix each case must fulfil two criteria be true to itself and be what it says it is. To identify restaurants that matched these two criteria, we looked for restaurants which have stayed the same, throughout time, without changing their concept and at the same time is what they say they are. For example, if they say they are an Italian restaurant, they must be and act like one. This means that everything from food to interior must be perceived as Italian. To make sure that their offers did match the outcome, we only chose restaurants that we both had visited and experienced before. Chosen restaurants are described below (see 3.5. Case studies - chosen restaurants).

Like most qualitative research, our selections of case studies are influenced by time, financial resources and convenience. In our research this might have affected on the final result. However, qualitative research aims at creating an in-depth analysis and an understanding of the studied area why the issue of representativeness is considered less important.

### 3.5. Case studies - chosen restaurants

The case study research consists of four restaurants, based on the above frame of reference. The presentation below is based on the different restaurants’ webpage and our personal experiences.

**‘The 50’s Café’** is promoted as the fifties cafe in Helsingborg. The cafe appears to be what it says it is; it has archetypal 1950’s furniture and decor, which according to them ‘is planned down to the smallest detail, everything being taken from and resolving around the wondrous 1950’s’ (The 50’s Café, 2009). Apart from coffee and hamburgers, customers can also purchase vintage books and vinyl records and 1950’s artefacts. It appears that the fifties café is true to itself. The

theme has been consistent since the café opened in 1997 and the owners are known to be 1950's enthusiasts.

**'The Summer Café'** is a small family owned café, located in the country side of Skåne, the southern part of Sweden. The café offers home baked biscuits and coffee in a traditional style, something they have done continuously, during the summer season, ever since they opened in 1938. The long consistency makes the summer café true to itself. On their web page they want guests to experience 'an unthreatened and joyful Swedish summer experience with authentic traditional biscuits, fresh brewed coffee and home made lemonade' (The Summer Café, 2009). The café is what it says it is. The setting with old houses and staff wearing traditional Swedish dresses turn the visit into a Swedish summer experience.

**'The Storytelling Restaurant'** is an Italian-American restaurant serving pizza, pasta and minced meat. The story is based on a fictive person, and how he have chosen a career as restaurateur, instead of joining the mafia, and eventually ended up in Gothenburg. The full story is presented on the restaurant's web page including fake pictures of the 'owner'. When visiting the restaurant one will truly experience the combination of Italy and New York as well as the fictive owner. The references are many; visiting the bathroom one can hear the sound from an American mafia movie, a shelf is decorated with vintage Italian wine bottles and they serve Italian pizza as well as American hamburgers. The whole concept has basically stayed the same since the restaurant opened in 1999, which makes the story true to itself.

**'The Chinese Restaurant'** is located in Gothenburg and serves traditional Chinese food. The restaurant has existed since 2004 and is run by a family with origins from Hong Kong. The web page welcomes anyone who 'would like to eat traditional, well prepared food in a genuine environment' (The Chinese Restaurant, 2009). They also claim themselves to be a Chinese Restaurant above the usual. This is no understatement, if compared to the typical 'Swedish-Chines' restaurants. Everything at this restaurant renders China, from the interior to the food. The Chinese restaurant appears to be true to itself. They have chosen to serve food in a traditional way with few, if any, compromises. This means that the food will take a much longer time to prepare and guests are told to be patient.

### 3.6. Observations

Authenticity has previously been described as something subjective which only exists in the eyes of the beholder. In order to study authenticity one should be able to 'see' or 'feel' it. It was therefore appropriate to perform observations in order to gain a holistic understanding of the concept. The importance of examining a site just using your sight should not be forgotten when doing research (Veal, 2006). The observations complemented our research and helped us gain knowledge of the different cases before we conducted the interviews (Veal, 2006). Our first step in the observation was to visit the restaurants websites in order to study the ambience and image communicated to the visitors. We carefully read all available information and studied the pictures. Two of the cases had presented their menus on their webpages which we carefully studied in order to gain understanding of all parts of the concept.

The next step was to perform on site observations. Observations were performed at three of the four restaurants. One of our cases, the Summer Café, is only open during the summer and spring season thus, it was not possible to visit the site at the time of our data collection. However, both of us had on previous occasions visited the Café and we are therefore somewhat familiar with the site and concept. We called and made a reservation before the visits, at the two restaurants, to assure that we could perform our observation as planned. All observations were performed on weekdays in order to avoid the sites being too crowded. The observation was unstructured with only a few in beforehand decided guidelines about what we were going to observe (Veal, 2006). We had decided to study factors affecting all senses as well as things that caught our interest. This allowed us to distinguish the significance and potential meanings of the case studies and relate the observation to our research question (Veal, 2006). In order to experience as much as possible during the restaurant visit we ordered different dishes and tried to study as many parts of the restaurant as possible. We observed the interior, the menu, the behaviour of the staff, the taste and appearance of the food, and sounds and smell in the restaurant. We visited the toilet and looked at the kitchen in the two restaurants where it was presented as a front stage area. One of the restaurants had a jukebox where we played a song. We did not take any notes during the actual observations however we constantly discussed what we saw and experienced. Shortly after the restaurant visit we wrote down our observations and thoughts (see appendix IV) in order not to omit any important details.

### 3.7. Conducting the interviews

We prepared an interview guide in beforehand where the questions were based around our research question. A copy of the interview guide can be found in appendix III. The questions are exploring the respondents' social world and what is important to the interviewee in relation to our research topic. Each question was constructed so it would help us answer our research question. However, we still tried to keep the questions broad in order to explore new angles of the topic. The order of the questions followed a natural flow but was somewhat changed during the course of the interview. In order to find out if the questions we came up with were relevant we tried to ask ourselves 'why is this interesting and how will it help us to answer our research question?' This helped us to eliminate unnecessary questions and keep the interview guide quite short. We tried to keep the questions as clear as possible avoiding academic and industry jargon that might be hard for the respondents to understand.

We chose to ask a few face sheet questions in order to be able to contextualize the respondents' answers afterwards. The questions we asked were mainly concerning the interviewees name, position and previous experience from the hospitality business. Other information regarding age and gender etc were not considered relevant for the analysis or for understanding the concept.

All the respondents were restaurant owners or a part of a family business. We had previously visited all four restaurants which helped us to better understand the respondents' answers. Three of the interviews were conducted, on site, at the different restaurants. This gave the respondents the possibility to give examples and better relate their answers to the business. It was not possible to conduct the fourth interview on site, however, since we both previously had visited the restaurant it was easy to connect the different questions to the concept and the environment.

Some interviews had to be conducted with only one interviewer, which might have affected the outcome. The respondents might have felt more relaxed with only one other person present, which could have resulted in richer answers. At the same time, it was harder to probe when just being one interviewer, since it requires a high level of alertness. Thus, we might have missed out on following up some interesting comments when carrying out the interview alone.

Before the interview started we were careful not to tell the respondents too much about our research. The respondents were only given information about our academic background and the theme of the interview; to research restaurant concepts. The interview was semi structured and

we had prepared an interview guide based around our research questions. The semi constructed approach left us with a great deal of flexibility in terms of probing, using follow-up questions and not strictly following the outlined guide (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

The interviews were carried out at times when the restaurants were not busy. This might have helped the respondents to be more relaxed and mentally present. However, some disturbance such as music, phones ringing and people interrupting was impossible to avoid. The interviews lasted between 30 min to one hour and tape recorders were used at all occasions. This allowed us to pay more attention to the respondents' answers during the interview as well as conduct a transparent analysis on the transcribed material afterwards (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The conversation normally continues a few minutes after we had ended the official interview and turned off the tape recorder. In some cases it was evident that the respondents became more relaxed after the tape recorder was turned off, which resulted in some interesting comments. We tried to remember and write down the comments as accurately as possible after leaving the interview site.

Before finishing the interview we asked the respondents if they wanted to add something more or if it was something that they wanted to clarify. After the interview we talked through how the interview went, if the respondent had misunderstood some questions or if it was anything else we needed to change for the next interview.

### **3.8. Conducting the analysis**

The attractiveness of qualitative research is the rich data it generates but the large amount of data is also the biggest challenge. In quantitative research there are a large amount of rules on how to conduct the analysis; this does not exist in qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). We have chosen to conduct a content analysis and code our data in order to handle the large amount of information we gained during our interviews. An abduction research method is used, moving back and forth between theory and data. This allowed us to further explore theoretical fields, relevant to our empirical material, and return and develop our literature review. The coding resulted in different concepts, which we found highly evident in the cases we studied. The actual analysis was then conducted, where we looked for relations between the concepts and theory and sought to answer our research question and draw conclusions applicable to the experience industry.

Throughout the whole analysis process we were sitting together, sharing our thoughts on the collected material. We also continuously wrote down memos, which helped us to remember and clarify our reflections, thoughts and ideas about the codes and concepts.

We chose to conduct the analysis manually since we had rather limited amount of material. The computer software program such as NVivo can be used in order to facilitate content analysis. The program allows the researcher to retrieve information from the interview transcripts much faster, however, the researcher still has to identify codes, interpret and analyse data. We believe such programs are very useful in larger studies, with large amount of interview material but in our research we estimated it to be just as time consuming as conducting it manually.

### **3.8.1 Coding using content analysis**

Coding can be seen as the starting point of the analysis. When coding data in accordance with content analysis it is the researchers' interpretation of data that shapes the emerging codes and the validity of the material (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The initial interviews with Stylt were coded as soon as they were conducted and transcribed. This allowed us to identify relevant codes, such as words and themes, and then return and collect more data with the already abstained material as a guide.

We started coding the empirical material obtained from interviews with the restaurant practitioners when all interviews were transcribed. All obtained material was printed and we started by carefully reading through the interviews. We read through all transcripts again, but this time we made notes in the margin if we found something interesting or underlined specific words. In the next stage, we had a brainstorming session where we compared our different notes and linked it to the words that been used in the literature and in our previous interviews with Stylt. The codes were then compared and linked to each other. Some general theoretical ideas started to take form and the codes were grouped into different categories all related to the creation of an authentic experience. Then we carefully read through all transcripts again identifying and marked important comments, in accordance with our identified categories. In the last stage we tried to find interrelationships between the concepts as well as with the existing theory in the field. We constructed a conceptual model, describing and clarifying the linkage between the different concepts and categories, before we started to write up the analysis. During the analysis we continued to return to our material until we felt that we reached a point of

theoretical saturation; when we felt that there was no more reason to review our data in order to find additional material (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

One of the problems with coding is that text is detached from its context. By taking out parts of an interview transcript the social context and how it was said is easily lost. Since the coding only captures small fragments, the framework of people's answers will not be evident in the coded material. It is therefore hard to gain understanding just with the codes if they are a part of a narrative answer (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

### **3.9. Validity and reliability of the research process**

Validity is referring to if you study what you say you are studying. External validity is concerning the transferability of the results; the degree to which the findings can be generalized to other settings (Bryman and Bell, 2007). We are, in this research studying cases in the restaurant industry but our aim is to be able to transfer our findings to other parts of the experience industry as well. We believe this is possible since the restaurant industry is characterized by the same features as amusement parks and museums. By providing the reader with our frames of reference when choosing the cases, interview guide and observation notes we create transparency and provide other researcher with the possibility to replicate our study. It might be interesting to conduct it in another setting or do a more in depth study of the restaurant industry.

The casual relationship, internal validity, between the cases studies and our conclusion can be an issue of discussion. We have clearly stated that we have a constructivist approach as a frame of reference when selecting our cases and drawing conclusions. This means that our chosen cases are very much influenced by our own opinion including aspects such as convenience, time and financial restrictions. To improve the transparency when choosing case studies, a matrix (see figure 2.) is used. Furthermore, qualitative research is always in some extent affected by the researcher's assumptions and interpretation (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This study is no exception.

If we had selected other cases it is possible that the answers and the conclusions might have been affected. It can also be argued that just a few case studies are not enough to provide any evidence or draw any conclusions that hold water (Silverman, 2005). However, this study aims to increase the understanding of authenticity, rather than putting 'hard facts' on the table.

It can also be argued that it is impossible to conduct objective research since the researcher can not understand a concept without a specific frame of reference. This argument is also criticising how realists sees the world; there is one absolute truth. The social world can be seen from many viewpoints which make it critical to discuss quantitative research in relation to validity and reliability (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Reliability is related to the research trustworthiness and conformability. Information obtained and material used during all stages of the research should be kept during the whole process in order to increase the dependability (Bryman and Bell, 2007). We chose to tape record and transcribe all interviews. We tried to transcribe all interviews as accurately as possible, without leaving out pauses or sounds that might seem trivial. However, it is still possible that some of these have been lost in the transcription process (Silverman, 2007). Thus, all empirical materials are saved if the reader or we for some reason wants to go back to the original source. In order to limit our own interference of the empirical material we have chosen to present direct quotes from the interviews. It can be argued that a separate chapter only presenting the empirical material would have been even freer of our own underlying assumptions; however, we believe that a chapter mixing the collected data with analysis and references to the literature will give the reader a deeper understanding of the concept.

All interviews were conducted in Swedish since both interviewers and all respondents were Swedish speaking. If the respondents are able to speak in their native language they can express themselves in a more exact way, the answers are richer and the respondents feel more relaxed (Bryman and Bell, 2007). However, we had to translate all direct quotes used in the analysis from Swedish to English. We tried to translate them as accurately as possible but there might be some variation from the original data.

The coding of the collected data was, due to limited resources and practical reasons, done by us. The coding is preferably done by people not familiar with the expectations or hypothesis of the research (Silverman, 2005). Qualitative research is often criticized for being too subjective since the findings often is based on what the researcher views as important and significant (Bryman and Bell, 2007). It is impossible to obtain total objectivity since all research is based upon a frame of reference. We have chosen to do a profound litterateur review, including previous studies on authenticity in different areas of the experience industry, in order to form an as objective base as possible for our research. Another reliability issue is the lack of transparency of the coding and

analysis process (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Here it can be argued that we could have increased the transparency by using computer software programs such as NVivo.

# 4. ANALYSIS

*In this chapter, our empirical material will be presented and analyzed. This analysis will draw on the literature review and previous interviews with the experts and the ones conducted with restaurant owners. We will mix exact quotations from the interviews with our own interpretations of the data based on literature and theory. A list of the respondents can be found below, see table 1. The analysis will start to explain how the respondents are serving experiences rather than food and service. Thereafter a number of concepts will be presented. These concepts are brick stones in the process of creating an authentic experience. We have highlighted some important theoretical key concepts in order to support the reading of this chapter.*

<b>The case studies:</b>	<b>Consultants at Stylt:</b>
The 50's Café	The Copywriter
The Summer Café	The Project Manager
The Storytelling Restaurant	The Interior Designer
The Chinese Restaurant	

Table 1. Naming of the respondents. See chapter 3.3 and 3.5 for further descriptions of the respondents.

## 4.1. A shift of focus- from food and service to authentic experience

*One example is restaurant X where many guests say the food is fantastic but I do not think it is the food people have experienced...You are fooled by the service, environment and context and think you ate great food. I do not think the food is the most important but that you have to do everything else extremely right (The Copywriter).*

The core products are in many restaurants considered to be food and service. However, it can be argued that experience is the main offering in concept restaurants. The ethnic origin of the food, style or the price are reasons for choosing to visit a specific restaurant but people do not just visit restaurants to get filled up. ‘The copywriter’ believes good food is not the single factor for success:

*...few chefs are so good that they cook so fantastic food that people will come independent of service, or if they are sitting on the floor or independent of price (The Copywriter).*

The restaurants must offer something else; environment, service, artefacts and the right feelings associated with the restaurant visit. All these factors need to communicate the same thing in order to communicate to the consumer what kind of restaurant experience this is and create a memorable experience.

‘The copywriter’ relates the restaurant industry to showbiz and the creation of movies. The producer is creating signals through the story, the artefacts and the casted actors. All signals should communicate the same thing and tell the viewer what kind of movie it is (The Copywriter). What he means is that restaurants should use the same method and tell the visitor what kind of restaurant they intend to be in all aspects of the business. ‘The copywriter’ believes this will increase the clarity of the experience.

Seen from the constructivist approach authenticity is something subjective. However, mass media and popular culture have formed a common perception and are often used as people’s frame of reference (Lego, Wood, McFee and Solomon, 2002). Thus, it can be argued that the signals a restaurant sends out must be based on established truths in order for consumers to understand the concept and perceive it as authentic. If the consumer can relate and understand the concept, the experience can lead to **escapism** (Jensen, 1999); a state of mind of being in another time and space.

One of the respondents also pointed out the importance of offering something more than just food and service. The story about the restaurant creates a meaning and understanding of the interior, food and artefacts.

*We have been more serious when it comes to having a common denominator. We have not just opened the restaurant and said; ‘Good food and great service that is what we do. Welcome!’ Instead we have created a history so people can go to our webpage and understand what we do (The Storytelling Restaurant).*

This shows how **storytelling**<sup>6</sup> is used to create a concept. Storytelling has also been related to authenticity (Lewis and Bridger, 2000). However, to be authentic the restaurant must stay true to the story. The story explains the restaurant’s background, its existence and makes it possible to

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<sup>6</sup> Corporate storytelling communicates a narrative which explains the company’s history and puts the business in a context (Dennisdotter and Axenbrant, 2008).

understand the artefacts in the restaurant. If the guests' experience is in line with the story and all the aspects of the restaurant signal the same thing there will be a feeling of the restaurant being true to itself. The story is also a way of making the concept more accessible for visitors. The guests know what they are supposed to experience which creates a sense of clarity.

Storytelling is an effective tool to help the employees understand the restaurant concept and make them work in accordance with the owners' visions. It is a guiding principle in the everyday work (Dennisdotter and Axenbrant, 2008). One of the respondents reflects on how easy it is to take decisions, not according to the concept, in order to save money; *'If you are not familiar with the concept it is damn easy to start cutting the costs'* (The Storytelling Restaurant). If the concept is to stay true to the story, storytelling can function as a tool to render authenticity. This is evident in The Storytelling Restaurant where every detail is aligned with the story. For example, one can see black and white pictures with 'fake' autographs hanging on the walls. However, the pictures are still true to the story, which makes them appear as authentic.

## **4.2. Core values- identify your background and passion**

All respondents (i.e. restaurant owners) have developed their restaurants in a very similar way. Instead of doing traditional market research, the owners have created concepts which reflect their personal background. The first respondent bought her first 1950's object when she was in her teenage years. Today she is the owner of a 1950's café. The second respondent is staying close to her Hong Kong heritage by cooking 'as it tastes back home'. The third respondent is the third generation café owner. The café has been modified throughout the years but he still serves biscuits and coffee in the same traditional style as his mother and aunts once did when they opened the café in the late 1930's. The fourth respondent had the ambition to create an Italian-American restaurant in Gothenburg. He wanted the restaurant to be as similar as the ones he so much appreciated when he lived in the United States. To render authenticity it is essential to stay true to oneself. To stay true to oneself companies are told to study their own heritage to understand their past (Pine and Gilmore, 2007). By following their personal backgrounds it can be argued that each respondent is being true to her- or himself. Or as put by one respondent:

*I was actually very true to myself. I did exactly as I wanted in every single little detail. I love this kind of food and I can stand for each and every dish. ‘...’ Things get pretty easy when you do something that you like. Because you can just ask yourself, do I like this or not? (The Storytelling Restaurant).*

Another respondent was determined that the concept should be their ‘own’ with no compromises, which basically meant that customers should accept the offer, or go somewhere else. A third respondent told us that it was obvious why she chose to have a 1950’s theme; she is obsessed with the 1950’s and everything it involves, including owning a mintgreen Oldsmobile Zeta, a station wagon from 1958.

*We are a bit obsessed with the fifties, so our choice of café came very natural. We love galon (a Swedish word from the fifties! for plastic fabrics) and machines where you can put coins and pull knobs, and light signs and neon lights. It is so stylish and we like it so much (The 50’s Café).*

‘The project manager’ believes that a person’s interests and background can help restaurants to create something interesting and at the same time render trustworthiness. For example, if a person has a passion for sea food, that person should preferably open a sea food restaurant. Restaurants are then more likely to deliver a higher standard of quality. At the same time he points out that being good at something or being passionate does not guarantee success: *‘They must love their products without losing focus on all the other aspects of running a business’* (The Project Manager). This is confirmed by one respondent who explains that one can’t be too obsessive with the concept: *‘...it is after all a business, which supports our living’* (The 50’s Café). Both ‘the copywriter’ and ‘the project manager’ emphasize the importance to see trends and understand the local market where restaurants are acting. ‘The copywriter’ believes that the environmental analysis is as important as the concept itself. He means that the concept should be developed in consideration with its place and time.

The respondents’ background and passion can also be interpreted from a **core value** perspective. Core value relates to brand management and refers to factors which can be helpful to create a strong brand identity. According to Melin (1999) core values should fulfil four criteria; add consumer value, be communicable, be unique and be hard to imitate by competitors. It is evident

that each respondent has core values which fulfil the mentioned criteria. Take the Chinese Restaurant for example and let's assume that one of their core values is 'a taste of the authentic China'. The added value is to experience authentic Chinese food, in Sweden. The 'authenticity' is communicable by, among other things, food, staff, and interior design. What makes their core value unique and hard to imitate is the family's passion and knowledge of cooking genuine Chinese food.

Core values can also be referred to as a **brand's soul**. According to Hultén et al (2008) the brand's soul is the 'softer' side of a brand including emotions, sensuality and values. They argue that brands with souls can satisfy customers on a deeper level as they trigger people's minds and hearts. To find a brand's soul a company must have core values which represent integrity, quality and self respect. Similar characteristics were found when talking to the respondent who represented the Chinese Restaurant.

*People were asking how we dared to only serve this; they told us to expand the menu with this and that. But we children said 'No!', because if we did we would be just like any other Chinese restaurant. That is the way of our concept, to say clearly; this is the kind of food we serve! (The Chinese Restaurant)*

However, core values are not only something to be defined, they must be acted out which is the focus of the next chapter.

### **4.3. Act out! - The logic of using a concept**

What people consider as 'real' or authentic has much to do with our preconceptions. Goffman (1977) believes that customers often expect a certain kind of behaviour. The grocer, for example, is expected to be lively and passionate. If the grocer is introvert, he is simply not a real grocer. Same reasoning can be applied on concept restaurants. To be perceived as real, restaurants must act out fully, and be what they say they are. This correlates with the case studies (i.e. the restaurants) where details are used to act out the concept. For example, during our interview at the Chinese Restaurant we noticed a large fish tank. It may be an odd detail for Swedish guests but the respondent explained that in Hong Kong fish tanks are very common in restaurants and they are usually much bigger.

'The copywriter' stress the importance 'to be something' and stand out in the crowd among competitors; *'You need to have a specific idea of what you are doing; fewer and fewer actors will be serving everything to everybody'* (The Copywriter). He believes that guests often look for a specific kind of food or type of restaurant when they go out, for example, Thai food or fine dining. To attract these customers restaurant must act out what they are; they must express their identity. To express an identity, companies can use themes or concepts. Mossberg (2001) believes that themes can help companies to improve their image and/or create a memorable experience. According to Mossberg (2002) the focus on food from a specific country is not a very unique theme. This might be true; however, if the theme renders enough authenticity, it may still stand out as something unique (O'Dell, 1999). This is evident in The Summer Café, like many other cafes they offer biscuits and coffee in a summer garden environment. What makes them unique is all the details that are associated with 'the ideal' Swedish summer; the summer garden, farm animals and old table ware.

MacCannell's (1999) concept of **staged authenticity**<sup>7</sup> is very evident at two of the restaurants. The Storytelling Restaurant and The Chinese Restaurant have both fully exposed kitchens, where guests can see how their food is being prepared. The concept of staged authenticity refers to 'tricking' people to experience something authentic when it is actually staged. However, if authenticity is about being true to oneself and be what you say you are, there is little reason to hide anything from the guests. The concept may therefore still be applicable from a constructivist viewpoint, yet interpreted in a different way. Furthermore, to see a chef in action is often something exciting which may enhance the dining experience.

#### 4.4. Clues

The word **clues** are here used as a common designator for; artefacts, logotypes and other things in the restaurant environment that communicate the concept to visitors. According to 'the interior designer' it is important that all clues are signalling the same thing in order to create the desired impression, if not, the concept becomes unclear and confusing. She mentioned a restaurant that had a name related to a 'come-as-you-are-attitude' but when she visited the company's webpage they had pictures on beautiful models and designer furniture which created a stiff feeling and a sense of excluding a certain crowd. To be perceived as trustworthy it is

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<sup>7</sup> MacCannell's (1999) concept of staged authenticity refers to tourist settings that impose to give an impression of being authentic by letting customers to peek in and see companies' inner operations.

important that all supporting products and clues are aligned with the concept (The Copywriter). Perhaps the most visible clue is the name of a restaurant. All respondents had used names and graphic logotypes that were coherent with their concepts. The Summer Café, for example, is using a name which refers to the original owners and the logotype is cursive with an old fashion design. Another example is The 50's Café which uses a name referring to the present owner. The logotype is very much associated with the style of the American 1950's; colourful and plastic.

All respondents showed a great interest in how their restaurants were decorated; every detail appears to have been considered: *Look at this coffee cup. If you watch old movies you will see that they used these kinds of cups in the Unites States. I purchase these from an old friend selling restaurant utilities in New York*' (The Storytelling Restaurant). Being passionate about the business appears to help owners when developing the concept and adding clues. *'...it is easy when you do something you like. You can just ask yourself; 'what do I want?'* (The Storytelling Restaurant)

Clues can have the function of recalling memories and feelings, which makes the experience stronger. Memories of the past can trigger people's emotions, which according to Jensen (1999) are affecting our decisions. One of the respondents talks about visitors' reactions when they enter the café:

*They say; 'Oh, we had one of those but we threw it away', 'We used to have that tableware!' And 'We used to have those, Gösta, do you remember that we got one of those when we got married?'* (The 50's Café).

All respondents have used clues in their restaurants, which we perceive as authentic. These clues are often rare, unique or antique and cannot be purchased anywhere. One of the respondents explains how she has decorated the restaurant:

*...The things hanging in the restroom is decorations from the 18<sup>th</sup> ... or 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is from real households, for example gable ends and other stuff they have taken down and sold in pieces* (The Chinese Restaurant).

In previous research authenticity has been linked to the **originality of artefacts**. Original artefacts may still be associated with museums where visitors expect to see original objects (McLeod, 1976). Thus, when businesses use clues which are perceived as 'the original' it may

render authenticity. The Summer Café, for example, has preserved the main building, a typical Swedish cottage from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which signals authenticity. Furthermore, original artefacts can also create a sense of legitimacy, a 'receipt' that indicates authenticity in the eyes of the consumer (Goulding, 2000).

To adapt all clues to the theme might be difficult, due to practical or financial reasons. One of the respondents explains why they had to use modern coffee cups even if it may diminish the authenticity of the concept:

*We had 1950's tableware from the beginning but at that time they were drinking coffee from small cups...and all the cups have to be the same so we had to stop using that (The 50's Café).*

If the whole concept communicates the same signals, guests may accept that a few clues do not. The Copywriter believes that guests can accept a few details that are not in accordance with the concept, before the experiences become unclear. One of the respondents mentioned that guests sometimes commented on artefacts or dishes that were not in accordance with the theme of the restaurant but she argued:

*Everything else is really good and then we do not have to say 'look at our nice stuff!' because people already know that. You have paved the way for your own concept. And then we do not have to sit and think 'did they have this and that at the 1950's?' (The 50's Café).*

The customers' background knowledge determines how the guests will perceive the restaurant (Ebster and Guist, 2005). Thus, it is relevant to consider the target customer group's knowledge of a theme before developing a restaurant concept, otherwise the restaurant will be perceived as inauthentic (Ebster and Guist, 2005). This can be related to Wang's (1999) concept of **symbolic authenticity**, which refers to the importance of building on customers' perception of reality rather than 'objective' truths.

## 4.5. Commodification

Previous research has identified that ethnic themed restaurants are highly **commoditized** to be perceived as authentic. Popular culture and media have strong influence on people's frames of references and used as a framework when creating a concept (Munoz, Wood and Solomon, 2006; Wood and Solomon, 2006; Ebster and Guist, 2005; Giradelli, 2004). Commodification is also evident in our case studies. One of the respondent comments on the fact that they have decorated the restaurant with stereotypical Chinese tassel lamps, which can be related to the **non verbal commodification**<sup>8</sup> strategies, which Giradelli (2004) identifies as common in ethnically themed restaurants.

*...It could just as well have been spotlights. I mean what is Chinese? When they come to China it is not for sure that they will see a typical Chinese restaurant, the ones you can find here. They do not exist. This is more like that we have taken what Swedish people want or expect to see (The Chinese Restaurant).*

The logic to use stereotypical artefacts can be explained by the need to build on people's common preconceptions and already established truths. The Copywriter says that guests need to understand the concept in order to experience it as trustworthy. He means that well-known artefacts and symbols will make the concept more distinct and clear.

Customers are becoming more and more culturally aware and their perception of authenticity will change and develop (Ebster and Guist, 2005). The increase of well travelled customers was identified by one of the respondents:

*...they are travelling more and thanks to that they also dare to try new things. Many of our guests have actually been abroad. They might have been in Shanghai, or other parts of China, or Hong Kong so they say 'I recognise this, it tastes exactly the same' (The Chinese Restaurant).*

If people are starting to be more culturally aware, restaurants might have to tone down stereotypical artefacts that are based on old perceptions (Ebster and Guist, 2005). For example,

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<sup>8</sup> Non-verbal signs such as colours, artefacts and ambience intended to stimulate associations in the visitors' minds (Girardelli, 2004).

Chianti bottles, checked table cloths and pasta on the menu may no longer be a guarantee for a restaurant to be experienced as authentic Italian.

#### 4.6. Communication - be who you say you are to others

*We have basically not changed the menu since we opened (The Storytelling Restaurant).*

It is evident that each respondent has stayed close to their initial concepts. The respondents have developed their restaurants, throughout time, without losing the original idea or identity. When changes were made they have been aligned with the concept:

*...we are damn picky when we decorate and it needs to fit in with the rest, we do not just put up anything (The 50's Café).*

It is important that concepts stick with the initial formula. If not, it can easily confuse customers. The Copywriter has experienced many restaurants which have changed their concepts soon after the opening. If changes are not aligned with the concept they can dilute the experience. He gives an example of a concept restaurant with a middle-eastern theme, where every detail was planned from the start including food, décor and logotype. However, soon after opening the restaurant started to play Swedish party music. This rather 'unfitting' music would probably be enough to detract the feeling of being in the middle-east and the experience would not likely be perceived as an authentic one.

The front line staff is a significant part of a restaurant experience since they are in close contact with the consumer and communicate the concept. The restaurant owner can in different ways influence what the personnel is communicating by choosing appropriate individuals, train them and give them instructions on how to act (Mossberg, 2001). During our observations the role of the employees was evident in the overall experience. In The Chinese Restaurant all employees were Chinese, which correlated with the rest of the concept, and young girls with typical Swedish appearance were serving at The Summer Café.

**Experiential marketing** can be helpful to understand how the respondents have communicated their concepts. The concept of experiential marketing refers to creating experiences by stimulating people's senses. Hultén et al. (2008) explain that when one **sense** stimulates another

sense it generates synergies which enhance and deepen the experience. They argue that the ‘ultimate experience’ happens when all our senses are stimulated at the same time. The use of experiential marketing is evident in each case study. The food, the smell, the interior, the music and the materials communicate the same thing and no sense is being left out. Take the Chinese restaurant for example. The visitors will experience China with all their senses; the touch of elegant chop sticks, the sight of Chinese décor, the sound of Chinese music and the taste and smell of genuine Chinese food. ‘The copywriter’ believes that when all of our senses receive a similar message our fantasy can be activated and when our fantasy is triggered we may experience the feeling of being in another time or place.

#### 4.7. Summary of Analysis

The table below is a summary of the above presented analysis. This summary table connects our key codes with theoretical concepts and findings from the consultants’ interviews and case studies.

<b>Key Codes</b>	<b>Theoretical concepts</b>	<b>Consultant Interview</b>	<b>Case Study</b>
Core values	Brand management, Brand identity, A brand’s soul, Study your own heritage, Stay true to oneself (Hultén et al 2008; Pine and Gilmore, 2007)	<i>If a person has passion for sea food, that person should preferably open a sea food restaurant (The Copywriter).</i>	<i>I was actually very true to myself. I did exactly as I wanted in every single little detail. I love this kind of food and I can stand for each and every dish (The Storytelling Restaurant).</i>  <i>We are a bit obsessed with the fifties, so our choice of café came very natural. We love galon and machines where you can put coins and pull knobs, and light signs and neon lights. It is so stylish and we like it so much (The 50’s Café).</i>
Act Out	Express identity, Staged authenticity, be what you say you are to others, (MacCannell, 1999; Pine and Gilmore, 2007).	<i>You need to have a specific idea of what you are doing; fewer and fewer actors will be serving everything to everybody (The Copywriter).</i>	The Storytelling Restaurant and The Chinese Restaurant has both fully exposed kitchens, where guests can see how their food is being prepared.

Clues	Escapism, Originality of artefacts (MacCannell, 1999; Jensen, 1999).	‘The interior designer’ talks about the importance of all clues signalling the same thing in order to create the desired impression.	<i>Look at this coffee cup. If you watch old movies you will see that they use these kinds of cups in the Unites States. I purchase these from an old friend selling restaurant utilities in New York (The Storytelling Restaurant).</i>
Commodification	Culturally aware, Staged authenticity, Non-verbal signs (MacCannell, 1999; Ebster and Guist, 2005; Girardelli, 2004).	‘The copywriter’ talks about the guests’ need to understand the concept in order to experience it as trustworthy.	<i>...It could just as well have been spotlights. I mean what is Chinese? When they come to China it is not sure that they will see a typical Chinese restaurant, the once you can find here. They do not exist. This is more that we have taken what Swedish people want to see (The Chinese Restaurant).</i>
Communication	Experiential marketing (Hultén et. Al., 2008)	‘The copywriter’ talks about that when all of our senses receive a similar message our fantasy may be activated.	<i>...we are damn picky when we decorate and it needs to fit in with the rest, we do not just put anything (The 50’s Café).</i>

Table 2. Summary table

It was found that all respondents offer something more than just food and service. By using a concept they turned their offer into an experience. Each concept was based on the respondents’ interest and background which can be related to a company’s core values. To be perceived as authentic companies are told to be true to themselves. This was evident in each case study where the owners (i.e. respondents) were staying close to their personal interest, background and passion. In order to be perceived as something ‘real’ restaurants must act out their concept and identity. This can be done by using staged authenticity. In two of the case studies open kitchens were identified, which is an example of staged authenticity. Clues can also help restaurants to be perceived as authentic. In our research all studied restaurants had used artefacts that symbol originality. According to previous research, clues have to be based on common perceptions and people’s cultural awareness in order to be understood. Therefore, a restaurant concept has to be commodified and adapted to people’s common perceptions of reality. Furthermore, the respondents indicated the importance of all clues communicating the same thing to all senses.

This is related to experiential marketing, which makes the experience stronger and might trigger customers' fantasy.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

*In this final chapter we are presenting the conclusions, research implications and discussing our findings. We will start with answering our research question followed by a discussion around our findings. Thereafter a model is used to illustrate the interrelationships between the findings. In the end we will give suggestions to practitioners and to further studies.*

### 5.1. What is the meaning of authenticity in the experience industry?

After reading literature, talking to consultants and researching four restaurant concepts we found that authenticity can have a number of meanings in the experience industry. The most important aspect of authenticity is to give the business a ‘soul’ and purpose for existing. The business soul can be described as a company’s core value. In our case studies the restaurants’ core values reflected the owners’ background and passion for what they do. The owners’ passion rendered a deeper meaning of the restaurants’ existence. A meaning which we believe is much more important to the owners than the financial profit of the businesses.

It was evident that the concept restaurant was trying to offer more than just food and services. They aimed at offering customers something extra; an experience. This was achieved by triggering consumers’ all senses, which in literature is called experiential marketing. If everything in the restaurant is perceived as authentic, and all five senses are affected, the quality of the food and service might be less significant.

To be perceived as real, restaurants have to ‘act out’ their identity and be what they say they are. It was evident that each restaurant implemented their concept or theme with help of clues and commodification. In literature this is labelled staged authenticity, which refers to a fake dramatization in order to be perceived as the real. Somewhat contradictory it was found that the staged authenticity was useful in order to create a perception of authentic experience. This confirms the constructivist viewpoint where everything can be perceived as authentic. However, to render authenticity some aspects should be considered. In each case study we found that the restaurants’ details had been carefully revised to communicate the same thing guided by the restaurant’s concept. If the customers’ senses are aligned with the same information, their fantasy may be triggered, which in literature refers to escapism. Escapism creates a deeper and more memorable experience.

We found that the restaurants used different clues to communicate their concepts. All respondents had much influence on every detail of the concept and selected all artefacts with delicacy and care. It might be suggested that it is easier to render an authentic concept if the owner has a ‘natural’ frame of reference. Storytelling can also be used as a framework when creating meaning and understanding of the interior, food and artefacts. It will help the employees and owners to stay true to the initial idea and act and develop the restaurant in accordance with the story.

In our case studies we came across a number of stereotypical artefacts related to the concepts. The literature indicates that customers’ background knowledge of the theme determines how they will perceive the restaurant. Thus it is relevant to consider the target customer group’s knowledge before developing a restaurant concept; otherwise the restaurant may be perceived as inauthentic.

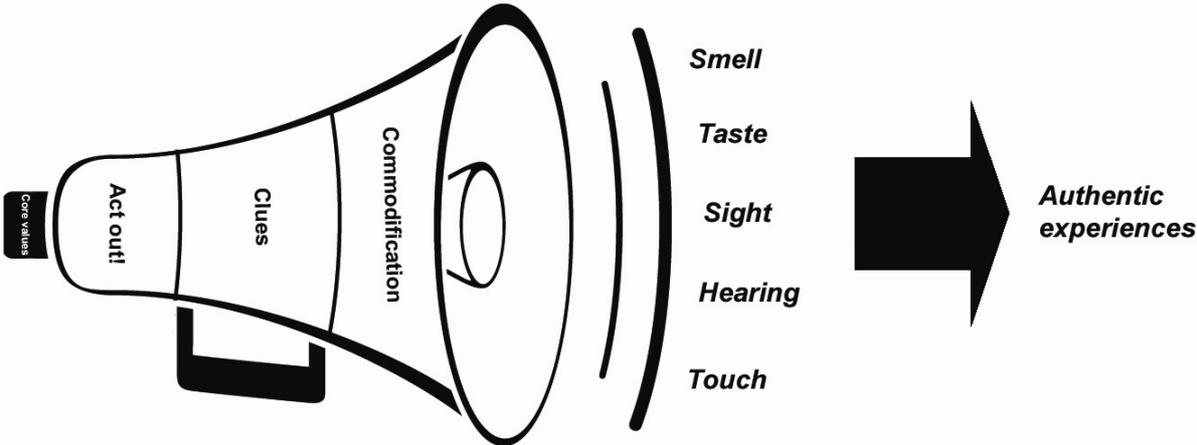


Figure 2. The process of creating authentic experiences

Based on the previous conclusions we have developed a model (see figure 2.). The model aims at clarifying the interrelationship between the concepts (presented in the analysis) and to illustrate a comprehensive process of creating authentic experiences; from the initial idea to how it is communicated to consumers. The megaphone is used as a metaphor to show how the different building blocks of an overall authentic experience are supporting each other.

The model begins to identify the **core values**, which are referred to as the companies ‘soul’ and **acted out** by using a concept or a theme, which turns an offer into an experience. To increase the ‘authenticity’ in the experience, **clues** such as artefacts and symbols can be used. In order for

customers to understand the clues, they have to be **commodified**, based on consumers' common perceptions and already established truths. Last but not least, the experience needs to be **communicated** to the individual's **all senses**, which intensify the experience. Based on our empirical data and previous research we believe that if all these concepts are considered there is a great possibility that the experience will be perceived as authentic.

## 5.2. Discussion

Authenticity from a constructivist viewpoint may first appear as a paradox. On the one hand everything is authentic while on the other hand, some things are perceived as more authentic than others. In the viewpoint of constructivism people will have different perceptions of what is authentic and what is not authentic. Since authenticity lies in the eyes of the beholder, the researcher must define authenticity. In this study the matrix (see figure 1.) by Pine and Gilmore (2007) was used to 'see' and identify authenticity. The matrix helped us to identify restaurant concepts that could reasonably be perceived as authentic ones.

Our general conclusions show that authenticity can be understood by using a number of concepts from different theoretical viewpoints. Despite the fact that this study has a constructivist viewpoint the research has also showed the explaining capability of other complementary concepts coming from other theoretical approaches. We believe that authenticity is based on creating emotions, memories and dreams. To enhance these feelings all senses have to be triggered. Modern society often leads people to feel a need to escape reality and be truly present in the moment. We believe people have an increased need of experiences to enrich every day life and the restaurant industry has a great possibility to capture this opportunity. The restaurant industry is also unique in the way that it affects all senses in one way or another. Other parts of the experience industry are often missing to integrate one or several of the senses. Thus, the experience might not be as strong and memorable as a restaurant visit. This gives restaurant owners a unique chance to create an attractive experience.

Based on our findings it can be seen that it is easier to sustain the quality and the concept if you are passionate about what you do. It can also be argued that the owners' passion creates a sense of trustworthiness which shines through in their businesses and penetrates the customers' mind. To find passion, we believe it is important to stay true to oneself and do what you love the most.

As a final discussion input we believe that there is a strong relation between authenticity and uniqueness. If something is unique it may appear as authentic. However, a very unique experience may not necessarily be felt as a pleasant or a memorable experience. For this reason we believe that businesses must stay in the context of what people already know, while at the same time stay true to oneself.

### **5.3. Transferability and limitations**

We strongly believe that our model (see figure 2.) also can be applied on other kinds of businesses in the experience industry. Many sectors in the experience industry are characterized by the same features; creating joyful memories, entertainment and self fulfilment. We also believe that the feeling of authenticity is valuable and relevant in other industries. For example, most people would want to be represented by a lawyer looking and acting in a certain way, which corresponds to our own perceptions of how a lawyer should act. Furthermore, we think that the meaning of authenticity as we define it, based on individual people's perceptions, is transferable to other cultural settings. Authenticity can be rendered anywhere if the practitioners are true to themselves and are who they say they are to others.

Despite the transferability there are some limitations of our findings. It can be argued that if authenticity lies in the eyes of the beholder, it would have been more logical to conduct this study from a customer perspective. However, this study aims to understand the meaning of authenticity rather than the effect it has on consumers. This study should therefore be seen as an introduction to authenticity from both a practitioner's and researcher's point of view.

The internal validity of this research can be discussed. The perception of authenticity is never given or objective. This makes our study questionable; are we really studying authentic concept restaurants? According to the constructivist approach there are no authentic or inauthentic concepts. Again, authenticity is not given - it is perceived. This research is therefore based on the authors' perception of authenticity which makes the internal validity questionable. Nevertheless, the case studies are not chosen randomly. Primarily they are chosen based on our own perceptions and their grounded reputation but also with the help from a matrix, constructed by well known academic researchers in the field of experience economy.

#### **5.4. Suggestions to practitioners and academics**

This study suggests a number of principles that can be applied by practitioners in the experience industry. First of all, the business should be self directed, true to itself and based on the owner's passion or background. Secondly, practitioners should communicate their concept with honesty; they must be who they say they are to others. For example, if you say that you serve authentic Chinese food it must be similar to what they serve in China. If not, customers who have been to China may perceive the food and the restaurant as fake. Thus, restaurants should render authenticity with delicacy and base the concept on people's preconceptions. Our final comment is that authenticity should not be seen as a mean to justify the end. In a restaurant, authenticity must be as much of a key consideration as are commonly the food, service and the environment.

From an academic viewpoint we believe this research has dealt with a very interesting subject and resulted in some relevant findings. First, we have not seen any other studies using the model by Pine and Gilmore (2007), why we believe this research is rather unique and a contribution to academic research in the field of the experience industry. It would be very interesting to see other researchers using this model in similar contexts. Second, we encourage other researchers to examine and evaluate the model (see figure 2.) we have constructed based upon our findings. Finally, it would be interesting to study authentic concept restaurants from a customer point of view in order to further demonstrate the relevance of authenticity. We believe it would clarify what effects authenticity has on the customer's experience.

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## APPENDIX I, INTERVIEW GUIDE

Vad är din roll/titel på Stylt och hur länge har du arbetet på företaget?

Hur ser trenderna ut inom restaurangbranscherna?

Varför är restauranger i behov av era tjänster?

Vilka gemensamma nämnare kan du identifiera bland de koncept inom restaurangbranschen som överlevt/varit framgångsrika?

Vad gör ett koncept framgångsrikt?

Det pratas ofta om koncept och teman för att skapa en restaurangupplevelse. Vad är betydelsen av att ha ett koncept?

Hur går man tillväga för att skapa ett koncept?

Vilka fördelar och nackdelar finns det med att använda sig av ett koncept?

När ni har formulerat konceptet på pappret hur skapar ni konceptet i praktiken?

Hur skapar man trovärdighet i ett koncept?

## APPENDIX II, INTERVIEW GUIDE

Berätta lite om din bakgrund och din roll på Stylt?

Vilken betydelse har inredningen för en restaurangupplevelse?

Som inredare, hur går man tillväga från idé till färdig restaurangmiljö?

Kan du beskriva hur denna restaurang förmedlar sin grundidé via inredning och atmosfär?

APPENDIX III, INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research question	Interview questions
Facesheet questions	Vad är din roll i restaurangen?
	Vad har du för tidigare erfarenhet av restaurangbranschen?
	Hur längre har restaurangen existerat?
What is the meaning of authenticity in the experience industry?	Hur skulle du beskriva din restaurang för någon som aldrig varit där?
	Kan du berätta historien bakom den här restaurangen?
	Hur arbetar ni för att förmedla restaurangens tema till gästerna?
	Vad tror du att restaurangens utformning och inredning har betydelse för kundens upplevelse?
	Varför tror du att gästerna väljer att komma till er restaurang?
	Hur skiljer sig er restaurang från andra restauranger?
	Vilka faktorer tror du har betydelse för gästens upplevelse?

**The 50's Cafe**

Fast inredning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Turkosa och svarta soffgrupper i galon</li> <li>▪ Svartruttigt golv</li> <li>▪ Gammal glasdisk</li> </ul>
Lös inredning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bord med virvarrmönster</li> <li>▪ Barbord och barstolar i kromat stål</li> <li>▪ Skylt i lysrör</li> <li>▪ Välkomstskylt med 50-talssnitt</li> </ul>
Rekvisita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Jukebox</li> <li>▪ 50-tals affischer</li> <li>▪ Vintageprylar till salu</li> <li>▪ Kolbestick</li> <li>▪ Servetthållare</li> <li>▪ Neonskyltar</li> <li>▪ Läsk- och popcornmaskiner</li> </ul>
Mat/Meny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Amerikansk mat</li> <li>▪ Svenska kakor</li> <li>▪ Läsk på glasflaskor</li> <li>▪ ”TV-ruta” (kaka)</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vintage servitörsuniformer</li> </ul>
Musik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ibland 50-tals musik från jukebox</li> </ul>

**The Chinese Restaurant**

Fast inredning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Genomgående mörka träslag</li> <li>▪ Trångt mellan borden</li> <li>▪ Exponerat kök</li> <li>▪ Tegelväggar</li> <li>▪ Stentrappa och trägolv</li> </ul>
Lös inredning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mörka färger på stolar och bord</li> <li>▪ Stoppade stolar</li> </ul>
Rekvisita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tofslampor</li> <li>▪ Akvarium</li> <li>▪ Kinesiska tavlor</li> <li>▪ Kinesiskt porslin</li> <li>▪ Kinesiska thékannor</li> <li>▪ Dekorationsskåp</li> </ul>
Mat/Meny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Endast kinesiska rätter på menyn</li> <li>▪ Peking anka</li> <li>▪ Kinesiska tecken</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kinesisk personal i ”traditionella” dräkter</li> </ul>
Musik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kinesisk musik</li> </ul>

## The Storytelling Restaurant

Fast inredning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Exponerat kök</li> <li>▪ ”Diners-soffor” i galon</li> <li>▪ Italiensk vedugn</li> <li>▪ Reliefkaket</li> <li>▪ Bar i italiensk design</li> </ul>
Lös inredning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kritstreckrandigt stolstyg</li> </ul>
Rekvisita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Svartvita porträtt på kända personer som ska föreställa den fiktiva ägarens ”vänner”</li> <li>▪ Chiantiflaskor dekorerar ena väggen</li> <li>▪ Rödvida dukar</li> <li>▪ Renässansskulpturer</li> <li>▪ Maten bärs in på stora brickor</li> <li>▪ Set med kryddor och oljor på bordet</li> </ul>
Mat/Meny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bild på ”ägaren”</li> <li>▪ Amerikansk-italiensk mat; pasta, pizza, hamburgare</li> <li>▪ Pelegrino vatten</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bistrodräkter (formellt italienskt)</li> <li>▪ Sneakers (amerikanskt)</li> </ul>
Musik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Filmljud (Maffiafilm) från toaletten</li> </ul>

## The Summer Café

Fast inredning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stor glasdisk där kakorna är väl exponerade</li> <li>▪ Växthus i modernare snitt</li> <li>▪ Bevarat ”gamla” detaljer på husets interiör</li> </ul>
Lös inredning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Utemöbler i äldre snitt</li> <li>▪ Skylt i gjutjärn</li> </ul>
Rekvisita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rödvida dukar</li> <li>▪ Äldre porslin (koppar och tallrikar)</li> <li>▪ Blomsterrabatter (trädgårdsblommor)</li> <li>▪ Bondgårdsdjur</li> <li>▪ Äng</li> <li>▪ Kaffekannor i kopparmetall</li> </ul>
Mat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kakor, fikamat och saft</li> <li>▪ Smörgåsar</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flickor i traditionella sommardräkter</li> </ul>
Musik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ljud från naturen</li> </ul>