

DISTINGUISHING *REAL* FROM *FAKE*: DEVELOPING AND TESTING A
THEORETICAL MODEL AND MEASUREMENT SCALE FOR PERCEIVED
ORGANIZATIONAL AUTHENTICITY

By

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To the love of my life, my husband, Udayan

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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This study further conceptualized and operationally defined the construct of perceived organizational authenticity and its dimensions by developing and testing a theoretical framework that identifies its causal linkages with organizational identity, reputation, and relational outcomes. In addition, the study developed and empirically examined an improved measurement scale for perceived organizational authenticity that is more parsimonious and has higher internal consistency than the index that Molleda and Jain (2011) proposed and tested.

Using a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods, seven research questions and 11 hypotheses were investigated regarding the relationship between perceived organizational authenticity, identity, reputation, and relational outcomes. Focus group and in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 marketing and public relations practitioners of Xcaret (esh-caret), a cultural and eco-archeological theme park in Riviera Maya, Mexico, to understand their roles and responsibilities in the construction, execution, and promotion of identity, authenticity, and reputation of the park and its main special events. Face-to-face intercept survey with 545 visitors and

interviews with 16 international visitors of Xcaret were analyzed to understand the dimensions of perceived organizational authenticity and test the proposed theoretical model and measurement scale. Variations in perceived authenticity in relation to demographics, visit-specific characteristics, and the type of sources that visitors used to obtain information about Xcaret were also examined. Theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and avenues for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This is a challenging time for organizations. Every day more, they are faced with increased scrutiny from government, consumers and other key publics. In these times, organizations struggle to find a way to communicate their value and trustworthiness to these publics (Debreceeny, 2010; Elvin, 2011). Reflecting upon these struggles and challenges, Richard Edelman, President and CEO of Edelman public relations agency, argued that our world has transformed from complicated to complex, where interactions and patterns in communication change constantly bringing unexpected and unforeseen outcomes (“Reimagining our profession,” 2011). He further explained that a complex world is fraught with skepticism and distrust where people believe nothing. In this age of complexity, authenticity is projected as a powerful construct that has the potential to (re)gain people’s trust.

Judging by the growing body of knowledge on the subject, organizations’ ability to communicate their authenticity has the potential of gaining the organizations the trust they so desire (Debreceeny, 2010; Henderson & Edwards, 2010; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011). Recently, authenticity has become an important construct for organizations across countries and industries. As a recent *The New York Times* article puts it, “[a]uthenticity seems to be the value of the moment, rolling off the tongues of politicians, celebrities, Web gurus, college admissions advisers, reality television stars” (Rosenbloom, 2011, ¶ 6).

The construct has been loosely used to define places, persons, objects, and even feelings and experiences (Debreceeny, 2010). In scholarly research, authenticity is often described as a quality of being true to oneself and one’s core values (Gilmore & Pine,

2007; Henderson & Edwards, 2010; Molleda 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011; Watson, 2011). In relation to organizations, scholars have suggested that consistency in organizational claims, actions, and behavior fosters perceptions of authenticity (Edwards, 2010; Molleda 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain 2011; Watson, 2011). Along these lines, Molleda and Jain (2011) defined the construct as the “degree to which stakeholders believe that an organization is acting in accordance to its identity, values, and mission” (p. 6).

The construct has also gained attention of politicians, practitioners, and industry leaders. For instance, it was used over 11,000 times in just one month during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign (Debreceeny, 2010). Also, the *Time* magazine projected authenticity as one of the top-10 ideas that are changing the world (Sachs, 2008). Similarly, public relations professionals and industry leaders called authenticity one of the top-three issues facing the profession in 2009-2010, as a Public Relations Society of America’s (PRSA) Counselors Academy survey reported (“PR industry leaders,” 2009).

The recent interest in the construct could be attributed to the fast evolving and transforming environment in which organizations today operate. The current economy is a “global experience economy,” where everything is being increasingly commoditized, from goods and services, to brands and people (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). In the global experience economy, attention has become the most valuable commodity where organizations and competing voices are vying to attract stakeholders by creating memorable, authentic experiences (Molleda & Jain, 2012). In their Harvard Business Review article, *Welcome to the experience economy*, Pine and Gilmore (1998) argued that we are in an era where experiences are a key economic offering that organizations

are actively designing and promoting in an attempt to look authentic. An experience economy, explained Pine and Gilmore, is all about rendering authentic experiences. Public relations and strategic communication practitioners often strive to render such authentic experiences by developing opportunities for public and media to directly observe and evaluate an organization and its offerings, communication claims and promises, and values (e.g. familiarization tours for the news media, trade shows, special events, people centric corporate videos etc).

The global experience economy coupled with the emergent media technology that has empowered multiple voices in the public sphere— be those supporters or adversaries – has led to public skepticism, and has eroded confidence in major institutions (Debreceeny, 2010; Henderson & Edwards, 2010). In fact, the most recent findings of the Edelman Trust Barometer showed that trust in the government, businesses, NGOs, and media has declined in the United States and several other countries in the world (“2011 Trust Barometer,” 2011). This is due in part to the recent financial crisis and corporate scandals, which have made stakeholders wary of organizational claims and promises. In these times with such far reaching changes in the social, political, economic, and even communication environment, stakeholders are looking to differentiate between fake and real, contrived and genuine, phony and original, or in other words, inauthentic and authentic (Debreceeny, 2010; Henderson & Edwards, 2010). As a *Forbes* magazine article fittingly said, “[i]n this new world of business, companies and leaders will have to show authenticity, fairness, transparency and good faith. If they don’t, customers and employees may come to distrust them, to potentially disastrous effect” (Kirkpatrick, 2011, ¶ 4).

This poses unique challenges for organizations attempting to render and communicate their authenticity. Today, organizations can no longer control how they wish to be perceived solely by managing their message systems (Debreceeny, 2010). An organization's control of their messaging and reputations has diminished to the extent that its actions and decisions have a global impact on how stakeholders identify it. Organizations are constantly being challenged to engage with a broader range of empowered stakeholders who are more technologically sophisticated and skilled (Debreceeny, 2010). In such a demanding environment, public relations and strategic communication professionals have a key role to play in helping organizations to articulate their coherent identities and, therefore, be perceived as real, trustworthy, credible, and honest, or in sum, authentic (Molleda, 2010a, 2010b).

Emphasizing the potential of the construct, Cook (2007) stated that authenticity is one of the top-future constructs to better understand the issues facing communication professionals and their clients. Additionally, he emphasized the role that public relations practitioners can have in influencing perceptions of authenticity. While writing in PRSA's *The Strategist*, he argued:

We're at the start of an era where people want authentic stories about authentic people. PR [and strategic communication] professionals are the storytellers. It's our job to help find the authenticity at the core of our companies and clients, and to tell those stories to the world in words that will truly be heard. (p. 33)

In sum, practitioners and scholars recommended that authenticity should become central to the field of public relations because we are increasingly being entrusted with the responsibility to discover, develop, and communicate the authenticity of the organizations that we represent by incorporating genuineness and truth at the core of meaning making process that we, as encoders and interpreters of meaning, actively

engage with. The significance of the construct is gradually being recognized in the field of public relations, as described in the next section.

Authenticity: An Emerging Construct in Public Relations

Discussions around the meanings and dimensions of authenticity are becoming prominent within both the academic (Edwards, 2010; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Jain & De Moya 2011; Molleda & Roberts, 2008; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011; Ragas & Roberts, 2009) and professional communities (“Authentic enterprise,” 2007; “Authentic influence,” 2009; “PR industry leaders,” 2009). In particular, authenticity has peaked interest of public relations and strategic communication professionals as evident from the Arthur W. Page Society’s *Authentic Enterprise* report issued in 2007, the International Communication Association (ICA) conference panel held in Chicago in May 2009, and the special edition issued by the Journal of Communication Management in 2010 discussing authenticity as one of the most promising constructs in contemporary public relations.

A number of public relations practitioners and scholars have argued that authenticity contains the promise of a unifying construct that can bring value to the organization and enhance key publics’ relationships with its offerings (“Authentic enterprise,” 2007; “Authentic influence,” 2009; Jain & De Moya, 2011; Molleda & Roberts, 2008; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011; “PR industry leaders,” 2009; Ragas & Roberts, 2009).

Further, industry leaders explained that authenticity has the potential to demonstrate how public relations adds value to organizations by building trust and loyalty with key stakeholders (Edwards, 2010). As Aedhmar Hynes (2009), CEO of Text 100 Global Public Relations, asserted, “[p]ublic relations should deliver the authenticity

and distinctiveness that can elevate a brand, bridging the trust gap in ways that advertising cannot” (¶2). There is an increasingly important call for public relations and strategic communication practitioners to take a leading role in communicating organizational authenticity. The Arthur W. Page Society’s *Authentic Enterprise* (2007) report indicated the significance of the construct for senior executives and practitioners:

The people a business needs to attract today – as employees, clients or partners – will not accept old-fashioned, hierarchical cultures and management approaches. In place of “the voice of authority,” they demand proof of *authenticity*. (p. 27, italics in original)

However, what is an authentic idea, cause, product, or service, and how organizations can render authenticity are questions that the field of strategic communication and, specifically, public relations still needs to further address. While public relations scholars and practitioners believe that organizations need to invest in authenticity in order to be accepted and trusted by their key stakeholders (Debreceeny, 2010; Edwards, 2010; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Watson, 2010), there have been only a few attempts to operationalize this multidimensional construct that could guide organizations in developing, communicating, and evaluating their authenticity (e.g. Molleda 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011).

Emphasizing the need to conduct more research examining authenticity, Molleda (2010b) argued, “authenticity should become central to the study and practice of public relations and communication management and their specialized functions because organizations are progressively being pressured by stakeholders demanding greater transparency, openness, and responsibility” (p. 223). Further, Taylor and Kent (2002) explained, “for organizations to build community relations requires commitment to

conversations and relationships, genuineness and authenticity — all strengths in ethical public relations” (p. 30).

As these discussions demonstrate, the construct has captured the attention of public relations and strategic communication scholars and practitioners, and is seen as a key factor in developing strong identities and subsequently, desired reputations (Molleda & Jain, 2011).

Public Relations Research Agenda for Authenticity

Authenticity captured the interest of communication scholars as early as 1990s when Hardt (1993) presented the evolution of discussions of authenticity from a critical theory perspective. Since then, the construct has continued to attract attention of scholars in various communication disciplines such as marketing, advertising, and most recently, public relations (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008; Camilleri, 2008; Fine, 2003; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Jain & De Moya, 2011; McLeod, 1999; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011; Zickmund, 2007).

However, the public relations research agenda for authenticity is only gradually developing. Realizing the potential and relevance of organizational authenticity, a few public relations scholars explored the multidimensional construct by examining how organizations make authenticity claims in their public relations programs. For instance, Molleda and Roberts (2008) assessed the authenticity of a public relations campaign sponsored by the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia that used Juan Valdez, a famous fictional coffee grower, as brand ambassador to enhance the perceived genuineness and thereby brand authenticity of the global and local (“glocal”) campaign. Similarly, Ragas and Roberts (2009) found in their study of Chipotle Mexican Grill’s social responsibility campaign that sincerity, one of the Aaker’s (1997) brand

personality dimensions, is closely associated with perceived organizational authenticity. Additionally, Jain and De Moya (2011) studied how tourism promoters for Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic make authenticity claims about their destinations by emphasizing their originality and natural appeal through web communication. Additionally, Molleda and Jain (2011) examined the perceived authenticity of a special event by developing and testing a measurement index for the construct.

The scholars who examined and studied authenticity argued that it is a valuable construct for public relations to demonstrate its unique contribution in enhancing organization-public trust, loyalty, and relationships (Edwards, 2011; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011). Molleda and Jain (2011) explained that authenticity is a dynamic construct that evolves with organization-public communication and on-going negotiation of meanings between the creator and consumer of organizational claims and promises. Further, public relations can foster this exchange of meanings by telling authentic stories, embedded in organization's values, mission, culture, and origins.

Yet, as these authors suggested, authenticity has not been explored to its true potential in public relations research and remains a relatively untapped area in need of further conceptualization. Molleda and Jain (2011) argued that there is a need for the further development of approaches to evaluate and empirically examine authenticity of organizations as evaluated by their myriad stakeholders.

With the exception of the aforementioned research, the construct of authenticity lacks theory-building studies and empirical support in the context of public relations. A limited theoretical understanding of what is meant by authenticity and how it can be measured is notable in contemporary public relations literature. The combined interest

in the construct, its increasing use in the field, and its lack of development and operationalization imply that more research should be conducted to contribute to the theoretical and empirical understanding of authenticity.

Therefore, this dissertation aims to build a more comprehensive and multidisciplinary theoretical framework for authenticity as it applies to public relations and communication management, by drawing from the multidisciplinary review of the academic literature in psychology, organizational behavior, authentic leadership, management, and communication. Such multidisciplinary theoretical perspective is essential because public relations has reached a stage in which complex constructs and issues facing organizations and societies are best addressed with knowledge produced by a variety of disciplines interested in the same phenomenon.

With this aim, the purpose of this dissertation is three-fold: (1) to further conceptualize and operationally define the construct of perceived organizational authenticity by developing its theoretical framework; (2) to develop and test a theory-based measurement scale for perceived organizational authenticity; and (3) to identify relevant construct outcomes emerging from the perception of an authentic experience.

According to Shoemaker, Tankard, and Lasorsa (2004), theory building is an important exercise in accumulating knowledge in a discipline and it starts by articulating constructs and their measurement. Therefore, what follows next is a discussion of how authenticity has been defined in the past, and how it is operationally defined for the purpose of this study.

Authenticity: Defining the Multidimensional Construct

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, authentic refers to someone or something that is “[e]ntitled to acceptance or belief, as being in accordance with fact, or

as stating fact; reliable, trustworthy, of established credit” (OED, 2010, ¶1). Similarly, The American Heritage Dictionary (1985) defined authentic as “[c]onforming to fact and therefore worthy of trust, reliance, or belief; [h]aving claimed and verifiable origin or authorship; [n]ot counterfeit or copied” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1985, p. 77).

In scholarly literature, the earliest discussions about authenticity could be found in philosophy and social psychology, where it was described using the proverb “To thine own self be true,” in relation to authentic individuals who are transparent to others about who they are in their actions, behavior, and thoughts (Harter, 2002). Reflecting on its philosophical foundations, Zickmund (2007) wrote that “[a]uthenticity is a process of being true to one’s own self, of living life according to one’s own being” (p. 407).

From a marketing and advertising perspective, Fine (2003) described authenticity as the quality of being “sincere, innocent, original, genuine, and unaffected ... linked to moral authority of the creator and simultaneously to the fact that the object was made by hand, not mechanically produced” (p. 155). Similarly, examining the construct from a consumer marketing perspective, Gilmore and Pine (2007) argued that authenticity is a source of differentiation for organizations to gain consumers’ attention in the experiential economy where goods and services have become commodities. Using the five economic offerings (i.e. commodities, goods, services, experiences, and transformations) as reference, the authors explained that people tend to perceive as authentic that which exists in its natural form, is not artificial or synthetic; is original in design and not an imitation or copy; is executed exceptionally and extraordinarily well; refers or draws from heritage or history; and inspires people to a higher goal.

Authenticity has also been extensively examined in organizational leadership literature. From a leadership perspective, Walumbwa, Wang, Wang, Schaubroeck, and Avolio (2010) explained that authenticity:

represents the extent to which a leader is aware of and exhibits pattern of openness and clarity in his/her behavior toward others by sharing the information needed to make decisions, accepting others' inputs, and disclosing his/her personal values, motives, and sentiments in a manner that enables followers to more accurately assess the competence and morality of the leader's actions. (p. 901)

From a public relations perspective, Molleda and Jain (2011) described authenticity as “a multidimensional construct that is theoretically defined as an experience and perception that is co-created by the organization and its stakeholders as an ongoing negotiation of meaning and understanding” (p. 6). In this sense, authenticity is a function of perceived genuineness and positive evaluation of organization’s actions and behavior (Trilling, 1972) and hence could determine the quality of organization-public relationships (Molleda, 2010a, 2010b). Additionally, much like reputation, trust, and relationships, while it is challenging to measure organizational authenticity, it can be evaluated by the “degree to which stakeholders believe that an organization is acting in accordance to its identity, values, and mission” (Molleda & Jain, 2011, p. 6).

Applying this rationale, Molleda (2010a, 2010b) proposed a preliminary index of authenticity, which includes a range of indicators through which an organization’s perceived authenticity could be evaluated. The purpose of the index is to measure the effectiveness of public relations efforts, techniques, and message system by evaluating the perceived authenticity of organizations, including its actions, operations, products, services, and corporate spokespeople in the mind of internal or external stakeholders. Recently, Molleda and Jain (2011) expanded the conceptualization of authenticity and

tested this index in their study involving the public relations efforts to promote a special event hosted by a private cultural and eco-archeological park in Riviera Maya, Mexico. The authors found that perceived authenticity is a multidimensional construct with two dimensions: overall experience with an organization, its products, services, and public relations claims; and active engagement of organizational publics with the organization and its offerings.

Following these multidisciplinary conceptualizations and definitions of authenticity, this study developed a theoretical framework for perceived organizational authenticity and used it to develop an operational definition of the construct grounded in the proposed theoretical conceptualization. Previous attempts at developing a measurement of authenticity by Molleda (2010b) and Molleda and Jain (2011) were used to guide the development of a perceived organizational authenticity scale. The study then employed qualitative and quantitative research methods to test the proposed perceived organizational authenticity (POA) model and measurement scale.

Theoretical Framework for Perceived Organizational Authenticity

The review of scholarly discussions about authenticity suggested that a theoretical framework of authenticity should place it in the broader context of organizational identity and reputation. Therefore, the proposed perceived organizational authenticity (POA) model identifies the causal linkages between identity, reputation, perceived organizational authenticity, and relational outcomes. It is understood that an authentic organization is true to its values, mission, purpose, and value proposition (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Walumbwa et al., 2010; Wong & Cummins, 2009). In other words, we know that authentic organizations must “be grounded in a sure sense of what defines it – why it exists, what it stands for and

what differentiates it in a marketplace . . . values, principles, beliefs, mission, purpose or value proposition – must dictate consistent behavior and actions” (“The authentic enterprise,” 2007, p. 6).

In this sense, organizations have to be aware of their identity and reputation, should actively communicate it to their myriad stakeholders, who then form a perception about the organization and who it really is, and ultimately, evaluate the organization’s claims of authenticity. Authenticity is considered an integral part of organizational reputation (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004) and is seen as firmly ingrained in an organization’s identity (Gilmore & Pine, 2007).

Scholars have suggested that an organization can portray itself as authentic by being transparent, sharing periodic and accurate information with its publics, engaging them in a dialogue by soliciting their feedback, and disclosing its personal values, motives, and beliefs in a manner that enable publics to more accurately assess its identity and integrity of its actions (Debreceeny, 2010; Gilmore & Pine, 2007).

Therefore, this study examined perceived organizational authenticity within the framework of organizational identity and reputation. The study began the exploration of perceived organizational authenticity with an examination of organizational claims and efforts to form an identity and reputation communicated to the stakeholders via various channels. It then examined how stakeholders evaluated these claims in conjunction with organizational identity and reputation to form opinions about organizational authenticity.

Further, discussions about authenticity in academic and trade publications emphasized that authentic organizations are perceived as trustworthy, credible, legitimate, and honest (Edwards, 2010; Molleda 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011;

Watson, 2011). In particular, Molleda (2010a, 2010b) argued that perceive authenticity could be a factor influencing the quality of organization-public relationships. Further, Molleda and Jain (2011) recommended that future studies should examine the impact of perceived authenticity on organization-public relationship outcomes. Therefore, this study conceptualized and examined the causal linkage between perceived organizational authenticity and relational outcomes.

Grounded in the proposed perceive authenticity model (POA), this study operationally defined the construct as a function of the degree to which stakeholders perceive an organization, its offerings, and communication claims to be consistent with its identity and reputation, which ultimately affects their trust, satisfaction, and commitment with the organization.

Methods Employed

This is a triangulation study that used qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the research questions and test proposed hypotheses. Specifically, this study used three research methods — focus group, in-depth interviews, and face-to-face intercept survey — to investigate its research questions and hypotheses. Scholars recommended that integrating qualitative and quantitative research approaches in social scientific inquiry draws from the respective strengths of both of these paradigms while minimizes their weaknesses in a single study (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Triangulation is a type of mixed methods approach that can be used to integrate qualitative and quantitative research approaches in various ways (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Triangulation design is a special form of mixed methods research, where the researcher gathers both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently and

then compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, difference, or some combination, also known as cross validation, or corroboration (Creswell, 2009; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Morgan, 1998).

Morse (2003) explained that such comparison and combination of the results obtained from qualitative and quantitative means of inquiry provide a more comprehensive picture of the results than either study could provide alone. Further, the authors described that there are two ways in which triangulation can be achieved: sequential and simultaneous. In sequential triangulation, two separate projects are conducted in order where the results of the first inform the nature of the second project. On the other hand, simultaneous triangulation compares and contrasts the data obtained from two projects conducted at the same time.

Grounded in a quantitative dominant approach, this study applied simultaneous triangulation to compare, contrast, and corroborate the data obtained from quantitative surveys with that gathered using qualitative interviews, to further our understanding about perceived organizational authenticity and its dimensions, its relationship with organizational identity and reputation, and its influence on organization-public relational outcomes. Further, qualitative findings were used to explain the results of the quantitative survey, an application of triangulation approach that scholars have recommended (Creswell, 2009; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Morgan, 1998).

The data was collected at a cultural and eco-archeological theme park, Xcaret, located in Riviera Maya, Mexico. Molleda (2010) explained that “authenticity is subjective and contextual” (p. 227), meaning that organizational publics form their perceptions of authenticity after carefully evaluating the authenticity claims and offerings

made by the organization through its actions, operations, and public relations efforts, including special events and other opportunities for target publics to directly experience the organization and its offerings.

Further, tourism attractions and theme parks contain the landscaping, buildings, and attractions that are based on one or more specific or central themes; elements that are identified as components of authenticity in academic literature (for e.g. Gilmore & Pine, 2007; MacCannell, 1973, 1976; Wang, 1999). In other words, these are places where the organization can create the context and opportunities for interaction and experience on which the public's perception of authenticity will be based.

According to MacCannell (1973), the motivation behind tourism visits is a quest for authentic experiences; tourists visit places that they believe have social, historical, and cultural importance. Authentic tourism experiences, as MacCannell (1973) explained, provide tourists with an opportunity to participate or at least witness the real life of the places visited. Along similar lines, Gilmore and Pine (2007) explained that theme parks and tourist destinations such as Disneyland are places where authentic experiences are created. Recently, Molleda and Jain (2011) developed and tested a proposed authenticity index in their study involving the public relations and strategic communication efforts of a private cultural and eco-archeological park in the Mayan Riviera of Mexico.

Therefore, this study used Xcaret as the context for data collection to empirically examine the proposed perceived organizational authenticity (POA) model and measurement scale. A focus group and in-depth interviews were conducted with Xcaret's marketing and public relations practitioners to examine their involvement and

motivation with the construction, execution, and communication of their organization's identity, authenticity, and reputation. Further, in-depth interviews and a face-to-face intercept survey with Xcaret's visitors were used to investigate their tourism experiences in the park, motivation of their visit, as well as their relationship with Xcaret.

For the purpose of data analysis, a variety of statistical tests were employed. To analyze the proposed perceived organizational authenticity (POA) model, multiple linear regressions and path analysis with the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method were used. The internal consistency of the scales was assessed using a Cronbach alpha reliability test. T-tests, ANOVA, and correlations analysis were also used towards exploring the research questions and the corresponding hypotheses regarding the variations in perceived organizational authenticity with demographics (i.e. age, gender, and country of origin), visit characteristics, and sources of information about Xcaret.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The second chapter presents a multidisciplinary review of pertinent literature from various fields of study including mass and human communication, social psychology, organizational leadership, business and management, public relations, and related strategic communication disciplines. This review incorporates the origins of authenticity as well as its historic and contemporary conceptualizations. In addition, the perceived organizational authenticity (POA) model and its elements are explained in this chapter, followed by the research questions and hypotheses that this study examined.

The third chapter describes the methods used in this study while providing specific details regarding sampling, data collection, instrument construction, and data analysis procedures that this study used. The fourth chapter details the research findings of

focus group, in-depth interviews, and face-to-face intercept survey used for data collection in this study. Finally, chapter five explains the key research findings and their theoretical interpretation, followed by the theoretical and practical implications of this study, its limitations, and avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Much like reputation and transparency, authenticity is an important construct for the development of organizational identities and perceptions (Debreceeny, 2010; Henderson & Edwards, 2010; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defined authentic as someone or something that is “[e]ntitled to acceptance or belief, as being in accordance with fact, or as stating fact; reliable, trustworthy, of established credit” (OED, 2010, ¶1). Similarly, *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1985) defined authentic as “[c]onforming to fact and therefore worthy of trust, reliance, or belief; [h]aving claimed and verifiable origin or authorship; [n]ot counterfeit or copied” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1985, p. 77).

According to Edwards (2010), authenticity is an important construct for organizations and lies at the core of the strategic communication industry, “built on a notion of authenticity: of organization, of products, of services, and in relationships with customers” (p. 192). Scholars suggested that authenticity is a multidimensional construct that is often associated with terms such as “trustworthy,” “legitimate,” “honest,” “genuine,” and “credible” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Walumbwa et al., 2010; Wong & Cummins, 2009); qualities that organizations need to embrace and communicate effectively.

However, the term has been ambiguously defined and applied in strategic communication disciplines including public relations, marketing, and advertising. Therefore, this study began its discussion about authenticity by first presenting its various conceptualizations in the existing literature from disciplines including mass and human communication, marketing and advertising, social psychology, philosophy,

organizational leadership and management, and public relations. It then traced its development in various fields of study and contemporary approaches used to examine the construct.

Multidisciplinary Conceptualization of Authenticity

This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man (Hamlet Act 1, scene 3, 78-82).

The above quote from Shakespeare's tragic play, *Hamlet*, is one of the underlying tenets of authenticity. The earliest discussions of the construct could be found in philosophy and social psychology, where it was described using the proverb "To thine own self be true," in relation to authentic individuals who are transparent to others about who they are in their actions, behavior, and thoughts (Harter, 2002). Reflecting on its philosophical foundations, Zickmund (2007) wrote that "[a]uthenticity is a process of being true to one's own self, of living life according to one's own being" (p. 407). In philosophical treatises, authenticity has been used as the notion of correspondence and genesis. The perspective of an authentic individual can be extended to organizations, which by the virtue of transparent and honest communication with their stakeholders could be perceived as authentic.

From a mass media perspective, Frosh (2001) defined authenticity as "'truth-to-onself,' a project of ontological fidelity that takes particular discursive forms: in the aesthetic realm, it stresses the creativity of the individual artistic personality ... and the formal and expressive uniqueness of the artwork" (p. 542). Analyzing stock photography as mass cultural production, the author pointed out that using a generic formula, product uniformity, and the supremacy of commercial imperatives erode perceptions of authenticity in stock photography. Applying Frosh's view to organizations

might suggest that people are skeptical of repetitive and shallow organizational promises that give way to inauthenticity and distrust.

From a marketing and advertising perspective, Beverland (2005) examined the authenticity of luxury wines and defined the construct as “a story that balances industrial (production, distribution and marketing) and rhetorical attributes to project sincerity through the avowal of commitments to traditions (including production methods, product styling, firm values, and/or location), passion for craft and production excellence, and the public disavowal of the role of modern industrial attributes and commercial motivations” (p. 1008). Along similar lines, Fine (2003) described authenticity as the quality of being “sincere, innocent, original, genuine, and unaffected ... linked to moral authority of the creator and simultaneously to the fact that the object was made by hand, not mechanically produced” (p. 155).

These definitions of authenticity again point out that people will not accept unsubstantiated corporate promises about being authentic unless they are granted legitimacy through actions and behavior. These arguments are further supported by Molleda (2010a), who argued that authenticity is built around the notion that communication plans, programs, or campaigns cannot achieve it unless the underlying object, person, or organization in its true essence represents an authentic being by manifesting its true identity in its actions, decisions, and philosophy of living up to its own and others' expectations and needs.

Examining the construct from a consumer marketing perspective, Gilmore and Pine (2007) argued that authenticity is a source of differentiation for organizations to gain consumers' attention in the experiential economy where goods and services have

become commodities. Referring to the five economic offerings (i.e. commodities, goods, services, experiences, and transformations), the authors explained that people tend to perceive as authentic that which exists in its natural form, is not artificial or synthetic; is original in design and not an imitation or copy; is executed exceptionally and extraordinarily well; refers or draws from heritage or history; and inspires people to a higher goal.

Authenticity has also been extensively examined in organizational leadership literature. From a leadership perspective, Walumbwa et al. (2010) explained that authenticity

represents the extent to which a leader is aware of and exhibits pattern of openness and clarity in his/her behavior toward others by sharing the information needed to make decisions, accepting others' inputs, and disclosing his/her personal values, motives, and sentiments in a manner that enables followers to more accurately assess the competence and morality of the leader's actions. (p. 901)

Similarly, a business and economics scholar, Morgan (2009) explained that consistency in actions, motivations, and intentions foster perceptions of authenticity:

We believe people are authentic when they are open with us in a sense that feels real. It has to do with transparency of motive and intention. We believe people are authentic when we know what makes them tick — because they've told us and their actions bear it out. And it has to do with consistency of action. We believe that people are authentic when they keep the same agenda for a substantial period of time. (p. 10)

These perspectives about authentic leaders and individuals could be extended to the context of organizational authenticity. It can be argued that an organization can portray itself as authentic by sharing periodic and accurate information with its publics, engaging them in a dialogue by soliciting their feedback, and disclosing its personal values, motives, and beliefs in a manner that enable publics to more accurately assess the identity and integrity of an organization's actions. According to Gilmore and Pine

(2007), authentic communication entails expressing the true values and traditions of an organization or brand with consumers or audiences they engage.

From a public relations perspective, Molleda and Jain (2011) described authenticity as “as a multidimensional construct that is theoretically defined as an experience and perception that is co-created by the organization and its stakeholders as an ongoing negotiation of meaning and understanding” (p. 6). In this sense, authenticity is a function of perceived genuineness and positive evaluation of organization’s actions and behavior (Trilling, 1972) and hence could determine the quality of organization-public relationships (Molleda, 2010a, 2010b). Additionally, much like reputation, trust, and relationships, while it is challenging to measure organizational authenticity, it can be evaluated by the “degree to which stakeholders believe that an organization is acting in accordance to its identity, values, and mission” (Molleda & Jain, 2011, p. 6).

Applying this rationale, Molleda (2010a, 2010b) proposed a preliminary index of authenticity, which includes a range of indicators through which an organization’s perceived authenticity could be evaluated. The purpose of the index is to measure the effectiveness of public relations efforts, techniques, and message system by evaluating the perceived authenticity of organizations, including its actions, operations, products, services, and corporate spokespeople in the mind of internal or external stakeholders. Recently, Molleda and Jain (2011) expanded the conceptualization of authenticity and tested this index in their study involving the public relations efforts of a private cultural and eco-archeological park in the Mayan Riviera of Mexico. The authors found that overall experience with an organization, its products, services, and public relations

claims, and active engagement of organizational publics are two dimensions that describe this multidimensional construct.

Further from a leadership perspective, Walumbwa et al. (2010) identified four dimensions of an authentic leader: self awareness, “[t]o what degree is the leader aware of his or her strengths, limitation, how others see him to her and how the leader impacts others”; transparency, “[t]o what degree does the leader reinforce a level of openness with others that provides them with an opportunity to be forthcoming with their ideas, challenges and opinions”; ethical/moral, “[t]o what degree does the leader set a high standard for moral and ethical conduct”; and balanced processing, “[t]o what degree does the leader solicit sufficient opinions and viewpoints prior to making important decisions” (p. 95). Validated across China, Kenya, and the United States, these dimensions could be used to further conceptualize authenticity and develop a better theoretical understanding of this construct in public relations and communication management contexts.

Grounded in these multidisciplinary conceptualizations and definitions, this study developed and tested a theoretical model and measurement scale for perceived organizational authenticity. To gain insights and further develop understanding of this multidimensional construct, the historic origins and evolution of authenticity in philosophy, psychology, and strategic communication was examined, as discussed in the next sections.

Historic Origins: The Authentic Self

Historically, authenticity has its roots in Greek philosophy where it was described in injunctions such as “know thyself” and “to thine own self be true” (Harter, 2002). Personal authenticity and authentic self-behavior has ever since been a topic of interest

in psychology and social-psychological literature that defined the construct of authenticity by considering its opposite, namely, lack of authenticity or false self-behavior, deceit, secrecy, imposter tendencies, and deception (Harter, 2002). In this regards, words commonly used in texts in contrast to authenticity included fabricating, withholding, concealing, distorting, artificial, hypocrite, fake, fraud, phony, manipulative, and dishonest (Erickson, 1995; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Harter, 2002; Trilling, 1972).

From a social-psychological perspective, Harter (2002) explained that the doctrine “know oneself” reflects the need to own personal experiences, feelings, thoughts, emotions, needs, and wants, in order to be authentic. Similarly, “to thine own self be true,” implies that authenticity lies in acting in accordance with the true self and expressing oneself in ways consistent with inner thoughts and feelings.

Both in the periods of modernism and post modernism marked by various scientific and technological advances, authenticity gained popularity among philosophers such as Gergen (1991) who asserted that “[m]odernist man is genuine rather than phony, principled, rather than craven, stable, rather than wavering” (p. 44). Fears of deceit became paramount in this era as observed by Goffman (1959), who in his book, *The presentation of self in everyday life*, described that societal forces pressurize individuals to pretend and manipulative motives compete with their desires to be sincere and genuine. Further, philosophers pointed out the needs of individuals to “communicate to others that we are competent, likable, moral, or worthy of respect, motives designed not only to protect and promote the self but also to curry favor, obtain social currency or power, and preserve critical relationships” (Harter, 2002, p. 383).

From a humanistic psychological perspective, Carl Rogers (1959, 1963) and Maslow (1968, 1971) also wrote about the authentic-self in terms of fully functioning persons who are fully aware of themselves in acting according to their true-nature and are able to clearly and accurately see themselves irrespective of the social expectations. Similarly, Heidegger (cited in Harter, 2002) in his existential and phenomenological explorations of the "question of being" suggested that the key to authenticity is to separate one-self from others by not surrendering to the influences and powers that manage everyday life. However, these beliefs about the authentic-self isolated from social contexts were challenged in the post-modern period.

Post-modern scholars and philosophers began to reflect on the possibility of different behaviors across social contexts under demands for multiple relationships that redefined the self and its authenticity (Gergen, 1991). In the increasingly complex society, there was a greater need to adapt to the diverse roles that individuals came to play, and the variety of relationships that they forged as members of the society. However, it was believed that acting differently in different relational contexts did not necessarily imply false self-behavior or inauthenticity (Harter, 2002). In fact, role theories supported the notion of behaving differently in different relationships and across social contexts as deemed appropriate to each relationship and context (Johnson & Boyd, 1995).

Supporting this view of the authentic-self in accordance to the social expectations, another popular description of authenticity was presented by Trilling (1972) in relation to sincerity. In his book, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Tilling defined sincerity as "a congruence between feeling and avowal" (p. 4) while describing an act from the famous

play Hamlet by William Shakespeare. Trilling observed that there is sometimes a dichotomy between own-self and the “best-self,” however, the best-self “co-exists with another self which is less good in the public moral way but which, by very reason of its culpability, might be regarded as more peculiarly mine” (p. 5). In other words, Trilling implied that sincerity is the extent to which one’s expression of feelings and thoughts across social contexts is aligned with the reality experienced by the self. In this manner, Trilling observed an interaction between own-self and the best-self, while sincerity being the moral criterion that represented the extent “to which the self is represented accurately and honestly to others, rather than the extent to which one is true to the self” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 320).

These perspectives from psychology provide the intellectual heritage for thinking about authenticity and are useful in developing our conceptual understanding of organizational authenticity. At its most basic level, organizations could be conceived as individuals with a social standing and relationships with various publics and stakeholders. Scholars have examined organizations using human traits and have found parallels between organizations and human personalities (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Johar, Sengupta, & Aaker, 2005; Kim, Han, & Park, 2001; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007). Therefore by extension, organizations that are true to their basic values, act in accordance to their mission and vision, and are honest and transparent in their communication with publics about their motives and true character could be perceived as authentic (Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011).

This understanding of organizations as social beings inspired communication scholars to explore authenticity and its various implications to communication disciplines, as the next section describes.

Authenticity: Historical Development in Communication Disciplines

The construct of authenticity captured interest of communication scholars as early as 1990s when Hardt (1993) presented the evolution of discussions about authenticity from a critical theory perspective while focusing on the centrality of communication in authenticity. Hardt's work was grounded in the philosophical foundations of Heidegger who examined the ontological problems of communication in a world where "problems of empathy and understanding become part of an individual's Being, while language as the house of Being provides the elements of discourse, which is the basis of human relationships" (p. 50, capitalized letters in original). However, authentic discourse as Hardt explained is shaped by the social, political and economic contexts that promote self-alienation and conformity to superficial standards that confer status to and measure accomplishments of individuals. Critiquing the role of media, Hardt further argued that this self-alienation is promoted by media that legitimizes outside influences, reproducing inauthenticity of "being."

From a critical theory perspective, Hardt examined the problems that modernity imposes on authenticity and alienation and also presented the reactions of critical theorists to an ideology of authenticity concluding that: "The discussion of authenticity has moved through the period of post-1945 discovery of the potential of critical discourse within Western Marxism— as a source of emancipation for the individual— and the rise of liberal democratic practices in Western Europe, accompanied by an Americanization of everyday life" (p. 49).

Since Hardt's work, the construct of authenticity has continued to attract attention of scholars and practitioners in various communication disciplines including study of films (Hart & Woldemariam, 2008; Pierson, 2003), journalistic authenticity of tabloids (Bromley, 2003), global media representation of ethnic identity (Molina, 2006), music genres (Herman & Sloop, 1998; McLeod, 1999; Peterson, 1997), political discourse (Liebes, 2001), reality television shows (Aslana & Pantti, 2006; Kraidy, 2009), rhetoric (Dickinson, 2002; Zickmund, 2007), self identity (Holt & Griffin, 2009), television broadcasting productions (Montgomery, 2001; Piccirillo, 1986), and virtual reality (Jones, 1993).

Of particular interest to this study is McLeod's (1999) examination of authenticity claims within hip-hop, a form of African American cultural expression. McLeod studied the range of meanings associated with authenticity discourse to understand how throughout the 1990s the hip-hop culture attempted to protect itself against the threat of misrepresentation, transformation, and assimilation. The hip-hop artists in this period made numerous authenticity claims using cultural symbolism and thereby, distinguishing the authentic from inauthentic cultural expression.

From a communication studies perspective, he explained that authenticity claims of hip-hop community members "are a way of establishing in-group/outgroup distinctions" and "[b]y organizing the expressions used in hip-hop authenticity discourse into semantic dimensions, identity talk can be understood as structured, meaningful, and a way of comprehending central elements of hip-hop culture from a native's point of view" (p. 146). McLeod (1999) identified six major semantic dimensions of meaning derived inductively from the data collected by the author from various sources including

interviews with the members of the hip-hop community who were actively engaged in making authenticity claims. These dimensions were arranged into real versus fake claims of authenticity:

1. Social psychological dimension (staying true to yourself versus following mass trends);
2. Racial dimension (black versus white);
3. Political economic dimension (the underground versus commercial);
4. Gender-sexual dimension (hard versus soft);
5. Social-locational dimension (the street versus the suburbs); and
6. Cultural dimension (the old school versus the mainstream) (McLeod, 1999, p. 139)

Summarizing the six semantic dimensions, McLeod (1999) concluded, “[s]emantic dimensions are used to demonstrate how authenticity claims and their meaningful structured place within a play of discourse can highlight a culture’s key symbols as they employed to maintain a ‘pure’ identity” (p. 148). This discussion suggests that authenticity is subjective and contextual, i.e., authenticity claims reflect the life experiences and aspirations of a society’s group and is influenced by a group’s identity as perceived by its members and others.

Contemporary Conceptualizations in Strategic Communication Studies

Inspired by its roots in social psychology and communication studies, the construct of authenticity has also drawn attention from contemporary scholars in various strategic communication disciplines including advertising, marketing, and public relations (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008; Camilleri, 2008a, 2008b; Fine, 2003; McLeod, 1999; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011; Zickmund, 2007).

Scholars have examined authenticity in a variety of strategic communication settings including authenticity of market offerings as perceived by consumers (Bruner, 1994; Grayson, 2002; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Gustafsson, 2006), tourism experiences and destinations (Cohen, 1988; Hughes, 1995; MacCannell, 1973; Wang, 1999), materiality of rhetoric in a corporate case (Dickinson, 2002), CEO portraits (Guthey & Jackson, 2005), luxury wines (Beverland, 2005; Beverland & Luxton, 2005), subculture of consumption (Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006), paradox and genres (Gilmore & Pine, 2007), corporate social responsibility and sustainability (Camilleri, 2008a), local and global brand and nation-building campaigns (Molleda & Roberts, 2008), and the food and beverage industry (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008).

Of these studies, works of Grayson and his colleagues are useful in conceptualizing organizational authenticity because of their extensive examination of “how different cues and their associated phenomenological experiences can contribute in different ways to assessments of authentic market offerings” (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 297). Examining consumers’ experience with and evaluation of authentic and inauthentic market offerings, Grayson (2002) suggested that authenticity is a subjective evaluation that can mean different things to different consumers in different contexts. The authors, however, identified two key sources of authentic judgments: ‘indexicality’ and ‘iconicity’ (p. 44). While indexicality refers to consumers’ belief that an object was owned by a famous person such as Shakespeare, iconicity reflects the perceptions that an object is an authentic reproduction or recreation whose physical manifestation resembles something indexically authentic such as a pen owned by Sherlock Holmes. In other words, consumers’ personal experiences form notions of authenticity by

examining the physical attributes (indexicality) and brand essence (iconicity) of market offerings (Grayson, 2002; Grayson & Shulman, 2000; Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

Scholars have identified cues that consumers use to form perception of both indexical and iconic authenticity as negotiated between the sources or creators of authenticity claims and their consumers. Grayson and Martinec (2004) explained, “The cues for communicating and perceiving authenticity are at the foundation of this dialogue between marketers and consumers over what is (or is not) authentic, and understanding and specifying these cues is an important step in the process of understanding this negotiation of meaning” (p. 310).

These two sources of authenticity, indexical and iconic, are useful for this study’s purpose of identifying the dimensions of authenticity by pinpointing the cues that publics use to evaluate the originality and genuineness of organizations, and thus their authenticity. While indexical authenticity suggests that organizational publics uses an absolute, objective criterion to evaluate an organization’s authenticity claims (MacCannell, 1973), perceptions of iconic authenticity are contextually determined and formed in relation to how publics expect organizations to act, behave, and communicate (Bruner, 1994; Cohen, 1988). In this sense, “the identity crafted and portrayed faces the test of audiences or consumers who in the end, through their personal judgment and life experiences, grant validity and acceptance to corporate promises and their responses to the claims communicated” (Molleda, 2010a, p. 228).

Authenticity claims have also been examined in association with corporate brands and consumption context, where a sense of authenticity is drawn via “the object and its ownership, consumer experiences, and identity construction and confirmation” (Leigh et

al., 2006, p. 481). Using an ethnographic approach involving participant observation, textual and visual analysis, and formal and informal interviews and conversations, Leigh et al. (2006) concluded that in consumption contexts, a brand's claims of authenticity are evaluated by how close it is to an idea standard and the brand heritage. In addition, a sense of brand community inspires feelings of authenticity among brand owners as they interact and experience a product or service.

Examining authenticity of luxury goods, Beverland and colleagues found that marketers and strategic communication professionals use the construct in their efforts to build a powerful corporate identity (Beverland, 2005; Beverland et al., 2008; Beverland & Luxton, 2005). Beverland et al., (2008) explained that tradition, culture, and craft have been heavily used by marketers in their authenticity claims about luxury wines. Similarly, Beverland and Luxton (2005) indicated that various communication strategies involving cultural sources have been applied to authenticity identity-building in luxury wines. One such communication strategy often employed in authenticity claims is creating and telling a sincere story (Molleda, 2010a).

According to Beverland (2005), developing a sincere story requires a creative combination of industrial and rhetorical attributes. Thus, sincerity is achieved through the public confirmation of hand-crafted techniques; uniqueness; relationship to place; passion for production; and the simultaneous denunciation of commercial motives, rational production methods, and the use of strategic communication techniques. Putting sincerity at the core of authenticity, Beverland (2005) identified seven elements in which luxury wine firms promote their brand authenticity:

1. protecting status, where the core-differentiating factor of a luxury brand is their status-based positioning, i.e., luxury brands represent the highest stage a brand can achieve in terms of value to retain their equity;
2. real commitment to quality, meaning that sincerity of story and luxury brand history are directly related to production quality;
3. historical quality and price performance, which implies that an essential element for protecting status is the ability to demonstrate actual enduring product quality and thereby, set price premiums;
4. using place as a referent, where sincerity of story is reflected by associating the brand to a particular place. In other words, authenticity is expressed in the commitment to terroir, originally a French term used in the wine, coffee, and tea industries to denote the special characteristics that geography bestowed on them (terroir can be loosely translated as "a sense of place" which is embodied in certain qualities, and the sum of the effects that the local environment has had on the manufacturing of the product or good);
5. using traditional production methods, or the linking of the brand to traditional methods of production led the luxury brands to seek protection for the use of that name, and traditional expressions associated with the brands;
6. keeping stylistic consistency, which is associated with remaining true to past styles while adapting to changing consumer tastes. Retaining stylistic elements illustrates the legend and timelessness of the brand and the intrinsic qualities established over time; and
7. using history and culture as referents, which enhances brand sincerity by making associations with the past. This final element is another resource to ensure authenticity by drawing on historical associations and building links to cultural events. Authenticity is communicated through heritage and links with past events, resulting in the continuance of myths regarding the production processes of certain style icons (p. 1013).

Similarly, from a consumer perspective, Beverland et al. (2008) concluded that advertising (or communication) reinforces images of authenticity that could take three forms: pure (literal) authenticity, approximate authenticity, and moral authenticity. The authors also recommend some cues that advertisers could use to enhance each of these forms of authenticity, for example pure (literal) authenticity can be developed using cues that "provide consumer with in situ [sic] guarantee of the genuine article;"

approximate authenticity can be enhanced by using cues that “provide consumers with a feeling that this brand will help achieve self-authentication through connecting with place and time;” and finally, moral authenticity can be built by using cues that “provide consumer with a feeling that this brand will help achieve self-authentication through connecting with personal moral values” (p. 8).

Scholars in strategic communication studies discussed brand authenticity as a multidimensional construct. Gilmore and Pine (2007) proposed five genres of authenticity corresponding to five economic offerings: commodities (natural authenticity), goods (original authenticity), services (exceptional authenticity), experiences (referential authenticity), and transformations (influential authenticity). The authors define the five genres as:

Natural authenticity: People tend to perceive as authentic that which exists in its natural state in or of the earth, remaining untouched by human hands; not artificial or synthetic.

Original authenticity: People tend to perceive as authentic that which possesses originality in design, being the first of its kind, never before seen by human eyes; not a copy or imitation.

Exceptional authenticity: People tend to perceive as authentic that which is done exceptionally well, executed individually and extraordinarily by someone demonstrating human care; not unfeelingly or disingenuously performed.

Referential authenticity: People tend to perceive as authentic that which refers to some other context, drawing inspiration from human history, and tapping into our shared memories and longings; not derivative or trivial.

Influential authenticity: People tend to perceive as authentic that which exerts influence on other entities, calling human beings to a higher goal and providing a foretaste of a better way; not inconsequential or without meaning (pp. 49-50, italics in original)

The authors recommended that organizations should identify one or more of these genres of authenticity that best describe their offerings – commodity, goods, services,

experiences, transformation – and attempt to render these offerings in a way that their customers find authentic.

Additionally, Gilmore and Pine (2007) recommended five axioms to communication managers that they can refer to while making authenticity claims:

- Axiom 1: If you are authentic, then you don't have to say you're authentic.
- Axiom 2: If you say you're authentic, then you'd better be authentic.
- Axiom 3: It's easier to be authentic, if you don't say you're authentic.
- Axiom 4: It's easier to render offerings authentic, if you acknowledge they're authentic.
- Axiom 5: You don't have to say your offerings are inauthentic, if you render them authentic. (p. 90, italics in original)

These axioms imply that organizations cannot claim to be authentic through marketing or any other means alone; organizations must earn the privilege to be perceived authentic through the act of rendering. In other words, businesses can render authentic offerings and experiences to their stakeholders. Gilmore and Pine (2007) described this process as an authenticity paradox: “all human enterprise is ontologically fake – that is, in its very being it is inauthentic – and yet, output from that enterprise can be phenomenologically real— that is, it is perceived as authentic by the individuals who buy it” (p. 89, italics in original). This illustrates that perceptions of authenticity develop when stakeholders experience and evaluate an organization, its offerings, and its authenticity claims. The authors suggested that authenticity is a construct that is subjectively defined, “what one person experiences as completely authentic, another may view as completely inauthentic, and a third may be somewhere in between” (pp. 92-93).

As these studies suggest, authenticity is an influential construct that has huge potential for public relations research and practice. Public relations is at the core of organizational communication and thereby can help organizations render authenticity by openly and honestly communicating about the organization, its values and mission, and generating opportunities for stakeholders to directly experience these values and offerings. Although few, previous public relations scholars have examined how organizations make authenticity claims in their public relations programs, as explained in the next section.

Public Relations Research Agenda for Authenticity

Public relations research on authenticity is progressively evolving. In 2008, Molleda and Roberts assessed the authenticity of a public relations campaign, sponsored by the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia that used Juan Valdez, a famous fictional coffee grower, as brand ambassador to enhance the perceived genuineness and thereby brand authenticity of the global and local (“glocal”) campaign. The aims of the campaign were to invigorate the identification of coffee growers with their lands and the industry with a nation-building communication effort and to reaffirm the leadership of Colombia as one of the world’s top coffee producers with a global media relations plan. The authors used Gilmore and Pine’s genres of authenticity to assess the perceived genuine nature of a key component of the public relations campaign, the Colombian coffee ambassador Juan Valdez. Molleda and Roberts summarized the forms in which the authenticity genres were found in the case:

[N]atural authenticity in the fact that coffee is a commodity that exists in a natural state, original authenticity as Colombia being the first country to stamp country-of-origin to a world commodity, and exceptional authenticity as Colombia’s coffee production is based on human care since the moment the beans are handpicked until they are delivered to the world market by an

authentic coffee grower functioning as spokesperson or international icon. The campaign of the new Juan Valdez also conveys referential authenticity, in which the background and experience of this idyllic coffee grower is a human story focused on shared memories and longings of the Colombian community of coffee growers and worldwide coffee consumers, and conveys influential authenticity in that the campaign calls for the preservation of the natural environment expressed by the accord signed between the Federation and Rainforest Alliance. (p. 169; italics in original)

Similarly, Ragas and Roberts (2009) examined how U.S.-based fast-food restaurant chain, Chipotle Mexican Grill, purposefully communicates its corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs to its publics and how its brand personality is perceived by its brand community. In this study, the authors argued that brand sincerity, one of the Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimension, can be conceived as authenticity. Using a multidisciplinary case study approach, including in-depth interviews, a survey and text analysis, the authors concluded that brand sincerity and authenticity is heightened by integrating purposeful and sustained CSR programs in corporate identity and reputation.

Additionally, Jain and De Moya (2011) studied how tourism promoters for Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic make authenticity claims about their destinations and found that both countries try to emphasize their originality and natural appeal through authenticity claims in their web-based communication with tourists and visitors.

Camilleri (2008a) also used a case study to explain the primary role of trust and collaboration in articulating an Australian wine company's authenticity. She argued that "the less time there is for consumers to choose for themselves and evaluate the trustworthiness of certain brands, the more important it is for brands to be authentically trustworthy" (p. 58). The author finally stated that "making organisational actions transparent, aligning brand values with organisational values, and communicating that the brand is a good citizen are necessary steps that ... [the wine company] must take to

demonstrate trustworthiness and willingness to engage in trust relationships with consumers and members of the value chain alike” (p. 59).

Most recently, Molleda and Jain (2011) analyzed the multiple-dimensions of perceived authenticity of a large-scale special event sponsored by a cultural and eco-archeological park in the Mayan Riviera of Mexico called Xcaret. Using triangulation research involving focus group with strategic communication professionals and institutional partners and a face-to-face intercept survey with visitors the authors operationalized and tested an index of authenticity, which resulted in two factors: overall experience and active engagement. While the first factor (overall experience) described visitors’ experiences in the festival, the second factor (active engagement) measured the level of involvement of visitors with the mission and values of the festival. Molleda and Jain also examined the relationship between perceived authenticity and demographic variables age, gender, and national origin and found significant associations: female visitors evaluated active engagement dimension higher than male visitors; out of state visitors evaluated the overall authenticity of the festival higher than visitors from the state in which the park is located; and finally, older visitors evaluated active engagement factor higher than younger visitors. The authors concluded that perceived authenticity is an experiential construct developed via an ongoing negotiation of meanings between organization and its stakeholders.

As these scholarly perspectives and definitions suggest, approaching authenticity as an experiential construct provides organizations and their public relations and strategic communication professionals an opportunity to create instances where stakeholders can experience the organization and its offerings and evaluate their

authenticity. This dissertation approached authenticity with this proposition and evaluated it in the context of tourism and theme parks that provide such experiential opportunities to visitors who then form perceptions of an authentic tourism experience.

Authenticity in Travel and Tourism

The multidisciplinary review of academic literature suggested that authenticity is an experiential construct that is subjective and contextual. Therefore, tourism promotion efforts provide an appropriate context for developing and evaluating the conceptual framework of authenticity. Tourism attractions such as theme parks could be used as a platform to evaluate perceived authenticity because they contain the landscaping, buildings, attractions, and special events that are based on one or more specific or central ideas (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). These attractions provide an environment where the organization can create the context and opportunities for interaction and experience on which the public's perception of authenticity will be based (Moscardo & Pearce, 1986). Additionally, strategic communication professionals working for promotion of tourism attractions and theme parks are often entrusted with telling stories about specific or central ideas of the parks to publics all around the world, and as Molleda (2010a, 2010b) highlighted, authenticity is an integral element of such storytelling.

In a tourism setting, authenticity was first examined by MacCannell (1973, 1976). According to MacCannell (1973), the motivation behind tourism visits is a quest for authentic experiences; tourists visit places that they believe have social, historical, and cultural importance. Authentic tourism experiences, as MacCannell explained, provide tourists with an opportunity to participate or at least witness the real life of the places visited. However, tourists frequently use guided tours, which make such experiences somewhat superficial, something that MacCannell called "staged authenticity" (p. 589).

Cohen (1988) further argued that such staged authenticity is a product of “commoditization” (p. 372) of local life products and experiences that, prior to tourism penetration, were present in their real form. For instance, the local cultural and ethnic art, products, costumes, rituals, and food become touristic services or commodities that are produced or performed exclusively for tourists. As these cultural products lose meaning to local people, they become overly exaggerated and fake in an effort to attract tourists and thereby “staged” to look authentic (p. 372).

However, Wang (1999) argued that such an object-related method for examining authentic tourism experiences ignores the existential nature of authenticity. Wang proposed that “[i]n search of tourist experience which is existentially authentic, tourists are preoccupied with an existential state of being activated by certain tourist activities” (p. 359). In other words, authentic tourism experiences are defined by individuals subjectively or inter-subjectively as the process of tourism unfolds. According to Wang, through other forms of tourism such as experiencing nature, going to the beach, partaking on adventures, enjoying family time, and visiting friends and relatives, tourists seek their own version of authentic experiences, irrespective of whether the toured objects are authentic.

Another evaluation of the construct in a tourism setting was conducted by Grayson and Martinec (2004) who identified six features of iconic and indexical authenticity after interviewing visitors at two tourism attractions (the Sherlock Holmes Museum and Shakespeare’s Birthplace) in London:

- Iconicity with fiction: Something that looks like a composite picture, which was constructed based on the consumer’s exposure to fictional narratives;

- Iconicity with old things: Something that looks like a composite picture, which was constructed based on the consumer's exposure to how things age;
- Iconicity with history: Something that looks like a composite picture, which was constructed based on the consumer's exposure to information about historical fact;
- Actual indexicality with inhabitant: Something that is believed to have been spatio-temporally linked with Holmes or Shakespeare;
- Hypothetical indexicality with inhabitant: Something that was regarded as if it had been spatio-temporally linked with Holmes or Shakespeare;
- Actual indexicality with inhabitant's era: Something that is believed to have been spatio-temporally linked with Holmes's. (p. 300)

More recently, Knudsen and Waade (2010) proposed that authenticity is "neither a 'thing' you can possess nor a 'state of mind' but something people can *do* and a feeling which is *experienced*" (p. 1, italics in original). The authors argued that in this form authenticity is performed, calling it performative authenticity. Through performative authenticity, entities such as tourism organizations, media, government, and other similar organizations can authenticate sites, places, and sights to enhance tourists' understanding and intimacy with the places and surroundings they visit. In other words, organizations can communicate and offer authentic tourism experiences to visitors.

Investigating the authentic experiences offered by historic theme parks, Moscardo and Pearce (1986) argued that theme parks are different from most other tourist settings and experiences in that their purpose is to go beyond tourist or leisure setting to expose visitors to the preserved or restored aspects of a nation or region's heritage. In their study of two Australian historic theme parks, Moscardo and Pearce operationalized perceived authenticity using historic accuracy of park elements including activities and demonstrations, buildings, employees working in the park, and the overall setting. The study also examined visitor satisfaction with the park by asking participants whether

they will recommend the park to their friends and family. Overall visitor experience in the park was evaluated using enjoyment ratings for park features, such as craftspeople, activities and demonstrations, shops and refreshments areas, cottages and other architecture, overall setting, and park employees. Finally, the study found that the amount of time spent in the park and number of previous visits have a positive reflection on its perceived authenticity. The authors concluded that authenticity is an important aspect of historic theme park experience and is a motive for traveling to theme parks. Further, authenticity is a subjective evaluation of theme parks held by visitors and an important factor in overall satisfaction with tourism experience.

Synthesizing the various definitions and dimensions of authenticity in strategic communication disciplines, Camilleri (2008a) identified nine genres of authenticity, including existential, exceptional, iconic, influential, natural, original, referential (or experiential), staged, and symbolic (Table 2-1).

Applying this rationale, Molleda (2010a, 2010b) proposed a preliminary index of perceived authenticity, which includes a range of questions through which an organization's perceived authenticity could be evaluated. The purpose of the index is to measure the effectiveness of strategic communication efforts, techniques, and message systems. This could be accomplished by evaluating the perceived authenticity of organizations, including its actions, operations, products, services, special events, and corporate spokespeople in the mind of internal or external publics. The index contains a series of questions regarding whether the (interactive, online, print, audiovisual) text, activity, or personal message conveys any of the following aspects about the sponsored organization:

- imagery of or claims that evoke pleasure or fun that could be achieved by stakeholders, individually or collectively, when they encounter or are exposed to the corporate offering, promises, or experiences;
- access to the original idea or design, which represents an accurate representation of the original;
- organisational values, including beliefs, principles, or way of acting or operating;
- associations with nature of commodities or products, such as being non-renewable or renewable natural resource;
- associations with originality in design of products, services, ideas, or facilities;
- exceptional quality of corporate offerings, promises, and operations;
- heritage of the organisation and its leaders, as well as references to historical background of the organisation and its corporate offerings or promises;
- sustainability and corporate responsibility programs, decisions, or actions;
- calls to become part of an action that goes beyond profit making and corporate gains; and
- imagery or claims of stakeholders' projections on the corporate offerings or promises, or core ideas. (Molleda, 2010b, pp. 232-233)

Using Molleda's (2010a, 2010b) and Molleda and Jain's (2011) index of perceived authenticity, this study further developed and empirically tested a measurement scale for perceived organizational authenticity by examining it in the context of a cultural and eco-archeological park, Xcaret, located in Riviera Maya, Mexico. As the review of academic research suggested, authenticity is a construct that needs further investigation in public relations and strategic communication management. Given the increasing importance and attention accorded to the construct, it is imperative to develop a theoretical framework and measurement to evaluate the perceived authenticity of organizations and their activities as communicated through their actions, operations, and communication.

Table 2-1. Genres of perceived authenticity

Types of perceived authenticity	An idea or object that ...
Existential	...involves the existential self “Being” (Wang, 1999). According to Wang (1999), two dimensions exist: intra-personal and inter-personal authenticity. Intra-personal authenticity refers to the individual’s “bodily feelings” (p. 361) and “self-making” or self-identity (p. 365). Inter-personal or social authenticity refers to the collective self rather than the individual self.
Exceptional	... is completed individually, carefully, and honestly (Gilmore and Pine, 2007)
Iconic	... is an accurate reproduction of the original (Grayson and Shulman, 2000; Grayson and Martinec, 2004)
Influential	... influences other entities and pushes people to achieve higher goals (Gilmore and Pine, 2007)
Natural	... exists in an unaltered manner (Gilmore and Pine, 2007)
Original	... is an innovative and creative design (Gilmore and Pine, 2007)
Referential, experiential, or indexical	... is inspired by some elements of the past (Gilmore and Pine, 2007; Grayson and Schulman, 2000; Grayson and Martinec, 2004)
Staged	... is presented with a certain degree of originality; that is, it also includes some recreated components to evoke the original (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1973)
Symbolic	... permits different interpretations of reality based on the person’s projections on objects (Culler, 1981)

About Xcaret

Located in Riviera Maya, Mexico, Xcaret (esh-careet) is one of the four parks that make up the conglomerate “Experiencias Xcaret” [Xcaret Experiences], which focuses on sustainable tourism, recreation, and social responsibility. The park is set up on a

198-acre set of facilities and natural attractions (i.e., springs, sinkholes, an underground river, and native flora and fauna) on the seashore 35 miles south of Cancun International Airport. Every year, more than one million people visit this privately owned park that opened in December 1990. Today, Xcaret employs about 1,550 direct and 6,200 indirect employees (“Experiencias Xcaret,” n.d.).

Xcaret, which means “small cove” in Mayan, is an eco-archeological theme park with attractions, events, shows, and activities that introduce visitors to Mexico’s natural and cultural richness and diversity. The park describes itself as “a natural park that treasures the best of the traditions and culture of Mexico, a paradise that combines the natural beauty and cultural wealth of the country and the region” (“Experiencias Xcaret,” n.d., n.p.). The park is built on the same area on which an archaeological site was originally purchased by a group of Mexican entrepreneurs to preserve the cultural history of the area and the remnants of the Mayan pyramids and buildings.

The attractions in the park include Mayan ruins and sites, butterfly pavilion, coral reef aquarium, and an underground river. Xcaret also offers its visitors performances representing Mexico’s traditions with live music, cultural dances, and entertainment. One of the highlights of the park is a daily night show, “Mexico Espectacular,” which features over 300 artists on stage that take visitors to a vibrant journey through the history of Mexico and Mayan culture. The two-hour show also demonstrates traditional hand-made dresses, dances, and musical performances from the various states of Mexico including mariachi songs and pre-Hispanic Mayan ball game.

One of the grandest events sponsored by the park is the “Festival of Life and Death,” that represents a long-celebrated ritual of Mexico. Each year, one of the states

in Mexico hosts the event at Xcaret by bringing artists and craftsmen to display and deliver a range of performances and handicrafts to the visitors of the park.

As this background explains, Xcaret provided an appropriate context for this study to examine how visitors evaluate the authenticity of the park after directly experiencing it and its offerings during their visit. Based on the description of the context and the multidisciplinary literature review, this study developed a theoretical framework of perceived organizational authenticity as described in the next section.

Theoretical Framework for Perceived Organizational Authenticity

As the review of scholarly discussions about authenticity suggests, a theoretical framework of authenticity should place it in the broader context of organizational identity and reputation. It is understood that an authentic organization is true to its values, mission, purpose, and value proposition and demonstrates consistency with these values in its actions, decisions, and behavior (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Walumbwa et al., 2010; Wong & Cummins, 2009). In other words, we know that authentic organizations must “be grounded in a sure sense of what defines it – why it exists, what it stands for and what differentiates it in a marketplace [...] values, principles, beliefs, mission, purpose or value proposition – must dictate consistent behavior and actions” (“The authentic enterprise,” 2007, p. 6).

In this sense, organizations have to be aware of their identity and reputation, should actively communicate it to their myriad stakeholders, who then form opinions about the organization and who it really is, ultimately evaluating its claims of authenticity. Thus, authenticity is considered an integral part of organizational reputation (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004) and is seen as firmly ingrained in an organization’s identity (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Along these lines, Molleda (2010a) suggested:

organisations progressively build their corporate personalities by highlighting and putting certain authentic features out to the scrutiny of their stakeholders who, at the same time, make selective interpretations and consequently judge these organisations' reputations. The consistency of what organisations do and say may result in a perceived reputation close to the carefully built corporate identity with the use of strategic public relations and communication management (p. 225).

To illustrate this proposition, Gilmore and Pine (2007) explained that at any given time, an organization is in the "here-and-now" space (p. 182), which represents a progression of organizational identity over time, beginning with its origin and heritage, and leading up to what it is today. At this point, organizations face an execution zone of future strategic possibilities that determine a future course of action, and thereby, dictate the possibilities of rendering organizational authenticity by acting in accordance to an organization's established identity and who it has come to be known for.

To help organizations render authenticity, Gilmore and Pine outlined eight principles to guide organizations in staking out viable, powerful, and compelling competitive positioning while remaining true to themselves:

1. Study your heritage, meaning to remain true to their identity, organizations much study their heritage, and thereby define their possibilities by their unique origin, and subsequent history.
2. Ascertain your positioning, implying that understanding current operating environment, the circumstances surrounding an organization, provides an important context for devising a compelling strategic direction for an enterprise.
3. Locate your trajectory, or in other words determine the direction and speed at which organizations want to move forward in the future. At this point, organizations should remain cautious of not meandering in spaces that are not consistent with their history and current positioning.
4. Know your limits, meaning that organizations should limit future possibilities to those that are definable, achievable, and valuable.
5. Zoom in your zone, that is identify the most defining characteristics and value offerings of an organization, and follow these into new possibilities of creating value, rather than re-inventing these defining characteristics.

6. Scan the periphery, for potential competitors and their positioning.
7. Affix the future, by identifying the spectrum of future possibilities that reflect your particular approach to offerings, capabilities, and stakeholders, and are an expression of your past and current positioning.
8. Execute well, by incorporating these seven principles in the behaviors and actions of the organization and its employees (p.189).

As these principles suggest, perceived authenticity is an evaluation of whether an organization's actions and behaviors reflect its origins and heritage, or in other words, identity. These principles are similar to those found in the authentic leadership literature, where self-awareness, which "refers to showing an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses and the multifaceted nature of the self, which includes gaining insight into the self through exposure to others, and being cognizant of one's impact on other people" (Walumbwa et al., 2010, p. 95), is considered an important dimension of an authentic leader.

Further, these principles illustrate the significant role that public relations could perform in helping organizations render authenticity. Scholars have suggested that organizations can portray themselves as authentic by being transparent, sharing periodic and accurate information with its publics, engaging them in a dialogue by soliciting their feedback, and disclosing its personal values, motives, and beliefs in a manner that enable publics to more accurately assess the identity and integrity of organization's actions (Gilmore & Pine, 2007).

In fact from a leadership perspective, Walumbwa et al. (2010) explained that relational transparency, which refers to "presenting one's authentic self (as opposed to a fake or distorted self) to others" is a key feature of an authentic leader (p 95). The authors elaborated that "such behavior promotes trust through disclosures that involve

openly sharing information and expressions of one's true thoughts and feelings while trying to minimize displays of inappropriate emotions" (p. 95), highlighting the importance of communication in forming perceptions of authenticity.

Therefore, this dissertation examined perceived organizational authenticity within the framework of organizational identity and reputation, as developed and communicated by an organization to its publics (Figure 2-1). The dissertation began the exploration of perceived organizational authenticity with an examination of organizational claims and efforts to form an identity and reputation communicated to the stakeholders via various sources and information platforms. It then examined how stakeholders evaluate these claims in conjunction with organizational identity and reputation to form opinions about organizational authenticity and whether these perceptions influence their relationship with the organization.

Further, the study also examined the outcomes of perceived organizational authenticity in terms of its influence on organization-public relationships. Discussions about the construct in academic and trade publications emphasized that authentic organizations are perceived as trustworthy, credible, legitimate, and honest (Edwards, 2010; Molleda 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011; Watson, 2011). In particular, Molleda (2010a, 2010b) argued that perceive authenticity could be a factor influencing the quality of organization-public relationships. Further, Molleda and Jain (2011) recommended that future studies should examine the impact of perceived authenticity on organization-public relationship outcomes. Therefore, this study conceptualized and examined the causal association between perceived organizational authenticity and relational outcomes (Figure 2-1).

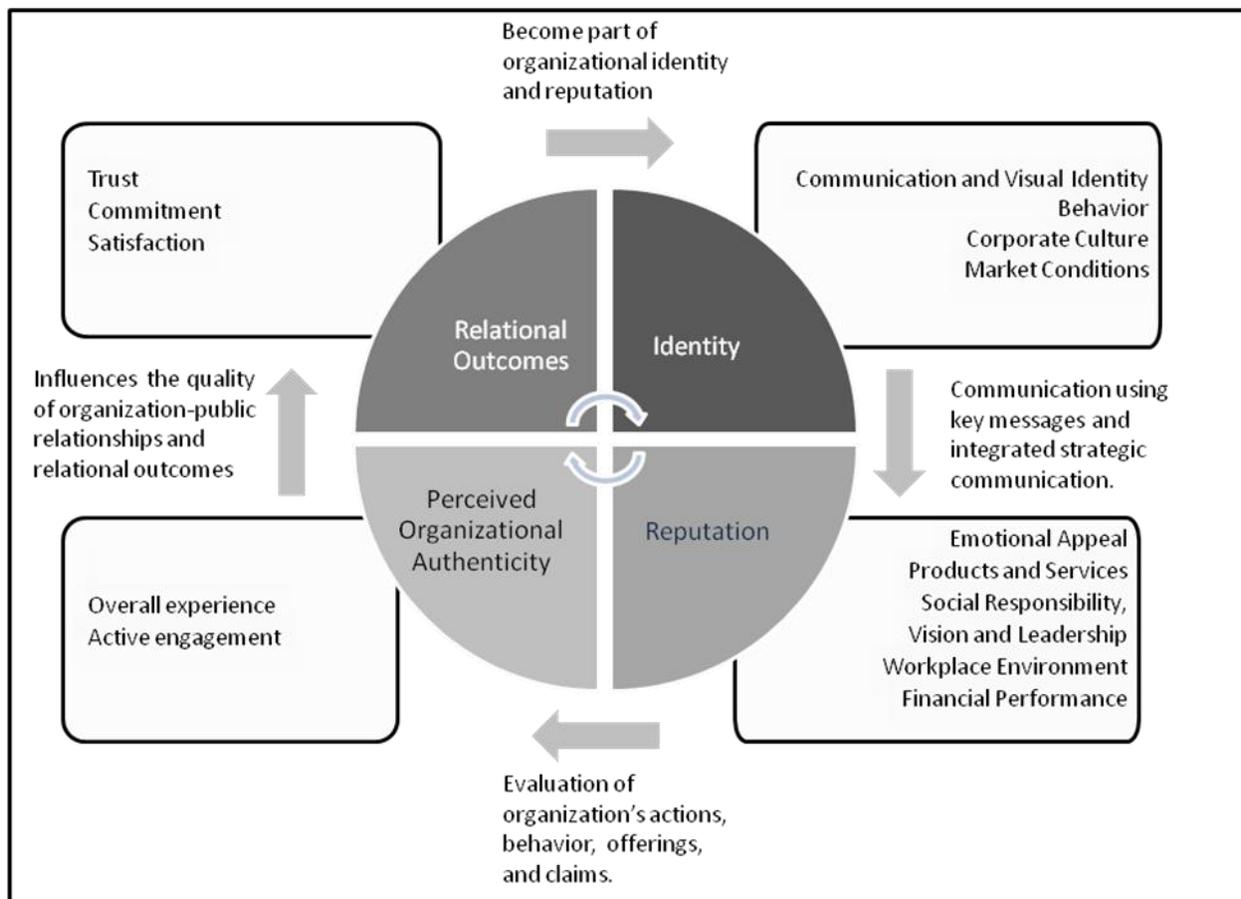


Figure 2-1. The Perceived Organizational Authenticity (POA) model

The next section describes the elements of the model i.e. identity, reputation, and relational outcomes and their associations with each other.

Organizational Identity

Organizational identity is a complex phenomenon that has received significant attention in business and communication literature, yet much like perceived authenticity, its nature remains debated. At its core, organizational identity deals with determining who the organization is. However, the answer to this question is not simple, since organizations can have multiple identities (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), that could evolve or be affected by changes in external and internal operating environment (Brilliant & Young, 2004).

Albert and Whetten (1985) described organizational identity as those characteristics of an organization that members perceive as enduring, central, and unique about their organization. At the individual level, members may develop a schema of core attributes that uniquely identify an organization and are shared by its members (Dutton & Penner, 1993). This implies that organizational identity may vary depending upon the attributes that members might associate with an organization. While an organization might be known for its social responsibility efforts and community engagement, another might be identified for its quality of products and services. However, irrespective of what attributes uniquely characterize an organization, organizational identity is a subset of the collective beliefs that constitute an organization's culture (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquil, 1994).

Along similar lines, Balmer and Greyser (2006) proposed that organizational identity is defined by a combination of organization's character, "what we indubitably are," and culture, "what we feel we are" (p. 735). The authors further elaborated that organizational philosophy and ethos, its products and pricing, distribution and sourcing mechanisms, quality of its products and services, its competitive positioning, and personality as exuded by its culture and employees, are the key elements of organizational identity. Other scholars also suggested that organizational mission statements, strategy, values, and beliefs are the foundation of its identity (Sha, 2009; van Riel & Balmer, 1997).

Examining the various perspectives approaching organizational identity, van Riel and Balmer (1997) characterized them into three main developments: organizational identity using graphic design, integrated communication, and last, a multidisciplinary

approach that draws from organizational behavior. Scholars have examined organizational identity from a graphic design perspective by analyzing visual elements such as symbols, logos, colors, and nomenclatures as manifestations of an organization's strategy, branding, and communication policies (Olins, 1978). From an integrated communication perspective, scholars such as J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992), Bernstein (1986), and Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1994) argued that organizational identity is an outcome of integrated communication efforts on behalf of the organization with all its stakeholders. Finally, a multidisciplinary approach suggested that organizational identity is a set of unique characteristics that are rooted in the behavior of its members, i.e., its culture. Further, organizations can achieve a desirable identity by using communication and symbolism and through actual behavior.

From a corporate perspective, Melewar and Jenkins (2002) identified four sub-constructs of corporate identity: communication and visual identity, behavior, corporate culture, and market conditions. The authors further elaborated that communication and visual identity is an outcome of corporate communications, uncontrollable communication, architecture and location of the firm, and corporate visual identity. Similarly, behavior represents corporate, management, and employee actions and behavior. Melewar and Jenkins described that corporate culture is manifested in the goals, philosophies, and principles of a firm, its nationality, history, and imagery. Finally, nature of industry and corporate or marketing strategies define market conditions of an organization, and are an integral part of its identity.

In sum, scholars conceive organizational identity as a collectively held frame by its members; however, identity is "objectively held – that is, it has a reality independent of

individual observers – although it is subjectively arrived at” (Scott & Lane, 2000, p.43). Thus, from a stakeholder perspective, “organizational identity is best understood as contested and negotiated through iterative interactions between managers and stakeholders” (Scott & Lane, 2000, p. 44). This perspective demonstrates the key role public relations and other strategic communication disciplines perform in the development and maintenance of organization identity because “organizational communication is essentially a process through which meaning is created, negotiated, and managed” (Cheney & Christensen, 2000, p. 241).

Also, organizational identity often serves as an important reference point for stakeholders to evaluate an organization’s actions, behavior, and communication claims (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). For instance in their study, Dutton and Dukerich found that the more the members perceive an issue to be relevant to organizational identity, the greater is the perceived legitimacy of the issue and the perception of the feasibility of resolving the issue.

These scholarly discussions suggest that organizational identity is an important precedent to evaluate if an organization is acting according to its true self, or in other words identity, and thereby could influence the opinions of stakeholders about organizational authenticity. Another closely related construct to identity, organizational reputation is an important precedent to perceived organizational authenticity as discussed next.

Organizational Reputation

Since most scholarly work has examined reputation in the context of corporations (Balmer, 1995; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Bromley, 2001; Mahon, 2002), this dissertation used this perspective to operationalize organizational reputation. From a corporate

perspective, reputation is defined as “the aggregation of a single stakeholder’s perception of how well organizational responses are meeting the demands and expectations of many corporate stakeholders” (Wartic, 1992, p.34). These aggregate perceptions are based on organizations’ actions as well as stakeholders’ memory and perceptions (Mahon, 2002). Similarly, Bromley (2001) defined reputation as stakeholders’ “overt expression of a collective image,” of an organization. In other words, reputation is the way in which external stakeholders conceptualize and perceive an organization.

Along these lines, Balmer and Greyser (2006) explained that organizational reputation, “what we are seen to be,” is an outcome of organizational communication, “what we say we are,” organizational constituencies, “whom we seek to serve,” and organizational covenant, “what is promised and expected” (p. 735). In other words, organizational communication, stakeholders’ management, and brand promise shape and inform how an organization is perceived and what stakeholders expect from it. Further, organizations that act consistent with stakeholders’ expectations will be regarded as authentic (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011).

Scholars argued that while organizational identity and reputation are related, they should be conceived as distinct constructs (Balmer, 2001; Bromley, 2001; Fombrun, 1996). According to Fombrun (1996), identity is the foundation of reputation, and to “focus on a company’s reputation also is to determine how it deals with all of its constituents; it is to focus on a company’s character or identity” (p. 111). In other words, while identity is intended and constructed by organizations, reputation is an outcome of

such efforts as perceived by its various stakeholders. Further, Bromley (2001) proposed that while identity refers to the perceptions and mental associations about an organization held by its members, reputation is defined as the evaluations and perceptions of an organization held by others outside the organization.

Similarly, Camilleri (2008b) conceptualized reputation as a function of organizational identity, in his examination of authenticity claims of a wine manufacturing company. The author emphasized that organizational identity is how organizations present themselves, whereas organizational reputation is how stakeholders perceive an organization. Similar to other scholars, Camilleri identified organizational mission, visual presentation, and corporate culture as the pillars of organizational identity, which is a precedent to stakeholder expectations from an organization. The author also highlighted the role of communication in building organizational reputation.

Reputation has been extensively examined in the business literature where it has been defined as opinions of market participants about an organization's strategic positioning (Weigelt & Camerer, 1988), salient characteristics that stakeholders associate with a firm (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), the value that publics ascribe to an organization (Fombrun, 1996), media coverage and tone (Deephouse, 2000), and people's collective belief about an organization's identity and personality (Rao, 1994).

Reputations are formed through direct interaction with an organization, as well as through the information that publics have of their actions (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). This process emphasizes the importance of communication in forming corporate reputation, and the key role played by public relations. Additionally, these conceptualizations illustrate that much like an organization's identity, its reputation also serves as a

reference point for stakeholders to evaluate organizational authenticity assertions against its actions and behaviors.

While there are several measurements of organizational reputation in scholarly research (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Black, Carnes, & Richardson, 2000; Narka, 2000; Carroll, 2004), Reputation QuotientSM, a proprietary service used by Harris Interactive is particularly useful for this study (Harris Interactive, 2009). The instrument is used to compile an annual ranking of the most visible companies in the United States and their reputation, as well as to offer its clients insights into their reputation branding goals and designing messages and strategies. Since Gradberg and Fombrun's (2002) initial evaluation, this index has been validated through scholarly research as an accurate measure of stakeholder's evaluations of organizations (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Carroll, 2004; Kiouisis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007).

The Reputation QuotientSM evaluates corporate reputation based on 20 sub-attributes items detailed, which compose six organizational dimensions: emotional appeal, products and services, social Responsibility, vision and leadership, workplace environment, and financial performance (Harris Interactive, 2007). These dimensions, or reputational attributes, are measured on a seven-point scale, which provides the composite evaluation of the company's reputation. Similarly, Doorley and Garcia (2007) suggested nine reputation criteria, six of which are similar to the Reputation QuotientSM, and three are unique: communicativeness (transparency), governance, and Integrity (responsibility, reliability, credibility, trustworthiness).

While these dimensions provide a comprehensive list of reputation attributes, Bromley (1993) and J. Grunig and Hung (2002) recommended that instead of asking

participants to forcibly answer the question items that are imposed by the researcher, an open-ended measure of reputation should be used which reads “[i]n a few phrases, please tell me what comes to mind when you think of the following organization.” This study uses this operationalization of organization reputation to evaluate how it influences and forms precedent to perceived organization identity.

Finally, this dissertation examines potential relational outcomes of perceived authenticity, as identified in scholarly discussions and presented in the next section.

Relational Outcomes of Perceived Organizational Authenticity

Grounded in multidisciplinary literature, this study proposed that perceived organizational authenticity influences organization-public relationships, considering the influences of organizational identity and reputation.

Beginning with Ferguson’s (1984) argument that relationships are at the core of public relations research and practice, the relational perspective has emerged as a major area for theory development in public relations. Several scholars have written about organization-public relationships and developed conceptualizations of this important construct (e.g., Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; J. Grunig, L. Grunig & Ehling, 1992; Hon & J. Grunig, 1999; Huang, 1997, 2001; Jo, 2006; Kim, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Organization-public relationships have also been examined in the international context (Huang, 2001; Jo, 2006).

Further, scholars have identified several dimensions of organization-public relationships and operationalized them into a scale to measure relational outcomes including trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality (Hon and J. Grunig, 1999; Huang, 1997, 2001). These four features have been found consistently in the literature of relationships that postulates that these relational outcomes represent the

essence of organization-public relationships (Huang, 2001; Yang, 2007). Of these relational outcomes, trust, commitment, and satisfaction are particularly relevant to this study:

- **Trust:** Identified as one of the relational outcomes, trust is defined as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999, p. 19). Conceived as a multidimensional construct (Burgoon & Hale, 1984), trust is defined using three dimensions: integrity, “the belief that an organization is fair and just;” dependability, “the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do;” and competence, “the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do” (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999, p. 19).
- **Commitment:** Conceived as a form of brand loyalty, commitment is defined as “[t]he extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote” (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999, p. 3). In other words, commitment reflects the willingness of partners to exert efforts and resources to maintain a relationship that they perceive as important (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Hon and J. Grunig (1999) identified two dimensions of commitment: continuance commitment, “a certain line of action,” and affective commitment, “an emotional orientation” (p. 3).
- **Satisfaction:** One of the most commonly studied relational outcome, satisfaction is identified as “[t]he extent to which each party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced” (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999, p. 3). Satisfaction refers to the perceptions that the benefits of a relationship outweigh the costs to maintain and nurture it (Ferguson, 1984; Hon & J. Grunig, 1999; Huang, 1997, 2001).

Based on the initial conceptualizations of relational outcomes, Yang (2007) operationalized the four relational outcomes in his study using a 28-item questionnaire that evaluated participants’ responses on a five-point Likert scale. This study used Yang’s scale to measure how perceptions of organizational authenticity influence participants’ opinions about organization-public relationships along the relational dimensions i.e., trust, commitment, and satisfaction. In addition to quantitatively measuring relational outcomes, J. Grunig (2002) also proposed some ways to qualitatively assess these outcomes as perceived by their stakeholders. Because of the

nature and focus of this study, relational outcomes of perceived organizational authenticity were also evaluated using qualitative approach of in-depth interviews.

As the multidisciplinary literature review suggested, the construct of perceived organizational authenticity lacks theory-building studies and empirical support in the context of public relations. A limited theoretical understanding of what is meant by authenticity and how it can be measured is notable in contemporary public relations literature. Given the combined interest in the construct, its increasing use in the field and its lack of development, the purpose of this dissertation is three-fold: (1) to further conceptualize and operationally define the construct of perceived organizational authenticity and its dimensions by developing a theoretical framework that identifies its causal linkages with organizational identity, reputation, and relational outcomes; (2) to develop and test a refined, theory-based measurement of perceived organizational authenticity; and (3) to identify relevant construct relational outcomes (trust, commitment, and satisfaction) emerging from perceptions of an authentic experience.

With this purpose in sight, this dissertation operationally defined perceived organizational authenticity as a function of the degree to which stakeholders perceive an organization, its offerings and communication claims to be consistent with its identity and reputation, which ultimately affects their trust, satisfaction, and commitment with the organization.

Table 2-2 presents the theoretical conceptualizations of each of the constructs in the proposed perceived organizational authenticity (POA) model. The conceptualizations guided the construction of instruments as detailed later in chapter 3 on methods.

Table 2-2. Conceptualization of constructs in the Perceived Organizational Authenticity (POA) model

Construct	Conceptualization	Authors/Study
Perceived organizational authenticity	Visitors' overall experience and active engagement in a tourism setting	Molleda (2010b), Molleda & Jain (2011)
Identity	Four sub-constructs: communication & visual identity, behavior, corporate culture, and market conditions	Melewar & Jenkins (2002)
Reputation	Open ended measure of reputation related to the schema of attributes that public associate with an organization	Bromley (1993), J. Grunig & Hung (2002)
Relational outcomes	Trust, satisfaction, and commitment with an organization	Hon & Grunig (1999), Yang (2007)

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Using tourism experiences as the context for evaluating the perceived organizational authenticity model and empirically investigating its measurement scale, this study conducted data collection at Xcaret, a cultural and eco-archaeological theme park in Mexico. Specifically, the following research questions and hypotheses were examined to further our understanding of perceived organizational authenticity from a public relations and communication management perspective:

RQ1: How do the marketing and public relations practitioners of Xcaret describe their roles and responsibilities in the construction, execution, and promotion of identity, authenticity, and reputation of the park and its main special events?

RQ2: What are the dimensions that best explain the construct of perceived authenticity?

RQ3: What are the factors that influence perceived organizational authenticity?

H1: The degree to which visitors perceive that their experience was consistent with the park's identity has a positive influence on the perceived authenticity of the park.

H2: The degree to which visitors perceive that their experience was consistent with the park's reputation has a positive influence on the perceived authenticity of the park.

RQ4: What are the relational outcomes that may be associated with perceived organizational authenticity?

H3: Perceived organizational authenticity is positively related to the quality of relationship between the park and its visitors.

H4: Perceived organizational authenticity is positively related to park-visitors trust outcome.

H5: Perceived organizational authenticity is positively related to park-visitors satisfaction outcome.

H6: Perceived organizational authenticity is positively related to park-visitors commitment outcome.

RQ5: What is the relationship between visitors' demographics and perceived organizational authenticity?

H7: Older visitors will evaluate perceived organizational authenticity of the park higher than younger visitors.

H8: Out of state visitors will evaluate perceived organizational authenticity of the park higher than visitors from the state in which the park is located.

H9: Female visitors will evaluate perceived organizational authenticity of the park higher than male visitors.

RQ6: What is the relationship between park's perceived authenticity and the amount of time visitors spent in the park and their previous visits to the park?

H10: The longer a visitor stays in the park, the higher is his/her evaluation of park's authenticity.

H11: A previous visit to the park will be associated with higher levels of perceived authenticity.

RQ7: What is the relationship between the type of source (media versus friends and family) from where the visitors obtained information about the park and their evaluation of the park's authenticity?

These questions were explored using focus group, in-depth interviews, and face-to-face intercept survey. The data collection and analysis procedures are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

This is a triangulation study that used qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the research questions and test proposed hypotheses. Scholars recommended that integrating qualitative and quantitative research approaches in social scientific inquiry draws from the respective strengths of both of these paradigms while minimizing their weaknesses in a single study (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Emphasizing integration of the two dominant research paradigms (qualitative and quantitative) as a key tenant of mixed methods approach, Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) broadly defined it “as research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry” (p. 4). Similarly, Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) called mixed methods research as an alternative, third research paradigm along with qualitative and quantitative research, while defining it as “the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (p. 123).

Johnson et al. (2007) described that the range of possibilities for integrating qualitative and quantitative research approaches under the mixed methods paradigm can be seen as a continuum bounded by pure-qualitative and pure-quantitative methods. At the center of this continuum lies the “pure” mixed methods research

approach that attributes equal status to both qualitative and quantitative data and approaches to add insights to a study's research questions. Closer to the qualitative end of the continuum is the qualitative dominant mixed methods research that argues for the inclusion of quantitative data and approaches into otherwise qualitative research projects that are primarily designed with a "constructivist-poststructuralist-critical" perspective (p. 124). Finally, closer to the quantitative end of the continuum are the quantitative dominant research methods that rely on a post-positivist, quantitative research perspective, while advocating for the inclusion of qualitative data and approaches to strengthen the study.

Triangulation is a mixed methods approach that can be used to integrate qualitative and quantitative research approaches in various ways (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Triangulation design is a special form of mixed methods research, where the researcher gathers both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently and then compares the two databases to determine if there is convergence, difference, or some combination, also known as cross validation, or corroboration (Creswell, 2009; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Morgan, 1998).

Morse (2003) explained that such comparison and combination of the results obtained from qualitative and quantitative means of inquiry provides a more comprehensive picture of the results than either study could provide alone. Further, the authors described that there are two ways in which triangulation can be achieved: sequential and simultaneous. In sequential triangulation, two separate projects are conducted in order where the results of the first inform the nature of the second project.

On the other hand, simultaneous triangulation compares and contrasts the data obtained from two projects conducted at the same time.

Grounded in a quantitative dominant approach, this study applied simultaneous triangulation to compare, contrast, and corroborate the data obtained from quantitative surveys with that gathered using qualitative interviews, to further our understanding about perceived organizational authenticity and its dimensions, its relationship with organizational identity and reputation, and its influence on organization-public relational outcomes. Further, qualitative findings were used to explain the results of the quantitative survey, an application of triangulation approach that scholars have recommended (Creswell, 2009; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Morgan, 1998).

This study used three research methods — focus group, in-depth interviews, and face-to-face intercept survey — to investigate its research questions and hypotheses in the context of an eco-archeological park, Xcaret, in Mexico (Figure 3-1).

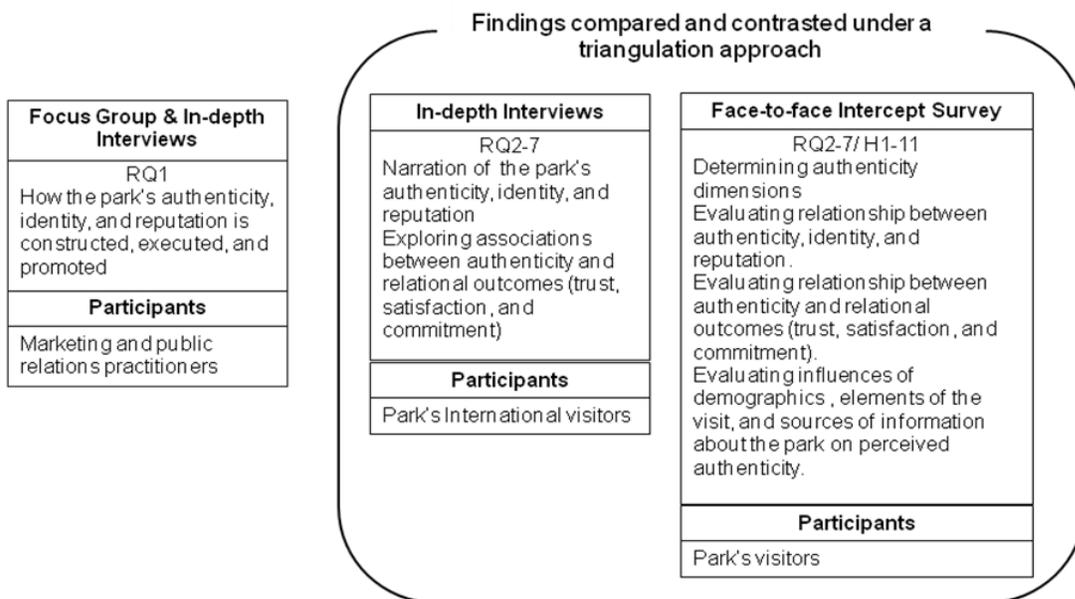


Figure 3-1. Methods used in the study

A focus group and two in-depth interviews were conducted with Xcaret's marketing and public relations practitioners to examine the first research question about the involvement and motivation of this group with the construction, execution, and communication of the park's identity, authenticity, and reputation. In-depth interviews and a face-to-face intercept survey with visitors of the park were used to investigate the remaining research questions and corresponding hypotheses that this study put forward. Each of these research methods are described next.

Focus Groups

Focus groups have been extensively used as a research tool within the social and behavioral sciences (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). The research method has also been used by several public relations scholars (e.g., Aldoory & Toth, 2002, 2004; L. Grunig, 1993; Hon, 1995; Palenchar & Heath, 2002; Sriramesh, Morghan, & Wei, 2007). As a data collection technique, focus groups gather rich experiential data elicited from the interactions within a selected group of subjects (Asbury, 1995). Merton (1987) explained that a focus group is a valuable research technique comprising of "a set of procedures for the collection and analysis of qualitative data that may help us gain an enlarged sociological and psychological understanding in whatsoever sphere of human experience" (p. 565). Similarly, Wimmer and Dominick (2006) described it as a qualitative research methodology for understanding audience attitudes and behavior. Analysis of focus group data provides key insights into what participants know about the subject matter and why they know what they know (L. Grunig, 1993).

Typically, six to 12 participants who are similar in some way are interviewed by a trained facilitator and a note-taker in a relatively unstructured, in-depth discussion about one topic or issues of specific interest to the researcher (Asbury, 1995; Greenbaum,

1998). The focus group moderator or facilitator acts as catalyst for social interactions and discussions that gradually build up to provide specific insights into the concept of concern by the dynamic interaction of the participants to provide researcher with detailed perspectives that could not be obtained through other research methods (Gaskell, 2000).

Focus groups are an appropriate research strategy to collect preliminary information about a topic or a phenomenon that has not been previously explored or lacks a theoretical understanding (Ausbury, 1995; Greenbaum, 1998; L. Grunig, 1993), such as perceived organizational authenticity. It also allows for researchers to adopt a flexible question design and follow-up, which contributes to the reliability of the data (Morgan, 1997). Further, focus groups are appropriate to gather data from participants who share similar backgrounds and are willing to talk about issues of common interest and/or concerns (Gaskell, 2000). Because this study's first research question examined the shared experiences of marketing and public relations practitioners of the park, focus group was an appropriate research method.

In-depth Interviews

Unlike focus groups, in-depth interviews are a useful technique to intensively explore the experiences and life-world of an individual (Charmaz, 2006). Gaskell (2000) described it as a "one-to-one conversation, a dyadic interaction" in which "an exchange of ideas and meanings" facilitates the explorations and development of various realities and perceptions (p. 45). In other words, an in-depth interview explores the personal worldview of the interviewee in detail.

Much like focus groups, public relations scholars have also employed in-depth interviews while studying various issues and contexts such as health communication

(Aldoory, 2001), role of women in public relations profession (Tsetsura, 2011), and organization-public relationships assessment (Huang, 2001).

Under a mixed-methods paradigm, scholars have used a combination of surveys and in-depth interviews to better understand the phenomenon under observation (e.g., Lippe, 2010, Kramer, 2010; Wheeldon, 2010). Advocating for integration, Bauer and Gaskell (2000) recommended that in-depth interviews offer profound understanding of valuable contextual information that helps to explain particular findings of quantitative methods such as a survey. Therefore, this study used in-depth interviews to enhance our understanding of perceived organizational authenticity by illuminating this multidimensional construct as described by the park's marketing and public relations managers and experienced and narrated by its international visitors. Further, a semi-structured interviewing approach was used, which starts with a few questions asked to the interviewee but is flexible to allow new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Face-to-face Intercept Surveys

In addition to in-depth interviews, this study used a face-to-face intercept survey to answer the remaining research questions exploring visitors' opinions about their relationship with the park and its identity, reputation, and authenticity. The results of the survey were used to empirically test the proposed perceived organizational authenticity (POA) theoretical model and measurement scale. Scholars recommended that face-to-face intercept surveys are an appropriate approach for evaluating visitors' perceptions in travel and tourism setting (Kim, Borges, & Chon, 2006; McHone & Rungeling, 2000; Pearce & Schott, 2005). In particular, such an approach is a valuable tool to evaluate the experiences of visitors after a daylong engagement in a tourism setting, as

demonstrated by Moscardo and Pearce (1986). Evaluating a tourism experience right after a visit is preferred over a survey where participants have to recall elements of a visit in the past (Moscardo & Pearce, 1986).

Fink (1995) defined a survey as “a system for collecting information to describe, compare, or explain knowledge, attitudes, and behavior” (p. 1). Surveys are an appropriate methodology for collecting responses from a large sample and for purposes of generalization of findings when random sampling procedures are used (Fink, 1995). Further, surveys have become a method of choice for collecting responses and testing measurement instruments in public relations (e.g., Gordon & Kelly, 1999; Huang, 2001; Kelly, 1994). Because the purpose of this study is to test the proposed perceived organizational authenticity (POA) model and measurement scale, quantitative survey was an appropriate research method.

The specific procedures of sample development and participant recruitment, instrument construction, data gathering protocol, and data analysis under each of these methods are described in the following sub-sections of the chapter.

Populations and Samples

Focus Group and In-depth Interviews with Marketing and Public Relations Practitioners

Xcaret’s marketing and public relations department has 15 members of which five are managers and 10 are communication technicians (personal communication, Nov. 28, 2011). The researcher invited all the communication technicians to participate in a 90-minute focus group and the managers for 60-minute interviews. The purpose of keeping the conversation with communication technicians separate from the managers was to avoid the influence of supervisors on subordinates’ opinions. All communication

professionals were invited to ensure that a range of opinions and different perspectives were examined. Gaskell (2000) recommended that the real purpose of qualitative group interviewing is not counting opinions or people but rather the range of opinions, the different representations of the issue, and thus a focus group should include different members of the social milieu.

However, one practitioner could not participate in the focus group and three managers in the interviews due to professional or personal commitments and appointments. Therefore, this study included insights from a total of nine focus group participants and two interviewees. The focus group and interviews were conducted on March 12, 2012 at the marketing and public relations head office in Cancun, Mexico.

In-depth Interviews with International Visitors

Because of language limitation, the researcher approached Xcaret's international visitors, who can communicate in English to take part in 30-40 minute interviews. Sixteen international visitors participated in individual interviews with the researcher over a five day period between March 11 and March 15, 2012.

The objective of these individual interviews was to understand each participant's experience in the park, motivation of visit and perceptions of an authentic tourism experience. In a previous study, Molleda and Jain (2011) found that guests from Xcaret's host state (Quintana Roo) evaluated the overall authenticity of a festival hosted by the park lower than the guests from other states and countries, emphasizing the subjective nature of the construct. Further, Cohen (1988) argued that increased commoditization of local culture can be perceived as "staged authenticity." Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted to further explore the experiences of international

visitors, who might not be much familiar with Mexican culture, heritage, and traditions that the park attempts to preserve and showcase.

Face-to-face Intercept Survey with Visitors

The population for the study's quantitative portion consisted of Xcaret's visitors. The data was collected over a five-day period from March 11 to March 15, 2012 using a face-to-face intercept survey of visitors as they were waiting for the last show of the day in the park's auditorium. The park received about 10,000 visitors during the five-day period of data collection (personal communication, March 15, 2012). With a 95 percent confidence level and two percent margin of error, the sample size required was 566 participants. A total of 570 surveys were collected by the researcher with the help of 10 customer relations staff members of Xcaret.

Construction of the Instruments

Instrument for Focus Group and In-depth Interviews with Marketing and Public Relations Practitioners

An organization's identity is defined as those set of core attributes that uniquely identify an organization and are considered as enduring and central by its members (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton & Penner, 1993). Further, public relations and strategic communication practitioners perform a key role in developing, communicating, and maintaining an organization's identity (Cheney & Christensen, 2000). Therefore, the focus group and in-depth interview agenda contained five questions related to the perceived role of marketing and public relations professionals in the development, maintenance, and promotion of park's identity, authenticity, and reputation. Table 3-1 presents the specific questions. In addition, participants and interviewees were asked to provide information regarding their position in the organization, roles and

responsibilities, and the years of experience in the current position. Both the focus group and in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with follow-up questions asked by the researcher for clarification and explanation of a response. Further, the managers were asked to describe their relationship with the park's owners to understand the involvement and integration of marketing and public relations with the park's core business strategy, decisions, and actions.

Table 3-1. Agenda for focus group and in-depth interviews with marketing and public relations practitioners

Questions
Please describe Xcaret's identity and mission.
What are your role and responsibilities in communicating and preserving Xcaret's identity?
What are the unique features of the park that you promote in your strategic communication efforts?
Please describe the experiences you want to offer to the tourists and what you want the visitors to take-away from their visit to the park.
What specific communication media, channels, actions, and tools you use for communicating park's identity, reputation, authenticity claims, and offerings?

Instrument for In-depth Interviews with International Visitors

The instrument for interviews with international visitors was also semi-structured. Underlying the interviewing approach was the objective to elicit responses from participants about their experience in the park and whether this experience met their expectations from the visit (Table 3-2).

Participants were asked to narrate their experience in Xcaret with as much detail as they could provide. They were also asked to share their opinions about the park and its identity and reputation. Finally, participants were asked to evaluate their relationship with the park using J. Grunig's (2002) proposed approach to begin with broad questions followed by specific questions about relationships.

Table 3-2. Agenda for interviews with international visitors

Questions

Grand tour questions:

Would you begin by telling me about your experience in the park and things you did (e.g., activities, shows, park features)?

How would you describe your experience in the park?

What part of your visit to the park you liked the most?

Are there any things you did not like or wish were different about your visit to the park?

Specific questions:

How did you come to know about Xcaret?

What did you expect from your visit to Xcaret? Do you think the park met your expectations? Please provide specific examples.

Do you feel that you have a relationship with Xcaret? Why or why not? Please describe your relationship with Xcaret.

Instrument for Face-to-face Intercept Survey with Visitors

The survey instrument was divided into five sections. The first section evaluated the authenticity of the park as perceived by its visitors. This section was adapted from Molleda and Jain's (2011) proposed authenticity index by re-wording and eliminating few existing items and adding news items to reflect the context of this study. The second section measured the extent to which visitors noticed during their visit to the park the expressions of its identity and mission, which is to preserve Mexican culture and traditions ("Experiencias Xcaret," n.d). Items in this section were constructed using Melewar and Jenkins' (2002) conceptualization of organizational identity.

The third section examined visitors' experience in the park against its reputation by asking them to evaluate the extent to which their visit met their expectations. The construction of items in this section was grounded in Bromley's (1993) and J. Grunig and Hung's (2002) suggested approach to not provide a list of things or attributes that define an organization but rather using a broader approach to let participants describe whether their experience was consistent with their perceptions about the organization.

The fourth section used Yang's (2007) operationalization of organization-public relationship dimensions to evaluate the quality of relationships between Xcaret and its visitors. The final section collected data regarding visitors' demographic (i.e., age, gender, and country of origin), visit characteristics, and sources of information about Xcaret. The purpose of the data collection in this section was to examine whether people's opinions about organizational authenticity vary and to evaluate the scholarly claims that perceived authenticity is a subjective and contextual construct (Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011).

The first four sections in the instrument used a Spanish/English, five-point Likert scale, where one is none (1 = nada), two little (2 = poco), three some (3 = algo), four much (4 = mucho), and five totally (5 = totalmente). This is an interval scale suggested by communication executives of Xcaret as most appropriate for the kinds of visitors that Xcaret receives (see Molleda & Jain, 2011).

The first section included 10 statements aimed to measure the perceived authenticity of the park (Table 3-3). The items in this section were adapted from Molleda and Jain's (2011) proposed authenticity index that evaluated the authenticity of a special event sponsored by Xcaret. To fit the purpose of this study, Molleda and Jain's index was revised and reworded to capture the experiences of participants in a tourism setting.

The first six statements assessed participants' overall experience in the park by asking how satisfactory, fun, memorable, comfortable, extraordinary, and unique their visit was. These survey questions captured the first item of the proposed authenticity index: "Imagery of or claims that evoke pleasure or fun that could be achieved by

stakeholders, individually or collectively, when they encounter or are exposed to the corporate offering, promises, or experiences” (Molleda, 2010b, p. 232).

Table 3-3. Survey instrument (Part I)

Items on perceived organizational authenticity measurement scale
My visit has been fun
My visit has been satisfactory
My visit has been memorable
My visit has been comfortable
My visit has been unique
My visit has been extraordinary
My visit has inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more
My visit has motivated me to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions
My visit as inspired me to advocate for conserving Mexican culture and traditions
During my visit, I felt active part of Mexican culture and Traditions

The next set of four statements, also drawn from the items of the proposed index of perceived authenticity, asked participants to characterize the park’s activities along four statements: “Inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more,” “Motivated me to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions,” “Make me feel active part of the Mexican traditions,” and “During my visit I felt active part of Mexican culture and traditions.” These items were used to measure visitors’ level of engagement with the park and its tourism offerings.

Melewar and Jenkins’ (2002) conceptualization of corporate identity was used to evaluate the degree of consistency between Xcaret’s perceived identity and visitors’ experiences. Nine items corresponding to the four sub-constructs of identity (i.e., communication and visual identity, behavior, corporate culture, and market conditions) were developed. Xcaret identifies itself as a place of genuine cultural expressions of Mexico (“Experiencias Xcaret,” n.d; Molleda & Jain, 2011). Therefore, participants were

asked to evaluate the extent to which they experienced these cultural expressions of Mexico during their visit to Xcaret (Table 3-4).

Table 3-4. Survey instrument (Part II)

Mexican culture and traditions are reflected in Xcaret's

Colors, symbols, and other visuals in the park
Marketing and advertising
Building and architecture
Employees' action and behavior
Shows and activities
Mission
Food
Music
Art and handicrafts

Further, to evaluate if visitors' experience was consistent with their opinions about park's reputation, this study used the approach that Bromley (1993) and J. Grunig and Hung (2002) suggested. Participants were asked to think about the park and then evaluate a set of four statements that describe whether their visit fulfilled their expectations from Xcaret (Table 3-5).

Table 3-5. Survey instrument (Part III)

Xcaret has been much like I

Expected
Imagined
Read or heard about
Hoped

The merit of using this approach to measure visitors' experience against park's reputation is that the survey participants did not need to forcibly provide a list of things that describe the park and then evaluate whether their experience was consistent with them (Bromley, 1993). Instead, the survey simply asked them to evaluate their experiences against their expectations from Xcaret and their visit.

The fourth section asked participants to evaluate their relationship with the park after their visit. These statements were adapted from the instrument developed by Hon and J. Grunig (1999) and revised by Yang (2007) to measure the quality of organization-public relationships. This section contained a set of 14 statements measuring visitors' level of trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction with the park (Table 3-6).

Table 3-6. Survey instrument (Part IV)

Items on relational outcomes measurement scale

- The park treats visitors fairly
 - The park is concerned with visitors' interests
 - The park delivered on its marketing/advertising claims
 - The park will include visitors' feedback in its decisions
 - The park has the ability to accomplish its goals
 - The park cares for long-term commitment with visitors
 - The park is trying to cultivate a relationship with visitors
 - The park wants to establish a long-lasting bond with visitors
 - The park values relationship with visitors
 - I am confident about park's hospitality skills
 - I am happy with the park
 - I had happy interaction with the park
 - I will visit the park again
 - I will recommend the park to friends and family
-

Finally, demographics and information about participants' visits and sources of information about Xcaret were collected in the final section that asked participants questions regarding their age, gender, country of origin, time spent in the park, number of previous visits, and the sources from which they obtained information about the park (Table 3-7).

Translation is an important factor in international research where the participants' language of communication could be different from that of the researcher (Park, 2001; Wu, Taylor, & Chen, 2001). The face-to-face intercept survey instrument was written in English and translated into Spanish by a bilingual translator. Following Brislin's (1970)

recommendations, the Spanish instrument was back-translated into English by another bilingual speaker to ensure accuracy. After careful examination, the Spanish Instrument was found to be consistent in meaning with the original English version.

Table 3-7. Survey instrument (Part V)

Questions about demographics, attributes of the visit, and sources of information
Age
Gender
Country of origin
Time spent in the park
Previous visits
Sources
Media (Newspaper, TV, Radio)
Park's website
Some other website
Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
Friends and family
Park's brochure, flier, or poster
Others

Pretest of Survey Instrument

Before the full-scale data collection began, the survey instrument was shared with Xcaret' chief communication officer and marketing research director to obtain their feedback on measurement items. The two practitioners suggested simplifying and shortening the scale to measure relational outcomes. In addition, some items were problematic when translated into Spanish. Therefore, the researcher re-worded the items on this scale and conducted a pretest of the survey instrument with 40 visitors of Xcaret between February 7 and February 10, 2012.

Three of the items on the original relational outcomes scale were found to be problematic during the pretest. The pretest participants commented that these items were not clear. These items also obtained low means and large standard deviations during data analysis and hence were dropped. In addition, the marketing research team

provided suggestions regarding rewording the rest of the items on the original scale. The feedback from the communication professionals and the pretest helped refine the measurement items and make them relevant to the park and its visitors. The revised and re-worded scale contained 11 items, as shown in Table 3-8.

As Table 3-8 shows, the revised scale contained items that reflect visitors' intended behaviors to seek information about the park, visit it again, and recommend it to family and friends. These items served to evaluate the value of public relations efforts by investigating the influence of perceived organizational authenticity on outcomes such as public's intended behavior, actions, and decisions.

Table 3-8. Revised survey instrument (Part IV)

Items on relational outcomes measurement scale

Employees of Xcaret treat visitors well
 Employees of Xcaret are concerned with visitors' interests
 Employees of Xcaret are capable of delivering on the park's promises
 I would like to learn more about Xcaret
 I would like to receive regular information from Xcaret
 I would like to visit Xcaret again
 I would like to recommend Xcaret to friends and family
 I am happy with Xcaret
 I am pleased with Xcaret
 I enjoyed myself at Xcaret
 I liked Xcaret

Data Gathering Protocols

All participants in the study approved the IRB consent form that explained the conditions of anonymity and confidentiality (Appendix A-C). The park provided a display card to the researcher that said, "I am making a TV show on Xcaret," which facilitated her in approaching the survey and interview participants. The researcher showed the card to park's visitors to seek their attention and then briefed the participants about the purpose of the study, its risks and benefits, the time required, and what it involves. They

were also informed about the voluntary participation guidelines and their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time. The contact information of the principal investigator and IRB at the University of Florida were shared with the participants. Following which, the actual data collection began. The focus group and interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription and data analysis.

While, all the marketing and public relations practitioners understand and speak English, a few focus group participants expressed some of their thoughts in Spanish. In fact, the researcher encouraged the participants to choose either language that best communicated their ideas and comments. After a response was obtained in Spanish, one of the focus group participants translated it into English for the researcher to understand and follow up, if the need be. In this manner, the researcher was able to obtain rich insights into the participants' experiences while maintaining an uninterrupted flow in the participants' thought process. During data analysis, all the responses in Spanish were again translated into English by a bilingual speaker.

Data Analysis

The data from focus group and in-depth interviews was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify specific themes emerging from the responses. Thematic analysis, a characteristic of most qualitative research, identifies groups of codes that recur through being similar or connected to each other in a patterned way (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Buetow, 2010; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested several ways to identify themes in textual analysis of data: repetitions, indigenous typologies or categories, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data, and theory related material.

Following Ryan and Bernard's suggestions, a summary of the findings were compiled with specific themes and verbatim quotes as illustrations.

Survey data were entered in and analyzed with IBM® SPSS® Statistics 19 and IBM® SPSS® Amos 20.0.0 for Windows. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were computed. An exploratory factor analysis was used to explore the dimensionality of the perceived organizational authenticity measurement scale as well as the relational outcomes. Factor analysis is recommended to explore the underlying structure in set of variables when no a priori theory of the relationship between indicators and factors is known (Dunteman, 1989; Kim & Mueller, 1978; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). In this case, the researcher explored all the potential factors of an indicator. Since, the scales used in this study were modified (some items were dropped or reworded and new items were added) from the way they have been previously used, factor analysis is an appropriate method to explore scale dimensionality. A Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) with a Direct Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization rotation was used to extract components that explained maximum variance in the observed variables that measured perceived organizational authenticity and relational outcomes. The internal consistency of the scales was assessed using a Cronbach's alpha reliability test.

To explore the third and fourth research questions and the corresponding hypotheses regarding the relationship between perceived organizational authenticity, identity, reputation, and relational outcomes, multiple statistical analyses were carried out. Spearman rho correlations and multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the individual relationships between variables i.e., identity, reputation, perceived organizational authenticity, and relational outcomes. Further, to test the

proposed theoretical model a path analysis was carried out using the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation (Figure 3-2). Model fit indicators χ^2/df , CFI, and RMSEA were used to examine the goodness-of-fit of the proposed theoretical model.

To examine the fifth, sixth, and seventh research questions, a series of T-tests and correlation analyses using Spearman rho coefficients were conducted. To explore the variation in perceived organizational authenticity with age (H7), correlation analysis with Spearman rho coefficients was used. The variations in perceived organizational authenticity with national origin (H8) and gender (H9) were assessed using T-tests statistics. Similarly, correlation analysis was used to examine the association between perceived organizational authenticity and the amount of time spent that a visitor spent in the park (H10), and number of previous visits to the park (H11). Finally, the last research question was explored using multiple regression analysis to determine if perceptions of authenticity vary with the type of sources from which visitors obtained information about the park.

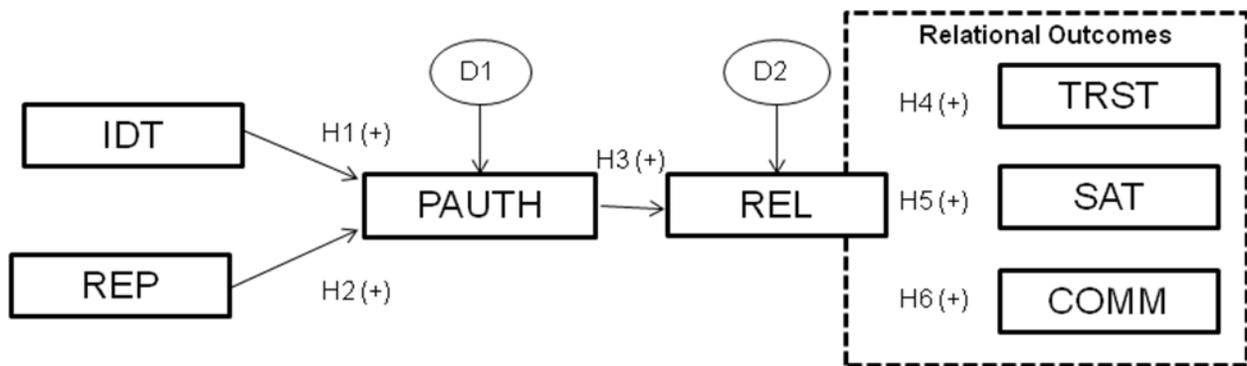


Figure 3-2. Path model identifying linkages between identity, reputation, perceived organizational authenticity, and relational outcomes

The study's methodological concerns regarding the reliability and validity of qualitative data and the ways in which it tries to control and minimize them are described in the next section.

Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data

Reliability and validity of qualitative data is defined as an evaluation of its trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009). In this study, several measures were followed to ensure trustworthiness of the data obtained from focus groups and in-depth interviews. Creswell (2009) suggested that researchers use triangulation, or a combination of methods to collect the data to improve trust in the study's findings. In this study, data were collected using focus group, in-depth interviews, and survey questionnaires.

Along these lines, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended thick description and maintaining an audit of the research process to enhance the credibility of the qualitative findings. Both of these recommendations were followed by the researcher by keeping the original audio files and transcripts of the focus group and interviews, as well as a detailed record of the data collection process.

The next chapter presents the qualitative and quantitative findings of this study, followed by the discussion and conclusion that discuss the findings and their implications to the theory and practice of public relations. Specific contributions and limitations of the study and avenues of future research are also presented.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

This study used a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the research questions and test the proposed hypotheses. Focus group and in-depth interviews with 11 marketing and public relations practitioners, face-to-face intercept surveys with 545 visitors, and interviews with 16 international visitors were conducted to test the proposed perceived organizational authenticity (POA) model and measurement scale. In this chapter, these findings are articulated and presented.

Qualitative Findings

Focus Group and In-depth Interviews with Marketing and Public Relations Practitioners

The first research question explored the roles and responsibilities of Xcaret's marketing and public relations professionals in the construction, execution, and promotion of identity, authenticity, and reputation of the park and its main special events. This question was examined using a focus group with the marketing and public relations communication technicians and in-depth interviews with the chief communication officer and the art director of the park. The purpose of keeping the conversation with managers separate from communication technicians was to avoid the influence of supervisors on subordinates' opinions.

Both the focus group and interviews started by each member describing their respective role in the marketing and public relations department and the amount of time they have served in their current position. The major public relations roles that focus group participants identified were media executives, graphic designer, head of public relations- Xcaret, public relations chief- Xcaret, Rivera Maya media executive, and social media executive. Participants' experience in their current position varied from six-

months to 10 years. The chief communication officer indicated working with Xcaret for 19 years and the art director for eight years.

History and heritage of Xcaret

During the interview, the chief communication officer described Xcaret as an outcome of one man's vision, an owner of Xcaret, Miguel Quintana. Quintana established Xcaret "as a place where people can enjoy nature," the respondent explained. However, because of his love and admiration of the Mexican culture, Quintana eventually transformed Xcaret from an ecological park to a cultural one. When Quintana first proposed to introduce a show to demonstrate Mexico's culture through performances, the internal members were surprised, because culture was not a part of Xcaret's original identity. Though, Quintana eventually convinced the park's internal members of his philosophy that "culture develops in natural environment. There is no culture in the world that developed in places that have not invested in natural environment," the chief communication officer described. Therefore over time, the essence of Xcaret's identity developed to be a balanced representation of the natural and cultural richness of Mexico. This history and heritage of Xcaret define what it is today, its values, and its offerings.

Xcaret's identity and mission

An organization's identity is described by the set of attributes and characteristics that members ascribe to it. Therefore, to understand the identity of Xcaret from the perspective of its members, focus group participants and the interviewees were asked to describe Xcaret in their own words. This also served to understand what aspects of Xcaret are most prominently communicated to its external publics by the members of its marketing and public relations departments.

In general, participants and interviewees described Xcaret as a place that personifies Mexico and its culture. When the researcher asked what Xcaret is, one focus group participant enthusiastically said, “Mexico.” The participant who has served as a media executive for about a year and a half further elaborated, “people, who just visit Rivera Maya or Cancun, do not find a lot of culture. But, if you visit Xcaret, you can experience everything about Mexico.” Another participant described Xcaret as a beautiful cultural and natural habitat that manifests Mexico’s values and traditions. She added, “we hope that all the people who come here [Xcaret] find it unique, experience everything, and be proud of us Mexicans.”

All participants agreed that Xcaret is a place that offers unique experiences to its visitors. One of the features that differentiate Xcaret from other parks is its exclusive geography and location, as described by the chief communication officer. The respondent explained:

There is no place like Xcaret anywhere else. Mexican culture is Mexican culture, so you can have the same idea anywhere else but it will be unique to that country and that culture and that nature. The concept could be the same but not the experience.

Reflecting on the cultural diversity of Mexico, a focus group participant who has worked with the park for over five years said, “Xcaret is the only place where you can see so many things from all over Mexico in just one place.” Reflecting on the negative associations about Mexico, the head of public relations said that Xcaret is a place that demonstrates its love to Mexico where people can come and forget about violence, war, and drug; the negative stereotypes that the country is often associated with.

In addition to Mexican cultural heritage, Xcaret is also associated with ancient Mayan culture, which is incorporated in the park’s archaeological sites, shows, and

performances. A media executive explained that several visitors come to Xcaret looking for Mayan culture and get inspired to acquire more knowledge about the history of this culture. Emphasizing this cultural association, a media executive also contrasted Xcaret with Disney: “When you go to Disney, you go on rides and have fun, but in Xcaret you have fun and learn something about the Mexican and Mayan cultures.”

In sum, members define Xcaret’s identity as a place that has preserved Mexican and Mayan cultures and traditions for visitors to learn about in a fun and exciting way.

Communication practitioners as storytellers

As a common theme, marketing and public relations practitioners described their roles as storytellers responsible for communicating Xcaret’s values and philosophy to its publics. The chief communication officer said, “our job is to tell the story of what is behind the scenes.” There are several dimensions of Xcaret’s identity, and marketing and public relations are responsible for communicating those to its myriad publics. The respondent added:

It [Xcaret] generates lots of stories every day. Most of public relations practitioners usually have to invent or create stories. We do have the stories. It is hard to choose which ones to tell.

Expressing the challenges of communicating the various facets of Xcaret’s identity to its diverse publics, the art director described his role as a translator between Quintana’s vision of Xcaret and people’s expectations of the park.

Because of Xcaret’s multifaceted identity, the researcher asked the marketing and public relations practitioners about the key aspects and features of the park that they emphasize in their communication with external publics. To this question, a graphic designer responded, “it is a challenge to show people what they will experience in the park and get them excited even before they see it [Xcaret].” The participant expressed

the difficulty of articulating the experience that Xcaret offers in a few pictures or words. Similarly, the Rivera Maya media executive who is responsible for coordinating local, national, and international media visits to Xcaret explained that it is hard to imagine what Xcaret is unless journalists visit the park to directly experience its various elements and activities. A media executive explained, “sometimes when I receive a media request to shoot a TV show on Xcaret, the journalist has no idea what Xcaret truly is.”

The art director said that he deals with this challenge by communicating the various elements of the park but “never exceeding the expectations of what people will actually see.” Explaining this with an example, he said:

When people see a Toucan on our brochure they want to come see a Toucan but it’s not just the Toucan, it’s the place, the sounds that you hear. So you come to expect the Toucan but when you are here it’s the ambience, which is hundred times more than what you expected to see.

The respondents emphasized that the park’s marketing and public relations are cautious about not over-promoting the park and its offerings. According to the chief communication officer the aim of all communication is to “show more than what they [public] want, less of what they will get, knowing that they will be satisfied.” Overall, the marketing and public relations managers expressed that the park is aware of its offerings to the visitors and does not promise anything that it will not be able to deliver.

Xcaret as an “experience”

The term “experiences” was used multiple times by all the members as an identifying feature of Xcaret. A media executive said “in other parks you enjoy what you see while in Xcaret what you feel.” To this another member added that the mission of Xcaret is to make people happy by providing them with a fun experience in the park.

Since Xcaret's marketing and public relations promote the park as an experience, the department is constantly looking for creating possibilities for media and people to directly experience the park and its offerings. The Riviera Maya media executive explained that Xcaret uses media as a tool to promote the park and is constantly looking for opportunities for media visits. In fact, Xcaret's head of public relations is responsible for developing possibilities for media and guests to directly observe the park and get familiarized with its values, mission, and services (e.g. media and familiarization tours, special events, festivals, etc.).

In this process, public relations practitioners described their role as facilitators who help guests experience Xcaret by sharing their personal stories, feelings, and emotions with guests. As a common theme, public relations practitioners emphasized that they all have personal memories associated with Xcaret that they often narrate to guests. A participant summed it up when she said, "it is fairly obvious that we all have our own passions about here [Xcaret] and by talking to people who want to know about the park, you can transmit that passion."

Communication practitioners as ambassadors of Xcaret

When describing the role of marketing and public relations, a graphic designer called the department the "face" of Xcaret or people's "first contact" with the park. Participants unanimously agreed that being the first impression that people have of the park, public relations bears great responsibility to communicate the true essence of Xcaret and what it stands for.

One of the ways in which public relations engages and interacts with targeted publics is through social media. Describing his role as a social media executive, a participant said that he is responsible to "humanize" the social media interface for

visitors, so that they feel that they are talking to an actual person. As a group, participants expressed their passion in making every experience a memory for visitors. Some of these memories are captured in the comment books that Xcaret's management has placed all around the park. The purpose of the comment books is to gather visitor feedback and use it to improve visitors' experience. The Rivera Maya media executive mentioned that the park's staff reads the comments at regular intervals during a day to address any concerns or issues that guests might have encountered during their visit. The participants said that they feel extremely proud when visitors describe Xcaret as "paradise," "magical place," or an "amazing experience". Overall, participants said that they considered themselves as bearers of the park's mission to be a doorway into Mexico's culture and biodiversity.

Reviving Xcaret's identity

The chief communications officer mentioned that one of public relations challenges is to constantly revive the identity of Xcaret, not only for visitors but also for people who sell tours to Xcaret. The tour operators are considered a strategic public for the park who actively participate in the construction and communication of Xcaret's image. The art director mentioned that he conducts extensive discussions with tour operators to understand the features that should be prominent on Xcaret's communication materials. As a consequence, Xcaret is constantly reviving its identity. The park's communication campaign has evolved from its initial message of "Admire Mexico" to the subsequent themes "Get Amazed," "Make an Expression," and most recently, "I am Mexico." Xcaret's current communication campaign, "Soy Mexico" (I am Mexico) is designed to engage visitors from all over the world by telling them that they become a part of Mexico by visiting Xcaret.

Integrating public relations with core business

A key to public relations' success is its integration to the overall business strategy of Xcaret. The chief communication officer works closely with the owners of the park, particularly on matters that involve communication with external publics, such as the media. The interviewee described her relationship with the president as that of a peer who counsels and consults him on organizational issues, opportunities, and challenges.

Personal involvement and identification

During the conversation with focus group participants and interviewees, an interesting theme emerged that of personal involvement and identification of marketing and public relations practitioners with Xcaret and its philosophy. When asked to describe their role in the current position, several members added, "I love my job." One member who has been working with Xcaret for over five years said that for her Xcaret represents "a lifestyle because even when you know you have to come to work every day, you always learn something that you take home with you and use." Another member who works as a media executive commented, "it's an experience that Xcaret can give you as an employee and teach you a lot."

When asked how the participants would describe their job, the head of public relations of Xcaret said "It is my second home. I am very proud of my job because I know when my family or people I know are going to visit Xcaret they are going to be proud of Mexico and they will forget all the violence and narcotraffic."

One member who works as a social media executive narrated a story about a group of children with cancer who visited Xcaret a day before the focus group was held. Each child participated in the release of the turtles program sponsored by Xcaret. As part of the program, Xcaret raises the turtles until they are 15 months old and then

releases them in hopes of providing them with a better chance of survival as they grow. Each child got to name a turtle and release it into the ocean. The member described his experience with these kids as heart touching and something that he could only feel while working for Xcaret. He further added that experiences like these make his job meaningful and gratifying.

Overall, members expressed that their association with Xcaret is a source of pride and satisfaction for them. This personal identification and involvement of members with Xcaret manifests itself in their daily activities and interaction with publics.

Researcher's experience

The focus group and interviews were conducted in a friendly and positive environment. The marketing and public relations practitioners seemed to enjoy working with each other and the managers seemed to support the subordinates using a participatory management style. All members of the focus group expressed their opinions about the topic in an open and cheerful manner. Participants often used narratives to support their views, which added to the richness of the data obtained during the focus group and interviews. As the managers did not participate in the focus group, it is reasonable to assume that participants expressed their opinions without influence or reservations. Participants approached the researcher in a friendly manner and at the end of the focus group asked her to describe her experience in the park. A social media executive instantly tweeted about the focus group while it was about to begin. In sum, the researcher was impressed by the level of detail and knowledge that Xcaret's marketing and public relations practitioners seemed to possess and the key insights she obtained during her conversation with them.

Interviews with International Visitors

Sixteen interviews with international visitors of Xcaret were conducted to further understand the reputation of the park, examine the experiences of visitors, motivations of visit, and assess their relationship with Xcaret. The interviews provided an opportunity to gain more insights into the quantitative findings and further our understanding about the relationship between perceived organizational authenticity, identity, reputation, and organization-public relational outcomes.

Xcaret: An authentic representation of Mexico

When asked to describe Xcaret, visitors acknowledged that Xcaret is a special and unique place and concept that represents Mexico's natural and cultural richness. For instance, a visitor from the United States said, "Xcaret is a treasure and a gem for Mexico and the country should be proud of what Xcaret has done to create a good representation of not only Yucatan but all of Mexico." Another participant from India called Xcaret a cohesive place to represent the wide range of Mexican culture, "I have been to six provinces in Mexico but I did not know anything about their culture and just a day's trip to Xcaret revealed a lot of things about the Mexican culture from flying men to regional dances." Another respondent from Canada who was re-visiting Xcaret after 20 years remarked, "I am amazed that it [Xcaret] still looks like the 19th century Mexico that I remember from my last trip."

In general, respondents admired the multidisciplinary nature of the park where natural and cultural expressions of Mexico are manifested in park's landscape, music, food, architecture, employees' attire, and the shows and activities. As a common theme, interviewees described Xcaret as a multidisciplinary theme park that offers a range of attractions and activities for people of all ages and preferences. Another visitor from the

United States summed it up, “it’s like theme park meets zoo meets the ocean meets the culture. It’s like a one stop shop for everything.”

Authentic cultural experience not a travel motive

In a tourism setting, perceptions of authenticity are contingent upon what travelers are seeking from a destination. During the interviews, visitors were asked to describe their reason to visit Xcaret and whether their expectations were met. In response to this question, all the interviewees said that their principal reason for visiting Xcaret was to have fun and spend a day with their family and friends. Therefore, the researcher asked the interviewees to describe some characteristics of such a place. As a common theme during the interviews, none of the visitors expressed their interest in Mexican culture or history as their motivation to visit Xcaret. In their description of a “fun place,” visitors used terms such as beaches, an underground river, wild animals, good food, music, and entertainment through activities and shows. For instance, a visitor from Canada said, “the impression we had of the park was more of a party atmosphere, having fun, and drinks and yet, when you land and spend time with indigenous people here you get an entirely different experience.”

The researcher followed up by asking the interviewees about their desire to experience Mexican or Mayan culture at Xcaret. To this one respondent from Canada said, “well, that is a plus, but I was not here to experience that as I have already seen Tulum and Chichen Itza.” However, most participants expressed their desire to watch the night show “Mexico Spectacular,” which is a collection of cultural performances from the various states of Mexico. Again, respondents stated entertainment as their principal reason to watch the show rather than a desire to experience Mexican culture.

Visitors' experience and engagement

Nevertheless, several dimensions of authenticity were implicitly or explicitly expressed by visitors in their description of overall experience at and engagement with Xcaret. Most visitors found the natural environment of Xcaret authentic and commended the park for preserving the landscapes in their natural state and not contaminating the nature with anything artificial or synthetic. A visitor from India said, "Xcaret represents how a person has preserved nature to create a place for culture to prosper and flourish."

Visitors also remarked about the originality or uniqueness of Xcaret as a tourism attraction by describing the park as a "natural wonder" with a unique confluence of nature and culture. A visitor from Canada pointed out, "Xcaret is very different from the parks we see in Orlando or other places. You will not see such architecture and natural setting in any other theme parks of the world."

Some visitors also stated that they enjoyed visiting the Mayan ruins within the park and the performances about Mayan traditions. The park strives to provide its visitors with an experience of this historic culture by preserving the Mayan ruins, delivering performances that educate people about this culture, and by selling artifacts that are representative of Mayan culture. It should be noted that during the last three days of this research, the shows demonstrating Mayan traditions were canceled in preparation of a new show that the park will launch this year. Therefore, some interviewees had not seen these performances at the time of the interviews. However, the visitors who watched the performances praised Xcaret's association with history. A visitor from Canada said, "it [Xcaret] is reminiscent of all Mexico as it takes you back in ancient times." Another participant from London explained how the park takes its visitors on a journey in history and inspires them to respect where they have come from.

Visitors also liked Xcaret's efforts to conserve the environment as well as an ancient civilization. A couple from London who booked a tour to ancient Mayan sites in Mexico during their visit to Xcaret mentioned that the park inspired them to gain better understanding of this ancient culture. They said, "we feel good about visiting Xcaret and respect it for donating a sum of their earnings to the preservation of the Mayan culture." Visitors also admired the park for its sustainability efforts and eco-friendly practices.

Finally, visitors also commented on the exceptional nature of services that Xcaret and its employees provide. A visitor from India said, "I am amazed at how well I am treated here, in a land where I am a foreigner and people do not understand my language that well."

Overall, international visitors mostly commented on their overall experience being fun and satisfactory due largely to their interaction with the natural elements of the park rather than the culture. When asked, most participants could not describe anything that they learned about the Mexican culture and traditions during their visit to Xcaret. Interestingly, a visitor from Canada said, "there is no such thing as the Mexican culture as it is not as homogenous." This could possibly explain the lack of engagement of respondents with Mexican culture and traditions at Xcaret. While the park strives to develop a cultural understanding among participants, it is hard for international visitors to get engaged and feel an active part of the traditions because of a lack of prior knowledge about the subtle cues that constitute a culture. This was also pointed out by a visitor from India who was vacationing with his son at Xcaret. The respondent said, "I want my son to learn about the culture here, but it is hard [...] while he might remember the flying men, he will not remember its cultural significance."

Perceptions about Mexico

Another theme across all responses related to respondents' change of perceptions about Mexico. In general, respondents stated that they were wary about their visit to Mexico because of its negative associations with crime, violence, and drug trafficking. However, their visit to Xcaret revealed an entirely new perspective about Mexico and its people. A visitor from the United States said, "my friends warned me about this place [Mexico] and asked me to stay cautious and now, I want to go back and recommend them to visit Mexico and Xcaret." Another participant from Canada said, "I did not know that Mexicans are so polite." Overall, respondents praised Xcaret for changing their perceptions about Mexico.

More satisfaction, less commitment

In response to the question regarding a long term relationship with Xcaret, a respondent from Canada said,

the problem as tourists is that you cannot just focus on one thing. There is so much to do. You probably gotta go to the next thing. Time is valuable and there is so much more to see.

This was a common theme among all the respondents. While visitors expressed their satisfaction with Xcaret and even mentioned recommending the park to their friends and family, no one expressed a desire to keep in touch with the park or actively seek information about it. This was a surprising finding considering many respondents were re-visiting Xcaret. This might suggest that relational satisfaction describes international visitors' relationship with the park better than relational commitment.

Researcher's experience

The interviews were conducted while participants were waiting for the last show of the day in Xcaret's auditorium. This place and time was suggested by the marketing and

public relations professionals as the most appropriate setting to conduct interviews. This gave the researcher an opportunity to examine respondents' views and thoughts after they had spent an entire day at the park experiencing its various elements, activities, performance, and shows. On the downside, some participants gave short answers because of exhaustion from the day's activities. However, the researcher followed-up short responses with requests to elaborate or reworded the question. In general, the interviews were conducted in a friendly and positive manner. Respondents seemed excited to share their experiences with the researcher. A few respondents also wanted to know more about the study's purpose that the researcher explained at length after the interview was over. In general, the interviews provided valuable insights about visitors' experiences at a tourism destination and their motivations to visit a theme park such as Xcaret.

Quantitative Findings

Face-to-Face Intercept Survey with Visitors

Sample description

A total of 570 surveys were collected of which 25 were discarded due to incomplete data. Table 4-1 presents the demographic and visit-specific details of the 545 participants in the final sample. The participants' age varied from 12 to 85 years with an average age of about 38 years ($SD = 14.6$). Over half of the survey participants identified themselves as females ($n = 301, 55\%$) and about 60 percent as international visitors ($n = 325$).

The average amount of time that participants indicated they had spent in the park at the time of data collection was about nine hours ($SD = 2.4$) with a minimum indicated as one hour and maximum 12. Most of the survey participants were visiting Xcaret for

the first time ($n = 383$, 70.3%). However of those who had visited the park before ($n = 149$, 27.3%), most visitors indicated that this was their third visit to Xcaret ($n = 57$, 10.5%).

Table 4-1. Profile of survey participants

N= 545	#	%
Age		
Average	38 years	
Range	73 (12-85 years)	
Standard Deviation	14.6	
Gender		
Male	236	43.3
Female	301	55.2
Country of residence		
Mexico	220	40.4
International	325	59.6
Times Spent		
Average	8.92 hours	
Range	11 (1-12 hours)	
Standard Deviation	2.409	
First visit to Xcaret		
Yes	383	70.3
No	149	27.3
Number of Previous Visits		
1	49	9
2	57	10.5
3	23	4.2
4	7	1.3
5	4	0.7
6	1	0.2
7	7	1.3
Source of Information about Xcaret		
News media	127	23.3
Park's website	121	22.2
Some other website	43	7.9
Social Media	60	11
Family and friends	340	62.4
Park's brochure or flier	140	25.7
Other sources	60	11

Participants were also asked to indicate the source from where they obtained information about Xcaret. As Table 4-1 shows, most participants heard about the park from friends and family or word-of-mouth ($n = 340, 62.4\%$). Park's brochure, flier, or other promotional materials ($n = 140, 25.7$) was indicated as the second most frequently used source of information about Xcaret, followed by news media ($n = 127, 23.3\%$), and the park's website ($n = 121, 22.2\%$).

Dimensions of perceived organizational authenticity

The second research question in this study explored the dimensions of perceived organizational authenticity. The construct of perceived organizational authenticity was examined using a measurement scale with 10 items. Authenticity is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct in scholarly literature. Therefore, this study used Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) with a Direct Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization rotation to extract components that explained maximum variance in the observed variables that measured perceived authenticity of Xcaret. The choice of direct oblimin over the varimax rotation was justified by a -0.6 correlation between the two factors, which reflected enough variance to warrant oblique rotation (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991).

For this study, PAF was an appropriate method to extract the dimensions of authenticity. Scholars recommend factor analysis to explore the underlying structure in set of variables when no a priori theory of the relationship between indicators and factors is known (Dunteman, 1989; Kim & Mueller, 1978; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). As the review of existing research suggested, there are no previous attempts to develop a measurement scale of perceived authenticity of organizations, with an exception of Molleda and Jain (2011). However, their scale evaluated perceived authenticity of a special event, while this study examines the perceived authenticity of an organization, in

this case, Xcaret. To fit the purpose of this study, the scale of Molleda and Jain was revised and reworded to capture the experiences of participants in a tourism setting.

Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) recommended Kaiser's rule to extract all factors with an eigenvalue of more than or equal to one. Applying this rule and the scree plot method, a two-factor solution of perceived authenticity was obtained. Table 4-2 presents the factor loadings for the component matrix and the means and standard deviation of the items.

The first factor of the two-factor model represented 55 percent of the variance in the latent variable, perceived authenticity and the second factor explained 11 percent. All the items in the two factors obtained a factor loading of greater than or equal to 0.6 and therefore were considered meaningful (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Similar to Molleda and Jain's (2011) study, the first factor was named "*overall experience*" and the second factor "*active engagement*."

Overall experience: The first factor evaluated participants' *overall experience* during their visit to Xcaret. This factor contained six items qualifying the degree to which participants' visit was fun, satisfactory, memorable, comfortable, unique, and extraordinary on a five-point Likert scale. The means of the items varied from 4.25 to 4.56, with the item "My visit has been memorable" obtaining the highest and the item "My visit has been comfortable" the lowest. The items in this factor obtained factor loadings in the range of 0.7 to 0.9.

Active engagement: The second factor, *active engagement*, reflected the degree to which participants' visit to Xcaret inspired them to value Mexican culture and traditions, to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions, to advocate for

conserving Mexican culture and traditions, and the degree to which participants felt an active part of Mexican culture and traditions. The four items obtained means of 4.45, 4.46, 4.50, and 4.21 respectively, on a five-point Likert scale. The respective factor loadings of these items were -0.8, -0.9, -0.9, and -0.6.

Both the factors were saved as variables while conducting the factor analysis. In addition, Cronbach's alpha values of the two factors were computed to examine the internal consistency of the items that measure them. Both the factors obtained an internal consistency of 0.9.

Table 4-2. Dimensions of perceived organizational authenticity: Factor loadings, eigenvalues, and percentages of variance explained using Principal Axis Factor analysis

Items	Factors		M	SD
	Overall Experience	Active Engagement		
My visit has been fun	0.678		4.48	0.72
My visit has been satisfactory	0.735		4.51	0.69
My visit has been memorable	0.812		4.56	0.72
My visit has been comfortable	0.673		4.25	0.91
My visit has been unique	0.773		4.47	0.77
My visit has been extraordinary	0.897		4.41	0.84
My visit has inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more		-0.827	4.45	0.76
My visit has inspired me to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions		-0.963	4.46	0.76
My visit has inspired me to advocate for conserving Mexican culture and traditions		-0.909	4.50	0.74
During my visit, I felt active part of Mexican culture and traditions		-0.600	4.21	0.95
% of variance explained	56.74	15.00		
Eigenvalues	5.7	1.5		

Notes. ^a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Direct Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

Dimensions of relational outcomes

The composite scale of relational outcomes comprised of three-items to measure *trust*, five-items to measure *satisfaction*, and three-items to measure *commitment*.

Instead of using a sum or average of the items to make composites for each of these three variables, Principal Axis Factoring with Direct Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization was used. The factor loadings, eigenvalues, percentages of variance explained, means, and standard deviation are presented in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3. Dimensions of relational outcomes: Factor loadings, eigenvalues, and percentages of variance explained using Principal Axis Factor analysis

Items	Factors			M	SD
	Satisfaction	Trust	Commitment		
I am happy with Xcaret	0.902			4.56	0.69
I am pleased with Xcaret	0.875			4.55	0.69
I enjoyed myself at Xcaret	0.981			4.60	0.65
I liked Xcaret	0.945			4.63	0.64
I will recommend Xcaret to family and friends	0.610			4.69	0.68
Treats visitors well		0.896		4.63	0.62
Concerned with visitors' interests		0.867		4.60	0.66
Capable of delivering on promises				4.62	0.65
Like to learn more about Xcaret			0.848	4.24	1.00
Like to receive regular information from Xcaret			0.794	3.85	1.32
Like to visit Xcaret again			0.511	4.46	0.94
% of variance explained	59.80	13.15	8.55		
Eigenvalues	6.6	1.4	0.94		

Notes. ^a. Rotation converged in 12 iterations.

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Direct Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

The first factor (*satisfaction*) represented about 60 percent of the variance in relational outcomes, the second factor (*trust*) attributed for 13 percent, and the third factor (*commitment*) explained nine percent of the variance. While the third factor

obtained an eigenvalue of 0.9, it was retained because of its theoretical conceptualization in this study.

The means of items in *satisfaction* varied from 4.55 to 4.69, with the highest mean for the item “I will recommend Xcaret to family and friends” and the lowest for “I am pleased with Xcaret”. The factor loadings of items in this dimension ranged from 0.6 to 0.9. All the items in *trust* received about the same means of 4.6 and their factor loadings varied from 0.7 to 0.9. Finally, the items in the third dimension of relational outcomes i.e. *commitment*, received means in range of 3.85 to 4.46, with the lowest mean reported for the item “I would like to receive regular information from Xcaret” and highest for the item “I would like to visit Xcaret again.”

Identity and reputation

Xcaret identifies itself as a special place that represents all of Mexico and its cultural diversity. Therefore, this study measured the extent to which visitors observed or noticed the manifestations of Mexico’s cultural traditions in the park and its various elements such as food, music, artifacts, buildings and architecture, and activities and shows. The study also investigated visitors’ experience in the park against its reputation by asking them to evaluate the extent to which their visit met their expectations from Xcaret. On a five-point Likert-scale, the means and standard deviation of these items are presented in Table 4-4.

The item, “Employees actions and behavior” obtained the highest evaluation in terms of its perceived association to Mexican culture and traditions and Xcaret’s “Marketing and advertising,” and “Mission” obtained the lowest. All the items regarding the degree to which participants’ experience in the park matched their expectations obtained similar means.

Table 4-4. Means and standard deviation of items on identity and reputation scales

Items	M	SD
Mexican culture and traditions are reflected in Xcaret's		
Colors, symbols, and other visual elements	4.51	0.660
Marketing and advertising	4.17	1.018
Buildings and architecture	4.46	0.774
Employees actions and behavior	4.53	0.729
Shows and activities	4.39	0.923
Mission	4.16	1.126
Food	4.29	0.979
Music	4.34	0.965
Art and handicrafts	4.50	0.775
Xcaret has been much like I		
Expected	4.35	0.911
Imagined	4.34	0.885
Read or heard about	4.37	0.860
Hoped	4.40	0.858

Perceived organizational authenticity, identity, and reputation

The third research question in this study examined the relationship between identity, reputation, and perceived organizational authenticity. Two hypotheses corresponding to this research question were explored. These hypotheses were approached using a variety of statistical tests. First, Spearman rho correlations between the composite scores of the items measuring each variable were computed (Table 4-5).

Table 4-5. Correlation between identity, reputation, and perceived organizational authenticity and its dimensions

Variables	Perceived organizational authenticity	Overall experience	Active engagement
Identity	0.667**	0.650**	0.588**
Reputation	0.664**	0.623**	0.615**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The perceived authenticity variable was found to have a significant positive correlation with both identity ($r = 0.667$, $p = 0.01$) and reputation ($r = 0.664$, $p = 0.01$). Also, the correlations between the two variables, identity and reputation, and the

dimensions of perceived organizational authenticity, *overall experience* and *active engagement* were significant and positive (Table 4-5).

After examining the relationship between the composite scores of the variables, multiple linear regression analyses were carried out to determine the degree of influence of independent variables identity and reputation on the dependent variable perceived organizational authenticity. First, regression equations were computed for the composite scores of the three variables. Both identity ($B = 0.362, p < 0.001$) and reputation ($B = 0.921, p < 0.001$) were found to have significant influence on perceived organizational authenticity. This model obtained an overall *R-square* of 0.549. Therefore, both H1 and H2 were supported demonstrating that the greater the stakeholders feel that their experience was consistent with an organization's identity and reputation, the greater is the perceived authenticity of the organization.

To further explore these relationships, multiple linear regressions were executed between the two perceived organizational authenticity dimensions (i.e., *overall experience* and *active engagement*) and the individual items used to measure identity and reputation. Four items corresponding to identity were found to have significant association with *overall experience*: "Visual identity" ($B = 0.250, p < 0.001$), "Buildings and architecture" ($B = 0.080, p < 0.1$), "Shows and activities" ($B = 0.117, p < 0.01$), and "Music" ($B = -0.084, p < 0.05$). Similarly, three items on the reputation scale were found to have significant relationship with *overall experience*: "Xcaret has been much like I expected" ($B = 0.231, p < 0.01$), "Xcaret has been much like I imagined" ($B = 0.119, p < 0.1$), and "Xcaret has been much like I hoped" ($B = 0.15, p < 0.01$). The overall *R-square* for this regression model was 0.508.

For the second dimension of perceived organizational authenticity i.e., *active engagement*, five items of identity had significant association: “Visual identity” ($B = 0.233, p < 0.01$), “Buildings and architecture” ($B = 0.139, p < 0.01$), “Employees actions and behavior” ($B = 0.109, p < 0.05$), Xcaret’s “Mission” ($B = 0.074, p < 0.05$), and “Food” ($B = -0.72, p < 0.1$). However, only two items of reputation obtained significant association with *active engagement*: “Xcaret has been much like I expected” ($B = 0.141, p < 0.5$) and “Xcaret has been much like I hoped” ($B = 0.164, p < 0.01$). This model obtained an overall *R-square* of 0.515.

Perceived organizational authenticity and relational outcomes

The fourth research question and the corresponding hypotheses examined the association between perceived organizational authenticity and organization-public relational outcomes. Three relational outcomes— *trust*, *commitment*, and *satisfaction* – were measured. Multiple statistical measures were again used to evaluate whether perceived authenticity enhances participants relationship with Xcaret. First, Spearman rho correlations were obtained between the composite scores of perceived organizational authenticity and relational outcomes (Table 4-6).

Table 4-6. Correlation between relational outcomes and perceived organizational authenticity

Variables	Perceived authenticity	Overall experience	Active engagement
Relational outcomes	0.727**	0.655**	0.678**
Satisfaction	0.657**	0.493**	0.516**
Trust	0.531**	0.602**	0.609**
Commitment	0.669**	0.587**	0.626**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Both variables were significantly and positively correlated ($r = 0.727, p = 0.01$). Further, associations between perceived organizational authenticity dimensions and relational outcomes were also found to be significant and positive. Finally, perceived

organizational authenticity and its dimensions were found to be significantly and positively associated with the dimensions of relational outcomes obtained using factor analysis.

After computing the correlations between the variables, a multiple linear regression was conducted between the dimensions of perceived organizational authenticity and the composite score of relational outcomes. Both *overall experience* ($B = 2.332, p < 0.001$) and *active engagement* ($B = 3.660, p < 0.001$) were found to have significant influence on the relational outcomes composite score. The overall *R-square* of this model was 0.439. Therefore, H3 was supported showing that perceived organizational authenticity has a positive influence on the quality of organization-public relationships.

The individual effects of items on perceived organizational authenticity scale were further explored by fitting a multiple regression between the items and the relational outcomes composite score. Six of the 10 items of perceived authenticity were found to have significant association with relational outcomes. These include “My visit to Xcaret has been fun” ($B = 1.159, p < 0.05$), “My visit to Xcaret has been memorable” ($B = 0.783, p < 0.1$), “My visit to Xcaret has been extraordinary” ($B = 1.693, p < 0.001$), “My visit inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more” ($B = 1.854, p < 0.001$), “My visit inspired me to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions” ($B = 0.985, p < 0.1$), and “During my visit, I felt active part of Mexican culture and traditions” ($B=1.277, p<0.001$). The *R-square* for this regression model was 0.59, further supporting H3.

Finally, this study hypothesized that perceived organizational authenticity has a positive influence on organization-public trust (H4), satisfaction (H5), and commitment (H6). To examine these hypotheses, multiple regression analyses were carried out with the two dimensions of perceived organizational authenticity (i.e. *overall experience* and *active engagement*) as predictor variables and *trust*, *satisfaction*, and *commitment* as dependent variables. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 4-7.

Table 4-7. Multiple regression analysis associating relational outcomes dimensions to perceived authenticity dimensions and its individual items

	Items in the model	B	p-value	R ²
Model 1a*	Overall experience	0.167	0.022	0.233
	Active engagement	0.444	0.000	
Model 1b*	My visit has been memorable	0.227	0.004	0.309
	My visit has inspired me to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions	0.345	0.000	
Model 2a**	Overall experience	0.458	0.000	0.363
	Active engagement	0.370	0.000	
	My visit has been fun	0.136	0.081	
Model 2b**	My visit has been satisfactory	0.179	0.036	0.513
	My visit has been memorable	0.130	0.055	
	My visit has been extraordinary	0.254	0.000	
	My visit has inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more	0.330	0.000	
	During my visit I felt an active part of Mexican culture and traditions	0.146	0.003	
Model 3a***	Overall experience	0.214	0.001	0.386
	Active engagement	0.559	0.000	
Model 3b***	My visit has been fun	0.196	0.006	0.535
	My visit has been extraordinary	0.237	0.000	
	My visit has inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more	0.289	0.000	
	During my visit I felt an active part of Mexican culture and traditions	0.278	0.000	

*Model for trust . **Model for satisfaction. ***Model for commitment

Both *overall experience* and *active engagement* were found to significantly influence visitors' *trust* (Model 1a), *satisfaction* (Model 2a), and *commitment* (Model 3a)

levels with Xcaret. The overall *R-square* for these models was 0.233, 0.363, and 0.386 respectively. Therefore, H4, H5, and H6 were supported.

To gain more insights into the items that significantly contribute to building visitors' *trust*, *satisfaction* and *commitment* with Xcaret, multiple linear regressions were carried out between the individual items on perceived organizational authenticity scale and the three relational outcomes dimensions. The individual items that had a significant influence on visitors' evaluation of their relationship with Xcaret were found to be different for each relational outcome dimension (Model 1b, 2b, and 3b). These items and their beta values are shown in Table 4-7. The respective overall *R-square* for these models was 0.309, 0.513, and 0.535.

Relationship between identity, reputation, perceived authenticity, and relational outcomes

This study developed a model that proposes a positive relationship between identity, reputation, perceived authenticity, and relational outcomes. To evaluate the suggested model, path analysis using Maximum Likelihood estimation in SPSS Amos 20.0 was conducted (Figure 4-1). The model fit indicators showed that the proposed model has a good fit: $\chi^2/df = 0.502$, $p = 0.478$, CFI = 1.000 and RMSEA = 0.000 [0.000, 0.100]. Figure 4-1 shows the path model with the corresponding path estimates between the variables.

The path analysis also supports H1, H2, and H3 explored in the study. Table 4-8 shows the Maximum Likelihood estimates of structural paths. H1 and H2 predicted a positive relationship between identity, reputation, and perceived authenticity. The standardized direct effect of identity on perceived authenticity was found to be 0.29 ($p < 0.001$) and of reputation to be 0.99 ($p < 0.001$). Therefore both H1 and H2 were

supported. Further, the hypotheses regarding a positive relationship between perceived authenticity and relational outcomes was also supported with perceived authenticity having a standardized direct effect of 1.07 ($p < 0.001$) on relational outcomes.

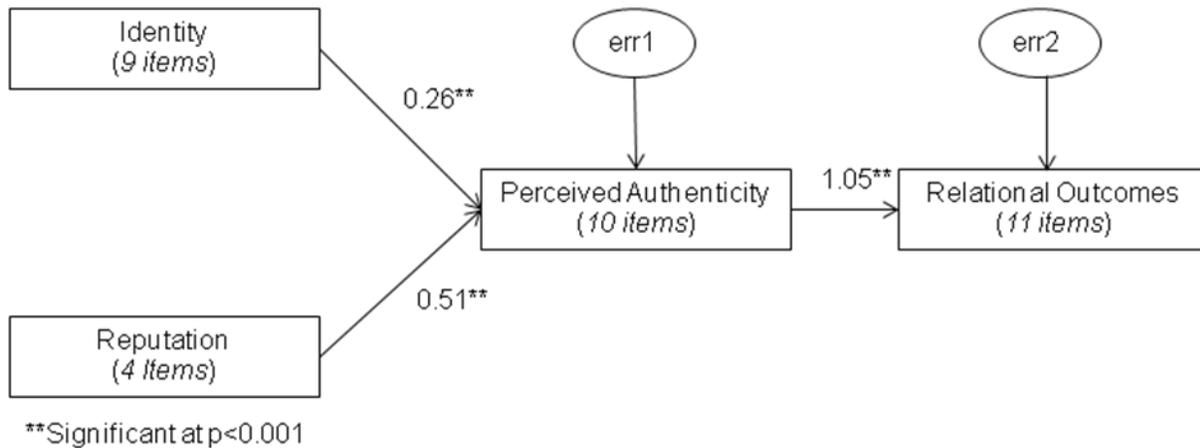


Figure 4-1. The path analysis showing associations between identity, reputation, perceived organizational authenticity, and relational outcomes

Table 4-8. Maximum Likelihood Estimates of structural paths for model with relational outcomes

	Standardized estimate	Unstandardized estimate	Standard error	p-value
Identity → Perceived organizational authenticity	0.261	0.287	0.034	<0.001
Reputation → Perceived organizational authenticity	0.510	1.049	0.069	<0.001
Perceived organizational authenticity → Relational outcomes	1.055	1.117	0.050	<0.001

In addition, a model between perceived organizational authenticity and the three dimensions of relational outcomes (i.e., *trust*, *commitment*, and *satisfaction*) was also tested using Maximum Likelihood estimation (Figure 4-2). The model fit indicators showed that the proposed model also has a good fit: $\chi^2/df = 1.561$, $p = 0.196$, CFI = 0.999 and RMSEA = 0.032 [0.000, 0.085]. Table 4-9 shows the Maximum Likelihood

estimates of structural paths for this model. The path analysis showed that perceived organization authenticity positively influences visitors' *trust* (H4), *satisfaction* (H5), and relational *commitment* (H6) with Xcaret as all the path estimates were found to be significant (Figure 4.2).

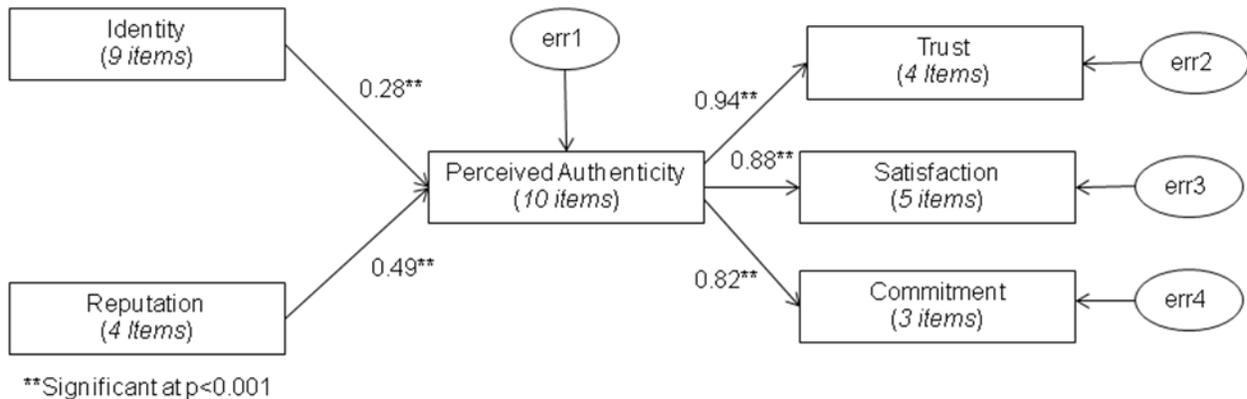


Figure 4-2. The path analysis showing associations between identity, reputation, perceived organizational authenticity, and dimensions of relational outcomes

Table 4-9. Maximum Likelihood Estimates of structural paths for model with trust, satisfaction, and commitment

	Standardized estimate	Unstandardized estimate	Standard error	p-value
Identity → Perceived organizational authenticity	0.283	0.311	0.032	<0.001
Reputation → Perceived organizational authenticity	0.491	1.011	0.065	<0.001
Perceived organizational authenticity → Trust	0.938	0.261	0.016	<0.001
Perceived organizational authenticity → Satisfaction	0.878	0.408	0.026	<0.001
Perceived organizational authenticity → Commitment	0.815	0.447	0.025	<0.001

Perceived organizational authenticity and visitors' demographics

The fifth research question examined the relationship between visitors' demographics and perceived organizational authenticity. Using three hypotheses, the

variation in perceived organizational authenticity with age (H7), country-of-origin (H8), and gender (H9) was analyzed. H7 hypothesized that older participants will evaluate perceived authenticity of Xcaret higher than younger visitors. The Spearman rho correlations between age and the two perceived authenticity dimensions (i.e. *overall experience* and *active engagement*) were not found to be significant. Therefore, H7 was not supported. To gain more insights into this relationship, correlations between age and individual items on the perceived authenticity scale were computed. Only one item, “During my visit I felt active part of the Mexican culture and traditions” was significantly but weakly correlated with age ($r = 0.097, p < 0.05$).

The country-specific variations were explored using H8 that predicted that international visitors will evaluate perceived authenticity of Xcaret higher than the visitors from Mexico, the country in which the park is located. Results of independent sample T-tests show that visitors from Mexico evaluated the *active engagement* dimension of perceived authenticity higher than the international visitors ($t(541) = 3.206, p < 0.001, d = 0.3, \text{medium effect}$). This dimension consists of items that reflect the degree to which participants were inspired to value, contribute, and advocate for the conservation of Mexican culture and traditions and their level of active involvement with Mexican culture and traditions during their visit to the park. To further explore this interesting finding, the two groups of visitors were compared along each of the 10-items on the perceived organizational authenticity scale.

For each item, the means of visitors from Mexico were found to be higher than the means for international visitors. However, the differences were statistically significant for six of the 10 items (Table 4-10). These items were: “My visit has been fun” ($t(541) =$

2.003, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.2$, *small effect*), “My visit has been satisfactory” ($t(541) = 1.843$, $p < 0.1$, $d = 0.2$, *small effect*), “My visit inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more” ($t(541) = 4.674$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.4$, *medium effect*), “My visit inspired me to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions” ($t(541) = 3.616$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.3$, *medium effect*), “My visit inspired me to advocate for conserving Mexican culture and traditions” ($t(541) = 3.675$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.3$, *medium effect*), and “During my visit, I felt active part of Mexican culture and traditions” ($t(541) = 4.098$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.4$, *medium effect*). Therefore, H8 was not supported.

Table 4-10. Means of Mexican and international visitors’ evaluation of perceived authenticity items

Items	Mexican visitors (n=219)		International visitors (n=324)	
	M	SD	M	SD
My visit has been fun	4.56	0.637	4.43	0.768
My visit has been satisfactory	4.58	0.673	4.46	0.698
My visit has inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more	4.63	0.597	4.33	0.828
My visit has inspired me contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions	4.60	0.640	4.36	0.819
My visit has inspired me to advocate for conserving Mexican culture and traditions	4.64	0.617	4.41	0.804
During my visit, I felt an active part of Mexican culture and traditions	4.41	0.815	4.08	1.011

Finally, H9 predicted that female visitors to Xcaret will evaluate perceived organizational authenticity of the park higher than male visitors. No significant differences were found between male and female participants’ evaluations of *overall experience* and *active engagement* dimensions. Similarly, no gender differences were observed along the individual items that constitute the perceived organizational authenticity scale. Therefore, H9 was not supported.

Perceived organizational authenticity and visit characteristics

This study also examined whether the duration of time that visitors experienced Xcaret (H10) and their previous visits (H11) to the park had any association with their evaluation of the park's authenticity. Weak, significant association was found between the *overall experience* dimension of perceived authenticity and the time spent by a participant in the park ($r = 0.095, p < 0.05$). However, none of the individual items on the perceived authenticity scale obtained a significant association with the time duration for which a participant was in the park. Therefore, H10 was only partially supported.

Independent sample T-tests revealed a significant difference between participants who had been to Xcaret before and those who had not along the *active engagement* dimension ($t(528) = 2.278, p < 0.05, d = 0.2, \text{medium effect}$). In addition, significant differences were also found along all the items that comprise this dimension (Table 4-11). These items were: "My visit inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more" ($t(528) = 4.452, p < 0.001, d = 0.4, \text{medium effect}$), "My visit inspired me to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions" ($t(528) = 1.796, p < 0.1, d = 0.2, \text{small effect}$), "My visit inspired me to advocate for conserving Mexican culture and traditions" ($t(528) = 2.452, p < 0.05, d = 0.3, \text{medium effect}$), and "During my visit, I have felt active part of Mexican culture and traditions" ($t(528) = 2.115, p < 0.05, d = 0.2, \text{medium effect}$). Therefore, H11 was partially supported.

Interestingly though, the number of times a participant had visited Xcaret had no significant influence on their evaluation of the park's perceived authenticity, as no significant association was found between this variable and the two perceived authenticity dimensions. This finding might suggest that authentic experiences remain

unchanged over time, unless the setting in which they take place changes dramatically from its original state. However, this finding needs further investigation.

Table 4-11. Means of responses from participants who had visited Xcaret before and those who hadn't

Items	Visited Xcaret before			
	Yes (n=149)		No (n=381)	
	M	SD	M	SD
My visit has inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more	4.67	0.551	4.35	0.814
My visit has inspired me contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions	4.55	0.678	4.41	0.795
My visit has inspired me to advocate for conserving Mexican culture and traditions	4.63	0.602	4.45	0.791
During my visit, I have felt active part of Mexican culture and traditions	4.34	0.834	4.15	0.993

Perceived organizational authenticity and sources of information

Finally, this study explored the relationship between the type of source from where participants obtained information about Xcaret and their evaluations of perceived authenticity of the park. Multiple linear regression equations were fitted with the sources of information as predictors and *overall experience* and *active engagement* as dependent variables.

For both the dimensions of perceived authenticity, park's website and social media were found to have significant influence. For *overall experience*, receiving information from the park's website had a positive influence ($B = 0.052, p < 0.001$) and social media a negative influence ($B = -0.05, p < 0.01$). Similarly, *active engagement* was positively influenced by the park's website as an information source ($B = 0.029, p < 0.05$) and negatively by social media ($B = -0.061, p < 0.001$).

Internal Consistency of Scales

Internal consistency of scales was measured using Cronbach's alpha. All of the four scales in this study obtained an internal consistency higher than 0.8 (Table 4-12), indicating that the scales have good reliability (Lee & Shavelson, 2004).

Table 4-12. Scale reliability

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived organizational authenticity	10	0.91
Identity	9	0.85
Reputation	4	0.91
Relational outcomes	11	0.91

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study further conceptualized and operationally defined the construct of perceived organizational authenticity and its dimensions by developing and testing a theoretical framework that identifies its causal linkages with organizational identity, reputation, and relational outcomes. In addition, the study developed and empirically examined an improved measurement scale for perceived organizational authenticity that is more parsimonious and has higher internal consistency than the index that Molleda and Jain (2011) proposed and tested.

Using a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods, seven research questions and 11 hypotheses were investigated regarding the relationship between perceived organizational authenticity, identity, reputation, and relational outcomes. Focus group and in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 marketing and public relations practitioners of Xcaret (esh-caret), a cultural and eco-archeological theme park in Riviera Maya, Mexico, to understand their roles and responsibilities in the construction, execution, and promotion of identity, authenticity, and reputation of the park and its main special events. Face-to-face intercept surveys with 545 visitors and interviews with 16 international visitors of Xcaret were analyzed to understand the dimensions of perceived organizational authenticity and test the proposed theoretical model and measurement scale. Variations in perceived authenticity in relation to demographics, visit-specific characteristics, and the type of sources that visitors used to obtain information about Xcaret were also examined. In this chapter, the key qualitative and quantitative research findings and their interpretations, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and avenues for future research are explained.

Key Research Findings

Qualitative Findings

Table 5-1 presents a summary of the qualitative research findings from the focus group and interviews with the marketing and public relations practitioners of Xcaret and the interviews with its international visitors.

Table 5-1. Summary of qualitative findings

Key themes from focus group & in-depth interviews with practitioners of Xcaret	Key themes from in-depth interviews with international visitors of Xcaret
History and heritage of Xcaret	Xcaret: An authentic representation of Mexico
Xcaret's Identity and mission	Authentic cultural experience not a travel motive
Communication practitioners as storytellers	Visitors' experience and engagement
Xcaret as an experience	Perceptions about Mexico
Communication practitioners as ambassadors of the park	More satisfaction, less commitment
Reviving Xcaret's identity	
Integrating public relations with core business	
Personal involvement and identification	

Focus group and in-depth interviews with marketing and public relations practitioners

An organization's identity is described as those characteristics of an organization that members perceive as enduring, central, and unique about their organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). In other words, an organization's identity defines its character, "what we indubitably are," and culture, "what we feel we are" (Balmer & Greyser, 2006, p. 735). Scholars suggested that an organization's mission statements, strategy, values, and beliefs are the foundation of its identity (Sha, 2009; van Riel & Balmer, 1997).

To understand Xcaret's identity, focus group and interviews were conducted with the marketing and public relations professionals of Xcaret. This also served to understand the park's identity as communicated in its marketing and public relations

efforts. The practitioners described the organization as a special place that represents Mexico, its culture and traditions, natural richness, and diversity. Mexico's cultural traditions are manifested in the various elements of the park such as food, music, artifacts, buildings and architecture, and shows and performances. Molleda (2010a) suggested that organizations progressively build their identities by selecting and communicating certain features to their stakeholders who interpret these claims and promises to form perceptions about an organization and its reputation. In general, the marketing and public relations practitioners agreed that the park's association to Mexican and Mayan cultural traditions and history is an identifying feature that they emphasize in their communication with Xcaret's external publics.

The practitioners also narrated the progression of Xcaret's identity over time, beginning with its origin and heritage, and leading up to what it is today. Gilmore and Pine (2007) emphasized that the process of rendering authenticity is defined by a "here-and-now" space (p. 182), that defines the future possibilities for an organization based on its history and heritage. The findings revealed that Xcaret gradually constructed its identity under the influence of its owners' vision and philosophy about the park, which is to use its natural environment and setting as a platform to showcase Mexico's history, culture, and traditions. The marketing and public relations leaders described that over the past couple of years, Xcaret gradually transformed from an ecological to a cultural theme park. Since then, the park has revitalized its identity and image, while remaining true to its core values and mission.

Further, its overall vision and philosophy have guided Xcaret in maintaining its current positioning as a cultural and ecological theme park; identifying business and

communication strategy for the future; limiting its future possibilities to those it can achieve and value; and enhancing its operating zone by capitalizing on its existing strengths to create new opportunities in the future. These findings are consistent with Gilmore and Pine's (2007) principles for rendering organizational authenticity. While there are several theme parks in the Riviera Maya (additional three under the same ownership as Xcaret), the park has retained its unique positioning due to its exclusive geography, location, overall setting, and original performances including live music, entertainment, cultural dances, and shows.

According to the marketing and public relations practitioners, the park is aware of its current positioning as a cultural theme park and uses it as a source of differentiation to distinguish it from the other parks in Riviera Maya. The park also understands its limits in terms of what it is and what it offers to its visitors. The marketing and public relations practitioners mentioned that they are cautious about not over-promoting the park and its offerings and strive to communicate a consistent story to the park's external publics. While the objective of all communication is to inspire interest in the park, Xcaret avoids making claims that would generate false hopes or expectations among its target publics regarding the experiences the park can offer.

Also relevant to Xcaret's attempts to communicate its identity and authenticity is its strategy to promote the park as an "experience" by generating opportunities for the media and publics to directly experience and interact with the park, its offerings, claims, and values. The objective of media and familiarization tours, special events, and festivals is to provide the target publics with an opportunity to validate the park's claims and promises about tourism experiences.

During the process of constructing and communicating a cohesive and consistent identity of Xcaret, the marketing and public relations practitioners described their role as storytellers and ambassadors of the park's mission, values, and philosophy. The participants and interviewees agreed that their personal involvement and identification with the park and its values manifests itself in their daily activities and interaction with publics. Further, the practitioners specified their professional roles at the park as facilitators who help guests experience Xcaret by sharing their personal stories, feelings, and emotions. Further, the leaders emphasized that the overall integration of marketing and public relations with the core business and the open access the departments have to the owners is a significant contributor in their success.

Overall, the interactions and discussions with the marketing and public relations practitioners demonstrated their intricate involvement and engagement in the construction, execution, and promotion of identity, authenticity, and reputation of Xcaret. Further, the findings revealed the strategic role of participatory management style and open communication in building consensus about and personal identification with the organization's core values, philosophy, and vision. Most importantly, the findings illustrated the significant role that public relations could perform in helping organizations render authenticity. Scholars recommended that organizations can portray themselves as authentic by being transparent, sharing periodic and accurate information with its publics, engaging them in a dialogue by soliciting their feedback, and disclosing its personal values, motives, and beliefs in a manner that enable publics to more accurately assess the identity and integrity of the organization's actions (Gilmore &

Pine, 2007). As the findings showed, all these actions were described as the roles and responsibilities of Xcaret's marketing and public relations practitioners.

Interviews with international visitors

This study also conducted interviews with 16 international visitors of Xcaret to examine their tourism experience in the park and motivations of the visit, as well as to evaluate the park's reputation and relationships from the perspective of its international publics. The interviews provided an opportunity to gain further insights into the quantitative findings and enhance our understanding about the associations between perceived organizational authenticity, identity, reputation, and organization-public relational outcomes.

In general, respondents described Xcaret as a multidimensional theme park that offers a range of attractions and activities that people of all ages and preferences can enjoy. Respondents stated that before visiting the park they imagined it to be a "fun" place with beaches, an underground river, wild animals, music, and entertainment. However, their experience in the park revealed a new aspect of Xcaret, which is its association to Mexican and Mayan culture and heritage. Overall, the participants said that they would describe Xcaret as a unique place and concept that represents Mexico's natural and cultural richness.

As a common theme, obtaining an authentic cultural experience was not identified by respondents as a principal motive to visit the park. Respondents also accepted not conducting much research about the park before their visit. Most of the visitors heard about the park from their friends and family or from other sources such as hotel staff and tour operators. Therefore, it could be assumed that these sources did not include the cultural aspects of the park in their explanation and framing of Xcaret as a tourism

destination. This might suggest that the park needs to find more ways to communicate its identity and offerings, particularly its cultural aspects, to its international publics. While Xcaret's public relations practitioners already coordinate with the Riviera Maya Tourism Trust to develop effective international media relations, especially for its special events such as the Festival of Life and Death Traditions, these efforts may need to be extended and intensified during the rest of the year.

Another interpretation of international visitors' lack of motivation and interest in obtaining an authentic cultural experience at Xcaret was provided by Wang (1999). According to the author, authentic experiences are not necessarily object related; tourists often seek their own version of authentic experiences through other forms of tourism such as experiencing nature, going to the beach, partaking in adventures, enjoying family time, and visiting friends and relatives, irrespective of whether the toured objects are authentic. The author referred to this form of authenticity as existential. Consistent with Wang's conceptualization of authentic tourism experiences, the findings suggested that Xcaret's international visitors were looking for existential authenticity and derived it by engaging in nature-oriented activities and spending time with family and friends at the park.

Interestingly though, respondents did admire Xcaret's efforts to preserve Mayan cultural heritage and represent this ancient culture through performances and shows. Knudsen and Waade (2010) called this performative authenticity, which is an experience that is created by the active involvement of people with the tourism setting. Through performative authenticity, entities such as Xcaret can authenticate sites, places, and sights to enhance tourists' understanding and intimacy with the places and

surroundings they visit. The findings suggested that visitors achieved performative authenticity in Xcaret by visiting the Mayan ruins and learning about this culture through active engagement and interaction with performers and indigenous people.

Further, the interviews revealed the references to the five genres of authenticity invoked by the visitors in their conversations about Xcaret (Gilmore & Pine, 2007): Natural authenticity in Xcaret's preservation of the landscapes in their natural state, original authenticity in the fact that Xcaret is a unique and special place that represents Mexico and its cultural and natural heritage, and referential authenticity through its association to the ancient Mayan civilization. The visitors also referred to the influential authenticity of the park that is manifested through its efforts to conserve the environment as well as an ancient civilization and exceptional authenticity through outstanding quality of services and care that its employees provide.

In general, the international visitors stated that the park exceeded their expectations by providing them with unanticipated cultural experiences and offerings. This is related to the findings reported earlier regarding the efforts of marketing and public relations practitioners to not over-promote the park. It appears that by refraining from fake promises in the marketing and public relations claims, Xcaret has succeeded in rendering authentic offerings and experiences to its international visitors. This is consistent with Gilmore and Pine's (2007) five axioms that suggested that if an organization is authentic, they do not have to claim that they are, but once they make claims about authenticity, they should better deliver on their promises. This finding also supported Molleda's (2010) argument that communication plans, programs, or campaigns cannot achieve organizational authenticity unless the underlying object,

person, or organization in its true essence represents an authentic being by manifesting its true identity in its actions, decisions, and philosophy.

While describing their relationship with Xcaret, visitors expressed satisfaction and even mentioned recommending the park to their friends and family. However, none of the respondents expressed a desire to keep in touch with the park or actively seek information about it. Respondents also declined to join the park on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. This was a surprising finding considering many respondents were re-visiting Xcaret. This might suggest that relational satisfaction described international visitors' relationship with the park better than relational commitment. This finding identified key strategic areas in which tourism organizations such as Xcaret should invest its resources to achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness of its marketing and public relations efforts in terms of establishing and cultivating relationships with its international publics.

Quantitative Findings

Table 5-2 presents a summary of the quantitative research findings of the face-to-face intercept survey with visitors of Xcaret with the corresponding hypotheses.

Results of face-to-face intercept surveys showed that the perceived organizational authenticity scale is a reliable measure to evaluate visitors' perceptions of the park and its authenticity. The factor analysis produced two dimensions, *overall experience* and *active engagement*, that explained about 70 percent of the variance in the underlying construct of perceived organizational authenticity. These findings supported scholarly claims that authenticity is a multidimensional construct (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008; Camilleri, 2008a, 2008b; Fine, 2003; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; McLeod, 1999; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011; Zickmund, 2007).

Table 5-2. Summary of quantitative findings

RQs	Hypotheses	Findings
2		Perceived organizational authenticity is a multidimensional construct with two dimensions: <i>Overall experience</i> and <i>active engagement</i> .
3	The degree to which visitors perceive that their experience was consistent with the park's identity <H1> and reputation <H2> has a positive influence on the perceived	Supported
4	Perceived organizational authenticity is positively related to the quality of relationship between the park and its visitors <H3>, park-visitors trust outcome <H4>, satisfaction outcome <H5>, commitment outcome <H6>.	Supported
5	Older <H7> and female <H9> visitors will evaluate perceived organizational authenticity of the park higher than younger visitors.	Not supported
	Out of state visitors <H8> will evaluate perceived organizational authenticity of the park higher than visitors from the state in which the park is located.	Not supported*
6	The longer a visitor stays in the park <H10>, the higher is his/her evaluation of park's authenticity.	Partially supported**
	A previous visit to the park <H11> will be associated with higher levels of perceived authenticity.	Partially supported***
7		For both the dimensions of perceived authenticity (i.e. <i>overall experience</i> and <i>active engagement</i>), park's website was found to have a positive and social media a negative influence.

Notes. *Visitors from Mexico evaluated the park's authenticity higher than international visitors, particularly along the *active engagement* dimensions and the items that define this dimension.

** Visitors' *overall experience* in the park improved with the amount of time they spent in the park; however, the *active engagement* of visitors with the park and its elements did not change with the duration of their visit.

*** Visitors who were re-visiting the park evaluated the *active engagement* dimension of the park's authenticity higher than the first-time visitors.

The perceived authenticity measurement scale developed and tested in this study is an improvement from Molleda and Jain's (2011) perceived authenticity index in terms of parsimony (11 items versus 14 items) and internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$ versus Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$). Despite the improvement and significant refinement of the original index, the factor analysis revealed the same two dimensions of perceived organizational authenticity i.e., *overall experience* and *active engagement* that Molleda and Jain (2011) reported in their evaluation of a special event sponsored by Xcaret. Further, the two dimensions explained higher variance (70%) in the latent construct of perceived organizational authenticity than obtained in Molleda and Jain's study (43.5%).

Consistent with the findings of the interviews with international visitors of Xcaret, the high means obtained for items that describe the *active engagement* dimension such as "Inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more" and "Motivated me to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions" supported Knudsen and Waade's (2010) claims about performative authenticity; a feeling that is experienced and performed by visitors in a tourism setting. The findings showed that Xcaret's efforts to preserve Mexican and Mayan culture and traditions and present them to the visitors inspired emotional/affective relatedness among them and enhanced performative authenticity of the park.

Additionally, the two dimensions of authenticity, i.e., overall experience and active engagement, represented the interplay between organizational communication and actions. Xcaret's communication efforts are geared towards providing visitors with an experience of its vision, mission, and values manifested in the park's visual identity, attractions, activities, and events. Similarly, the park and its employees strive to

generate opportunities to actively engage visitors with Mexican culture and traditions through performances, activities, and shows. This dynamic interaction between organizational communication and actions reflects the two aspects of perceived organizational authenticity and provides further support to Molleda's (2010a) recommendation that an organization can only achieve authenticity when its actions and communication are consistent with each other and the organization's identity and reputation.

Findings of the path analysis also supported the proposed theoretical model and this study's conceptualization of perceived organizational authenticity as a function of the degree to which stakeholders perceive an organization, its offerings and communication claims to be consistent with its identity and reputation. Scholarly literature on authenticity explained that it is an evaluation of whether an organization's actions and behaviors reflect its origins, heritage, core values, vision, and philosophy, or in other words its identity and reputation (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Fombrun & van Riel, 2004; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Molleda, 2010a, 2010b; Walumbwa et al., 2010; Wong & Cummins, 2009). Xcaret identifies itself as a special place that represents all of Mexico and its cultural diversity. The path analysis showed that the degree to which Xcaret's visitors observed or noticed the manifestations of Mexico's cultural traditions in the park and its various elements and felt that their experience was consistent with their expectations from the park had a positive influence on their evaluation of its authenticity.

Further, findings of this study also revealed that perceived organizational authenticity is an important factor in determining the quality of organization-public relationships. Specifically, path analysis showed a positive association between

perceived organizational authenticity and the dimensions of relational outcomes i.e., *trust*, *commitment*, and *satisfaction*. Discussions about authenticity in academic literature emphasized its role in fostering perceptions of an organization's trustworthiness, credibility, legitimacy, and honesty (Edwards, 2010; Molleda 2010a, 2010b; Molleda & Jain, 2011; Watson, 2011). In fact, Molleda and Jain (2011) proposed that future studies focused on authenticity should examine its impact on organization-publics relationship to understand how organizations can benefit from developing and cultivating perceptions of authenticity. These findings are significant from both reputation and relationship management perspective as they reflect a way to evaluate the value of public relations efforts in building organizational authenticity through communication and ultimately, organization-public relationships.

In this study, the positive influence of perceived organizational authenticity on visitors' behavioral intentions to seek information about the park, visit it again, and recommend it to their family and friends demonstrated the value of this construct for public relations research and practice. Measuring the impact of public relations efforts in terms of behavioral and action outcomes is an important endeavor for the field (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Yang, 2007) and this study contributed to this research stream by illustrating how perceptions of organizational authenticity can significantly affect public's intended behavior, actions, and decisions.

In addition, this study found that people differ in their perceptions of authenticity, as domestic visitors' evaluation of Xcaret's authenticity was found to be higher than the international visitors along the *active engagement* dimension and the items that describe it. This finding could be explained by the lack of familiarity of international

visitors with Mexican culture coupled with the fact that the park cancelled some of the shows and performances representing Mexican and Mayan cultures and traditions during the last three days of data collection for this study. The shows and performances were canceled in preparation for a new show that Xcaret plans to introduce this year.

This finding could also be explained by reviewing the interviews with the international visitors that showed that this group is not as interested in obtaining an authentic cultural experience at Xcaret. In fact, this group of visitors explained that their motivation to visit Xcaret was to have fun and spend a day with family and friends. This could explain the low means of the responses from international visitors on items such as “My visit inspired me to value Mexican culture and traditions more,” “My visit inspired me to contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions,” “My visit inspired me to advocate for conserving Mexican culture and traditions,” and “During my visit, I felt active part of Mexican culture and traditions.”

This finding is different from what Molleda and Jain (2011) observed in their study. The authors found that the evaluations of perceived authenticity were higher by out-of-state visitors than the natives. An explanation of this difference is the unique context in which the two studies were conducted. While this study examined the perceived authenticity of Xcaret during a regular tourism season, Molleda and Jain analyzed the experiences of visitors during a special annual event sponsored by the park, the Festival of Life and Death Traditions. This is a special occasion for the park when one of the states in Mexico hosts the event to showcase a long established tradition of Mexico and its rituals through a variety of dance performances, theatre presentations, and

concerts. Visitors from all around the world come to Xcaret exclusively to experience this cultural and traditional manifestation.

The differences in the findings between the two studies might suggest that it is more challenging to convince the domestic visitors about the authentic representation of a deep rooted cultural tradition. On the other hand, the international visitors who visit Xcaret during a regular tourism season might not be motivated and willing to actively engage with Mexican culture and traditions. This finding also supported scholarly arguments that perceived authenticity is a subjective and contextual construct, which develops through the direct and indirect experiences of people with the underlying object about which authenticity claims are being made (e.g. Grayson, 2002; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Molleda 2010a, 2010b; Moscardo & Pearce, 1986).

In terms of gender and age variations, this study did not find statistically significant differences between male and female visitors' evaluation of Xcaret's perceived authenticity. Similarly, variations in perceived organizational authenticity along age were not significant. These findings might suggest that Xcaret offers a range of experiences that people of all age like and find authentic. This was also a common theme among the interviews with international visitors who described Xcaret as a multidimensional theme park with a variety of attractions and activities for people of all ages and preferences.

Again, these findings are different from those reported by Molleda and Jain (2011), who found statistical significant differences along both age and gender variables. These differences could again be attributed to the differences in the overall setting and contexts in which the two studies were executed. These findings suggested that while the park could use similar communication efforts across target publics for the rest of the

year, it is important to incorporate audience segmentation strategies in its communication about the special events and festivals that the park hosts.

In terms of visit characteristics, while the duration of visit had a weak association with visitors' evaluation of the park's authenticity, significant differences were obtained between participants who had been to Xcaret before and those who hadn't along the active engagement dimension. These findings are similar to those observed by Moscardo and Pearce (1986) in their evaluation of perceived authenticity of historic theme parks. Relevant to this study, the findings could be explained by the fact that people who revisit the park are more aware of its cultural associations and might be more actively engaged in its mission to preserve the Mexican culture and traditions. Interestingly though, the number of times a participant had visited Xcaret was found to have no significant influence on their evaluation of the park's perceived authenticity. This finding might suggest that authentic experiences remain unchanged over time, unless the setting in which they take place and its activities change dramatically from their original state. However, this finding needs further investigation.

Finally, this study explored the relationship between the type of source from where participants obtained information about Xcaret and their evaluations of perceived authenticity of the park. For both the dimensions of perceived authenticity, park's website was found to have a positive and social media a negative influence. These findings suggested that the information obtained on social media might not have been similar to what participants experienced in the park. In fact, the cancelation of some of the shows and performances during the last three days of data collection could have affected the perceived authenticity evaluation of visitors who obtained information about

the park from social media. Social media represents a public platform where people share their experiences and interact with others. It could be assumed that visitors read about these shows on social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter and were disappointed by their cancelation during their visit to Xcaret.

Knudsen and Waade (2010) explained that media plays a significant role in the construct of authenticity by producing representations of a place, which can not only inspire people to visit a destination but also provide a platform for tourists to validate a destination's media image with their actual experiences. Therefore, this finding suggested that public relations practitioners of Xcaret should revise their communication approach on social media to present more accurate and updated information about the park and its offerings.

Implications for Public Relations Theory

A primary contribution of this study is to develop and test a theoretical model that conceptualizes the linkages between identity, reputation, perceived organizational authenticity, and relational outcomes. This is the first study that simultaneously examined the causal associations between predictors and outcomes of perceived organizational authenticity to further our understanding of the construct from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Perceived authenticity is a promising construct in the theory and practice of public relations, particularly in an experience economy where competing and contrasting voices are vying for attention of their stakeholders. And yet, a review of academic literature suggested that the construct lacks theory-building studies and empirical support in the context of public relations. A limited theoretical understanding of what is meant by authenticity and how it can be measured was notable in contemporary public

relations literature. Therefore, this study further conceptualized and operationally defined the construct of perceived organizational authenticity and its dimensions and filled an important gap in the scholarship.

According to Shoemaker et al. (2004), theory building is an important exercise in accumulating knowledge in a discipline and it starts by articulating constructs and their measurement. In this study, perceived authenticity was operationally defined as a function of the degree to which stakeholders perceive an organization, its offerings and communication claims to be consistent with its identity and reputation, which ultimately affects their trust, satisfaction, and commitment with the organization.

Another contribution of this study is to develop and test an improved measurement scale for perceived organizational authenticity that is more parsimonious and has better internal consistency than the index that Molleda and Jain (2011) proposed. The issue of measurement and evaluation of perceived authenticity of an organization and its communication activities is a significant stream of research in public relations for both academic and professional communities. For instance, Molleda (2010b) argued that “authenticity should become central to the study and practice of public relations and strategic communication management and their specialized functions because organizations are progressively being pressured by stakeholders demanding greater transparency, openness, and responsibility” (p. 223). Therefore, this study clarifies a relatively undefined and abstract construct of perceived organizational authenticity by constructing and testing its measurement scale.

This study also contributes to the growing body of research in public relations measurement and evaluation, an on-going challenge and opportunity for the field. The

effectiveness of public relations in relationship management was assessed by identifying the influence of perceived organizational authenticity on the quality of organization-publics relationship. Of the various indicators of the value of public relations, relational outcomes such as trust, commitment, and satisfaction are the most widely recognized (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; J. Grunig, L. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992; Hon & J. Grunig, 1999; Huang, 1997, 2001; Jo, 2006; Kim, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Yang (2007) argued that organization-public relationship management demonstrates a long-term and enduring concept that is particularly relevant to public relations.

This study found that perceived organizational authenticity is a significant factor in determining publics' trust, satisfaction, and commitment with an organization. Similarly, perceived organizational authenticity was found to have positive influence on visitors' behavioral intentions to seek information about the park, visit it again, and recommend it to their family and friends. By operationalizing and quantifying the linkage between public relations efforts and organization-public relational outcomes and public's intended behavior, this study provides research evidence of value of public relations in achieving organizational objectives and contributes to theory building in relationship management.

Implications for International Public Relations Theory and Research

This study also informs international public relations and strategic communication theory and research. The theoretical model and measurement scale for perceived organizational authenticity was tested in an international context, which contributes to the body of knowledge in international public relations. The study's qualitative and quantitative findings reflected the various reputation and relationship management

strategies that public relations practitioners operating in a unique cultural context of Mexico use to cultivate relationships with national and international publics.

The study also reveals the opportunities and challenges involved in planning, developing, and executing international public relations research. During adoption and translation of research instruments and measurement scales into a different cultural context and language, some items might lose their meaning. This was found to be the case with the relational outcomes scale that was revised and reworded following the suggestions from the park's public relations practitioners and a pretest with a sample of the population.

Further, researchers should be cautious and aware of the cultural context in which a study is conducted while drawing meanings and interpretations from data. As it turned out, having an inside person as a personal liaison was an effective way for the researcher to gain access to the international participants, develop cultural understanding, and analyze the meanings of the data collected in this study. In addition, language could be a barrier for researchers planning an international research project. Again, this was overcome by the help of the personal liaison who had a bilingual public relations practitioner accompany the researcher during her visit to the park and data collection.

Implications for Public Relations Practice

This study is significant for public relations practitioners as it quantified the impact of their efforts on relational outcomes and thereby also contributed to the practice of relationship management. The issue of measurement and evaluation has always been crucial to public relations. The findings of this study demonstrate how public relations can help organizations construct and communicate their authenticity to publics, which

ultimately can enhance organization- public trust, satisfaction, and commitment. Since, transparent and open communication is at the core of perceived organizational authenticity, public relations practitioners are best trained and skilled to perform a leadership role in helping organizations achieve an authentic identity and reputation.

The improved measurement scale will provide practitioners with an alternative to the ad hoc scales or measurements that they currently use in their communication efforts to convey authenticity to their myriad publics. This would help in planning future activities, rationalizing budgets, and claiming a seat at the management table.

For public relations agencies this research would suggest ways for developing new services around building an identity and reputation for the clients that is perceived as authentic. Counseling and advising companies to audit, improve, and evaluate their communication efforts to project an authentic identity is a growing business. The agency that can provide a model based on solid research and supported by academic and professional knowledge is in a good position to capitalize in this area.

Finally, this study identified key areas that public relations practitioners should emphasize in their messages and best practices to achieve authenticity for their organizations. As the qualitative findings revealed, relational satisfaction described international visitors' relationship with the park better than relational commitment. This finding suggests the strategic areas in which tourism organizations such as Xcaret should channel their public relations efforts to develop, cultivate, and improve the quality of their relationship with key publics.

Best Practices in Constructing and Communicating Organizational Authenticity

Articulate your identity: The process of developing organization authenticity should start by public relations practitioners identifying the history and heritage of the

organization as well as its current values, mission, philosophy, and vision. Public relations should articulate organizational identity and its various facets as defined by the organization's owners, management, and other internal members.

Communicate who you are: The next step to achieve organizational authenticity is to selectively and consistently communicate the dominant set of attributes that identify the organization to its key external stakeholders. Public relations should be cautious about communicating only the characteristics that truly represent the organization and what it stands for.

Identify and fill gaps between identity and reputation: Using a reputation audit, public relations should also help organization identify the attributes and characteristics that external stakeholders use to describe the organization. Any gaps between what the organization is and what it is recognized as should be immediately addressed using transparent and open communication with key stakeholders.

Avoid over or under representing yourself: Public relations should counsel organizations to avoid making claims and promises that they cannot deliver to stakeholders. Making false or fake claims regarding the organization, its offerings, and values will be perceived as inauthentic and ultimately damage stakeholders' trust, satisfaction, and commitment with the organization. The objective of all communication should be to present accurate and genuine information regarding the organization while avoiding over or under representing its identity to stakeholders.

Generate opportunities for direct experience: Perceived organizational authenticity is an outcome of stakeholders' careful evaluation of an organization's claims and offerings made through its actions, decisions, and communication.

Therefore, public relations practitioners should generate opportunities for stakeholders to directly experience the organization and its offering as well as validate its claims and promises. Familiarization tours, special events, on-site visits, and exhibits at public events are a few such opportunities for organization-public engagement and interaction.

Actively engage your stakeholders: Creating opportunities for direct experience are not enough. Public relations should act as organization's ambassador and facilitator of knowledge and information about its values and mission. Creative and innovative ways should be conceived to actively engage stakeholders while they are experiencing the organization and its products or services to realize most effective outcomes in terms of enhancing their relationship with the organization.

Integrate public relations into core business: In order to succeed in their efforts of developing and communicating organizational authenticity, public relations should be integrated into the overall business strategy while having full and open access to management decisions and actions. Performing the role of an organizational counselor, public relations should actively participate in the organization's daily decisions regarding issues, opportunities, and challenges.

Limitations of the Study

While this study makes significant contributions to the theory and practice of public relations, it has some limitations that should be addressed. First, this study was conducted at a cultural theme park in Mexico and therefore its findings should be interpreted in that context. Since perceived authenticity is subjective and contextual, the background in which participants described their experiences and the cultural influence on responses should be considered while understanding the findings and their implications.

Language could be considered a limitation of this study. Language is the medium through which one can express their thoughts to others. It is also an expression of one's culture. While the marketing and public relations practitioners of Xcaret were comfortable conversing with the researcher in English, it is possible that they would have expressed their thoughts better in Spanish, their native language. The researcher encouraged the practitioners to choose either language that best communicated their ideas and comments. However, it is possible that the practitioners were shy or wanted to please the researcher by communicating in her language.

Another limitation that should be considered is the potential social desirability bias of both public relations practitioners and visitors who took part in this study's focus group, interviews, and face-to-face intercept survey. The researcher's presence might have influenced the responses of the practitioners who participated in the study. Similarly, the survey participants' responses might have been biased by the presence of the researcher and staff members who collected the data. Scholars suggested that socially desirable reporting is most common while examining topics that are personally or socially sensitive (Fisher, 1993; King & Bruner, 2000). While a tourism experience and professional roles and responsibilities should not fall under the realm of a sensitive construct, it is still a possibility. The researcher tried to minimize social desirability bias in responses by employing promises of anonymity and confidentiality. However, it is still possible that participants responded in a manner that they viewed will please the researcher.

As mentioned before, some of the cultural shows were canceled during the last three days of data collection, which might have influenced survey and interview

participants' responses regarding Xcaret's identity and reputation. While the researcher attempted to explain the findings in this context as much as possible, readers must bear this in mind while drawing interpretations from this study.

Finally, while the study obtained good fits between the data and the hypothesized theoretical model, there could be other causal elements that might have not been accounted for by the researcher. The path analysis conducted in this study used single indicators for each of the variables in the causal model, i.e. it used a structural model to analyze the data but not a measurement model, which could be considered a limitation of the data analysis method used in this study.

Avenues for Future Research

This study developed and tested a theoretical framework and improved measurement scale of perceived organizational authenticity. Future research should further refine and test the proposed theoretical model to continue building a theory of perceived organizational authenticity. Researchers interested in the construct should replicate this study with another theme park to validate the theoretical model as well as the perceived organizational authenticity measurement scale.

Not limiting to theme parks, future studies should examine the perceived authenticity of a variety of organizations in various industries. Today, stakeholders get to experience organizations and their offerings through various online and offline mediums. Future research should evaluate these experiences against people's perceptions of and expectations from an organization under a variety of settings. The proposed measurement scale is flexible and can be adapted to other organizations and contexts.

Another avenue for future research is to examine people's online and virtual life experiences to evaluate the perceived authenticity of organizations in the digital space. For instance, an organization's attempts to construct and communicate an online identity via social media could be evaluated by conducting textual and visual analysis of its conversations with stakeholders on social media pages such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Emergent and new media technologies provide publics a range of opportunities to experience an organization, its offerings, and communication claims and promises. The direct and indirect experience and engagement of publics with an organization also fuels skepticism and distrust, which is a challenge of the experience economy. Future research should identify best practices in developing, nurturing, and communicating organizational authenticity on online and digital communication platforms.

Other future applications of this research could be to evaluate the perceived authenticity of organizations' corporate social responsibility efforts and crisis response. Both of these situations represent special issues for organizations. Recognizing what social responsibility programs and efforts are considered authentic to an organization's identity and reputation is a crucial issue in an economy where stakeholders are skeptical of all organizational actions, decision, and behavior. Similarly, choosing a crisis response that will be perceived as authentic and consistent with an organization's identity and reputation could be regarded a significant stream of research and practice for public relations. Future research could integrate the proposed theoretical model with the existing theories and models in crisis responses, in particular, the situational crisis communication theory.

Further, this study could also inform future attempts to evaluate the perceived authenticity of organizational leaders and spokespersons. In academic literature, organizational leadership is described as an influential factor in organizational reputation. An authentic leader will also contribute to building the reputation of an authentic organization. The organizational leadership literature reviewed in this study along with the theoretical model and the measurement scale could serve as a platform to evaluate leadership styles and identify key features that contribute to developing an authentic leader.

Finally, theory building in the area of perceived organizational authenticity could also benefit from a diversity of research methods employed to analyze the construct. Future research could approach the examination of the proposed theoretical model and the measurement scale using a variety of methodological approaches including experimental research. In addition, future research could use structural as well measurement model for data analysis.

In sum, perceived authenticity of organizations is a significant and emerging area for public relations research and practice and this study hopes to contribute to these efforts.

APPENDIX A
FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title:

Distinguishing *real* from *fake*: Developing and testing a theoretical model and measurement scale for perceived organizational authenticity

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: To explore how tourism promoters make authenticity claims in their communication efforts, as well as the means through which they reach their intended audiences.

What you will be asked to do in the study: The moderator will ask you about the identity and mission of your organization and your role and responsibilities in communicating and preserving this identity.

Time required: Approximately 90-minutes.

Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks or benefits involved with this study.

Compensation: There is no compensation offered for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a password-protected file. Your name will not be used in any report. The focus group will be recorded.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study: Dr. Juan-Carlos Molleda, Associate Professor, Department of Public Relations, University of Florida. (352) 273-1223/ jmolleda@jou.ufl.edu.

For information regarding your rights as research participant contact the IRB at 352-392-0433

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title:

Distinguishing *real* from *fake*: Developing and testing a theoretical model and measurement scale for perceived organizational authenticity

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: To explore the tourism experiences of visitors to Xcaret.

What you will be asked to do in the study: The interviewer will ask you to describe your experience in the park and things you did (e.g., activities, shows, park features).

Time required: Approximately 30-40 minutes

Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks or benefits involved with this study.

Compensation: There is no compensation offered for participating in this study

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a password-protected file. Your name will not be used in any report. The interview will be recorded.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study: Dr. Juan-Carlos Molleda, Associate Professor, Department of Public Relations, University of Florida. (352) 273-1223/ jmolleda@jou.ufl.edu.

For information regarding your rights as research participant contact the IRB at 352-392-0433 Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C
SURVEY INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title:
Distinguishing *Real* from *Fake*: Developing an Organizational Authenticity Scale

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: To explore the tourism experiences of visitors to Xcaret.

What you will be asked to do in the study: You will be asked rank the degree of your agreement with a set of 32 statements on a scale of 1-5 (where 1= Nothing and 5= Totally). You will also be asked questions about your age, gender, home country, time spent in the park, and where did you hear or read about the park.

Time required: Approximately 15-20 minutes

Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks or benefits involved with this study.

Compensation: There is no compensation offered for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a password-protected file. Your name will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study: Dr. Juan-Carlos Molleda, Associate Professor, Department of Public Relations, University of Florida. (352) 273-1223/ jmolleda@jou.ufl.edu.

For information regarding your rights as research participant contact the IRB at 352-392-0433

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D
FOCUS GROUP INSTRUMENT

1. How would you describe the identity and mission of the park?
2. Please describe your role and responsibilities in communicating and preserving the park's identity.
3. What unique features of the park you promote in your strategic communication efforts?
4. What experiences you want to offer to the tourists and what you want the visitors to take-away from their visit to the park?
5. What specific communication media, channels, actions, and tools you use for communicating park's identity, reputation, and authenticity claims, and offerings?

APPENDIX E INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Grand tour questions:

- Would you begin by telling me about your experience in the park and things you did (e.g., activities, shows, park features)?
- How would you describe your experience in the park?
- What part of your visit to the park you liked the most?
- Are there any things you did not like or wish were different about your visit to the park?

Specific questions:

- How did you come to know about Xcaret?
- What did you expect from your visit to Xcaret? Do you think the park met your expectations? Please provide specific examples.
- Do you feel that you have a relationship with Xcaret? Why or why not? Please describe your relationship with Xcaret.

APPENDIX F
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Q: Thinking about your visit to Xcaret, please rate the following items on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1= Nothing, 2= Little, 3= Some, 4= Much, and 5= Totally.

My visit has been...	None	Little	Some	Much	Totally
...fun	1	2	3	4	5
...satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5
...memorable	1	2	3	4	5
...comfortable	1	2	3	4	5
...unique	1	2	3	4	5
...extraordinary	1	2	3	4	5

My visit has inspired me to...	None	Little	Some	Much	Totally
...value Mexican culture and traditions more	1	2	3	4	5
...contribute to the preservation of Mexican culture and traditions	1	2	3	4	5
...advocate for conserving Mexican culture and traditions	1	2	3	4	5

During my visit...	None	Little	Some	Much	Totally
...I have felt active part of Mexican culture and traditions	1	2	3	4	5

Mexican culture and traditions are reflected in Xcaret's...	None	Little	Some	Much	Totally
... colors, symbols, and other visual elements	1	2	3	4	5
... marketing and advertising	1	2	3	4	5
...buildings and architecture	1	2	3	4	5
... employees actions and behavior	1	2	3	4	5
.. shows and activities	1	2	3	4	5
... mission	1	2	3	4	5
... food	1	2	3	4	5
..music	1	2	3	4	5
... art and handicrafts	1	2	3	4	5

Xcaret has been much like I...	None	Little	Some	Much	Totally
...expected	1	2	3	4	5
...imagined	1	2	3	4	5
...read or heard about	1	2	3	4	5
...hoped	1	2	3	4	5

Employees of Xcaret...	None	Little	Some	Much	Totally
...treat visitors well	1	2	3	4	5
...are concerned with visitors' interests	1	2	3	4	5
...are capable of delivering on the park's promises	1	2	3	4	5

I would like to...	None	Little	Some	Much	Totally
...learn more about Xcaret	1	2	3	4	5
... receive regular information from Xcaret	1	2	3	4	5
...visit Xcaret again	1	2	3	4	5
...recommend Xcaret to friends and family	1	2	3	4	5

I..	None	Little	Some	Much	Totally
..am happy with Xcaret	1	2	3	4	5
...am pleased with Xcaret	1	2	3	4	5
...enjoyed myself at Xcaret	1	2	3	4	5
...liked Xcaret	1	2	3	4	5

Q5. What is your age? _____

Q6. Are you 1. Male _____ 2. Female _____ 3. Other _____ 4. Don't want to answer _____

Q7. Which country are you from? _____

Q8. How long were you in the park today? _____

Q9. Have you visited Xcaret before? _____

If yes, how many times? _____

Q10. Where did you hear or read about the park? (Check all that apply)

1. Media (Newspaper, TV, Radio)
2. Park's website
3. Some other website
4. Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
5. Friends and family
6. Park's brochure, flier, or poster
7. If other, please specify _____

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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