Distilling Authenticity: Materiality and Narratives in Canadian Distilleries' Authenticity Work

| Abstract: | Authenticity is increasingly seen as a source of competitive advantage in many industries. Accordingly, authenticity work, the organizational efforts to develop and sustain believable authenticity claims, has emerged as an important organizational practice. We examined the interplay of materiality and narratives underpinning producers' authenticity work in the context of incumbent and micro-distilleries operating in the Canadian whisky industry. We found that producers' material endowments, especially central product features, anchored what authenticity claims they could credibly narrate. Other material endowments, such as key people and architectural design, were used to reinforce the integrity of authenticity claims. Our study extends our understanding of authenticity as a valued organizational resource. First, we identify two mechanisms, anchoring and reinforcement, through which materiality both constrains and facilitates organizations' authenticity narratives. Second, our research brings to the fore how audience members' experiential closeness to producers colors their perceptions of authenticity, and we show how material artifacts can enhance such closeness. Third, our findings enrich the understanding of competitive value of authenticity in the context of strategy by unpacking how producers' material endowments may constitute a resource or a liability. |

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Canadian Distilleries' Authenticity Work

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ABSTRACT

Authenticity is increasingly seen as a source of competitive advantage in many industries. Accordingly, authenticity work, the organizational efforts to develop and sustain believable authenticity claims, has emerged as an important organizational practice. We examined the interplay of materiality and narratives underpinning producers' authenticity work in the context of incumbent and micro-distilleries operating in the Canadian whisky industry. We found that producers' material endowments, especially central product features, anchored what authenticity claims they could credibly narrate. Other material endowments, such as key people and architectural design, were used to reinforce the integrity of authenticity claims. Our study extends our understanding of authenticity as a valued organizational resource. First, we identify two mechanisms, anchoring and reinforcement, through which materiality both constrains and facilitates organizations' authenticity narratives. Second, our research brings to the fore how audience members' experiential closeness to producers colors their perceptions of authenticity, and we show how material artifacts can enhance such closeness. Third, our findings enrich the understanding of competitive value of authenticity in the context of strategy by unpacking how producers' material endowments may constitute a resource or a liability.

"What is a Canadian hug? It's the warm embrace of rye whisky going down smooth and slow." – Alex, Master Blender, Heritage Brands

It is difficult to overstate the importance placed on authenticity in contemporary society. Consumers desire authentic brands (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Holt, 2002), businesses search for authentic leaders (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Patriotta, 2019), and voters crave authentic politicians (Alexander, 2010; Hahl, Kim, & Zuckerman Sivan, 2018). People also aspire for authenticity in their careers (Caza, Moss, & Vough, 2018; Ibarra, 1999) and, most importantly, in their lives (Potter, 2010; Taylor, 1991). In organizational contexts, authenticity refers to "audience members' subjective perceptions of an organization's external expressions as genuinely representing its identity" (Demetry, 2019: 937). Although being authentic can sometimes mean disavowing commercial motives (Grazian, 2010; Hahl, 2016), authenticity has also become integral to organizational success in many industries (Kovács,

2019; Kroezen, Ravasi, Sasaki, Żebrowska, & Suddaby, 2021; Ruebottom, Buchanan, Voronov,

& Toubiana, in press; Verhaal, Hoskins, & Lundmark, 2017).

If authenticity is important for organizational success, then authenticity work (Peterson,

2005), organizations' effortful projection of being authentic to their audiences, becomes an

important focus of investigation. From the vantage point of studying authenticity work,

authenticity itself is a communicative accomplishment that is dependent on audience buy-in

(Alexander, 2004; Demetry, 2019; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Peterson, 2005). Extant research

has emphasized the importance of narratives in persuading audiences that a product, organization

or even an entire category is authentic (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016; Verhaal et al., 2017). A

narrative is a linguistic emplotment that links people, places and/or things in a coherent

arrangement that is easily understood by others (Patriotta, 2003; Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje,

2016). Thus, narratives impinge on audiences' perceptions of authenticity by conveying

simplified and accessible representations of what an organization stands for – its values, history,

identity and so on.

Researchers have more recently become interested in the role of materiality in

augmenting the narrative aspects of authenticity claims. Materiality refers to the "physical mode

of being" with distinctive "spatial attributes—a unique location, shape, volume, and mass"

(Faulkner & Runde, 2012: 51). In the context of authenticity, researchers have recognized the

importance of historical artifacts like founding mottos (Hatch & Schultz, 2017), symbolic

artifacts like brands (Beverland, 2005b, 2005a; Holt, 2002), production equipment (Negro,

Hannan, & Rao, 2011), corporate museums (Ravasi, Rindova, & Stigliani, 2019), and other

iconic facilities (Howard-Grenville, Metzger, & Meyer, 2013). These studies suggest that, when

connected to materiality, authenticity claims are more persuasive because the seemingly

objective nature of physical artifacts makes narratives of authenticity more believable

(Cavanaugh & Shankar, 2014).

Yet, material artifacts are not equally accessible to all organizations (Ravasi et al., 2019),

nor are they equally powerful in relation to specific narratives. This is because organizations are

endowed with different artifacts and infrastructures that have sedimented over time as a result of

their varying developmental trajectories (Kroezen & Heugens, 2019; Raffaelli, DeJordy, &

McDonald, 2021). Since organizations thus cannot access material artifacts to support

authenticity claims arbitrarily, the relation between material and narrative aspects of authenticity

claims requires further investigation. The purpose of this article is to extend research on

authenticity through an exploration of how organizations' material endowments enable and

constrain their authenticity claims. We define *authenticity claims* as the combination of

narratives and material artifacts through which an organization asserts its character, values and

spirit. *Authenticity work*, in this context, is the practice of constructing preferred authenticity

claims (Peterson, 2005) through believable narratives and material artifacts that resonate with

audiences.

Empirically, we explore authenticity work in the Canadian whisky industry. Similar to

other experiential products (Biswas, Grewal, & Roggeveen, 2010), authenticity is valued highly

among whisky connoisseurs and other audiences (Bryson, 2020; Holt, 2006; McKendrick &

Hannan, 2014; Ocejo, 2017; Thurnell-Read, 2019). As a result, the practice of crafting

authenticity claims is important to whisky producers. Surprisingly, we found that incumbent

organizations, despite distinguished pasts, iconic founders, and abundant artifacts that are

essential to the tradition of Canadian whisky making, did not enjoy an authenticity advantage in

the eyes of audience members over upstart micro-distilleries, which seemingly had fewer of

those material resources. The variations in authenticity work and perceptions within the industry made this a compelling setting to develop a theory of the relationship between materiality and narratives in organizations' authenticity work.

A focus on the interaction between materiality and narratives helps scholars understand how organizations engage in authenticity work to maintain resonance with their audiences. Our study contributes to three open questions related to materiality in authenticity work as an organizational practice. First, we explicate the relationship between materiality and narratives in organizations' ability to craft and sustain authenticity claims. Based on our grounded analysis, we identify two processes, anchoring and reinforcement, through which materiality constrains organizations' authenticity narratives while still affording opportunities for skillful action. Second, our research brings to the fore how audience members' experiential closeness to organizations colors their perceptions of authenticity, and we show how material artifacts can enhance closeness. Third, our findings enrich the understanding of competitive value of authenticity by unpacking how an organization's material endowment may constitute a resource or liability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Authenticity is understood as the subjective perception that an entity (e.g., person, place or thing) is real (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009), credible (Peterson, 2005) or both (Lehman, O'Connor, Kovács, & Newman, 2019), and that the lineage of that entity can be verified (Lindholm, 2008). Although multiple conceptualizations of authenticity exist in the literature (Lehman et al., 2019), the aspect that is emphasized most commonly – and across different research streams – is the perceived consistency between an entity's internal or private values and qualities, and their external expressions (Demetry, 2019; Hahl et al., 2018; Peterson, 2005). This conceptualization stresses the expression of a unique character and emphasizes the link between

the presentation of identity claims and how audiences evaluate these claims (Beverland, 2005a; Hochschild, 1983; Holt, 2002; Peterson, 1997). Audiences may also draw on the perceived conformity of an entity to the social category to which the entity has been assigned or that it has claimed for itself (Lu & Fine, 1995). From this perspective, authenticity is assessed in relation to the social norms underpinning categories and genres (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009; Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Negro et al., 2011). Lastly, authenticity may also refer to the perceived connection between an entity and a person, place, or time as claimed (Lockwood & Glynn, 2016). The connection can be physical, spatiotemporal (Beverland, 2005a; Spracklen, 2011), based on transference (Grayson & Martinec, 2004), or symbolism (Hahl, 2016; Lockwood, Glynn, & Giorgi, in press).

Most importantly, however, authenticity is a perception (Kovács, 2019) and does not inhere effortlessly in people and things. Thus, people and objects are neither objectively authentic nor inauthentic. Instead, authenticity arises from practices of *persuasion* and *evaluation* that result in the affirmation or rejection of authenticity. A sense of authenticity can arise from partaking in carefully crafted rituals (Alexander, 2004; Demetry, 2019; Ruebottom et al., in press), or when audiences uphold authenticity claims put forward by organizations (Demetry, 2019; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). When audiences evaluate an authenticity claim affirmatively an entity or object is then deemed "believable relative to a more or less explicit model, and at the same time being original, that is not being an imitation of the model" (Peterson, 1997: 220).

Multiple communicative practices can be utilized by organizations to project authenticity claims. Narration of authenticity claims, in particular, has been emphasized as crucial (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016; Foster, Coraiola, Suddaby, Kroezen, & Chandler, 2017). Two aspects of narratives are important in the context of authenticity work. First, narratives follow a structure

(plot) that connects particular experiences to broader claims, rather than simply asserting general truths. Narratives "reflect and express – and also shape and create – realities and experiences thereof" (Zilber, 2009: 208). Second, narratives have a comprehensive rhetorical purpose, that is, they are geared towards producing a cognitive as well emotional connection between the performer and the audience (Giorgi, 2017; Vaara & Tienari, 2011). Narrative communication is thus suited to persuade audiences that an organization is faithful to itself and its audiences. For example, organizations often construct narratives that bring to life their long history, identity and values to position themselves as "authentic," and to separate themselves from purely financial motives (Beverland, 2005b; Foster et al., 2017; Grazian, 2010).

Recent research, however, has increasingly acknowledged that narratives alone, are not sufficient to persuade audiences that they are, in fact, authentic. This is because, for example, narratives are commonly associated with the world of fiction rather than the world of facts; they privilege "telling" over "showing". Hence audiences may find it difficult to assess the believability of a purely narrative message. In this regard, materiality may increase audience perceptions of authenticity by facilitating the visual and bodily apprehension of physical aesthetics, places, and other culturally legitimated physical artifacts that are leveraged in authenticity work (Massa, Helms, Voronov, & Wang, 2017; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018). This research suggests that authenticity claims are apprehended through both narrative and material components (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Siebert, Wilson, & Hamilton, 2017), each of which makes important and distinctive contributions to the believability of authenticity claims.

The Role of Materiality in Authenticity

There is a growing awareness among organizational researchers that materiality can have a significant impact on organizations and organizing (Boxenbaum, Jones, Meyer, & Svejenova, 2018; Leonardi, 2011; Siebert et al., 2017; Wright, Meyer, Reay, & Staggs, 2020). Materiality

directs attention to the physical properties of artifacts. These properties are fixed, and this fixedness affects what organizations can do (Leonardi, 2012). Yet, materiality is flexible enough to allow organizations to combine material elements in different manners and for different purposes. Most notably, the socio-materiality perspective shifts the focus of attention from the properties of artifacts to their use in particular contexts (Orlikowski, 2007). From this standpoint, every organizational activity is bound with materiality (Faulkner & Runde, 2012; Orlikowski, 2007). This "material turn" in organization studies has questioned classical oppositions between mind and body, agency and structure, meaning and matter, social and material worlds (Coole & Frost, 2010).

An emphasis on materiality draws attention to two important aspects of authenticity: the agency of actors involved in the construction of authenticity claims and the role of materiality in representing and communicating authenticity to intended audiences. First, the construction and development of authenticity claims is intertwined with specific material conditions that afford as well as constrain certain narratives whose meaning depend on people's perceptions (Barad, 2007). From this standpoint, authenticity work entails blending an organization's material endowments with cultural conventions, norms, and other phenomena we define as social (Schatzki, 2010). Second, objects and physical artifacts can be conceived as material signs, serving as a medium to shape beliefs, understandings, and perceptions (Foucault, 1998; Zilber, 2011). In particular, recent research on authenticity has devoted increased attention to the roles of places (Bell, Dacin, & Toraldo, 2021), buildings (Hahl, 2016; Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Spracklen, 2011), production equipment (Negro et al., 2011), people (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018), and other culturally significant material artifacts in amplifying organizations' authenticity claims. Overall, this body of work suggests that authenticity claims are constructed as

communicative acts between producers and audiences through the deployment of both narratives and materiality.

While researchers have documented the respective importance of narratives and of materiality in authenticity, how narratives and materiality contribute to enabling or constraining organizational authenticity work has not been extensively explored. Neither particular narratives nor forms of materiality are solely persuasive in themselves, but only in connection to crafting authenticity claims that relevant audiences believe. In this regard, materiality has so far typically been considered as a "downstream" tool that makes authenticity claims more persuasive to audiences, rather than as a more fundamental "upstream" factor that influences – and possibly constrains – the options available to organizations for making authenticity claims. Whether considering historical artifacts (Ravasi et al., 2019) or an iconic stadium (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013), materiality appears to be something that can be deployed – selectively and as needed – to reinforce the authenticity claims an organization has already chosen to make. From this perspective, access to materiality that affords compelling authenticity claims appear to be unproblematic and suggests extensive agency in supporting claims with material dimensions. In other words, while scholars have recognized the importance of materiality in supporting organizations' preferred authenticity claims, they have not explored the role of materiality in influencing *how organizations choose* the authenticity claims they make, or how these claims resonate with audiences.

Throughout the remainder of this paper, we examine the interaction of materiality and narratives underpinning organizational effort to develop and sustain believable authenticity claims.

METHODS

We found the setting of the Canadian whisky industry to be generative for exploring our

research interests, because it lays bare how authenticity claims of organizations are influenced by

material endowments that are specific to the industry but are heterogeneously distributed across

its members. For reasons described below, it is also well suited for examining the interrelation

between the material and narrative facets of authenticity claims.

Research Setting

Whisky (as it is spelled in Canada, Scotland, and Japan), or whiskey (as it is spelled in the US

and Ireland) is a distilled alcoholic beverage. It is made from grain (such as corn, barley, rye, or

wheat), which is mashed, fermented, distilled, and aged in oak barrels for a minimum period that

varies from country-to-country (e.g., at least three years in Canada). There are five major whisky

producing nations: Scotland (birthplace of Scotch), Canada, US (birthplace of Bourbon), Ireland,

and Japan. Each of these countries has a distinctive whisky-making tradition (Broom, 2014a),

and these traditions "are singular enough that you can often tell what you're drinking just by the

flavors and aromas" (Bryson, 2020: 9). Authenticity has emerged as an important aspect of

competition in the whisky market for many reasons, not the least being the increased importance

of connoisseur consumers who act as influencers within that market (Bryson, 2020; McKendrick

& Hannan, 2014; Ocejo, 2017). Thus, in the wine and spirits sector, companies compete not only

for market share and shelf space but also for the attention of these highly engaged consumers and

other influential audiences (Humphreys & Carpenter, 2018).

Canadian whisky is recognized at home and abroad. In Canada, it has been the dominant

product in the whisky market from the beginning of commercial whisky production in the late

1700s. Abroad, the popularity of Canadian whisky is reflected in international sales. For

example, in 2017 annual sales of Canadian whisky reached $5.9 Billion and it is sold in more

than 160 countries (De Kergommeaux, 2017). Further evidence of the product's popularity is

that since 1865, Canadian whisky has been within the top 2 whisky segments (by volume) in the

US market (the biggest market for Canadian whisky).

The Canadian whisky tradition is distinct from those of other major distilling countries

(De Kergommeaux, 2012). In particular, Canadian distillers pioneered several whisky production

techniques that are now accepted as industry standards. For example, they were the first to

mandate whisky aging in wooden barrels. This tradition, in fact, has since become the most

defining characteristic of a whisky made anywhere in the world. Also, the national style of

whisky production that involves distilling grains separately and creating artful blends that may

involve upwards of 20 different whiskies made at the same distillery[1] can be traced back to the

founding of the Canadian Club brand in 1884 (Jackson, 1987). Thus, being a Canadian whisky

producer provides distilleries with material and narrative resources for constructing authenticity

claims. For example, incumbent distilleries have distinctive traditions (Jackson, 1987), a long

and colorful history (e.g., Faith, 2007; Rannie, 1976; Teatro, 1977), and salient material artifacts

such as equipment and facilities.

The industry is rich in cultural norms, about what makes a whisky product "good", and

the particular ways in which it should be produced, narrated and enjoyed (Broom, 2014b;

Bryson, 2014, 2020). Materiality is implicated in whisky industry in at least three ways: 1) the

whisky liquid itself; 2) the process that turns the physical inputs into the final liquid, and 3) the

various physical spaces that are central to both the production and the audiences' experiences of

the whisky products.

Yet, we found that although Canadian distilleries appeared to possess the material

endowments identified in prior research as valuable for authenticity work (e.g., Hatch & Schultz,

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[1] Unlike Blended Scotch, which consists of multi-distillery blends, Canadian whisky is typically single-distillery blend (De Kergommeaux, 2012).

2017; Ravasi et al., 2019), organizations varied widely in both their practices of claiming authenticity and the extent to which their practices resonated with audiences, as reflected in interviewees' responses. These differences made the authenticity work visible and the variable success among the distilleries offered the analytic advantage of requisite variance for comparison.

Data Collection

Our data collection took place between 2015 and 2019. We aimed to accomplish two things. First, we sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of how authenticity is constructed in this industry from the point of view of the distilleries and key audiences. Similar to other experiential products (Biswas et al., 2010), where authenticity is often an important aspect of their commercial appeal (Askin & Mol, 2018; Demetry, 2019; Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Han, Newman, Smith, & Dhar, 2021), certain elite audiences, or intermediaries between distilleries and less engaged audiences (McCoy, 2005), codify what is deemed authentic in the given industry (Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Massa et al., 2017). Thus, in our sampling, we selectively focused on these audience members (e.g., retailers, bloggers, restaurateurs, connoisseurs). Second, we sought to ensure that we sampled a broad range of distilleries to include differences in such theoretically important characteristics as age, size, ownership structure, geographical location, relative reputation, and the reliance on in-house distilling versus contract distilling[2]. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of our sample and data sources.

Insert Table 1 about here

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[2] Sourcing aged liquid from third-party distilleries, or contract distilling, is common all over the world. For example, the vast majority of Scotch whisky sold are made from blended Scotch whisky; approximately 130 distinct brands of US whiskey are made from the liquid produced at a single distillery Midwest Grains Products (MGP) (https://thewhiskeywash.com/distillery-profiles/visit-mgp-distillery/) and several Japanese whisky brands source whisky from remote locales such as Scotland, the US and Canada.

Insert Table 2 about here

Semi-structured interviews. We conducted a total of 92 semi-structured interviews with distillery representatives and audience members, employing open-ended questions. Distillery interviewees were asked about the factors that influenced their decisions about how to portray their organizations and their product offerings as authentic, and what they thought audiences were looking for. Audience members were asked about the factors that made them accept or reject distilleries' authenticity claims (See Appendix 1- Sample Interview Questions). Critically, interviewees were asked to offer details and specific examples to illustrate their points, and we probed to elicit as much detail as possible. The interviews ranged in length from 1 to 1.5 hours and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Over the course of the study, we modified and refined the interview protocols to take advantage of emerging themes (Spradley, 1979), which we will elaborate in the Data Analysis section below. We continued our interviews until they started adding little new information.

In situ observations. The first author observed more than 70 hours of both routine distillery operations (e.g., production processes, hosting distillery visitors) and social interactions at public events (whisky festivals). These observations allowed us to get a sampling of different common situations where distillery representatives convey key authenticity messages to audience members. When attending whisky festivals, the first author observed and took field notes during masterclasses as distillery representatives discussed the flavor profiles of whisky products and explained the production methods, answered audience questions, and occasionally allowed attendees to taste the component whiskies that were blended into a final product. These

observations enabled the author to access first-hand narratives that distillery representatives

constructed as well as pertinent material artifacts.

During these events the author also observed audience reactions and subsequently asked

audience members to reflect on their experiences during these masterclasses. Due to the rapport

that the author built with employees of the distilleries and some key whisky writers in Canada,

he was able to get unique behind-the-scenes access to distilleries and observe some of the

interactions with audiences that were not typically visible to "regular" consumers. For instance,

he was invited to join a group of influential whisky bloggers from Canada and abroad on a tour

of micro-distilleries, organized in conjunction with a whisky festival. On another occasion,

during a large whisky festival, the author was able to observe a private, invitation-only event

hosted by a distillery brand ambassador. At this event, a small group of whisky bloggers were

given the exclusive opportunity to taste some rare and not-yet-released products. These kinds of

observations were essential to our understanding of how and why whisky writers and bloggers

endorse or reject distilleries' authenticity claims.

Documents. We collected books, articles and other documents that reported on the

Canadian whisky and the Canadian whisky industry. We also examined texts documenting

public perceptions of Canadian whisky. These included: (1) writings of professional whisky

writers in newspapers, books, blogs, and other industry publications, and (2) blog entries and

social media discussions by connoisseurs and distillery visitors. Lastly, we monitored the

websites and social media postings of the distilleries in our sample during the study period.

Data Analysis

Phase one – Identifying authenticity claims and the role of narratives. At the outset of

this research, we sought to understand broadly how organizations use tradition and history for

strategic advantage, and we focused on several large distilleries that had been operating for

several decades. The focus on authenticity emerged from the data as a "mystery" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007), as we noticed authenticity being mentioned extensively in our interviews – with both distillery representatives and audience members. It was also mentioned extensively in the writings about whisky. We were especially surprised that our audience members claimed that some of the older and most famous distilleries in Canada were producing whisky that they viewed as inauthentic.[3] This puzzling evidence prompted us to refocus our research on understanding how authenticity claims were constructed, accepted or rejected by audiences.

We expanded our sampling to a wider selection of the distilleries (as explained in our Data Collection section). We immersed ourselves in popular media and social media coverage of Canadian whisky and read extensively about the history of Canadian whisky. These secondary sources, along with audience member interviews helped us understand what audiences deemed authentic and inauthentic in the context of whisky. We analyzed our interview, observational and archival data, iterating between the raw data and the emerging theory using a constant comparison technique (Locke, 2001).

Initially, we coded for authenticity claims in an open-ended manner, taking note of the specific narratives distillery representatives constructed to characterize what made their respective distilleries and their offerings authentic. For each distillery, we compared and contrasted the narratives that appeared in interviews, website descriptions, and the formal and informal presentations by distillery representatives during distillery visits or during whisky festivals.

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[3] At the start of this research, the overall perception among the elite audience members we interviewed was that the whisky made by the incumbent older distilleries was mass-market "budget" product and of limited interest to connoisseurs. During the course of our research, the perception began to change, as several incumbent distilleries worked hard to change these perceptions via material and narrative work, as detailed in the findings.

We looked broadly throughout the data sources for mentions of authenticity and related terms that were especially relevant to whisky. The narratives typically included terms such as "genuine", "traditional", "honest", "faithful", and "original", and synonyms. We also compared our grounded analyses to prior studies of authenticity in management research (e.g., Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Kovács, 2019; Kovács, Carroll, & Lehman, 2014; Lehman, Kovács, & Carroll, 2014) as well as in sociology and anthropology (e.g., Alexander, 2004; Lindholm, 2008; Trilling, 1972) to help sensitize ourselves to other vocabularies related to authenticity, such as "pure", "real", "believable", "sincere", and "skilled". We then returned to our data to determine if any additional expressions of authenticity might emerge.

Over multiple iterations, key theoretical categories emerged. Specifically, we noticed the emergence of two broad categories of authenticity claims: *authenticity as tradition* that emphasized doing things in a time-honored and traditional manner; and *authenticity as originality* that emphasized creativity and doing things in a distinctive, personally expressive and unusual manner.

Comparing within and across cases, we first noticed two other intriguing patterns. First, within-case comparison revealed that each distillery tended to make relatively consistent claims, emphasizing either tradition or originality. Second, across-case comparison revealed the tendency of micro-distilleries to emphasize authenticity as originality, while the incumbent distilleries tended to emphasize authenticity as tradition.[4] This intriguing pattern motivated us to examine more systematically the underlying reasons for these tendencies.

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[4] Micro-distilleries are commonplace around the world and refer, typically, to up-start new and small operations (Bryson, 2020). In Canada, the first micro-distilleries emerged in the mid-2000s (De Kergommeaux & Phillips, 2020), and we classified any older distilleries as incumbents. We do not use the term "craft distilleries" (Ocejo, 2017) to refer to micro-distilleries, because many of our informants found it ideological, rather than descriptive, and confounding smallness with craft attitude, which, they argued, can be exhibited by distilleries of any size or age (De Kergommeaux, 2017).

Phase two – Identifying the role of materiality. During our coding of the interviews, we noticed that our distillery informants mentioned different material endowments in explaining the authenticity claims they thought they could make plausibly. For example, informants representing micro-distilleries admitted that it was difficult to argue that their products were traditional because they were still "youthful" or "rough around the edges". We also noticed that our audience informants tended to cite material artifacts, such as the flavor profile of the liquid or direct engagement with a whisky maker, as evidence for their acceptance or rejection of distilleries' authenticity claims.

We then turned attention to the role of materiality in facilitating the different authenticity claims. Prior research found that the meanings of authenticity are tied closely to specific local cultural fields, such as high tech industry (Buhr, Funk, & Owen-Smith, 2021) or country music (Peterson, 1997). Artifacts associated with authenticity also differ from field-to-field. Thus, while boots and cowboy hats might be important in country music (Peterson, 1997), in artisanal meat (Cavanaugh & Shankar, 2014) and chocolate (Terrio, 1996) production, land and ingredients are more central. Thus, we returned to the authoritative writings about whisky to sensitize ourselves to the material resources deemed essential for whisky production around the world. We identified three broad categories of material resources that were most salient: the aged liquid itself, as manifest in whisky product features, key people involved in whisky making, and the architectural design of the distilleries.

Armed with this background knowledge, we re-examined the interview transcripts and the information gathered about the distilleries in our sample from secondary documents and observations to assess whether these material resources were relevant to our specific setting. Not surprisingly, these categories of material artifacts were strongly salient in our sample, as well.

We then went back to information available to us about each distillery in the sample and made across-distilleries comparisons to understand which of these material endowments were available to each of them. We also examined the data for mentions of which material endowments might have been absent or in short supply for any given distillery. For example, some distilleries reportedly lacked well-aged liquid that would be valuable for making certain whisky products. In several cases, when the information was not available, we followed up during subsequent interviews or by email.

Phase three – Understanding the interplay of narratives and materiality in authenticity work. We then sought to deepen our understanding of authenticity work by integrating the emerging patterns that linked audiences, performers, materiality and narratives. We sought to link the narratives constructed by distillery representatives, while making authenticity claims, identified in phase 1, to their respective material endowments, identified in phase 2. We noted the presence or absence of these artifacts that could be narrated by distilleries to make authenticity claims.

We identified distinctive roles of each of the three categories of material endowments. First, *product features* connoted specific ingredients and process that had to be described with accuracy. Second, key people involved in whisky making connoted relevant embodied knowledge that facilitated direct human connection between a distillery and audience members, and as such, these people were *human embodiments* of a distillery's authenticity claims. Third, *architectural design* of each distillery connoted distinctive space where whisky production happened and the possibility of a more transparent and immersive engagement with a distillery.

Tentative interpretations of the findings were presented to our interviewees at different point throughout the study. Their feedback was used to refine the coding scheme. Throughout the

period of the study, the first author wrote up reports for distilleries and audience members and

used these as a basis for discussions meant to assess the accuracy of the emerging interpretations.

This offered informants opportunities to express their agreement or disagreement with the

researchers and, more importantly, to further articulate their views about the industry and

individual distilleries.

We discussed differences in interpretations, until we reached a consensus. When we

could not reach a consensus, we consulted our interviewees to determine the most appropriate

course of action and to ascertain if additional data collection was necessary, thereby increasing

the "trustworthiness" of our analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

FINDINGS

Our findings shed light on the intricate relationship between materiality and narratives in

authenticity work. On the one hand, authenticity claims around Canadian whisky required work:

they needed to be grounded in explanatory narratives to be believable to audiences. As a

marketing consultant explained: "with authenticity. If you-- you can't just use the word. You

need to explain it. You need to build it into your story line. And if you do, then it makes it really

hard for others to continue to use that word eventually. Just like I'm saying, you know, people

will eventually start to dig and dig and then they'll go, oh, now I know what authentic means."

On the other hand, the credibility of producers' stories was anchored by materiality, so that

materiality made some authenticity claims more natural and obvious.

Audiences used two widely shared criteria to assess authenticity in the context of whisky

making: tradition and originality. Producers sought to orient audiences toward one of these

qualities through narratives that signaled a preferred basis for claiming authenticity.

Bases of Authenticity Perceptions: Tradition and Originality

Tradition and originality form bases of admissible authenticity claims in the whisky industry because they are widely seen by diverse industry participants (and were mentioned extensively in the literature on global whisky industry that we consulted) as essential or defining connotations of whisky itself. Notably, in this industry, tradition and originality are understood not as mutually exclusive opposites but as independent qualities.

Whisky products and the process of whisky production are firmly rooted in the notion of tradition. Acclaimed American writer Lew Bryson (2014), for instance, argues that the "centuries of tradition stand on the shoulders of thousands more years of brewing tradition, which in turn stand on the foundation of civilization. Here's how whiskey fits into the history of humankind." Tradition in this context connects whisky and whisky making to a valued historical imagery that conveys a sense of cultural heritage and identity. In our data, narratives that claimed authenticity based on tradition correspondingly emphasized continuity, loyalty to the original roots, and adherence to received practice and methods of production.

Yet, whisky writers often pointed out that whisky is quintessentially about originality. As noted British whisky writer Dave Broom summarizes, "Whisky is about flavour, and whisky-distilling is about the way in which each distiller or blender, no matter where they are in the world, creates and crafts the specific flavours that make their whisky unique" (Broom, 2014b). Originality in this context is about the creativity that inheres in the craft of whisky making, so that the product expresses the individuality and independence of the whisky maker despite adherence to received methods and principles. In our data, narratives claiming originality as a basis of authenticity consequently emphasized uniqueness, novelty, and virtuosity in whisky production or the resulting products.

As shown by our data (see Table 3), Canadian distilleries sought to claim authenticity based on tradition as well as originality. Even though these bases of authenticity were both valued and compatible, in principle, most incumbent distilleries tended to emphasize tradition while most micro-distilleries emphasized originality (see Table 4). We found that three types of material referents guided distilleries' authenticity work in mobilizing these bases of authenticity in their narratives: product features, human embodiments, and architectural designs. While product features strongly suggested possible bases of authenticity claims, human embodiments and architectural designs served primarily to reinforce their claims.

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        Insert Table 3 about here
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The Anchoring Role of Materiality in Authenticity Work

We found that material product features, such as flavor profiles or age, anchored authenticity narratives by signaling integrity in the product's core elements of production (ingredients, recipes, labels, tools and technology, and production process). The broad consensus among audience and distillery interviewees was that knowledgeable whisky drinkers could readily spot a disconnect between the narrative of an authenticity claim (e.g., in product descriptions) and the material qualities manifest in the whisky flavor profile. As one blogger summed up: "Just don't lie to me about what's in your bottle! [laughs] That has to be transparent 100 percent" (Blogger 5). Furthermore, many producers pointed out that even less knowledgeable whisky drinkers (who cannot taste the differences themselves) can access online information to verify distilleries' statements with reference to the same material product features. A distillery manager observed: "Being truthful is something that's very important, and talking

about your product in the right ways that communicates exactly what you've done with it" (Mel, Western Spirit). Thus, the link between a distillery's narrative and the respective bases of authenticity claims had to be believable to audience members, and material product features signaled truthfulness.

We observed rare instances in which inconsistent claims were exposed. For example, one of the authors attended a whisky festival where a large distillery introduced its new rye grain offering underneath a large banner that read "Our Single Malt", which is a misnomer – a single malt in the Scottish tradition (and as widely understood among whisky connoisseurs) has to be made from malted barley (not rye). The distillery was ridiculed for this practice by connoisseurs, such as in the following: "[It] is awkwardly marketed as 'the Single Malt of Canadian Whisky' despite the fact that it isn't made from malted barley at all, and despite the fact that there are Canadian distilleries that *actually* produce single malt whisky. […] In my humble opinion, this whisky isn't aimed at the experienced connoisseur."

The narratives constructed by the distilleries to promote or explain their whiskies' flavor profiles thus tended to closely align with the most readily verifiable material aspects of their products, such as the grains used in making the products and the specific distillation and aging techniques. Although this association between a claim and the materiality of the product could be advantageous to producers, it also made it difficult for them to narrate alternative claims, even when those claims might have been desirable to the audience. For incumbents, the material properties of their product were limiting because in the eyes of audience members they were associated with traditional Canadian flavor profiles that were currently less fashionable. Yet, these producers could not credibly deviate from the tradition claims anchored by the flavor profiles of their whisky to claim originality in their narratives. Conversely, micro-distillers, as

predominantly young organizations, often had not produced whiskies that were aged enough to

credibly evoke in their narratives the refinement and technical polish that signal tradition.

Our data suggests that the most important material manifestation that anchors authenticity

claims is whether the product is made with well-aged liquid. This product feature is an essential

distinguishing feature: not only is being an aged spirit a central connotation of whisky, but

sufficient aging even determines whether a distillery can release a product that can be legally

labeled "whisky". We found that, on balance, abundant stocks of well-aged liquid made

distilleries more likely to construct narratives that emphasize tradition while limited access to

stocks of well-aged liquid made distilleries more likely to emphasize originality (see Table 5).

Insert Table 5 about here

Product features anchor incumbent distilleries' narratives to tradition claims. Both the

writings about whisky and our interviewees emphasized that whisky products aged for many

years are highly desirable and what makes a whisky a whisky. Across our diverse data sources,

the ability to age whisky is seen as an asset of incumbent distilleries that have a long history of

distilling, and a limitation of more recently founded micro-distilleries. Indeed, incumbents have

stocks of spirit that may exceed 20 years-old, and in some cases 40 years-old. One incumbent's

master blender explained this advantage of incumbents, "If I want something 10 years old, I'd

have to put it in barrel 10 years ago. So it's all tied in together" (Kurt, House of Distinction). For

example, Heritage Brands and House of Distinction, each own more than 1.5 million barrels of

aged liquid produced following Canadian whisky tradition. From these stocks of aged liquid,

they produce offerings that would be readily recognizable by connoisseurs as Canadian whisky

due to the distinctive flavor profile that can only be accomplished through specific ingredients, distillation and aging techniques.

Incumbent distilleries predominantly emphasized tradition in their narratives when articulating authenticity claims, in line with the material referent of possessing vast stocks of well-aged whisky made in the Canadian whisky tradition. Thus, the most common subject of incumbents' narratives was the liquid itself. Distilleries aimed to cast their whisky products as true reflections of the Canadian whisky making heritage because they were produced in a traditional manner. Our interviewees at incumbent distilleries also reported that, on the other hand, having abundant in-house aged liquid limited their ability to construct desirable, alternative narratives because they deviate from authenticity as tradition claims.

Incumbents were sometimes disparaged by whisky connoisseurs, who found the traditional Canadian whisky style "boring" and devoid of flavor. Some even referred to traditional Canadian whisky pejoratively as "brown vodka"[5], implying that many incumbents distilled whiskies were mostly devoid of flavor and originality. As many of our audience interviewees explained, the traditional Canadian whisky's acclaimed smoothness was at odds with the more desirable bolder flavored products valued by the connoisseurs. One retailer bemoaned, for instance: "my head's going to explode, but I always hear from people, 'oh, it's so smooth'" (Retailer 1). Incumbent interviewees expressed difficulty in overcoming this constraint. Because the incumbents were anchored to the aged liquid, they were unable to construct narratives about the flavor profile that might counter the perception that their products were boring and devoid of flavor. One production manager summed up the disadvantage of being anchored to traditional Canadian whisky style, "And we've been accused in some respects of

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[5] Vodka is a distilled alcoholic beverage that typically has very little flavor and is used mostly in cocktails.

being called the brown vodka" (Kevin, Heritage Brands). Yet, he explained that the traditional whisky style was the most accurate description of the distillery's products, and it was necessary to stay true to the product features when describing the products.

Product features anchor micro-distilleries' narratives to originality claims. The inability to age whisky for a long time is a distinctive weakness of more recently founded micro-distilleries. As such, these distilleries are limited in their ability to credibly claim authenticity based on tradition. Most micro-distilleries (as organizations) have been in existence for less than a decade and, because of their youth, do not have an option of releasing well-aged whiskies. In fact, most of our micro-distillery informants emphasized how challenging it is to even wait until their spirit is at least 3-years old – a minimum legal requirement to be called whisky. Some micro-distilleries even sought to limit the commercial pressures by releasing whisky before it was 3 years old. To do so they employed the term "spirit" instead of "whisky" in their narratives highlighting the ways they tried to mitigate the shortage of aging. The following is an example of this: "We released a distillery exclusive 12-month-old single malt spirit in late 2017 to much acclaim. The 'Mac Na Braiche', or son of malt, has only been maturing for 12 months but is regularly believed to be five to eight years old in blind tastings." The product in this example is new, but the langage implies something older: noting the age of the whisky as 12 month rather than one year, using a Gaelic name to signal a high status (Scottish) tradition, and seeking to deflect criticism of youthfulnes by comparing favorably to "older" whiskies. Despite such attempts, due to the limited aging, micro-distilleries' releases were typically seen by audiences as less refined and less sophisticated in a traditional sense, and their products were often characterized in our interviews as "harsh" due to shorter aging period. As one bartender

explained, "I'm not too crazy about their products. I think they're rushing them out, but it's really hard to put quality aged products on the market right away" (Bartender 1).

informantsThe more common approach of micro-distilleries was, however, to claim authenticity from originality. In particular, they lent credibility to that claim by emphasizing the uniqueness and unusualness of their products within the industry and by pointing to material product features available to micro-distilleries. Instead of age and the refinement associated with tradition, the narratives of micro-distilleries commonly revolved around their products' higher alcohol content (implying purity and flavor intensity), unusual flavor profiles, and grains that were difficult to work with (e.g., rye) or to obtain (e.g., malted barley). A consultant who had worked with several micro-distilleries explained, "They are young, and there are no rules. So in terms of manufacturer, they're doing interesting and varied things" (Consultant 1). Micro-distilleries' narratives usually emphasized the unique flavor profile – rather than the technical refinement (e.g., "smoothness") of a whisky, giving a material referent to the notion of originality.

A common way for the micro-distilleries in our sample to claim originality was to tap into a foreign whisky making tradition – typically Scotch. These narratives emphasized how drawing on foreign traditions in the whisky making process delivers originality in comparison to the predominant (and ostensibly more uniform and less exciting) Canadian whiskies. They argued that this approach resulted in more distinctive, bold and intense taste profiles that express stronger independence and individuality in interpreting the craft of whisky making, even with the limitations of access to aged liquid which would be typical in these foreign traditions. In fact, most micro-distilleries adhered to a foreign tradition for at least some of their product offerings, while three distilleries in our sample adhered to a foreign tradition exclusively. The notion of

(foreign) tradition was leveraged by these distilleries – unexpectedly – to claim originality within the Canadian industry. The core message in the narratives was the delivery of something novel and rarely seen *among incumbent Canadian distilleries*. As John (of Transplanted Spirits) explained, "the Canadian whisky was a poorer cousin to the single malts and Scotches of the world. So we were almost trying to buck that perception that we were making Canadian whisky." This distillery, then, appropriated a high-status tradition to justify its production choices and to explain the originality of the resulting products, by emphasizing the virtuosity of the appropriation while fending of the risk of looking derivative of the foreign tradition by still claiming uniqueness.

According to most of the audience members we interviewed, it was that unusualness of the micro-distilleries' offerings, made by an upstart, under-resourced distillery that was compelling to them. They recognized that the resulting whiskies could not be as traditionally polished as the offerings of the incumbent Canadian distilleries but appreciated the products as authentic because of the producers' individuality, unique situation, and spirit of experimentation. One blogger explained the appeal: "The reason I buy them is because it's unique. And so, you know, to get a cask-strength [high-alcohol un-diluted with water] rye whisky, really hard to even do that at a craft distillery. So, you know, and that to me is worth money even if it's not-- the quality may not be quite as high." (Blogger 4).

Attempts to mitigate anchoring by product features. While product features anchor distilleries to either tradition or originality authenticity claims, respectively, this anchoring is not deterministic, but rather strongly suggestive. We found distilleries made efforts to overcome the anchoring effects of the product features to tap into alternative forms of authenticity, though this required more effort.

This form of authenticity work was evident when incumbents attempted to claim originality – something desired by connoisseurs – despite the reliance on aged liquid, which anchored them to tradition. The most common way to change their narratives was by recombining the material elements of their products in unconventional ways to develop new whisky products that could be described as original and distinctive. Heritage Brands, for instance, developed a collection of unique whiskies that emphasized experimentation. These annually released products were promoted as utilizing extra-long barrel aging, blending of unusual combinations of distillates, special distillation techniques and higher alcohol content[6] – all intended to intensify the flavor and bring out unusual flavor profiles. These new and distinct offerings generated positive audience reactions from most of our interviewees and illustrated that it was possible for incumbents to appeal to connoisseurs successfully. As one whisky blogger commented: "It tastes awesome, and it's local. And it embraces the sort of localness and pays homage to this very district which I can see sort of just down the road from me. So for me as a Canadian whisky consumer, this is a very exciting bottle to hit the shelves." (Blogger 5).

A complementary example features micro-distilleries attempting to mitigate perception that they rushed products to market and abandoning tradition. Several up-start micro-distilleries opted to source aged liquid from an incumbent distillery to compensate for the lack of their own aged liquid – at least until their own liquid was ready for the marketplace. Such contract distilling is meant to be a short-term measure, and eventually, most of these distilleries start to produce their own liquid. For example, Jason, owner of Spirit of Adventure, explained the challenges faced by a peer micro-distillery as it sought to scale up production by blending some

[6] Whisky is bottled at a minimum of 40% alcohol content, which is accomplished by diluting whisky that is distilled to 55%-75% alcohol with water. While lower alcohol content is commercially attractive to distilleries, higher alcohol content is preferred by connoisseurs.

of its in-house distilled whisky with the liquid purchased from an incumbent distillery: "They

produce about 15 to 20 percent of their own whisky, and that's a flavoring whisky. So it's very

rye-forward, distilled to a low proof. And then what they do is buy from large Canadian whisky

producers base whisky. Base whisky is distilled to a very high proof."

Because of the reliance on incumbents, micro-distilleries that engaged in contract

distilling were, to a large extent, anchored to tradition claims in the same manner as the

incumbents from which they sourced the aged liquid. Given the need to ensure the consistency

between materiality and narratives, it was more difficult for them to sustain the authenticity as

originality claim than for the micro-distilleries that made whisky in-house. To claim originality

they therefore emphasized their own unique contributions to the final product, such as finishing

the previously aged liquid in unusual barrels. For example, this is the way Great Plains Distillery

describes its process:

> We have secured a unique portfolio of well-aged western Canadian whisky (straight corn and rye) currently ranging from 3 to over 30 years in age. […] Picking just the right barrels to compliment the taste of the whisky is the secret to perfecting the flavor during finishing. […] *Since we always have a portfolio of products ageing and finishing, we are in a unique position to experiment and come up with blends that you simply won't find any other distiller trying.* (Emphasis ours)

In other cases, micro-distilleries engaging in contract distilling did not emphasize the

uniqueness of the specific offerings, but instead, they highlighted some of the experiments that

were being done at the distilleries that would influence future releases. For example, one of the

authors visited Legendary Spirits, whose current product offerings consisted of aged liquid

sourced from an incumbent distillery that were matured for an additional period in barrels

formerly used for winemaking. While touring the distillery, the master blender highlighted this

aspect of the production process and expressed pride in some of his unaged spirit, which would

not be released commercially for at least another three years. In this manner he emphasized the

future originality, though the current product features anchored the distillery to tradition.

Summary. Taken together, these findings suggest that the tension between tradition and originality, as bases for making authenticity claims, was influenced in important ways by distilleries' material endowments that anchored their product to a specific base of authenticity and required constructing narrative accordingly. We found that micro-distilleries and incumbents alike presented their authenticity claims in narratives that had to be believable to their audience, and that material product features that are seen as most central to whisky – such as aged liquid and flavor profile – were used to evaluate the believability of narratives. The different material endowments of distilleries thus anchored them to particular authenticity claims. Anchoring operated in a suggestive way, in the form of dispositions and expectations that made some claims appear more natural and easier to convey than others. Yet, it also limited the opportunities to construct alternative claims. In response to the material constraints of product features, incumbents and micro-distilleries were able to exercise skillful agency that resulted in varying degree of success of authenticity work.

In the case of incumbents, while anchoring to tradition they struggled to respond to the audience members' desire for originality. Conversely, in the case of micro-distilleries, the anchoring to originality seemed to provide a better fit with audience expectations. Despite the shortage of aged liquid, the primary resource for whisky production, these distilleries were able to be more flexible in constructing narratives claiming authenticity based on originality by stressing the distinctive ingredients, higher alcohol content, unusual flavor profiles, and appeal to foreign whisky traditions (liberating them from the constraints of the less fashionable Canadian whisky tradition). Yet, the strong influence of material endowments, as encapsulated in the product features, on the construction of narratives to convey preferred authenticity claims was

not deterministic, and we found that distilleries engaged in authenticity work to mitigate the

anchoring effects of the product features and make plausible alternative authenticity claims.

The Reinforcing Role of Materiality in Authenticity Claims

Our analysis also suggests that authenticity work did not stop with the alignment of

narratives and material referents of authenticity claims. Instead, producers mobilized additional

forms of materiality that were not as defining to the category of whisky to reinforce the

credibility of their authenticity claims. We found that key distillery representatives were cast as

human embodiments of authenticity that influenced audience perceptions of expertise in whisky

making, while *distilleries' architectural design* evoked authenticity to the extent that it conveyed

transparency and visibility of the production process. Both elements strengthened the

engagement of audience members with the producers and thus offered visible and experiential

proof of producers' authenticity claims (see Table 6).

Insert Table 6 about here

Human embodiments reinforce authenticity claims. The majority of our audience

informants emphasized that their tendency to believe a distillery's authenticity claims was

reinforced, when they had access to a distillery's employees with deep knowledge and expertise

in whisky making. These people appeared to be *human embodiments* of the distillery's

authenticity claims. Human embodiments deepened the connection between a distillery and

audience members by acting as credible spokespersons and offering visible and palpable proof of

distilleries' authenticity claims. Our audience interviewees explained that what made such

employees effective human embodiments of authenticity was not their mere existence but rather

their visibility, accessibility, and willingness to interact with the audience members. Although

these employees could be met during distillery tours, a more common opportunity for audience

members to encounter these human embodiments was at various whisky festivals that featured

tastings and masterclasses. These events often involved not just guided samplings of whisky

products but also hands-on opportunities to engage in the whisky making process by blending

whiskies or tasting and analyzing component whiskies that make up a particular product.

Whisky festivals epitomize the encounter between materiality and narratives, and

between performers and audiences. The material layout consists of tables, glassware, whisky

samples, grains, water, tasting sheets, banners, books and brochures, pieces of production

equipment (e.g., barrels), and other whisky paraphernalia that, together, convey a rich

representation of both whisky production and consumption. A representative of the whisky

distillery - typically a master blender, master distiller or brand ambassador - leads the event and

connects the audience to the product through narratives about whisky and whisky making. The

narratives not only provide a context for the whisky experience, but also connect whisky, as a

material product, to places, times, bodies of knowledge, and the work that signals authenticity.

The vast majority of audience members reported valuing opportunities to ask questions

and verify and validate claims of tradition or originality. They generally concurred that master

blenders (who develop the final whisky blend) or distillers (who distill the spirit used for whisky

making) were the most compelling human embodiments. As one connoisseur explained, it is

important "to have people representing the distillery that are knowledgeable. Not just someone

who is going to spew the gospel or the company line" (Connoisseur 2). According to audience

interviewees, it was the unquestioned technical competence of such employees that made them

more convincing in reinforcing tradition claims by highlighting their knowledgeability in whisky

tradition. In addition, these employees were also essential for reinforcing originality claims by

legitimizing experiments, unusual choices and deviations from traditional Canadian whisky

making approaches. Yet, distilleries differed in both the ways they used human embodiments of

authenticity and their success in doing so.

    Human embodiments reinforcing tradition claims. The authenticity work of older

incumbent distilleries often involved showcasing and revering the historical figureheads, such as

founders, to reinforce authenticity claims. Because these historical figureheads are connected to a

distillery's whisky making process, and by extension, to the founding of Canadian whisky

making tradition, they were deemed as suitable candidates to support and promote tradition-

based authenticity claims, as illustrated in the following:

> John Philip (J.P.) Wiser was the son of a Dutch farmer from New York State. Like his father, J.P.
> was a man of integrity, strong values and an exceptional work ethic, which was evident in his
> whisky-making process. In the hands of J.P. Wiser, this process was one that could not be
> sacrificed by rushing. According to J.P. Wiser, "Quality is something you just can't rush. Horses
> should hurry, but whisky should take its time" (JP Wiser's website).

    Through these narratives about historical figureheads, incumbent distilleries sought to

reinforce their authenticity claims by emphasizing their past and foundational distinctive

contributions to the whisky making tradition that still guide them in the present. And yet, most

audience members reported that they found reference to historical figures in authenticity claims

unconvincing. One whisky blogger, for instance, felt like the emphasis on the origins of a

particular whisky style, as exemplified by a distillery's founding story dating back to mid-1800s,

was meaningless because, "the way that styles of whisky change and come and go as

whatchamacallit, not quite as often as I change my socks, but almost" (Blogger 3). Similarly, a

bartender complained about the limited relevance of a distillery's founder in the present day:

"They're not selling us on the legacy. They're calling it 'Legacy' but they're still not kind of,

you know, like, yeah, you just don't see it as, like, historical" (Bartender 1).

    Furthermore, incumbent distillers deployed brand ambassadors, whose background was

typically in bartending or sales, rather than in whisky making, to represent them at whisky

festivals. These events were generally conceived as opportunities to promote the distillery by entertaining and educating whisky drinkers. In their presentations brand ambassadors would typically place the whisky event in the context of the distillery's history. For example, their narratives constructed authenticity as emerging out of an unbroken tradition of Canadian whisky making, a tradition based on the heroic endeavors of the founder, the purity of ingredients and recipes and the orthodox methods of production. Jim, the brand ambassador for International Brands, for instance, explained the key messages he seeks to convey to audiences as follows: "I talk about them a little bit just so we know-- okay, this is how Canadian whisky's made and, oh, and this is how it's different than our friends in Scotland. […] I think it's important to talk about all whiskies a little bit, but focus on the Canadian way and then that way they at least know a little bit more than they did before they got there."

But, because of the lack of background in actual whisky making, brand ambassadors, whether accurately or not, were often seen as less knowledgeable and less effective in reinforcing the distilleries' authenticity claims. In fact, most audience members and even two distillery informants offered a variety of examples of brand ambassadors revealing a lack of technical knowledge or being unable to offer satisfactory answers to audience technical questions at trade shows or tasting events. One whisky writer even dismissed them as "salespeople". As Restaurateur 3 noted, when discussing one brand ambassador, "he's a global ambassador, but he's just… he's cocktails. He's a bartender!"

During conversations with distillery representatives, they explained that the dearth of active human embodiments was due, largely, to the high organizational complexity of incumbent distilleries, including large numbers of employees, distributed geographically, and the separation of production facilities from the customer facing facilities. As a result, master-blenders (whose

job was in production) were typically isolated from customer-facing activities, the purview of

marketing, and not performing duties that would make them accessible to audiences.

There were rare exceptions among the incumbents, with one leveraging the technical

expertise of a master blender as prominent human embodiments of authenticity, and two others

doing so on rare occasions. For example, in one of his presentations, Alex, the master blender for

Heritage Brands, constructed a tradition narrative that combined historical heritage with

technical detail. Almost all of our audience informants, who interacted with Alex appreciated the

helpfulness of his explanations but bemoaned that there were few such people among

incumbents. They explained that understanding the origin and the distinctiveness of Canadian

whisky tradition resonated with them positively – when presented by such credible human

embodiments. One connoisseur described the significance of his interactions with Alex:

> I had an opportunity to meet Alex from Heritage Brands a few times. And he's engaged, the
> master blender. I've asked him questions. He's told me the ratios of the different types of spirit,
> whether it's column distilled or pot distilled and whether it's-- what type of barrels they use and
> that. And actually, he gave me enough information a couple of years ago that I could blend and
> recreate from my own stocks on my shelf, his [Product Name], which I just adore. So, and then
> I've gone back to a few seminars that he's hosted and showed him what I've done, and he said,
> "Yeah, you've added the right complexion. That'll probably do it" (Connoisseur 2).

One of the authors was, on several occasions, able to observe such producer-audience

interactions. For example, during a masterclass at a whisky festival, he observed how Alex's

performance seamlessly balanced technical explanations of whisky making (including with

charts detailing the chemical reactions involved in the production of a particular whisky) with

folksy humor and entertaining stories. Thus,

> Upon introducing a whisky made primarily from rye grain, Alex waits for attendees to take a first
> sip. He looks around the room and takes a tiny sip himself. He then asks attendees if they felt a
> slight warming sensation in the chest. As attendees nod in agreement, he raises his voice: "We
> call this a 'Canadian Hug'." Attendees laugh. Alex then starts explaining that this warming
> sensation is a hallmark of authentic, rye-based whiskies, that are at the core of the new and
> distinctive products that he is showcasing. He then switches to the PowerPoint slides that explain
> the technical elements of the whisky production and the chemical reactions involved. Some
> audience members still chuckle with amusement. Others are taking careful notes (Field Notes).

In such master classes, Alex both signaled his deep knowledge of tradition-bound whisky making, which was the core authenticity claim of the distillery, while at the same time stressing the innovative products that his expertise enabled him to develop. Importantly, he did all this in a highly relatable, personable and entertaining manner, establishing a bond with the audiences. Yet, while the connoisseurs sought out such distillery employees for repeat interactions, they reported that it was very difficult to access such employees at most incumbent distilleries. Alex was the only incumbent master blender that was regularly available for such interactions.

Human embodiment reinforcing originality claims. Micro distilleries relied on a different use of human embodiments, which produced different narratives and a different type of engagement with audiences. Formal events at whisky festivals are expensive, and micro distilleries can only afford a minimal presence (e.g., rent a table to offer informal tasting opportunity to attendees). Hence, micro-distilleries privileged informal, in-house visits and distillery tours. These events were typically led by master blenders or master distillers, and audiences mainly consisted of self-proclaimed "whisky geeks", interested in technical details. Their communication with audiences was generally less scripted, less formal, and less polished, with frequent Q&As. In presenting the whisky offering, emphasis was typically placed on the originality and distinctiveness of the philosophy of the distillery, the use of local ingredients, the role of farmers and the sense of community. The production process was also characterized as "experimental", based on innovative production techniques, and aimed at producing new flavors.

Among almost all these young distilleries in our sample, the founders or the co-founders doubled as the whisky makers, which made them readily available as human embodiment of originality-based authenticity claims. The micro-distilleries seeking to claim originality by drawing on a foreign whisky making tradition emphasized a distiller's work experience or

training in Scotland or another whisky making region used as the inspiration for the distillery's

products. These credentials were highlighted both on their websites and in the verbal overviews

during distillery visits. This information was well known among audience members. For

example, one blogger explained how a distillery founder's background, which included training

at one of the most revered Scotch distilleries, enhanced the distillery's originality claims: "Bruce

imported Scottish-made pot stills and mash tuns, and received training from the master distiller

of Bowmore. […] whisky that was authentic to strict Scottish standards. All of the whisky would

contain just three ingredients: water, barley and yeast." The quote highlights the role of founder

as a human embodiment. It reinforces authenticity as originality via references to the simplicity

of ingredients that the interviewee deems as hallmarks of a valued foreign tradition. That enables

the distillery to offer something novel and distinctive vis-à-vis Canadian whisky tradition.

Further, micro-distilleries relied on human embodiments to deflect the criticism that they

prematurely released a whisky into the marketplace. In fact, representatives of several micro-

distilleries that we interviewed – unprompted – contrasted their offerings, which they presented

as unique and innovative, to the more traditional Canadian whisky, which was typically cast as

"smooth" (also a code word for "boring"). These distillery representatives tended to embrace and

celebrate the putative lack of classical refinement of their products, casting the rawness as a

badge of honor and an indication that they were staying true to their distinctive vision for the

product. Even on the rare occasions when we found evidence of micro-distilleries making

tradition claims, they emphasized the hands-on and small-scale nature of their whisky making

process. As one distiller explained, "we want to tap into that Canadian tradition, but revive it a

little bit by being not big and corporate and-- small batch. Handmade, that kind of attention to

detail." (Greg, Quirky Spirits). When these claims resonated with audience members, they

praised the "big brash younger ryes, which I think we do incredibly well" (Retailer 4) and downplayed the harsh flavors as "brashness of youth" (Blogger 2). A key reason these claims tended to resonate with audience members was, as our informants noted, due to the visibility, accessibility and relatability the whisky makers.

Summary. Taken together, these findings portray variations in the use of human embodiments of authenticity claims, which result in different types of authenticity work across the incumbent/micro distilleries divide. Incumbents primarily leveraged historical figures from a distant past that embodied the Canadian whisky making tradition. Furthermore, in their interactions with audiences at whisky events, they relied on brand ambassadors who promoted the distillery by emphasizing the historical origins and the merits of Canadian whisky style. Conversely, micro-distilleries relied on present-day figures and used representatives directly involved in the production process to convey claims of authenticity as originality. They did so by connecting whisky making to experimental recipes and production methods, the value of local products and local communities, and the appeal to foreign traditions. The use of different human embodiments affected the believability of authenticity claims. Incumbents' lack of present-day embodiments and the emphasis on brand promotion often distanced distilleries from their audience. In contrast, micro-distilleries' use of master blenders and the direct involvement of the founders allowed them to establish a greater closeness with the audiences and convey an overall sense of a more genuine whisky experience.

Architectural Features Reinforcing Authenticity Claims

The architectural design of distilleries connects the activity of whisky making to places that evoke particular experiences that can be perceived as more or less authentic. They convey visually and immersively a distillery's identity, history, character and culture. Our findings suggest that architectural design facilitated their development of authenticity claims by

conveying transparency. Many of the audience members we interviewed observed that the

transparency of whisky making process was of paramount importance in providing a tangible

evidence of distilleries' authenticity claims. As one connoisseur, when asked what he considers

to be key elements in determining whether a distillery is authentic, responded: "Honesty,

transparency and a little bit of face time" (Connoisseur 2). Architectural design signaled

transparency via the physical openness of the distilleries' production facilities. This enabled

distilleries to educate audiences about how they were making whisky products, reinforcing either

tradition or originality claims.

Architectural design reinforcing tradition claims. The architectural design of incumbent

distilleries was consistent with tradition-based authenticity claims. Many buildings have been

there since the founding of those distilleries in the middle of 19th Century, and some have been

classified as historically significant architectural landmarks. They are typically large structures

and located in industrial districts.

Although these buildings are traditional, most of them have neither aesthetically pleasing

architectural design nor are they located in scenic areas or tourist hot spots. As historical

publications explain, these facilities were built many decades ago with an eye on efficient

manufacturing (De Kergommeaux, 2017), rather than on offering tours (which was not done

during those eras). When arriving for a visit at Heritage Brands, for instance, one of the authors

noted a complex of large, industrial buildings that look like a factory, built between late 1800s

and early 1900. He also noted large trucks delivering grains to massive silos. The look turned out

to be similar to the other large distilleries that the author visited subsequently.

Furthermore, the large size and the factory-like appearance of their facilities did not fit

the images of distilleries that the audience members we interviewed associated with authenticity.

As one connoisseur observed about an incumbent distillery, "These are industrial plants. There's no romance there." (Connoisseur 1). A restaurant owner concurred, "They're very much kind of, like [pauses]… factories" (Restaurateur 2). Incumbent distillery informants acknowledged that their production facilities looked more like manufacturing plants, than the picturesque buildings that audiences associate with authenticity. As one brand ambassador described his distillery: "100 years ago it was a manufacturing plant. There was no romance" (Mike, Patriot Pride).

While architectural design of incumbent distilleries was off-putting to some connoisseurs, more importantly, it was the failure to *use* the architectural design to offer visitors opportunities to visit and reinforce the distilleries' authenticity claims by showcasing their whisky making that was mentioned by our audience members as the most significant missed opportunity. One retailer, for instance, poignantly contrasted the approaches taken by an incumbent and a micro-distillery located in the same city:

> There's no taster experience. There's no brand education program. There's no tasting room that they have open to the public. They don't allow tours to the public. And so you find people that like their product, but they're not as excited to promote the product themselves as something like [nearby micro-distillery] or something craft. Because it doesn't seem as hands on-- it's not seen as hands on, and they haven't had that experience that has made them try and search it out in the same way." (Retailer 4)

The recognition of the importance of using distillery architectural design to reinforce key authenticity claims was apparent in the increasing efforts among incumbents to build visitor centers. Over the course of our study, one distillery opened a large visitor center adjacent to its production facilities, complete with historical artifacts from the distillery's long past, a visitor-friendly tasting boutique, and easy access to some of the production facilities. Another one was in the process of launching a visitor center as a part of an overall reconstruction of their distillery. Incumbent distilleries sought to use the architectural design to engage the audiences. Heritage Brands, for instance, has welcomed whisky bloggers and whisky clubs who might be

dedicated enough to make a trip to its off-the-beaten-path location. It has also partnered with a

local food group to help attract visitors interested in local products. Audience members who

visited reported being highly impressed with the experience. As one whisky society member

recalled, "What's most exciting to us is that a company as massive and long-standing as Heritage

Brands isn't stuck in its ways, or simply reverting to the mean or lowest common denominator,

but rather is innovating and responding to mainstream consumers and aficionados alike, trying to

satisfy all niches of the whisky-loving community."

   Architectural features reinforcing originality claims.   Since micro-distilleries were

newly built, their architectural design was typically aligned the originality-based authenticity

claims they wished to convey to their audiences. To emphasize transparency and to showcase the

backstage of the production, micro-distilleries were often situated near areas that are readily

accessible to visitors and tourists, enabling large flows of visitors who can witness first-hand the

whisky making process. All the micro-distilleries we visited were built to be visitor friendly and

designed in a manner that made whisky making process more visible. The transparency of

architecture allowed visitors to either enter or at least see (through a glass wall) the production

facilities and the people working there. In this way, whisky makers were able to showcase the

originality and experimental character of their whisky making making. According to most of our

audience interviewees, the key to micro-distilleries' success in this domain was "showing" the

personal connection to the whisky making by making themselves accessible to visitors. One

whisky writer, however, was skeptical about equating visitor friendliness with transparency:

"Entertaining visitors is not transparency. In fact, some distilleries take the opportunity to tell

stories that are not exactly true. And many of the micro-distillers don't really know what they are

doing so how can they be transparent about anything other than that?" (Writer 1).

It was not purely – or even necessarily – the "beauty" of the architectural design that made these micro-distilleries appealing to the audiences. Urban Spirit, for example, is in a suburban warehouse district in a nondescript building. There is no grand entrance or polished boutique. The visitor needs to ring the buzzer on the door and be let into a modest tasting room, with the distiller and other production workers doubling as hosts. When visiting the distillery, the first author observed how the co-owner of Urban Spirit had to interrupt the conversation about the distillery because he had to attend to a sudden distillation problem that occurred during this conversation, and that was readily visible to the distillery visitors. The rye grain being distilled at the time began to foam, threatening to ruin the production run. Once the issue was resolved, the distiller then shrugged off the incident as a normal challenge associated with trying to do something different and unusual. He mentioned that such problems occur often, because rye grain is very difficult to work with. Hence, few distilleries work with 100% rye grain. Being able to see these processes up-close – including such mishaps – was appealing to audiences and helped to reinforce the message that distilleries were doing something unique and unusual.

Several of the micro-distilleries were built in in farming areas – in proximity to the fields where the grains are grown, and this made it easier for them to showcase their reliance on locally sourced ingredients and local suppliers. In this manner, they used architectural design to reinforce the grain-to-glass story, which these distilleries used to make originality claims. In addition, the size of a distillery, in itself, appeared to be an important signal of authenticity. As one retailer explained, the association between size and authenticity makes it easier for micro-distilleries to use architectural design to reinforce their authenticity claims, because the transparency is implicit in their smaller size: "To some consumers the so-called micro or craft distilleries are more authentic than the larger players" (Retailer 3).

Furthermore, the open architectural design also promoted a sensorial connection to the product and the production process that reinforced the perception of authenticity in the eyes of audiences. This is illustrated by the quote below that was a typical sentiment among our audience interviewees who had visited micro distilleries: "There's this piece about it that sort of keeps you just completely invested in it the whole time. And then you get to go see the thing, you know, the mash. And you get to go smell the mash. And you get to have this very visceral sort of connection to the product. You get to--I mean, the smells alone are a reason enough to go back and back again, as far as I'm concerned" (Blogger 5).

Summary. The architectural design of distilleries reinforced authenticity by linking the product and production process to a "place". While the architectural design of incumbent and micro distilleries was consistent with their respective authenticity claims of tradition and originality, they triggered different reactions from the audiences. In particular, they evoked contrasting images (e.g., large factory in industrial district vs. small farm in the countryside), and sensorial experiences (opaqueness vs. transparency, distance vs. proximity) that impacted on the depth of connection to audience and ultimately affected the believability of authenticity claims.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the interaction of materiality and narratives underpinning authenticity work, that is, the organizational efforts to develop and sustain believable authenticity claims. We found that aspects of materiality that are especially central to the identity of a product category – product features – anchor producers to particular bases of authenticity. Because producer organizations vary in their material endowments regarding those features, some claims appear more natural and plausible to audiences, while others would require more narrative effort. Further, we found that producers deployed additional forms of material endowments – in this case, human embodiments and architectural design – to reinforce the

integrity and persuasiveness of their authenticity claims. Our study contributes to the literature in several ways.

Expanded Role of Materiality in Authenticity

Our study suggests an expanded role of materiality in authenticity. Prior research has indicated that materiality can amplify organizations' chosen claims by making them more believable. From this perspective, organizations utilize material artifacts, as needed, in support of the authenticity claims they have already decided to make (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Negro et al., 2011; Ravasi et al., 2019). In contrast, our study suggests that materiality may also limit the kind of claims that producers can make, based on their differential access to forms of physical embodiments that are culturally legitimated as central to a market category. This does not deny that organizations may use materiality more-or-less skillfully, as highlighted in prior research (e.g., Hatch & Schultz, 2017). Rather we uncover ways in which materiality is prefigurative, that is, a "qualification of possible paths of action on such registers as easy and hard, obvious and obscure, tiresome and invigorating, short and long, and so on" (Schatzki, 2010: 140). Thus, the required skill in authenticity work should not be seen in isolation from the more elementary role of materiality, which can make work easier or harder.

The key implication of our findings is that constructing narratives by leveraging the organization's distinctive material endowments is most effective in making authenticity claims because it signals that an organization is being "true to itself". In other words, by promoting what the company does best (whether it is traditionally made "smooth" whisky or "rough" un-aged whisky), the company is less likely to be seen as merely trying to cater to consumers' wishes.

Anchoring is the key manifestation of the prefiguring role of material arrangements for producers' authenticity claims. Although organizations make authenticity claims that leverage their own material endowments, these claims are not written on blank canvases. Rather,

materiality informs the selection of those narratives by the producers as well as their reception by audiences. In our setting, we found that product features anchored incumbents who possessed a track record of producing aged whisky to tradition claims even when those claims were less appealing to audiences. Conversely, the micro-distilleries' lack of access to aged liquid anchored them to originality claims that might be more appealing to audiences but required a focus on intangible features, such as the borrowing foreign tradition and emphasis bold flavors, to deflect from likely criticisms such as abandoning tradition.

At the same time, our findings highlight the agency of producers in constructing authenticity claims and doing authenticity work. For example, we found evidence of producers attempting (with mixed results) to overcome the anchoring by the product features when an alternative basis of authenticity appeared to be more appealing to the audiences. For example, some incumbents strove to creatively realign product features (e.g., by creating new product collections) to believably construct narratives based on originality. Conversely, micro-distilleries that had no such track record had more flexibility to experiment with new flavors or emulate a high-status foreign tradition to claim authenticity as originality. Interestingly, those micro-distilleries that opted to source aged liquid from incumbents, to mitigate inability to credibly construct authenticity as tradition claims, also lost part of their ability to claim originality and increasingly constructed narratives based in tradition.

Based on our findings, we suggest that resource endowments create material constraints that anchor product offerings to a prefigured base of authenticity. Authenticity claims are corroborated and reinforced through narratives that create a natural connection between characteristics of the product and content of the claim. At the same time, narratives can be leveraged to adjust for an unfavorable base of authenticity and to reorient audience perceptions

in a preferred direction. Hence, an organization's ability to (re)combine narratives and

materiality through authenticity work can confer plasticity to authenticity claims and generate

audience buy-in, thus resulting in new versions of authenticity-based advantage. In this regard,

while we concur that materiality can reinforce narratives in sustaining authenticity claims (e.g.,

Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Ravasi et al., 2019), our study also suggests that the persuasiveness of

such narratives should be seen *in connection* to the claims that are anchored in prefigurative

materiality. In sum, our findings lead us to argue that authenticity work should be conceptualized

as *the skillful combining of materiality and narratives with the aim of overcoming the constraints*

of anchoring or reinforcing an existing base of authenticity.

Authenticity from Closeness

Our findings also help better explain *how* materiality enhances the persuasiveness of

authenticity claims by reinforcing the messages that the organization wishes to convey. Prior

studies have demonstrated that narratives supported by materiality tend to be more believable

than those that are purely narrative (Hatch & Schultz, 2017). Yet, we find that the immediacy of

the material enhances the audience members' experiential closeness, or affective bond, with the

organizations, which in turn, enhances perceptions of authenticity (Alexander, 2004; Massa et

al., 2017). We suggest that two forms of closeness, corporeal and physical, enhance authenticity.

Closeness enhanced through corporeal means refers to the materiality of living human

embodiments. First-hand accounts of experts reinforce authenticity as they make the reasoning

why something is authentic more tangible and personal. The importance of live human

embodiment is apparent in our finding that present-day embodiments are more effective than

historical figureheads in reinforcing authenticity claims. Historical figureheads, even though they

are material (and verifiable via historical texts) referents, remain abstractions that are talked

about in the third person, while living representatives can communicate in the first person as

concrete and tangible contemporaries that inhabit the same social world. This more immediate

presence makes it easier for people to relate to and identify with them, which makes their

narratives more trustworthy and believable. For example, as the whisky is consumed, closeness

was enhanced when distilleries guided their audiences through the sensory experience with the

help of experts and whisky makers, drawing attention to different aspects and in effect curating

the consumption experience. The "Canadian hug" moment, described in the findings, is an

example of how the curation of an experience through corporeal embodiment aids the

verification of the authenticity claims.

Closeness generated through physical means refers to the materiality of architectural and

other designed surroundings that reinforce authenticity claims by enabling audience members to

recognize and verify the claims not only cognitively but aesthetically (Creed, Taylor, & Hudson,

2019; Eisenman, 2013). Physical closeness is about visually and holistically apprehending and,

hence, verifying the claims that narratives put forward. The aesthetic judgement involved in

appreciating physical surroundings invites the audiences' affective as well as reflective

engagement and can hence make narrative authenticity claims more intuitive and vivid. Prior

research has alluded to the importance of physical surroundings in enhancing perceptions of

authenticity (Demetry, 2019). Our findings highlight the role of architectural design, such as the

open design of a distillery building that transparently displays people involved in the whisky

production process, in effectively staging the material processes of production emphasized

narratively in authenticity claims. Physical surroundings can also offer an iconic representation

of the values expressed by in their narratives, and thus allow audiences to judge whether the

authenticity claims of the organization conform with their revealed aesthetic tastes.

Additionally, physical closeness highlights the role of materiality in facilitating immersive multisensory experiences, for example, with a distillery. Our findings suggest that authenticity claims are more likely to be accepted by audiences if different sensory experiences are drawn upon at the same time in support the authenticity claim. Conversely, it is easier to question claims in the absence of such experiences, as was apparent in audience members' expression of skepticism of authenticity claims put forth by distilleries that could not be visited. This is likely because environments that combine sound, smell, visual and somatosensory stimuli make experiences more vivid (Siebert et al., 2017) and narratives more tangible. Our audience interviewees referred to the authenticity reinforced by immersive visits that combined access to the organization's production facility with its multi-sensory stimuli with the product and personal access to human spokespersons. Our findings then help explain how materiality enhances audience-performance authenticity, or the audiences being "immersed in the performance due to the visceral and minimally mediated nature of the experience" (Ruebottom et al., in press).

In sum, while prior research has emphasized key dimensions of authenticity as being consistency between the internal and external, category conformity, and connection to referents (Lehman et al., 2019), we emphasize the importance of experiential closeness as an important process that colors judgments of consistency, conformity and connection. Authenticity claims are reinforced and become more believable when the audience feels a personal and affective sense of connection with the producer of claims.

Authenticity Work as Organizational Strategy

Our empirical context is focused on the authenticity work that organizations conduct in the context of competitive dynamics. Overall, our findings suggest that micro-distilleries were more effective than incumbents at authenticity work. An interesting puzzle arising from our study, then, is how new entrants, lacking history and some of the key resources typically required

for success, can engage incumbents with history and outcompete them in terms of being seen as authentic by audiences. In other words, how do organizations with an apparent disadvantageous resource endowment make up for this apparent shortcoming or deficit? These questions highlight the strategic importance of authenticity work. We show that one way in which new entrants could gain an advantage, despite a lack of history, is to leverage alternative authenticity claims and embrace the basis of authenticity that (partly) transforms these weaknesses into strengths. This is achieved through the combination of materiality and narratives in constructing, anchoring, and reinforcing claims.

Our empirical focus on the competitive dynamics between incumbents and micro-distilleries, extends the research on implications of authenticity for competitive strategy (e.g., McKendrick & Hannan, 2014; Pozner, DeSoucey, Verhaal, & Sikavica, in press; Verhaal et al., 2017). Due to the anchoring of producers to a particular base of authenticity by their material endowments, we found that relatively stable authenticity profiles emerged. These profiles generated clarity about the producers' identities and conferred consistency to their action. Material endowments then help organizations make necessary strategic authenticity trade-offs by constraining possible authenticity claims. On the other hand, the effectiveness of a chosen basis of authenticity depends on how it is communicated through narratives and how these narratives resonate with audiences.

Furthermore, while anchoring claims to a clear base of authenticity is important, our findings also suggest that producers can attempt to mitigate the anchoring effects of product features. Similarly to generic competitive strategies (Porter, 1980), authenticity-based competition requires that performers be able to demonstrate parity or proximity in alternative bases of authenticity relative to their competitors. This is especially important, when audience

members may find an organization's preferred base of authenticity irrelevant or unappealing. For example, tradition-based incumbents must be able to demonstrate that they are able to innovate by releasing more unusual products to appeal to audiences who care more about originality as the basis of authenticity. Additionally, reliance on visible and approachable whisky makers, along with architectural design features that enabled educating audiences about the more innovative practices also helped incumbents to straddle the line between tradition and originality. In contrast, micro-distilleries strove to demonstrate that they were firmly rooted in their own history and that they were knowledgeable about the tradition of whisky making, deflecting that perception that their product offerings were not "real" whisky. Material endowments helped them in this endeavor. Accordingly, they emphasized the rigorous training and vast experience of their whisky makers and used the architectural design to educate the audiences about their respect for traditional whisky making – even as they focused on innovating.

These considerations connect our research to the increased focus on optimal distinctiveness among strategy researchers (Zhao, Fisher, Lounsbury, & Miller, 2017), whereby organizations seek to conform to a recognizable category while trying to carve out a distinctive niche within that category. Our findings imply that materiality may play an important role in influencing organizations' effort to attain optimal distinctiveness. Thus, while researchers have noted the importance of crafting optimally distinctive narratives (Taeuscher, Zhao, & Lounsbury, 2022), it is important to acknowledge the role of material endowments in anchoring organizations to particular narratives and the utility of material artifacts in reinforcing their chosen narratives. The strategic value of authenticity, then, resides perhaps less in the content of claims per se and more in the agentic work by which organizations combine narratives and

materiality to anchor, reinforce or mitigate their claims in relation to relevant bases of

authenticity.

Furthermore, our findings highlight a broader point related to the relationship between

material resources and authenticity, and more specifically, the rarely acknowledged *symbolic*

function of resources. While management researchers have long been aware of the strategic

importance of resources (Barney, 1991; Kraaijenbrink, Spender, & Groen, 2010), our findings

connect the research on authenticity to the discussions of resourcing (Feldman & Worline, 2011),

and the importance of framing and narratives (Fraser & Ansari, 2021; Rindova, Dalpiaz, &

Ravasi, 2010) in determining how resources acquire value. This, in turn, has implications beyond

the research on authenticity. Although the lack of resources is often framed as a disadvantage,

we found that it is the use of the resources in authenticity work that determined their

effectiveness and value. Because resources acquire or change their value in relation to the

narratives that organizations are able to construct around them, the advantage that they confer is

no longer a matter of ownership or lack thereof. It is, arguably, more a matter of how

organizations engage in authenticity work to develop narratives that best utilize their material

endowments.

Future Directions

There are several promising research directions that emerge from our findings. While our

setting is most directly relevant to industries that produce experiential goods, such as artisanal

cheese (Boghossian & David, 2021), wine (Negro et al., 2011), perfume (Bacco & Dalpiaz,

2022), and fine dining (Slavich, Svejenova, Opazo, & Patriotta, 2020), authenticity has been

identified as important in very different industries, including high technology industries (Buhr et

al., 2021), and in the sharing economy (Bucher, Fieseler, Fleck, & Lutz, 2018). Although

material bases may vary from industry to industry, we would expect the challenge of managing

material and narrative aspects of authenticity work to be an important consideration in any

industry where authenticity matters. Future research could examine the extent to which the

challenge of balancing the different bases of authenticity might impact authenticity work may

vary across industries, and how these differences may impact the relationship between

materiality and narratives.

An interesting line of inquiry would examine when materiality matters more in audience

perceptions of authenticity than the narratives surrounding an object or experience, and when a

different hierarchy between materials and narratives might be observed. Further, in our context

the perceived authenticity of a particular product was intrinsically tied to that of a producer. In

other settings, including in high technology industries (Buhr et al., 2021) and sharing economy

(Bucher et al., 2018), such ties may not be as close. Future research could examine the

relationship between materiality and narratives in authenticity work when material bases of

authenticity are different, when materiality does not anchor a producer to particular authenticity

base as strongly, or when the ties between the product and the organization are looser.

Another valuable research direction emerges from our focus on intermediaries that are

particularly important for and sensitive to authenticity, such as whisky bloggers, restaurateurs,

and other connoisseurs. Research in a variety of domains has acknowledged a diversity of

audiences (Kim & Jensen, 2014) and suggested that some audiences may be more important for

influencing key social dynamics in industry. For example, Taeuscher et al. (2022) emphasize the

importance of novelty-seeking consumers behaving differently than regular consumers in the

short-term rental market. Such audience members – like in our study – help to draw boundaries

around an elite category. Research could examine whether material endowments play different

roles in influencing narratives that are constructed in elite categories, where audience members

are more engaged and more knowledgeable, as compared to lower status categories, where

audience members might be less engaged and less knowledgeable, as well as the extent to which

organizations may experience tension between satisfying different audiences.

In our research we relied on audience members' accounts of what they deem authentic,

and we deferred to their subjective understandings of how materiality matters in their

judgements. Thus, ours account of how materiality matters in authenticity work builds on an

audience-centric view of authenticity in management (e.g., Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Kovács,

2019; Kovács et al., 2014) marketing (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Debenedetti, Oppewal, &

Arsel, 2014), and elsewhere (Grazian, 2010; Spracklen, 2011), and it requires researchers to be

mindful that audiences play a fundamental role that constrains and disciplines organizations'

authenticity work. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that neither audience perceptions nor

producers' actions are always consistent, and there is likelihood of audience members' reactions

leading producers to refine and modify their narratives in situ. The negotiated nature of

authenticity in given situations is very rarely studied by management scholars (for exception see

Demetry, 2019), and it would be valuable to examine how the meaning of particular material

artifacts is negotiated in a situated nature in the context of authenticity work.

In addition, although this was not the focus of our study, we found some tentative

evidence that the straddling between authenticity claims may bring about a gradual change of an

organization's primary authenticity claim. Future research could examine how authenticity work

changes over time, with attention to both internal and external factors. For example, such factors

as retirement of organizational founders, or changes in technology or audience preferences, may

prompt a gradual shift toward an alternative base of authenticity.

CONCLUSION

The preoccupation with authenticity in contemporary society has been widely noted by researchers across the social sciences. What makes authenticity organizationally challenging is that it breeds tensions between organizational constructions of authenticity claims and audiences' perceptions of such claims. A focus on the interaction between materiality and narratives helps scholars understand how organizations engage in authenticity work to maintain resonance with their audiences. We encourage more research that unpacks how authenticity is constructed and contested in a variety of contexts and that considers the complex nexus of narratives and materiality, performers and audiences, and agency and constraint that underpin organizational authenticity work.

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Table 1: Overview of Distilleries* in the Sample and Interviews Conducted

Distillery	Age	Type	Interviews (no.)
Boundless Brands		Incumbent	*2 Interviews:* Marketing staff (2)
• **Patriot Pride**	100+		
• **Peak Distillers**	50+		
House of Distinction	80+	Incumbent	*7 Interviews:* Master blenders (3), Director, Marketing staff (4)
Heritage Brands		Incumbent	14 Interviews: Master Blender x (4 times), VP Operations, Marketing staff (8) (Senior brand manager x 2 times)
• **James's**	100+		
• **Michel's**	100+		
• **Jack's**	20+		
• **Collin's**	10+		
International Brands		Incumbent	*3 Interviews:* Senior brand manager, Marketing staff (2 x 2)
• **Novelty Spirits**	~10		
• **People's spirits**	50+		
Innovative Spirits	30+	Incumbent	*1 interview:* Marketing staff
Western Spirit	40+	Incumbent	*1 interview:* Director
Clean Air Spirits	<10	Micro (Contract Distilling)	*1 interview* Senior brand manager
Urban Spirit	~10	Micro	*3 interviews:* Distiller/co-owner x 2 Manager
Legendary Spirits	<5	Micro (Contract Distilling)	*7 interviews:* VP (x 2), master distiller, Senior brand managers, export market manager, mixologist
Spirit of Revolution	<10	Micro	*1 interview:* Owner/distiller
Quirky Spirits	<5	Micro	*1 interview:* Owner/distiller
Boundless Spirit	<5	Micro	*1 interview:* Owner/distiller
Spirit of Adventure	<5	Micro (Contract Distilling)	*2 interviews:* Owner x 2
Spirit of Scotland	<5	Micro	*1 interview:* Owner
Transplanted Spirits	<10	Micro	*1 interview:* Owner/sales and owner/distiller
City Spirits	<5	Micro	*1 interview:* Owner/distiller

* To preserve confidentiality of the distilleries participating in this study, we use the above pseudonyms to attribute interview quotes and observations, while the quotes obtained from public domain sources (e.g., websites, press coverage) utilize the distilleries' real names.

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Table 2: Other data source

Other interviews	N
• **Critics and bloggers**	10
• **Restaurateurs and bartenders**	11
• **Retailers**	9
• **Government**	2
• **Connoisseurs**	7
• **Others**	4
Documents	
• **Distillery websites** • **Newspaper articles** • **Whisky Blog Entries and Reviews** • **Distilleries' and key bloggers' social media**	25 websites 180 articles 500+ entries 12 accounts
Books	
• **Books about Canadian whisky industry**	5
• **Books about international whisky**	6
Observations	
• **Distillery tours** • **Distillery tastings/informal visits** • **Whisky festivals (each festival includes master classes, presentations, tasting events, socials)**	8 17 4

Table 3: Authenticity Claims

Analytical categories	Selected evidence
Authenticity as Tradition	• "To me authenticity has to be tied into history a lot. That's how I equate the two. 'Cause you can't really be authentic if you don't have any history, in my opinion. And these craft distilleries haven't been around very long. […] You need to be around for a while to prove what you're doing. You just can't open up a craft distillery and say, okay, now I'm authentic. Why? Just because it's small and I have a big one you're more authentic than me?" (Kurt, House of Distinction, Incumbent) • "So what we love is the fact that we can tell the story of we're making our whisky in the traditional Canadian way which is the grains are individually mashed, individually distilled and then the art is in the blending and the finishing. And so we think that that's a really fantastic story to tell and it's one that will resonate well with consumers." (Christine, Legendary Spirits, Micro/3rd-Party Sourcing) • "But a lot of us have been around a long time, and we learned from the person before us who learned from the person before them. So we can actually, like, so I learned from Andrew who learned from Art Dawe who learned from the person, you know, so we're really passing it on. And we're still doing it going forward, so we're investing time and I have two apprentice blenders." (Sandra, House of Distinction, Incumbent) • "The man…the legend. John Philip Wiser grew his whisky empire from humble beginnings into Canada's best-selling family of whiskies. The choices he made, including using only the highest quality ingredients and aging his whisky longer, has led to a lasting legacy that you can still taste today." (JP Wiser's website, Incumbent) • "Ploughman's Rye is a nod to Alberta farm pioneers as Eau Claire combines the first horse farmed rye since the turn of the century, with our special barley blend. From land in the Alberta foothills, we planted, harvested and distilled rye to produce this unique spirit. We named it Ploughman's Rye in honour of our horse farming heritage." (Eau Claire Distillery website, Micro)
Authenticity as Originality	• "I think it's early days for a change because all the big guys, the Hiram Walker's and Diageo's and so on, not trying to name names, but all those big guys are-- continue to make what they make the way they make it. However, places like us and some other craft distillers are looking to do something different." (Nick, Transplanted Spirts, Micro) • "The Canadian whisky was a poorer cousin to the single malts and Scotches of the world. So we were almost trying to buck that perception that we were making Canadian whisky." (John, Transplanted Spirits, Micro) • "I don't think we have any problem whatsoever for the next-- even if we were ten times the size we were, I think we could still-- we're going to make a really unique-- something completely different people haven't seen." (Craig, Spirit of Revolution, Micro). • "Before, for the most part, most distillers used vintage bourbon barrels, seasoned bourbon barrels. Well, we started experimenting with once-used bourbon barrels and then different types of-- introducing new American oak and using-- marrying up light, medium and heavy charred American oak barrels with the different grains. So well, let's see if a lighter char works with a rye. Let's see if a heavier char works with barley. Let's-- it was all just really a tremendous amount of experimentation." (Jeff, Innovative Spirits, Incumbent) • "It's not the most radical tasting whisky you'll come across. But it's much more distinctive, much bolder profile as far as Canadian whiskey goes, right." (Kevin, Legendary Spirits, Micro/3rd-Party Sourcing)

Table 4: Differences in distilleries' authenticity claims

Pseudonym	Incumbent/Micro	Authenticity Claim	Interviews	Observations	Website/Social Media	Blogger/Media
Boundless Brands	Incumbent	Tradition	High	High	High	Medium
		Originality	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
House of Distinction	Incumbent	Tradition	High	High	Medium	High
		Originality	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Heritage Brands	Incumbent	Tradition	High	High	Medium	High
		Originality	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
International Brands	Incumbent	Tradition	Medium	High	Low	Medium
		Originality	Medium	Absent	Medium	Low
Innovative Spirits	Incumbent	Tradition	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
		Originality	High	Medium	High→Medium	High → Low
Western Spirit	Incumbent	Tradition	High		Low	Medium
		Originality	Low		Absent	Absent
Clean Air Spirits**	Micro	Tradition	High		High	High
		Originality	Absent		Low	Low
Urban Spirit	Micro	Tradition	Low	Medium	Absent	Low
		Originality	High	High	High	High
Legendary Spirits**	Micro	Tradition	Medium	Absent	Absent	Medium
		Originality	High	High	Low	Low
Spirit of Revolution	Micro	Tradition	Low	Low	Low	Low
		Originality	High	High	High	High
Quirky Spirits	Micro	Tradition	Absent		Absent	Absent
		Originality	High		Medium	High
Boundless Spirit	Micro	Tradition	Low		Absent	Absent
		Originality	High		High	High
Spirit of Adventure**	Micro	Tradition	High	High	Medium	Medium
		Originality	Low	Low	Low	Absent
Spirit of	Micro	Tradition	Absent		Absent	Absent

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Scotland		Originality	High	✕	Low	Medium
Transplanted Spirits	Micro	Tradition	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
		Originality	High	High	High	High
City Spirits	Micro	Tradition	Absent	✕	Absent	Absent
		Originality	High	✕	Low	Medium
Island Spirit	Micro	Tradition	✕	Low	Low	Low
		Originality	✕	High	High	High

** Sources aged liquid from an incumbent distillery

<u>Note 1:</u> For each distillery, tradition and originality claims are assessed, as high, medium, low or absent, for each data source. Crossed out columns indicates that the type of data for the specific distillery was not available.

<u>Note 2:</u> In Column 1: gray shade = primarily tradition claims; no shade = primarily originality claims.

Table 5: The Anchoring role of materiality

Analytical categories	Selected evidence
• **Product features anchoring organizations to tradition claims**	• "They can count and rely on it, yes. House of Distinction today is what it was 10 years ago, what it was 15, 20 years ago. And that is, I believe, why they can rely on House of Distinction and the products we make. And that's how they're getting emotional. 'Cause they know it. They know it and they don't want it to change." (Kurt, House of Distinction, Incumbent) • "The big part of the emotional connection I think is that familiarity and consistency. You're going back to an old friend" (Connoisseur 5). • "So authenticity means you have to be able to support the style that's accepted by the consumer and then the brand itself has to sort of give a very special flavour within that framework. And so that's what gives it authenticity, from my perspective." (Retailer 3) • "Because if I turn around and I try and call a lot of Canadian bourbon in it, and I call it a House of Distinction blended product now, I got to stipulate a difference here. House of Distinction blended product, I would feel it would have to be in the House of Distinction family of flavors. Versus what we're starting to see now is a lot of these single whiskey items. For example, House of Distinction Rye. That's all rye. This is obviously deliberate because this is what the marketing-- consumer's looking for and I think it's also a way to compete with the malts of Scotland. They're individual malts; now we're coming up with individual whiskies." (Kurt, House of Distinction, Incumbent) • "So we did some research and they were laid down in, I think it was, must have been the early 1990's. And in the mid-- after about 10 years, so in the mid-2000's, the last documentation we had on it was they just weren't ready. The taste profile wasn't the desired level yet. So-- and then when your master blender leaves, that's sort of his or her experiment, so everyone forgets about it. So anyway, fast forward 10 more years and when they tasted the whisky they just could not believe how good it tasted." (Frank, Novelty Spirits, Incumbent)
• **Product features anchoring organizations to novelty claims**	• "There's a lot of lines being blurred between these spirits. And I mean, it's really sort of to sell more young whiskey in my mind, and there's nothing wrong with that. But what's coming next as the innovation" (Daniel, Spirit if Scotland, Micro) • "Despite the whisky world's obsession with age, some young all-rye whiskies are sensational. Stalk and Barrel is best known for its single malt whisky but the range now includes single barrel all-ryes as well. These 3-year-old ryes are bottled both at 92 proof and at cask strength for those wanting more punch. Look for brilliant high notes, grain dust, fruits and flowers and an audaciously youthful wallop of spicy rye." Daily Mail • "So even though those ex-bourbon barrels don't exist smaller than 200 litres, I made it to 100 litres using used wood. So for me that's one way I can accelerate the maturation process and capitalize on the smaller barrel." (Cory, Boundless Spirits) • "And in the case of Dillon's, what they did for the first three years is they released a white rye, because what he didn't want to do was to wave oak chips by it or put it in a barrel for a short period of time and say, this is a straight in the way that these guys have said it. Geoff didn't want to make any claims that it's ready before it's ready in that perspective." (Marketing Consultant 1) • "They're making some good single-malt Canadian, like, whiskey, right. And that's interesting. That always kind of gives a legitimacy. They're still young and it's not-- the whiskey's not where it needs to be, but I see them moving in the right direction." (Bartender 1) • "That hint of alcohol bite on the nose comes though more forcefully at the end of the delivery making the whisky just a little difficult to sip neat. I taste a bevy of wood and grain spice as well as a ribbon of malt grain sweetness. What came across as musty burlap in the breezes has settled into a nice flavour of nutty barley which gives the dram a robust quality which I enjoy. Herbal menthol and licorice provide some relief for the effects of the high alcohol content and its youthful bite." Blogger 2

Table 6: The Reinforcing Role of Materiality

Analytical categories	Selected evidence
• **Human embodiments reinforcing tradition claims**	• "We've got Alex. Alex is, you know, being an expert at-- expertise lends a lot of authenticity too." (Kevin, Heritage Brands, Incumbent) • "Hiram Walker, a successful grain merchant, founded what would become Canadian Club whisky in 1858. Our first distillery was established in Walkerville Ontario because of the exceptional quality of the local grains there…. Our whisky was different - smooth and easy to drink and we wanted people to know who made it. So we branded our barrels with our name on it, as a signature of confidence and assurance of quality…. At Canadian Club we have stayed true to the unique recipe and process we created over 162 years ago. This is what has allowed us to continue to produce an exceptionally rich and smooth whisky." (Canadian Club's website) • "The story of the guy that made that first still and he had a little plot of land that was named Lot 40. I mean, it was-- there was nothing extraordinary about that guy and his whiskey. But you tell that story 100 years later and it's extraordinary." (Mike, Patriot Pride) • "This is the mindset of a Master Blender. 140 different whiskies made of corn, rye, wheat, or barley. Aged 3 - 40 years. Many types of barrels (white oak, sherries, rum, wine, Bourbon, Scotch). Pot distilled or column distilled. The combinations are endless. Where does a Blender start?" (Alex, Heritage Brands, Incumbent) • "And Alex, as you say, has my respect. So not only do I know him, but I trust his judgement, so I'm kind of interested in tasting his liquids. And that will dictate where my hand falls on the Canadian whisky shelf. I'm going to buy Lot 40 soon." (Consultant 1) • "I think it [history] could be used a lot more. Like, we should be proud of it; we've been doing this for years. Just like the Scots, right, and the Americans. Like George Washington, I mean, it's-- but we don't-- I think it needs to be out there more. I think that needs to be first and foremost, you know, and 'hey, we're really good at this 'cause we've been doing it a long time'" (Restaurateur 1).
• **Human embodiments reinforcing originality claims**	• "So when people do come, we welcome then in and they actually get to meet the whisky makers and see what we're doing." (Blake, Urban Spirit, Micro) • "Well, you can't really beat it when the distiller's the brand ambassador." (Bartender 5) • "That makes a huge difference in whiskey. Especially if you ever get a chance to talk to a master distiller or read a little blurb like that on their bottle. Like the guys at Dillon's or the guys at Still Waters. They're really proud of their product because they have to try really hard to get into that market." (Connoisseur 3) • "We're focusing on the people. So we're telling the story of the grain grower and the malter and the cooper and the distiller. We're telling these stories, and we're telling the story of time as well, the sense of time. How long it should take. We talk romantically, not specifically, but romantically about the aging process and the flavours that are imparted. So we try and keep it pleasant. But at the same time what it's doing is it's revealing the way Spirit of Revolution does it." (Consultant 2) • "I've gotten to know Michael personally. So when you get to meet and talk to people, it's like '*yes'!*'" (Connoisseur 1)
• **Architectural features reinforcing tradition claims**	• "Specifically and technically designed for the complete control of whisky-making, leaving nothing to the chance be it human error or the whims and vagaries of nature." (Patriot Pride employee training manual) • "They're very much kind of, like [pauses]… factories." (Restaurateur 2) • "These big factories that are much more automated in what they do and much more hands off" (Retailer 4) • "The Tour highlights the history of the founding family, the HQ building and its connection to prohibition. The building is beautiful and has a fascinating history." (Online forum)

		• "The building itself was amazing, the grandeur and elegance considering its age. The grounds were well manicured and complimented the building, and the setting. Well worth he trouble to admire on its own. […] It was a shame we couldn't enjoy the brand center." (Online forum)
	• **Architectural features reinforcing originality claims**	• "There's no real trade secrets. Everything's very open, and people really like that. So it's really-- I mean, it's a combination of a lot of things that are happening out there." (Blake, Urban Spirit, Micro)" • "I mean, for us, we find that what's really-- seems to hit a cord with people is transparency. So unlike big brands we're very open about what we do, both on our website and social media as well as in person. So when people do come, we welcome then in and they actually get to meet the whiskey makers and see what we're doing. There's no real trade secrets. Everything's very open, and people really like that. So it's really-- I mean, it's a combination of a lot of things that are happening out there." (Blake, Urban Spirit, Micro) • "I think the hands-on approach is really needed. I think people need to look, touch, feel. So that's bringing people down to our distillery." (Harry, Heritage Brands, Incumbent) • "You get to see a still working. You get to [inaudible]. They've put all this money into making it sort of friendly for you to come in. The space is there. The history is on the walls. There's just stuff everywhere for you to look at it." (Blogger 5) • "The stills are beautiful, and walking through the production areas, it truly feels like you've been transported to Scotland." (Toronto Whisky Society write-up of a distillery tour)

APPENDIX 1 – SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Sample Questions for Distillery Interviews:

What is your vision for your distillery? Can you tell me about what makes your distillery distinctive from both domestic and international competitors?

What is it like to be a small producer? (for micro-distillery interviewees)

How do distilleries create a sense of specialness for the whisky brands?

How important is history and tradition in Canadian whisky?

How important is authenticity for a whisky? What does authenticity mean to you?

What do you think are the biggest challenges that the Canadian whisky industry faces?

What would you like to see Canadian distilleries be doing that they are not currently doing? Are some doing better job than others?

What developments in the Canadian whisky industry are you most excited about?

Do the emerging independent distilleries play any kind of significant role in how Canadian whisky is perceived?

Sample Questions for Audience Interviews:

How do distilleries create a sense of specialness for the whisky brands?

How important is history and tradition in Canadian whisky?

How important is authenticity for a whisky? What does authenticity mean to you? How do you know if a whisky is authentic?

How do you select whiskies for your lists? What is your philosophy? How does Canadian whisky fit in? (for bartenders and restaurateurs)

What kind of feedback about Canadian whisky do you get from your customers? (for retailers, bartenders and restaurateurs)

What do you think are the biggest challenges that the Canadian whisky industry faces?

What would you like to see Canadian distilleries be doing that they are not currently doing? Are some doing better job than others?

What developments in the Canadian whisky industry are you most excited about?

Do the emerging independent distilleries play any kind of significant role in how Canadian whisky is perceived?

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