



# Managing heritage brands: A study of the sacralization of heritage stores in the luxury industry



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## ABSTRACT

We investigate the concept of the heritage store, that is, the locations that lies at the heart of a brand's identity and history. Based on store observations and interviews with managers and sales personnel in the luxury industry, we analyze the characteristics of heritage stores and their role in the management of heritage brands. We show how managers sacralize a store's heritage to nurture the value proposition of the brand. Our analysis yields new insights into retailing, introducing the concept of the heritage store and emphasizing its sacralization. We outline the implications for retail marketing in developing and maintaining the sacralization of heritage stores.

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Gray walls, Louis XVI armchairs and Haussmannian moldings... In the heart of Shanghai, the magic of 30 Avenue Montaigne was there to greet the silhouettes of Raf Simons' spring-summer haute couture designs for Dior."<sup>2</sup>

As described in the opening quote, the store of Dior on the Avenue Montaigne in Paris features several iconic elements that are reproduced in commercials, retail outlets, and fashion shows. The Dior store on the Avenue Montaigne in Paris features several iconic elements that are reproduced in commercials, retail outlets, and fashion shows. In the vein of literature on heritage brands (Urde et al., 2007), we refer to this kind of location as a heritage store, that is, a location that lies at the heart of a brand's identity and history. We argue that heritage stores are key in the management of heritage brands.

Heritage brands emphasize their history as a key component of their brand identity. They are not brands with a heritage but "heritage brands," heritage being part of a brand's value proposition and identity (Urde et al., 2007). From this perspective, heritage brands nurture, maintain, and protect their heritage to generate stronger corporate marketing (Urde et al., 2007; Fionda and Moore, 2009). In this article we explore the characteristics of heritage stores and their role in the management of heritage brands.

Our empirical setting is the luxury industry. Drawing on interviews with professionals and observations conducted online and in stores, we analyze the characteristics of heritage stores and their role in the management of heritage brands. We show how managers sacralize store heritage to nurture the value proposition of the brand. Similarly to sacralization in a religious context, the sacralization of heritage brands is institutionalized through a set of mythical narratives, ritual practices, and symbolic boundaries (Wunenburger, 1981). This study contributes to the literature on heritage brands by introducing the concept of the heritage store and analyzing how companies sacralize these stores to nurture their heritage. We also outline the implications for retail marketing in developing and maintaining the sacralization of heritage stores.

## 1. Theoretical background

To begin to study the management of heritage stores, we present our understanding of key constructs, e.g. heritage brand and sacralization.

### 1.1. Heritage brands

Aaker (1996) mentioned heritage as a component of brand equity but the concept has been developed more recently and now constitutes a distinct conceptual category (Hudson, 2013). Heritage brands make their heritage part of a brand's value proposition and identity (Clais, 2002; Dion and de Boissieu, 2013; Urde et al., 2007). Their heritage holds value for the customer and other stakeholders, distinguishes the brand, is difficult for competitors to imitate, and

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.dior.com/magazine/be\\_fr/content/view/full/7036](http://www.dior.com/magazine/be_fr/content/view/full/7036) (accessed 13.02.14.).

therefore leads to brand equity (Keller and Richey, 2006). Brand heritage adds sincerity and differentiation (Merchant and Rose, 2013), brings authenticity (Fionda and Moore, 2009; Kapferer and Bastien, 2008), and reduces purchasing risk (Stewart-Allen, 2002).

Heritage brands nurture, maintain, and protect their heritage, principally to generate stronger corporate marketing (Urde et al., 2007). From this perspective, we study heritage stores, that is, the locations at the heart of a brand's identity and history. These heritage stores have a special aura. They are more than flagship stores (Dion and Arnould, 2011; Joy et al., 2014; Kozinets et al., 2002) or brand museums (Borghini et al., 2009) because they are part of a brand's heritage. We argue that managers sacralize heritage stores—treat them as sacred places—to cherish and reinforce a brand's heritage.

## 1.2. The sacred

Studies have shown the development of the sacred in contexts other than religion, including politics (Rivière, 1994), music (Ménard, 2001) and consumption (Belk et al., 1989). Researchers have studied sacred experiences and practices of sacralization in brand relationships (Khalla, 2007) and brand communities (Schau et al., 2009; Schouten et al., 2007; Chalmers and Arthur, 2008; O'Sullivan et al., 2011). Authors have also focused on the sacralization of secular objects (Belk et al., 1989; Curasi et al., 2004; Robert-Demontrond et al., 2007; Fernandez, 2008; Hirschman et al., 2012; Rinallo et al., 2013) and rituals of consumption (Rook, 1985). Other studies have investigated the use of religious objects such as crucifixes (Higgins and Hamilton, 2011), rosaries (Rinallo et al., 2013), and religious places like cathedrals (Shackley, 2002) and cemeteries (Toussaint and Decrop, 2013). They analyze how consumers sacralize and desacralize both secular and religious objects and show that the frontier between profane and sacred meaning has become increasingly blurred (Arnould and Price, 2004). In contrast to prior research, we study sacralization from marketing rather than the consumer perspective. We explore marketing practices used to sacralize heritage stores.

A sacred place is a key place associated with the identity of a social group. It holds a legitimate power in relation to the origin of things (Laburthe-Tolra and Warnier, 2003). We argue that in a similar way, heritage stores lie at the heart of the identity and history of heritage brands. Similar to sacralization in a religious context (Turner, 1967, 1969; Wunenburger, 1981), the sacred is institutionalized through a set of myths, rituals, and prohibitions.

## 2. Methodology

We focus on the luxury industry to understand the management of heritage brands (Clais, 2002; Kapferer and Bastien, 2008) because it is an “extreme case” (Eisenhardt, 1989). Heritage is crucial for many luxury brands, as it brings an element of authenticity and uniqueness (Clais, 2002; Fionda and Moore, 2009). These brands emphasize their history as a key component of their brand identity (Kapferer and Bastien, 2008; Lipovetsky and Roux, 2003).

To analyze heritage stores, we adopted an inductive approach, an emergent and interactive research process rooted in ongoing engagement with the field of retail action (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Our analysis is built on continuous comparisons between the data collected through field observations and interviews with experts, inductive analysis of data, and the scrutiny of these data through a number of conceptual lenses (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Since we do not study consumers' experiences and perceptions but the way firms

manage heritage stores, we based our empirical study on store observations and expert interviews.

The data collection began with the observation of 45 luxury stores in Paris, selected by location: we visited all the luxury fashion and jewelry stores located in the Triangle d'Or, the historic headquarters for luxury shopping outlets in Paris bordered by the Champs Elysées and the Avenues George V and Montaigne. There is a wide variety among the stores visited in terms of brand range, history, and parent company. The length of each visit varied from 15 to 45 min depending on the size of the store. Systematic observations were carried out using an observational grid. This remained semi-open, allowing us to add unexpected items and categories that appeared during the observation period (Peretz, 2007). The grid was organized around three dimensions: the substantive staging of the point of sale (design, materials used, decorative elements, music, fragrances, lighting, colors, and street frontage); evaluation of the point of sale (inductive appreciation of the atmosphere and retail design elements); and the impressions made by the store and personnel (Arnould et al., 1998; Baker et al., 2002). The grid was semi-open in the sense that we did not have predefined modalities. That is, we did not have a precise list of elements to check when describing a street frontage, for example. We had to describe such features in a more precise way. We analyzed notes taken in the field using a categorization process (Dion, 2007). We established several store categorizations (e.g., by brand, country of origin, street, parent company, store design style, artistic director, etc.). We subsequently interviewed 17 experts in luxury retail. Our goal was to obtain different perspectives on heritage stores by interviewing people in marketing and retailing departments. Our informants worked or had worked in a variety of positions (general management, sales, marketing, merchandising, architecture, and innovation) in the following luxury firms: Boucheron, Cartier, Christofle, Van Cleef and Arpels (jewelry); Dior, Chanel, Ferragamo, Hermès, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Louboutin, Moynat (fashion and haute couture); and Printemps Haussmann, Galeries Lafayette Haussmann (elite department stores). All our informants were French. However, most of them worked on international issues and had worked in other countries, mainly China and Japan.

The interviews were non-directive and organized around the theme of luxury stores. In order to avoid prompting informants, we did not mention issues of heritage or sacralization in the interviews. We let informants talk spontaneously about luxury shops, beginning with “grand tour” questions about participants' professional backgrounds (McCracken, 1988). The interviews lasted between 45 min and 2.5 h. We transcribed and coded interviews using open coding. These qualitative data were then interpreted using a hermeneutic approach (Thompson, 1997); we continuously revised our provisional coding through an iterative process of analyzing transcripts of the verbatim interviews and relating them to our emerging theoretical understanding of our interviewees' observations (emic meanings) and our own (etic categories) (Thompson and Arsel, 2004).

After having identified our initial findings, we returned to the field to conduct further analysis (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). This data collection concentrated on four heritage stores: Chanel Rue Cambon, Dior Avenue Montaigne, Cartier Rue de la Paix and Boucheron Place Vendôme. It is a common outcome of the iterative research process to highlight in-depth analyses of a small number of representative cases (e.g., Borghini et al., 2009; Kozinets et al. 2002). We selected these four stores because they appeared to best exemplify our theory. Similarly to a floating observation, we conducted extensive online research and collected press articles, blogs and comments on these four locations. Our goal was to identify instances of sacralization at work and triangulate our store observation and interview data with the online data (Kozinets, 2002). The aim of our online research was to

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