

M(Art)Worlds: Consumer Perceptions of How Luxury Brand Stores Become Art Institutions

Annamma Joy^{a,1}, Jeff Jianfeng Wang^b, Tsang-Sing Chan^c, John F. Sherry Jr.^{d,*}, Geng Cui^e

^a Professor of Marketing, Faculty of Management, The University of British Columbia-Okanagan, EME4145 – 3333 University Way, Kelowna, BC, Canada V1V 1V7

^b Assistant Professor of Marketing, Department of Marketing, G 7515, Academic 1, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

^c Shun Hing Chair Professor of Marketing, Department of Marketing and International Business, Lingnan University, 1/F Simon and Eleanor Kwok Building, Lingnan, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

^d Herrick Professor of Marketing, Mendoza College of Business, The University of Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA

^e Department of Marketing and International Business, Lingnan University, 1/F Simon and Eleanor Kwok Building, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Abstract

Through an ethnographic study of how consumers perceive and experience Louis Vuitton flagship stores, we show that luxury stores are becoming hybrid institutions, embodying elements of both art galleries and museums, within a context of exclusivity emblematic of luxury. We create the term “M(Art)World” to capture the essence of this aesthetically oriented strategy. Participants take note of the company’s sleekly elegant architecture, interior design, and adroit use of lighting that are modelled after those of museums housing world-class exhibits. The store’s merchandize is artisanal, often produced in collaboration with artists. Objects for sale are displayed alongside actual art, rendering both products equivalent. Employees function as curators, offering guidance and knowledge, as well as goods for sale. We analyze how luxury consumers experience and evaluate the ways in which luxury stores operate as contemporary art institutions, and extrapolate those insights into managerial implications for other retail venues.

© 2014 New York University. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Luxury; Luxury brand aesthetics; Retail brand aesthetization; Consumer perceptions; Art; Artists; Corporate art patron; Museums; Louis Vuitton

Introduction

The tenuous, uneasy yet inherently symbiotic relationship between culture and commerce has long been a research concern in the social sciences, and more recently, in the study of marketing and consumer behaviour (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Han, Nunes, and Dreze 2010). By overtly embracing art as an integral element of its commercial core, the luxury industry giant Louis Vuitton has reinvented itself as a hybrid institution, part luxury fashion store and part museum gallery, creating what we term a “M(Art)World”—a market that contains art within its very identity. Through our ethnographic study of consumer experiences in Louis Vuitton flagship stores in Hong Kong, we

argue that in the international market for contemporary art, deals are made and prices set in constant interaction with a cultural sphere involving aesthetic judgement and social recognition. LV intentionally elides art and commerce, with each reinforcing the other’s intrinsic value.

According to Kapferer and Bastien (2009), art is the aesthetic and social guarantor of luxury: truly a marriage of culture and luxury. The view by consumers of LV as an art world, despite its obvious commercial orientation, underscores the importance of how stores like LV have evolved strategically into M(Art)Worlds. In this paper, we elucidate how consumers process artistic presence and presentation at LV stores, as they negotiate the new phenomenon of a hybridized brand.

In the past, luxury stores and museums co-existed in most major cities. Traditionally, non-profit organizations such as museums were considered “product-oriented” (Griffin 2003), while for-profit entities, such as stores and commercial art galleries, were seen as “market- and consumer-oriented” (Crane 1987; Joy 1998). Museums connote the “art world” (Becker

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 574 631 6484.

E-mail addresses: Annamma.joy@ubc.ca (A. Joy), jeffwang@cityu.edu.hk (J.J. Wang), Chants@ln.edu.hk (T.-S. Chan), jsherry@nd.edu (J.F. Sherry Jr.), GCui@ln.edu.hk (G. Cui).

¹ Tel.: +1 250 807 8606.

1982), while commercial galleries are the “art market” (Crane 1987; Moulin 1986); scholars typically study these disparate institutions separately. Little is known about consumer experiences in commercial contexts that combine product and market orientations peculiar to the art world—particularly in the contemporary art world (Dion and Arnould 2011). In this world, two opposing conceptions of the market are at work: one based on the eternity of art (Hirschman 1983), the other on the process of perpetual innovation (Kapferer and Bastien 2009). In the context we explore, the focus is on continuous renewal, congruent with the strategy of many luxury retailers, who, while venerating their history and heritage, strive to also both fuel and satisfy the desires of today’s consumers. How do consumers experience the new M(Art) world of LV luxury? What are the individual dimensions of this hybrid retail experience?

In the following section, we review the literature on customer retail experiences, both within department stores and museums. We then provide an overview of our primary research site, the LV Hong Kong flagship store. After reviewing our methodology, we present and interpret our findings. We conclude with a discussion of the managerial implications of our work.

Literature review

Luxury brands

The market for luxury goods is booming (Kapferer and Bastien 2009), with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), including Hong Kong, becoming the second most important consumer of such goods (Degen 2009). Yet, we know little about the meaning of luxury or luxury brand consumption, despite the luxury sector being one of the most profitable marketing segments worldwide, and the fastest growing. The paucity of literature is regrettable, with occasional books and articles on luxury branding (Kapferer 1997; Kapferer and Bastien 2009; Twitchell 2002), and, for example, an issue of the *Journal of Brand Management* devoted to luxury brands (2009). We concur with Berthon et al. (2009), that luxury brands can be considered in terms of their materiality, the individual experience of such products, and their symbolic roles, as signifiers of wealth and taste.

Definitions of pleasure and beauty are central to any such discussion (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Creative directors at today’s luxury brands—the drivers of creating brand essence—are considered artists in their own rights. Without such leadership and charisma, luxury brands would be hard pressed to succeed (Dion and Arnould 2011). We build on their argument that successful brands are auratic, and show that luxury brands such as LV focus on core aesthetics. In a broader context, that core encompasses the collaboration of artists and the corporation-as-patron, engaged in a single pursuit: the production of a precisely engineered retail narrative.

Aesthetics and aesthetization have long existed in retailing and have become essential to the contemporary marketplace (Charters 2006; Schroeder 2002; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) define aesthetics as all forms of sensory experiences relating to the arts, including mundane objects. They note, following Schroeder (2002), that as

consumer culture increasingly becomes a visual culture, the movement towards aesthetization becomes ever stronger.

The rise of aesthetic consumption

In the nineteenth century, department stores used visual merchandizing to transform products into desirable and expressive commodity signs (Featherstone 1991; Parker 2003). Merchants of the day created exquisite palaces of consumption (Parker 2003), featuring glass skylights that flooded stores with natural light. Weather permitting, consumers could finally see objects clearly: a new era in consumerism was born, setting the stage, as it were, for today’s luxury stores, which now mesmerize consumers throughout the industrialized world (Benjamin 1927/2002). Over time, department stores began to incorporate signs of luxury to attract affluent customers; customers came to expect sensory stimulation when they shopped. Today, the critical difference between department stores that make ordinary goods look extraordinary, and actual luxury brand stores, is that, in the former, the sign value of an object becomes more important than its aesthetic value. “Ordinary, everyday commodities (e.g., pots), reflected in their opulent surroundings, became signs of wealth and affluence” (Parker 2003: 363). In actual luxury stores, aesthetics reign supreme.

Moreover, luxury retail stores are designed to do more than promote sales—they must also promote their brand, by selling “the dream,” or “the experience,” with consumer perceptions of the brand’s quality and of the store image playing a significant role in this promotion (Martineau 1958). Puccinelli et al. (2009) describe atmospherics as both the tangible and intangible aspects of retail stores that strongly affect customers’ experiences (Bitner 1992; Mehrabian and Russell 1974). Three sets of consumer cues have been identified: design, ambient cues, and social cues (Baker and Cameron 1996). Consumers are aware of the multitude of variables that comprise the built environment; such awareness drives their approach and avoidance behaviour (Mehrabian and Russell 1974).

Focusing on consumer experience allows researchers to better understand how consumers use various store elements, both to create their own identity, and to pursue communal projects (Arnould 2005). The sociological literature (e.g., Ritzer 1999), emphasizes the top-down orchestration of the experiences consumers have within retail spaces, which ultimately reduces consumer agency to powerful symbolic forces within such spaces. The move to make cultural showcases while simultaneously selling the brand is highlighted by Sherry’s (1998) study of Niketown, and by Penaloza’s (1999) visual ethnography of NikeTown. Both authors explore the contours of the spectacle; they argue that rather than paralyzing consumers overwhelmed by its features, such spectacles have instead enabled consumers to co-create the performance.

Recent studies focus on the ludic aspects of consumption spectacles. Kozinets et al. (2002), portray the ESPN Zone as an exemplar of the multisensory dimensions and multiple mythotypes used in such spaces. The three distinguishing features of themed flagship stores they identify relate to the ownership of the store by the manufacturer, the sale of only the company

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات