



The value of art in marketing: An emotion-based model of how artworks in ads improve product evaluations

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ABSTRACT

Arts-based initiatives provide many benefits for organisations, managers, and employees, but little is known of how marketing can incorporate art to add value for consumers. The present research situates marketing tools within broader organisational theory to develop and empirically test an emotion-based model of how artworks in advertisements can increase the perceived value of a product (*art infusion effect*). Across three experiments ($N = 516$) using three different artworks (by Vermeer, van Gogh, and da Vinci), three different products (mineral water, toilet paper, and chocolate), and three different measures of product value (product evaluation, willingness to buy, and willingness to pay), brand affect strongly mediated the art infusion effect. Furthermore, this affect-mediation was stronger for utilitarian products (water) than for hedonic products (chocolate). Thus, in support of general theories of arts-based methods in management, emotion appears to be a fundamental mechanism through which art affects product and price evaluations.

1. Introduction

Many theoretical insights explaining the benefits of arts-based initiatives for business processes and outcomes have emerged recently in organisational and management research (e.g., Adler, 2006; Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Meisiek & Barry, 2014a; Schiuma, 2011; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). Nevertheless, Meisiek and Barry (2014b) recently lamented that “the field...is desperately in need of deeper and more carefully worked out theorizing that can help explain empirical findings and guide research efforts” (p. 83). With that goal in mind, this study addresses a research problem related to how marketers can utilize art to create value both for companies and for their customers. More specifically, marketing constructs are situated within broader organisational theory to investigate two research questions: a) how can artworks in advertisements impact the perceived value of a product?; b) do brand affect and product type mediate and moderate this impact? To answer these questions, we develop a highly specified conceptual model of one particular marketing effect (i.e., the ‘art infusion effect’, explained below) and empirically test it through three experiments that pit our emotion-based model against an alternative luxury-based model. After the introduction of the theoretical framework adopted in the research, the value of art in organisation, management and marketing is considered, focusing on the use of visual arts in advertising. Then we describe an emotion-based model of how art in advertisements

can affect consumers' evaluations and valuations of products, and we report methods and results of three experiments. Following this, we discuss the theoretical contributions of this study and the main managerial implications.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The value of art in organisation and management

Recent years have borne a “cross-fertilization” of art and management (Adler, 2006), with initiatives ranging from adding art courses to business school curricula and engaging employees in artistic activities, to hiring artists for management positions and even using artistic processes for structuring organisations. Arts-based methods in management have arisen from a growing skepticism that traditional management methods can adequately address the increased complexity of the modern business context, combined with a growing optimism that the arts can provide dynamic and innovative methods for handling that complexity (Adler, 2006; Nissley, 2010; Schiuma, 2011; Troilo, 2015). Adler summarized these sentiments thus: “Creating the next great thing demands constant innovation; it’s a design task, not merely an analytical or administrative function. Historically, such creativity has been the primary competence of artists, not managers” (p. 490; see also Troilo, 2015). Taylor and Ladkin (2009) identify four distinct

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contributions that the arts can provide to managerial development within organisations: (1) the transfer of art skills (e.g., unbiased perception) to management activities; (2) projecting managers' subconscious thoughts into their managerial strategies; (3) discovering the true essence of one's product, service, or situation; and (4) increasing managers' experience of personal presence, which can positively impact their business decisions and actions. To be sure, many other scholars have contributed additional important insights about how the arts create value for organisations (see the other papers in this Special Issue), but it is beyond the scope of the present research to fully review that literature here. Rather, we now turn attention to the broad theoretical framework in which the present research is situated.

Schiuma (2011) presents a general framework for understanding and implementing *arts-based initiatives* in organisations. This framework distinguishes between dynamic- and static-based views of art. The *dynamic view* concerns the organisational factors through which value creation occurs; it addresses *how* an arts-based initiative creates value. These factors include such processes as how the organisation utilizes the arts in managerial learning and leadership, and how employees are exposed to and interact with the arts to improve performance and create value. The *static view* instead assesses the generated value at a specific time; it addresses *what* value the arts-based initiative delivers. It essentially entails a snapshot of the outcomes of an arts-based initiative. These outcomes include such measures as the flexibility of the organisation to adapt to environmental changes, the innovativeness of its managers, and the creativity of employees in solving work-related problems. Importantly, these dynamic and static views are intricately interdependent and complementary; *how* arts-based initiatives create value is tightly linked to *what* value they create. Nonetheless, these different views do support distinct methods for incorporating the arts into the business. The dynamic view suggests that arts-based initiatives may be implemented as a general organisational approach for managerial learning, or as a technique for infusing aesthetic and emotive characteristics into the value creation process. The static view instead suggests that the arts be incorporated into the organisation for instrumental purposes, that is, for creating value in the components or products themselves. By this view, then, the organisation might consider simpler and more easily implemented methods of incorporating the arts to increase the value of the organisation's outputs.

The present research examines Schiuma's (2011) static-based view of arts-based initiatives, investigating how standard marketing tools can utilize art to create added value in products. Before conceptualizing the specific research question, however, one should consider whether Schiuma's framework is applicable to the marketing of products. In fact, this framework focuses almost exclusively on organisation and management, so its relevance to product marketing can reasonably be doubted. However, Schiuma's definition of arts-based initiatives includes "the exploitation of the arts to create intangible value to be incorporated into products" (p. 3). Thus, we assume that the static-based view of arts-based initiatives can indeed be applied felicitously to product marketing. Specifically, our research investigates how the simple method of incorporating artworks in advertisements can increase consumers' valuations of the product (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008b). This research is among the first to examine how simple marketing actions can fit into the broader context of arts-based methods in organisation and management. Moreover, because using artworks in ads is among the simplest, most direct, and most easily implemented forms of arts-based initiative, it provides a rather conservative empirical test of arts-based methods: if simply including art in an ad increases the valuation of a product, this would clearly reveal that the arts can directly create tangible, financial value for business.

2.2. The value of art in marketing

So then, in what ways can arts-based initiatives be implemented in marketing to create value for the business? To begin with, marketing

managers can benefit from arts-based initiatives in all the same ways that other types of managers can, such as Taylor and Ladkin's (2009) four contributions of the arts to managerial development (described earlier). Indeed, art may be incorporated more easily and naturally into the marketing unit than into other units within an organisation. Furthermore, art can additionally be incorporated into several marketing-specific processes and outcomes, such as new product development and product design, to create value (Troilo, 2015). For example, artistic product designs can improve product evaluations and even compensate for moderately poor functionality (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2014). But on the other hand, artistic product design can also backfire: an artistic design can decrease evaluations of products with extremely poor functionality (Hoegg, Alba, & Dahl, 2010). More generally, the crucial role of art in product development and design is unequivocal, and current theorizing within organisation and management research clearly recognises this (e.g., Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Schiuma, 2011). Notably however, those broad theoretical frameworks have largely overlooked advertising as another effective tool for utilising the arts.

Many products and services are packaged or advertised with art. Perhaps the most famous example is Absolut's long-enduring marketing campaign (1986–2004) in which the brand's iconic vodka bottle was illustrated by famous contemporary artists such as Andy Warhol and Keith Haring. Other brands have used art in more or less engaging ways, such as alluding to or re-creating famous artworks, placing art on a package, or merely including artworks in the background of an ad. Indeed, marketing with art is ubiquitous, and for good reason: the exact same product may be evaluated substantially more positively when advertised with art than without art (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008a,b, 2011). Thus, art in advertising creates value for consumers. Although this *art infusion effect* is now well established, its underlying psychological mechanism is less well understood. Here we propose and demonstrate that one of the most fundamental aspects of art – its emotionality – underlies the art infusion effect.

2.3. Art infusion

Relatively few studies have examined the simple practice of merely placing art on products, packages, or in advertisements. In a seminal demonstration of art infusion, Hagtvedt and Patrick (2008b) presented advertisements for bathroom fittings that contained either an artwork (Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*), a photographic re-creation of the same scene (which was judged not to be art), or no image at all. Participants evaluated the bathroom fittings more positively when viewing the ad with an art image than with either a nonart image or no image. In a subsequent experiment they found similar art infusion effects on evaluations of a soap dispenser regardless of whether the artwork itself was judged positively (Monet's *Palazzo da Mula*) or negatively (Turner's *Burning of the House of Lords and Commons*). Moreover, if the artwork is perceived as an illustration rather than an artwork, then product evaluations decline substantially (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2011). Thus, art improves product evaluations regardless of participants' evaluations of the artwork itself, so long as the artwork is perceived as an artwork. This art infusion effect generalizes to novel brand extensions (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008a), and it appears to be mediated by perceived luxury (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008a,b; Lee, Chen, & Wang, 2015). Evidently, the mere presence of art endows products with an image of luxury, which in turn improves evaluations of the associated products.

These prior studies have definitively documented a theoretically interesting and practically important effect of art on consumers' evaluations of products. The present study substantially advances this prior work by developing a well-specified conceptual model of art infusion that includes a more proximal mediating mechanism and a practically important moderator. A new conceptual model emerged from two critical observations. First, although luxury perceptions are known to mediate art infusion effects (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008a,b; Lee et al., 2015), luxury perceptions themselves arise from several antecedent

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