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## Art infusion in retailing: The effect of art genres

Kelly Naletelich<sup>a</sup>, Audhesh K. Paswan<sup>b,\*</sup><sup>a</sup> College of Business, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, United States<sup>b</sup> Department of Marketing and Logistics, College of Business Administration, University of North Texas, P.O. Box 311396, Denton, TX 76203-1396, United States

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## ABSTRACT

Visual art is an integral part of our lives and affects us in more ways than we can imagine. However, research attention given to this topic is sparse and the primary focus has been on luxury products and retail settings. This study addresses this gap and investigates if different genre of art (realist, abstract or no art) influence the relationship between purchase intention and its antecedents (shopper, store and product characteristics). Results from a non-luxury eyeglass retail setting suggest that in the presence of abstract art, hedonic and utilitarian motivations, openness to art, the fact that the consumers made the choice and product aesthetics are positively associated with purchase intention. Whereas, in the presence of realist art only product aesthetics and symbolism was associated with purchase intention. Finally, when no art was present, purchase intention was positively associated with hedonic motivation, store atmosphere and social environment, and product aesthetics, but negatively with utilitarian motivation. These findings and their implications are discussed in the manuscript.

## 1. Introduction

Art is perhaps one of the most pervasive concepts of human existence and influences us in more ways than we can imagine. Indeed, marketers have been using art to promote products (Althuizen & Sgourev, 2014; Hoegg, Alba, & Dahl, 2010; Joy & Sherry, 2003). Companies such as Chanel, Ketel One, De Beers, and American Apparel increasingly rely on art to create unique consumer experiences. Apple recently transformed its retail locations into galleries that display consumer created artwork as part of their “create something new campaign” and the Department of Veterans Affairs spent \$6.3 million on artwork to enhance perceptions of VA hospitals (Wax-Thibodeaux, 2015). Luxury brand Louis Vuitton integrated artistic elements into their flagship stores to create an M(Art) Worlds (Joy, Wang, Chan, Sherry, & Cui, 2014).

Surprisingly, the research attention devoted to the phenomenon of art usage by business to create value is somewhat limited. Further, most of the studies have used the high-end luxury products and services as their research context (e.g., Dion & Arnould, 2011; Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008a). The few studies on the topic have found that use of art increases brand recall, creates brand differentiation, aids in brand extensions, teases the consumer imagination, and lays the creative foundation for effective advertising (Dion & Arnould, 2011; Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008b; Huettl & Gierl, 2012; Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 2005). Joy et al. (2014) introduced the concept of M(Art) Worlds and found that high-end retail consumers experience feelings of luxury,

enthrallment, exclusivity, and ethereal embodiment in presence of art. Researchers also agree that art and marketing have a synergistic relationship (Colbert & St-James, 2014; Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008b; Joy et al., 2014; Schiuma, 2011). While these studies have added to our knowledge about the effects of art, more research is needed for a deeper understanding of how the use of art alters value perceptions (Colbert & St-James, 2014). We still do not know enough about the finer details of how art influences consumer behavior in a retail context.

In response, this study investigates if the infusion of different genre of art in a retail store influences consumer behavior differently. We use abstract and realistic art as two genre of art with an absence of any art as the default control setting, and use a non-luxury retail context - an eyeglass store as the research context. This study focuses on three research questions: Does the genre of art within a retail environment matter? Can a consumer's ability to choose the type of art displayed at a retail store influence their purchase intentions? Do consumer, store, and product characteristics affect purchase intention differently when retailers use different genre of art (i.e., no art, realist and abstract)? Practical implications of this study are highlighted by the fact that the marriage of marketing and art has already gained considerable attention within the business community. Theoretically, this study contributes to this relatively under-researched field of value creation and enhancement using art.

In an attempt to answers these questions, this study first reviews relevant literature - i.e., elaboration likelihood and art infusion to theoretically anchor this investigation and develop hypotheses. Details

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [Kelly.naletelich@unt.edu](mailto:Kelly.naletelich@unt.edu) (K. Naletelich), [paswana@unt.edu](mailto:paswana@unt.edu) (A.K. Paswan).

of the research method used and the results follow next. Finally, the discussion of results, their implications and limitations are presented.

## 2. Theoretical background-art effects

Art is rich with symbolic and cultural meaning making it open to a wide array of interpretations. What is art to one person may be nothing more than an old twisted piece of metal to another. Why do these perceptions differ so starkly and how do consumers perceive a store or a product when it is associated with art? Aside from the fact that it has taken humans a considerable amount of evolutionary time to develop the necessary schema to appreciate art (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2011; Lindell & Mueller, 2011) the way in which meaning is transferred from art to consumer may shed some light. Drawing upon the meaning transfer model by McCracken (1986), art is first perceived through the lens of an individual's culturally constructed world, then this culturally anchored meaning is transferred from the art to the associated object (i.e. product and/or store), and subsequently to the consumer. One could argue that this forms a loop that either reinforces or alters existing values.

Further, relying on the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and underlying process of how advertising works (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999), art could be seen as a signal that passes through a series of psychological filters (i.e. level of involvement and motivation), to influence cognitions and affective states, and ultimately a consumer's behavior. Researchers using stimulus-organism-response framework have voiced similar sentiments (Vieira, 2013). Relying on these evidence and the literature on retailing (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002; Childers, Carr, Peck, & Carson, 2002; Homburg, Schwemmler, & Kuehnl, 2015), this study focuses on three groups of factors to understand the manner in which presence of art in a retail setting influences purchase intentions. These include shopper centric factors (*hedonic, utilitarian, and openness to art*), retail store centric factors (*atmosphere, social and lighting*), and product centric factors (*aesthetics, functionality and symbolism*). In addition, choice (whether a shopper can choose the genre of art- retail store combination or not) is also included based on literature on consumer decision making when choices are available (Dhar, 1997; Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008a; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

The term “art” is ambiguous and not easily defined. For example, Wartenberg (2012) identified over 29 perceptions of art and Hagtvedt and Patrick (2008a) explored the distinction between art and non-art. Further, art could be classified into groups anchored in major movements in history, i.e. Mesopotamian, Roman, Renaissance, Venetian, Neoclassical, Realism, Impressionist, Cubism and Postmodernism (Stokstad & Cothren, 2014). This paper focuses on paintings as a depiction of art, as they are easier to replicate and transport, and likely to be used in an “everyday” retail environment without overwhelming and distracting the retail consumers. Further, for the sake of parsimony, this paper uses three commonly understood painting types in a retail environment (a) no-art, (b) realist-art, and (c) abstract-art (i.e., Stokstad & Cothren, 2014).

To illustrate the focal phenomenon of this paper, consider the example of a consumer shopping for eyeglasses. First, the consumer visits a mall and notices a store, and the store interior along with the eyeglasses exhibited, can be seen from outside. The interior may either have nothing else; have a large realist painting or an abstract painting. At this point, the consumer may walk into the store (with either no art, abstract art or realist art displayed along with eyeglasses), selects an eyeglass and buys it. In this case, the consumer has no choice in terms of the type of art displayed. He/she simply reacts to it by entering the store or not. In another example, the same consumer sees three eyeglass stores (one with no art, second with realist art, and the third with abstract art). Now the consumer has choices. He/she exercises the choice by entering the eyeglass store s/he feels comfortable with, selects an eyeglass and buys it. We argue that the final purchase decision will be a

function of consumer centric factors, whether s/he has a choice of store-art combination, store centric factors, and product centric factors.

### 2.1. Consumer centric factors

Consumer centric factors such as personality has been extensively studied in the marketing and retailing literature (Kwak, Jaju, & Larsen, 2006; Odekerken-Schröder, De Wulf, & Schumacher, 2003). It has also been studied by researchers examining art and the interaction of art within business (Schiuma, 2011) and marketing (Chamorro-Premuzic, Reimers, Hsu, & Ahmetoglu, 2009; Dion & Arnould, 2011; Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2008a,b; Hagtvedt, Patrick, & Hagtvedt, 2008; Lantos & Craton, 2012; Joy et al., 2014). These studies suggest that when evaluating products, services or experiences, consumers make value judgments at a product specific level or as holistic experience (Babin & Darden, 1995; Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Crowley, Spangenberg, & Hughes, 1992; Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2002). These value judgments represent two distinct types of consumer centric shopping motivations: *hedonic* and *utilitarian*. Utilitarian consumers focus on functionality and the fulfillment of instrumental goals, whereas hedonic consumers seek consumption experiences that fulfill experiential, symbolic, and emotional desires. In other words, hedonic consumers desire, “fantasies, feelings, and fun” (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982, p. 132), whereas utilitarian consumers desire functionality, feasibility, and focus.

Extending this line of thinking to the retail setting, hedonic consumers seek a retail setting that extends beyond simple functionality and receive gratification not just from the acquisition of the product but also from the holistic shopping experience (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Hirschman, 1980). Thus, art within the retail environment offers a logical foundation for stimulating hedonic shopping values. Given the subjective nature of art and its ability to stimulate sensory cues, hedonic consumers are more likely to be more sensitive to arousal component of art. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) note that, “In some cases, the symbolic role [of product consumption] is especially rich and salient: for example, entertainment, the arts, and leisure activities encompass symbolic aspects of consumption behavior that make them particularly fertile ground for research” (p. 134). Art within the retail environment represents a reactive source of value likely to appeal more to hedonic consumers as opposed to utilitarian consumers. According to Holbrook (1994), “reactive value occurs when the individual simply apprehends, appreciates or responds to an object.... in this instance, the object affects the subject” (p. 51). Within the present context, art represent the object by which the consumer is affected and creates a spillover effect to the store environment and product perceptions. Mathwick et al. (2002) note that “reactive sources of value are reflected in a consumer's appreciation of “aesthetic” elements intrinsic to a consumption setting that are manifest in the visual appeal or entertainment value of a retail experience” (p. 53).

Summarizing the discussion so far, this paper proposes that the use of art (realist or abstract) by retailers is likely to appeal to different consumer segments, then when no art is used. For example, since utilitarian consumers favor functional settings with minimal peripheral cues and distractions (Childers et al., 2002), they are likely to prefer a store without any art. The functional store with no art is likely to motivate them to purchase from that store. However, presence of art may or may not take away from the utilitarian aspect of a purchased product. After all, all purchases must fulfill their utilitarian role at the very least. In comparison, hedonically motivated consumers are likely to prefer a retail environment that engages the imagination and creates a memorable experience, which is more congruent with the use of art. Hence, hedonic motivation is more likely to lead to purchase from stores with art.

**H1.** Hedonic shopping motivation is positively associated with purchase intentions when (a) abstract-art and (b) realist-art is present; but not (c) when art is absent.

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