

**CONCEPTUALIZING THE MEDIA OF ARTIFICATION:
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE THEORY OF ARTIFICATION OF LUXURY BRANDS**

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Abstract

Luxury has long thrived on a storytelling where craftsmanship, rarity, exclusivity and uniqueness were central. Both the industrialization and the financialization of luxury industry have led to a risk of losing its rarity and exclusivity values associated to the idea of craftsmanship. Leveraging on the structural proximity that exists between art and luxury, many luxury brands have been developing connections to art to capitalize on the benefits that could arise in terms of positioning and legitimacy. This conceptual paper studies and extensively investigates the different kinds of existing links between art and luxury brands as well as their related constructs in existing literature, which appear to be marginal and lacking consensus. However, this study identifies a conceptualization, which encapsulates all types of linkage between luxury brands and art that aim at enhancing the perception of luxury brands and luxury goods by consumers. It further proposes a definition of this conceptualization, which will benefit both academics and practitioners.

Keywords

Luxury- Brand - Art- Artification - Brand symbolic value

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Managerial context of the research

Luxury is a highly-performing sector: sales of personal luxury goods amounted 281 billions Euros in 2019 and should recover this level by 2022 (Bain & Co., 2021). Luxury groups perform so well that in 2021 LVMH became the first European market capitalization.

Luxury is also a very financialized sector, with a high concentration of key players (Deloitte Power of Luxury Goods, 2020): In 2019, the ten biggest luxury companies accounted for more than 50% of sales while multi-sectorial luxury groups represented 30% of global sales.

Theoretical context of the research

Over the last decades, the growth of the luxury sector and its financialization have undergone a major shift in the legitimization of the price and symbolic power of luxury. No longer able to thrive on rarity, craftsmanship and uniqueness, many luxury brands turned to art to reinforce their moral, aesthetic and symbolic value, while conferring themselves non-commercial connotations and legitimizing their high prices (Kapferer, 2014; Chailan, 2018).

Due to their structural proximity (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012), art and luxury have been related throughout history. However, their relationships are no longer sporadic or fortuitous (or very rarely) but scheduled and strategic (Riot et al, 2013; Kapferer, 2014; Passebois-Ducros & Silhouette-Dercourt, 2015)

Despite the growing marketing literature on the relationships between art and luxury, the conceptualization of these links between art and luxury brands or goods is only marginally addressed by scholars (Chailan, 2018). Moreover, academic publications employ various terms to describe such relationships, reflecting a “lack of consensus in conceptualizing the phenomenon” (Koronaki et al., 2017).

Research objective

- Provide a global definition of the various strategies used by luxury brands to enhance their perception through links with art.

Approach

This paper is a conceptual exploration. It aims at proposing a global construct that may encompass all forms of linkage between art and luxury brands which lead to the artification of those brands.

Litterature review

1. Contextualization of the artification of luxury

1.1. Phenomenology of the artification of luxury brands

The artification theory developed in luxury brand management by Kapferer (2014) is originally a cross-disciplinary concept. Grounded on a philosophical basis (Böhme, 2017) and the development of the artistic capitalism theory (Serroy & Lipovetsky, 2013), the *artification* neologism was first introduced by two French sociologists (Shapiro, 2004; Heinich & Shapiro, 2012). According to Heinich and Shapiro (2012), “the artification can be defined as the process of transforming non-art into art, the result of complex work that is an outcome of a change in the definition and status of people, objects and activities”. Applied to marketing, the process of artification consists in a positioning strategy with a purpose of universality (Kapferer, 2014), aiming at providing luxury brand with enhanced legitimacy, reputation and differentiation (Lipovetsky & Roux, 2013).

Despite the fact that the initiators of the artification concept appreciated the luxury industry as a privileged domain of artification (Heinich & Shapiro, 2012), certain necessary conditions must be met so that a specific relationship between art and a luxury brand could be viewed as an artification. Among them, recognition and legitimization by the artistic community and institutions is a mandatory condition (Heinich & Shapiro, 2012; Kapferer, 2014).

1.2. Effects of the artification of luxury brands

Art has connotations of excellence, luxury and exclusivity (Hoffman, 2002) and is a strategic opportunity for luxury brands that can enhance both their own symbolic value (Kapferer, 2014) and the perception of luxury goods by consumers (Valette-Florence, 2015).

Regarding luxury goods, artification allows the restoration of their exclusivity and rarity (Chailan, 2018), at least what Kapferer considers as *abundant rarity* (2012). Legitimacy of luxury products is no longer grounded in their objective scarcity but in their status as works of art (Passebois-Ducros et al., 2015), which further justify their high price (Kapferer, 2014). In this way, artification may be considered as a de-commoditization strategy of luxury products in order to protect and enhance their aura as well as to maintain the value perceived by the consumer (Riot et al., 2013).

Notwithstanding, artification is more than a mere de-commoditization strategy (Jelinek, 2018) as it reinforces luxury brands' singularity and symbolic value (Kapferer, 2014; Chailan, 2018) through the cultural elitism of those brands (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008). In doing so, the artification of luxury brands transcend their status and allows them to be viewed as cultural players (Kapferer, 2014; Joy et al., 2014) as well as to benefit from an “irrefutable aura” (Masè, 2020).

Artification legitimizes what is coined *abundant rarity*, “where feelings of privilege are attached to the brand itself, seducing through its experiential facets, pricing, prestige and the world it symbolizes” (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016)

2. Overview of the various types of linkage between art and luxury brands and their related constructs through a systematic literature review

The terms used to describe the relationships between luxury brand and arts in existing academic literature are manifold, from the concept of artification initially theorized in marketing by Kapferer (2014), to typologies like the “*Luxury Brand-Art Collaborations*” (LBCAs) developed by Baumgarth & Kastner (2014), or even narrower concepts dedicated to a specific kind of relationship between art and luxury brands like “*M(Art)Worlds*” at the store level (Joy et al., 2014), “*art-infused products*” (Kim et al., 2020) or “*Luxury Items with Visual Artistic Elements*” (LIVAE) (Ochkovskaya, 2018) at the product level.

However, three major trends arise from the systematic literature review to define the types of links that bind luxury brands to art (see Table I below).

First, it has been extensively acknowledged that the various links between luxury brands and art may be seen as *collaborations* (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008; Dion & Arnould, 2011; Kastner, 2013; Baumgarth et al., 2014; Jelinek, 2018). This trend, that was the first one to emerge, is also the most widely spread among marketing scholars (Lee et al., 2015; Codignola & Rancati, 2016; Baumgarth & Kastner, 2017), even though its use is tending to decrease over the years. This disaffection is due to the weaknesses of the *collaboration* construct in embracing certain kinds of linkage between art and luxury brands, especially regarding cases where luxury brands are inspired by or refer to art, without actual collaboration with an artist (Baumgarth, 2018; Ochkovskaya, 2018; Batat, 2019).

This terminology has been challenged by a term with a wider spectrum, that originates in the management and organization literature. Initially used to describe art-related activities targeted at internal publics within organizations, the *Arts-based initiatives* concept has been theorized by Schiuma (2009). Building on a broader definition of *arts-based initiative* (including “the exploitation of the arts to create intangible value to be incorporated into products”) later developed by Schiuma (2011), another host of scholars elaborated on this specific construct to define the strategic interlinking of luxury brands and art (Estes et al., 2018; Koronaki et al., 2018; Batat, 2019; Yang et al., 2021).

More recently, Chailan identified four types of relationships with the arts adopted by luxury brands (namely *Business Collaboration*, *Patronage*, *Foundations* and *Artistic Mentoring*) that he globally defined as “*art to luxury brand*” *binding modes* (2018). This new marketing definition has subsequently been taken up by other scholars (Masè, 2020; Massi & Turrini, 2020). Based on the fact that the *Business Collaboration* form fails to capture the bridging of art and luxury in cases where the brand is inspired by or refer to art, it has been suggested to add *collaboration with art heritage* to Chailan’s classification (Ochkovskaya, 2018).

Table I – Taxonomy of the main constructs used in literature to describe the relationships between luxury brands and art

Construct	Collaborations	Arts-based initiatives	Binding modes
Authors	Baumgarth et al. (2014)	Schiuma (2011)	Chailan (2018)
Definition	None.	“An ABI can be interpreted as any management action using one or more art forms to enable people to undergo an aesthetic experience within an organisation or at the intersection between the organisation and its external environment, as well as to embed the arts as a business asset.”	“By binding modes, we refer to the type and nature of the relationship between an artist or an artistic event and a luxury brand.”
Typologies	Arty limited editions, philanthropic art and luxury brand collaboration, experimental art and luxury brand collaborations.	Training, coaching, residency activity, team-building, creative investigation, event, art collection, sponsorship, arts and architecture, art and design, corporate social responsibility, embedding the arts into organisational life.	Artistic collaborations, patronage, foundations and artistic mentoring.
Other references	Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2008; Dion & Arnould, 2011; Kastner, 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Codignola & Rancati, 2016; Baumgarth & Kastner, 2017 ; Jelinek,2018, ...	Estes et al., 2017; Koronaki et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2021, ...	Chailan & Valek, 2014; Masè, 2020(a);Masè , 2020(b), ...

Besides the three main terms used in academic literature to define and conceptualize the different types of links between art and luxury brands (namely collaborations, arts-based initiatives and “art to luxury brand” binding modes), those links may also be defined around two marketing concepts in existing literature: Some authors refer to the strategic dimension of such links by using *strategies* (Joy et al., 2014), *art-based strategies* (Masè & Cedrola, 2017) or even *art as strategic branding tool* (Jelinek, 2018), while other scholars focus on the artification concept (Kapferer, 2015; Vukadin, Lemoine & Badot, 2016). According to some academics, the concept of *artification strategies* can merge both the aforementioned constructs (Passebois-Ducros et al., 2015 ; Massi & Turrini, 2020).

However, the concept of strategy cover neither genuine artistic collaborations under the impulse of the artistic director of the brand nor artistic references made by luxury brands, despite the fact that such types of links may enhance the perception of luxury brands (Peluso et al., 2017; Ochkovskaya, 2018; Batat, 2019).

Despite the merit of the above theoretical contributions in shedding light into the types of links connecting art and luxury brands, it should be acknowledged that none of the proposed terminologies allows to encapsulate all types of linkage between arts and luxury brands while taking into account their processual dimension as well as their brand positioning effects.

Proposed conceptualization

1. *The medium of artification* as a much-needed marketing concept

Among the three most commonly used terms that arise from existing literature to conceptualize the different types of relationships between art and luxury brands – i.e. collaborations, arts-based initiatives and “art to luxury brand” binding modes – the broader concept that may embrace the many forms of artification is the one of *arts-based initiatives*.

However, its wide spectrum may be seen as its own weakness for marketing purposes. The arts-based initiatives concept, which is mostly used in management and organizational studies, covers such a large range of art-related activities that it may be seen as not precise enough to address specific marketing strategies. Its 2,2 millions occurrences on Google Scholar tend to confirm its lack of accuracy to conceptualize a specific marketing strategy like artification.

Therefore, building on Kapferer’ seminal article on artification of luxury (2014), this study suggest to use the term of *medium of artification*, that is not defined but mentioned by Kapferer on the side of his proposed artification scale (which itself does not refer to any medium and is more focused on collaborative forms of artification). Such concept is less blurry than the one of arts-based initiatives and more appropriate for marketing studies.

2. *The medium of artification* as a global concept embracing all types of linkage between art and luxury brands

The careful analysis of a large body of literature allows to identify three main constructs aiming at encompassing the different types of links connecting art to luxury brands. However, to the exception of *arts-based initiatives* (which is not suitable for the abovementioned reasons), none of the *collaborations* or the “*art to luxury brand*” *binding modes* - as defined by Chailan (2018) - would permit to these concepts to embrace all types of links connecting art to luxury and

leading to an enhanced perception of the luxury brand by consumers. Chailan' suggested *binding modes*, which he defines as "the type and nature of the relationship between an artist or an artistic event and a luxury brand", cover four main types of relationship, namely business collaboration, patronage, foundations and artistic mentoring. References or tributes to art and artists are then outside of the scope of this construct.

The solution suggested by Ochkovskaya (2018) to remedy this issue is to add *collaboration with art heritage* to Chailan's classification. This suggestion raises two difficulties. First, the concept of *collaboration* does not reflect the inspiration process (Thrash & Eliot, 2003) which is at stake when it comes to references and tributes to art or artists by luxury brands, as there is no actual collaborator on the artistic side, which is required by the very definition of a collaboration (Cambridge Dictionary). A fifth type of relationship should then be added. Second, the definition of so-called binding modes given by Chailan should also be broadened as it only covers "the relationship between an artist or artistic event and a luxury brand".

Therefore, and despite the potential of this terminology, "*art to luxury brand*" *binding modes* is too narrow to encompass all kinds of strategic interlinking of art and luxury brands.

Conversely, referring to *media of artification* allows to embrace all types of linkage between art and luxury brands. It should be further noted that this construct can cover both existing kind of links and future kind of links that could arise (from digitalization, for example).

The *medium of artification* construct built on Kapferer' seminal article seems the most relevant concept and ought to be defined accordingly.

3. Proposed definition of the media of artification

According to Kapferer (2014), and despite the fact that he did not give any definition of the concept, there are "multiple media of artification" that are supposed to capture all kinds of strategic interlinking between art and luxury brands aiming at the artification of the latter.

Moreover, by using the *artification* term, this terminology integrates both the idea of process and the brand positioning effect of the theory when applied to brand management.

Consequently, this study suggest the following definition of *media of artification* : **the *media of artification* should be referred to as art-related supports or events which aim at enhancing the perception of luxury brands and their products by consumers through products, communication, retail or e-tailing.**

Application of the media of artification's concept to the existing forms of linkage between luxury brands and art

By referring to art-related supports or events which aim at enhancing the perception of luxury brands and their products by consumers through products, communication, retail or e-tailing, the media of artification construct can be applied to all known forms of links between art and luxury brands that purport to the artification of such brands.

Possible forms of artification might exist at the product level, the communication level and the store level.

1. Artification at the product level

Luxury products may be media of artification, either through inspiration by an artist or an art piece (Ochkovskaya, 2018; Batat, 2019) or through an actual collaboration with an artist (Michel & Willing, 2020) or his/her estate.

Product collaborations between luxury brands and artists do mainly occur for luxury fashion and leather good products (Massi & Turrini, 2020), as well as wines and spirits (Passebois-Ducros et al., 2015). Louis Vuitton was the pioneer brand to collaborate with artists to offer co-branded products (Riot et al., 2013; Masè & Cedrola, 2017). It is more scarce as far as high jewelry or fine watchmaking products are concerned.

Collaborations with artist may also be an opportunity for luxury brands to extend their offer, like Givenchy which offered their first digital artwork in the form of NFT (Non-Fungible Tokens) in collaboration with artist Chito in November 2021.

2. Artification at the communication level

Brand communication and corporate communication, in many of their forms, may be qualified as media of artification, either through inspiration by an artist or an art piece, through a reference or tribute to an artist, an art piece, a type of art or art in general, or through an actual collaboration with an artist or his/her estate or foundation.

Regarding brand communication, advertising pioneered as a medium of artification based on the collaboration of brands with artists (Michel & Willing, 2020) as well as by incorporating artistic references without any collaboration (Lehu, 2011; Peluso et al., 2017).

The whole range of brand management communication tools may be supports or events that proceed to the artification of the brand through collaborations with artists. This includes, among others, fashion shows (Pinchera & Rinaldo, 2020), store windows (Wiedmann et al., 2013), pop-up stores (Michel & Willing, 2020) as well as digital brand content (Kastner, 2013). Temporary museum exhibitions of luxury brands proceed to artification as well (De Lassus & Silhouette-Dercourt, 2015).

With respect to corporate communication, it is the first media of artification to have been used by luxury brand through corporate art collections (Kapferer, 2015), artistic mentoring (Chailan & Valek, 2014), patronage of artists, artworks or events (Koronaki et al., 2018, Massi & Turrini, 2020), corporate art museums (Caru et al., 2017) and foundations (Riot, 2017; Batat, 2019).

3. Artification at the store level

Retail is viewed as a growing medium of artification, as store artification through the display of artworks and the store atmospherics (Dion & Arnould, 2011) has proved to foster customer experience (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008) as well as to enhance store and product image (Vukadin, Lemoine & Badot, 2019; Logkizidou et al., 2019). In certain cases, artified stores may be seen by customers as hybrid “art institutions” that enhance brand image (Joy et al., 2014).

Theoretical implications

This study aims at bringing a conceptual contribution in the field of luxury brand management through artification strategy, by proposing a global concept referring to all existing and forthcoming types of linkage between art and luxury brand which, to the best of my knowledge, does not exist to date.

Managerial implications

In practice, this study allows luxury professionals to be aware of the whole range of existing or potential media of artification that are or would be available to proceed to an artification strategy for a luxury brand.

Limitations and directions for future research

Beyond the need for a global marketing concept encapsulating all types of linkage between art and luxury brands, it would have been interesting to further investigate those types of links and provide a comprehensive typology of the different media of artification that may be used by luxury brands.

To date, literature is fragmented on this topic as well. We have seen that some authors have categorized different forms of collaborations, whether such categories are divided into arty limited editions, philanthropic art and luxury brand collaboration, experimental art and luxury brand collaborations (Baumgarth et al., 2014) or artistic collaborations, patronage, foundations and artistic mentoring (Chailan, 2018). There has been other attempts to categorize the different forms of collaborations between luxury brands and art through a marketing-mix approach (Batat, 2019), while a few authors favor artification scales (Kapferer, 2015; Massi & Turrini, 2020). Moreover, existing categorizations hardly encapsulate all types of linkage between luxury brands and art that may lead to artification.

I therefore propose to follow up this conceptual exploration with later empirical research aiming at defining a model conceptualizing all potential media of artification that may be used by luxury brands.

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