The Elevation of Luxury: Art Infusion and Artification as Vehicles for Creating Shared Value

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Abstract
Luxury brands have historically benefitted from engagement with the artistic community. There is a robust academic literature on the specific benefits for luxury brands of using mechanisms like art infusion and artification as a means of enhancing brand image and overcoming challenges associated with modern market conditions. Less clear, however, is how luxury brand involvement with the arts can benefit the artistic community and contribute to societal well-being more generally. In this paper, we argue that some means of artistic engagement should be considered more socially responsible than others and show how Porter and Kramer's (2011) creating shared value framework can help brands develop strategies that use art to simultaneously benefit brand and society. We highlight three specific means by which luxury brands can create shared value through their artistic engagement: 1) through reconceiving products and markets, 2) by redefining productivity in the value chain, and by enabling local cluster development, including the promotion of underrepresented artists. We close by considering how these engagements with art may play a larger, more transformative role in the CSR strategies of a luxury brand, enabling it to transcend from a corporate entity to a purveyor of culture, art, and well-being.

Keywords**:** Shared Value, Corporate Social Responsibility, Artification

Introduction

The luxury industry has a long history of turning to art and artists for inspiration (Baumgarth et al 2014, Baumgarth et al 2018). However, establishing and maintaining connections between the worlds of art and luxury is now more than ever considered an essential part of luxury brand strategy (Jelenik 2018, Soito 2018, Okonkwo, 2009). In fact, the creative directors of today's luxury brands are often characterized as artists themselves, whose creative vision, leadership, and charisma are viewed as being essential to the company's success (Dion & Arnould, 2011). In many respects, this seems like a natural pairing. Like fine art, luxury goods are the product of craftsmanship and expertise and are created with the aim of evoking emotional connection (Heine & Berghaus, 2014; Poelina & Nordensvard, 2018, De Angelis et al, 2020). But the reasons for this convergence go beyond natural affinity: luxury brands seek out involvement with art and the artworld, whether through artist collaboration, sponsorship, corporate museums, or other means, to elevate the esteem, status, and value of the brand (Chailan, 2018; Kapferer, 2014).

Though while the collaboration between art and luxury has only become a major focus of study in recent years, the two share a long, intertwined history. In one of the earliest collaborations of this kind, in the 1930s, Salvador Dalì partnered with the Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli to reinvigorate her clothing designs (Gibson, 2003). In 1965, Yves Saint Laurent would draw heavily (and famously) from Piet Mondrian's artworks in launching his iconic haute couture (Kim, 1998). In 1966 he would release another art-inspired collection, this time by the pop art of Andy Warhol (Kapferer, 2014). These are but two of many examples of luxury designers taking creative inspiration from the work of trendsetting artists throughout the 20th Century. However, it was not until the 1980s that luxury brands truly began to treat fine art as a potential brand asset above and beyond its value as a source of raw creative inspiration, a shift that correlates with the increasingly popular trend of creating foundations to preserve and promote their artistic legacies and broader connections to the art world.

More generally, the incorporation of art and artistic vision within a brand's products and narratives elevates its status and value (Kapferer 2013) and associates it in the minds of consumers with attributes commonly valued by those with high status tastes (Kapferer 2013, Kapferer and Bastien 2012). In particular, luxury brands benefit from the fact that channeling the creative power of renowned artists imparts an aura of rarity and uniqueness to products and the brand itself (Chalian 2018), which helps to satisfy the demand of luxury consumers for these features in their products (Kapferer and Laurent, 2016, Rucker et al., 2011) and experiences (Cuny et al 2020, Batat 2019a, Shukla et al., 2016). Finally, associating luxury with art may also provide a stiff barrier to entry for would-be competitors, who are unable to overcome the challenge of building these connections with the art world, which are oftentimes complex, nebulous, and tacit (Chailan, 2018).

There are two related ways that these effects tend to be generated, via *art infusion* and/or *artification*.

From art infusion to artification

Unlike art infusion, which is about using the power of art to generate useful effects like the art infusion effect described above, luxury artification is the process by which luxury brands seek to secure the perception of their products *as* art (Batat 2019b, Shapiro 2019, Kapferer, 2014). What does or does not count as art is effectively a social construct, meaning that, while artification does tend to rely in practice on collaboration with established artists, its success or failure depends on how those collaborations, along with other means of influencing public opinion, lead to a social transformation in how their products are viewed (Shapiro, 2019). The design of retail spaces, sponsorship and curation of museums housing their products, and broader marketing profile are therefore as much a part of the artification process as the design of the goods themselves.

Luxury brands often create art through collaboration, with some brands relying to a far greater extent on the cache of artist partnership. For example, LVMH engaged the process of artification with Japanese artist Takashi Murakami in their "Speedy Bag" collection. The collaboration blurred the line between artist and product line, not only by virtue of its duration and consistency (spanning 2003 - 2015), but because of the privileged artistic freedom that LVMH allowed. Not one to downplay the artification of his brand, LMVH Creative Director Marc Jacobs remarked of the collaboration, "It has been, and continues to be, a monumental marriage of art and commerce. The ultimate crossover – one for both the fashion and art history books." (Milligan 2009).

Arguably the finest and most ambitious example of this effect is the recently completed Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris (Mase and Cedrola, 2017). Erected in 2014, the 126,000 square foot art museum was designed by Frank Gehry and cost nearly $900 million to create (Faynaed, 2014). The museum's permanent collection includes works owned by Founder and CEO Bernard Arnaud from a range of influential artists including Jean-Michel Basquiat, Gilbert & George and Jeff Koons (Moore 2014). The Fondation has made a concerted effort to ensure the museum is not merely a platform for direct brand promotion by housing and hosting a truly extensive and diverse collection of art and artistic voices and developing programs to promote young and emergent artists. The museum is now home to a range of educational programs relating to the arts and provides special scheduling and pricing for school trips, along with steep discounts for teachers and professional artists. The aim is for the space to become an iconic, public museum in the spirit of Paris's other great art institutions, helping to secure public perception of the LVMH brand as fundamentally committed to the value, promotion, and production of art, culture, and taste (Riot 2017). While early controversy in the museum's construction and development may have delayed that process, the authenticity behind its mission distinguishes it from many other luxury brand competitors.

The difference between this approach and that taken by direct competitors like Gucci is stark. Gucci's broader artification strategy has involved producing a series of public exhibitions including, among other things, the "The Artist is Present" exhibition at the Yuz Museum of Shanghai and the creation of a series of collaborative murals or "artwalls" painted in London, Milan, New York, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (Sepe & Anzivino, 2020). However, their own foray into the museum world has been markedly brand-focused. Whereas the Prada and LVMH museums are dedicated to the broader public promotion of art and artists, Gucci Garden (formerly Museo Gucci) in Florence serves exclusively as a shrine to the history of the brand and emblem of its artistic vision for the future. Visitors to the museum can dine at the Osteria, where they will pay high prices for food prepared in the kitchen of a three Michelin Star awarded chef. They can browse Gucci-related books and other media in the bookstore and even purchase clothes in the Garden boutique. Furthermore, they can explore displays cataloguing a history of the Gucci brand and the phenomenon of "Guccification" through its codes and symbols, its "historical jet-set customer," and – most importantly from the perspective of this paper – the sources of creative inspiration for its past, present and future.

Clearly, there are some significant differences among brands in terms of how their art infusion and artification strategies connect with a broader commitment to promoting and actively participating as creative forces within the arts. The rest of the paper views these differences through the lens of social responsibility, arguing that, as tastemakers with the power to shape public perception of the arts, luxury brands have an opportunity to generate significant social value through their interventions in the art world.

Instrumental Benefits to Society

How do art experiences and participation in the arts contribute *in general* to human well-being in society? There are many possible ways to answer this question. It goes without saying that art has intrinsic value above and beyond its capacity to generate such effects, in the form of aesthetic pleasure experienced by those who create and experience it. Corporations can and should take this value into account in considering the role they may play in promoting the arts in society. However, beyond these intrinsic sources of its value, which are deeply personal and can be difficult to quantify, there are some clear instrumental benefits of art for individuals and society at large.

Art experiences not only provide us a means of creative expression but deepen and enrich one's emotional life by engaging us to adopt new perspectives, deepening the reflection on personal experience, and even stimulating reflection on the meaning of life. One landmark study out of Scotland identified a strong link between attendance at artistic and cultural places and events and perceived life satisfaction (Leadbetter & O'Connor, 2013). The study involved analysis of survey data from nearly 10,000 respondents, and the result held even when accounting for other factors, including age, economic status, income, and education. Specifically, the authors found that those who had visited such a place or event in the previous 12 months were nearly 60 percent more likely to report good health that those who had not. Similar findings have been found to hold in Sweden (Bygren et al., 2009), Norway (Cuypers et al., 2011), and Finland (Hyyppa et al., 2005).

Beyond the direct contributions of arts participation, exposure, and education for human well-being, the arts contribute considerable instrumental value in society as a source of economic stimulus. A recent National Endowment for the Arts study found that "the value of arts and cultural production in America in 2019 was $919.7 billion, amounting to 4.3% of gross domestic product" (NEA, 2021: 1). Moreover, from an employment standpoint there were 5.2 million "arts and cultural sector" jobs in America in 2017, which amounted to 3.3% of all U.S. jobs. Those jobs are estimated to have paid workers a total of $446.7 billion dollars (NEA, 2021). These numbers include 35 arts and culture fields, including broadcasting, movies, streaming, publishing, the performing arts, and arts-related retail, meaning they far outstrip the scope of the discussion in the paper so far (Florida, 2019). Nonetheless, they do provide a clear indication of the significant role that the arts and adjacent industries play in one's daily economic life.

Though the mainstream media and entertainment industries play a prominent role in driving these numbers, it is important not to underestimate the powerful impact that investing in the arts can have at a local level. Arts festivals and events can have a particularly dramatic positive impact on local economies by attracting visitors, creating jobs and developing skills, attracting and retaining businesses, revitalizing places, and developing artistic talent and investing in future value (LGA, 2013).

Beyond these benefits of immediately investing in local level initiatives, additional knock-on effects of all forms of arts and culture investment (including supply chain effects) extend within and beyond the immediate communities in which such activities occur (Five Lines Consulting, 2012). For example, a report on the arts and culture industries by the British Center for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) concluded that these effects alone contribute as much as 1 percent to the UK GDP (CEBR, 2013). Evidence of such effects is well-substantiated in the U.S. as well, where the impact of the arts and culture sector is diffuse, adding over $72 billion to eighteen rural state economies, which are those states in which 30 percent or more of the population live in rural setting

Using Art to Create Shared Value

The central motivating idea behind CSV is that corporations have historically taken a damagingly narrow view of value creation. Porter and Kramer argue that modern corporations "continue to view value creation narrowly, optimizing short-term financial performance in a bubble while missing the most important customer needs and ignoring the broader influences that determine their longer-term success" (Porter & Kramer, 2011). As a result, they argue, companies "overlook the well-being of their customers" and, among other things, ignore "the depletion of natural resources vital to their businesses, the viability of key suppliers, [and] the economic distress of the communities in which they produce and sell" in the name of promoting short-term profitability (Porter & Kramer, 2011). The alternative they propose is for us to cease viewing business and society as being "pitted against each other" and instead recognize that "societal needs, not just conventional economic needs, define markets." Moreover, they emphasize that "social harms or weaknesses frequently create *internal* costs for firms – such as wasted energy or raw materials, costly accidents, and the need for remedial training to compensate for inadequacies in education" (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Therefore, solving these problems through innovative strategies and technology can often be viewed as a means of increasing productivity and expanding markets rather than merely a source of increased costs.

Ultimately, Porter and Kramer identify three primary strategies for promoting shared value. *Reconceiving products and markets* involves focusing primary attention on developing products and services that meet important societal needs. As the authors put it, "An ongoing exploration of societal needs will lead companies to discover new opportunities for differentiation and repositioning in traditional markets, and to recognize the potential of new markets they previously overlooked" (Porter & Kramer, 2011). *Redefining productivity in the value chain* involves identifying those places within a company's value chain where increased efficiency, policy changes, and internalization of externalities may provide benefits to society at large while improving the bottom line. Finally, *enabling local cluster development* involves supporting and building physical and human capital necessary to sustain growth and development among "geographical concentrations of firms, related businesses, suppliers, service providers, and logistical infrastructure" that support a company's core business. They argue that pursuing the creation of shared value by refining a company's practices in these three areas will not only improve social outcomes but ensure long-term business success.

Of course, no account designed to assign the social responsibilities of business will be perfect, and CSV has at times been criticized. For example, critics have argued that, in posing the possibility of "moving beyond" tradeoffs between economic and social value creation, it ignores the very real situations in which choosing to pursue one will come at the expense of the other. Furthermore, CSV has been said to place undue focus on the role of reconceiving new products and markets, without offering guidance for companies that "produce products that are of questionable social good" (e.g., tobacco companies) and to gloss over the scale and complexity of value chains in its aim to identify "win-win" scenarios that will require little sacrifice on the part of global corporations (Crane et al., 2014). Another important criticism relates to the potential impact of CSV's broad promotion of "local cluster development" which, when uncritically implemented, can disrupt local economies and lead to "migration issues, overcrowding, and precarious [local] dependencies on a particular industry" (Crane et al., 2014; Martin & Sunley, 2003).

Two Routes to Transformation

At this point in the paper, the attention turns to understanding what it really means for luxury brands to embrace the practical value of art in general, by taking concrete steps to use it as a means of creating shared value. There are two main directions they may take to do so: by *deepening art infusion* and *broadening artification.*

Deepening art infusion. The phenomenon of art infusion need not only apply to products but may also involve the transformation of ordinary management processes by introducing art as a medium for reflection and engagement. As described in significant detail below, art can play an important role within business organizations by disrupting ordinary routines and patterns and facilitating new and exciting forms of engagement among internal and external stakeholders.

Broadening artification. Like art infusion, luxury brands should view the artification process as being not merely about the transformation of products. Rather, the transformation of products into art requires using the market power these brands command as tastemakers to create a world within which their products will be more broadly recognized and received as works of art. Part of this involves telling the brand's story to the world in artistic terms, cataloguing the creative direction of the brand and its legacy for the world to see. However, it should also involve combining genuinely creative artistic output with efforts to proliferate arts awareness and a broader receptivity among the public to the value and importance of art in its increasingly diverse forms. Using the power and influence of luxury brands to cultivate such an audience is not only good for the brand and part of the artification process, but also potentially good for society in many ways.

Reconceiving Products and Markets

Strategies that involve deepening art infusion and broadening artification both provide potentially valuable means of reconceiving products and markets and thereby creating shared value in society. The discussion begins by considering the use of art infusion strategies in the workplace to promote so-called interspaces within which the usual norms of interaction among individuals and groups are "temporarily suspended, thereby enabling the expression and exploration of new ideas and behaviors, which individuals and groups can choose to take forward afterwards" (Paolino & Antal, 2020, para. 16).

Art has the ability to function as a means of bridging gaps in communication and facilitating new forms of communication that would be difficult or impossible to cultivate without it (Antal, 2014; Antal & Strauß, 2015; Paolino & Antal, 2020). This applies to the workplace and stakeholder engagement as well as it does in other areas of civil society (Taylor et al., 2015). Barry and Meisek (2010) identify *art collection, artist-led interventions,* and *artistic experimentation* as the three primary ways that arts-based initiatives are typically introduced within organizations. Any of these means can be used to upend conventional workplace norms by creating “interspaces” that empower new forms of communication among employees, management, and stakeholders. These shared experiences can lead to new insights that inform a luxury brand’s product development and marketing approaches, contributing to the role they play in promoting shared value. This is an example of deepening art infusion, through extension of arts engagement and participation to new social spheres.

Some companies have used art collections or the infusion of workspaces with works of art as a means of disrupting expectations and fostering renewed communication, supposing it will function as a means of transforming the way that members of the organization see and think about their working lives. Executives at EA Generali, an Austrian insurance company, introduced art collections into the workplace that “provoke and irritate” with the aim of spreading “creative unrest” throughout the company (Breitwieser, 1995). Following a similar strategy, Mads Øvlisen the former CEO Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk intentionally sought to acquire “difficult” artworks from unknown artists and exhibited them through the company workspace, which many employees found appalling and controversial. His hope in doing so was that “people would stop and think, and…start asking questions about themselves, their ways of noticing things, and their work” (Aunstrup et al., 2000; Barry & Meisiek, 2010, p. 8). Despite unrest that initially followed the art’s introduction to the workplace, researchers report that employees did ultimately take inspiration from the art, describing it as a kind of “symbol of being able to undertake weird projects” (Barry & Meisiek, 2010, p. 8). In fact, years later when Øvlisen retired and workers were given the opportunity to move the art, they would ultimately decline to do so.

A recent case study cataloguing such a process at Bruno Rossi, an Italian luxury shoe producer, offers particularly useful insight into the potential value of such events. In that case, CEO Riccardo Sciutto brought three artists representing past, present, and future to learn from employees and produce separate pieces of art for the company space that would re-establish a sense of pride in the shoe production process that had been lost as the scale of the company’s production had increased (Paolino & Antal, 2020). Through a process of engaging with employees, members of the local community, and competitors, the artists drew on the history and culture of the business to produce work that became a source of meaning and pride for the employees. The process drove continual conversation among stakeholders about the company’s legacy and its future. Furthermore, the artworks became, not only meaningful symbols of the company story, but emblematic of the shared experiences through which the art had been created, about which there was widespread enthusiasm (Paolino & Antal, 2020).

These findings suggest that creating interspaces through different kinds of artistic interventions can facilitate reconceiving markets and products in at least two ways. First, by facilitating new forms of communication that are not bound to conventional workplace norms and providing a means for stakeholders within and outside of companies at different levels to engage and interact with one another, the use of art in this way promotes creativity and cross-pollination of ideas that is bound to generate constructive change. The outcome is even more likely if firms specifically use art as a means of stimulating discussions about the company's future direction, including discussions about product development and corporate identity.

So far, the primary focus has been on how art infusion can impact internal company dynamics and the product development process. However, if the artification process is truly to be part of a broader effort to create shared value in society, luxury brands will need to undertake a dramatic reconception of how they cultivate and address the market for their products. Specifically, luxury brands committed to CSV must dedicate significant resources to promoting and supporting the arts within communities. Deepening this artification process involves luxury brands moving beyond merely cultivating the standing of their own products as art, to focus on promoting the value of creating, engaging with, and enjoying art more generally. By using their market-shaping power to open access to and stimulate public appreciation for the arts, brands can help create a society with stronger tastes for artified products and ensure the success of their brand strategy over the long-term. By taking genuinely public-spirited action through arts philanthropy and sponsorship, the cultivation of social and educational programs dedicated to the arts, and creation of shared spaces for arts experiences and enjoyment, luxury brands will not only benefit society, but create market conditions for their own success.

Redefining Productivity in the Value Chain

Many of the beneficial features of extending art infusion into the workplace can also help luxury firms to begin redefining productivity in the value chain. Fostering improved stakeholder engagement and transforming the relationship of workers and management through artistic interventions can not only stimulate reflection on the nature of the business's products, but on the inefficiencies and social costs imposed by current supply and production processes. Therefore, art interventions might be used strategically, as a medium for engaging employees and suppliers, to spur reform of production and supply chain processes by engaging workers and contractors to participate in identifying and solving problems.

This approach, in which employees, technicians, and suppliers are treated as a resource for improving productivity, shares philosophical features with the "Toyota Way." The latter revolutionized manufacturing by introducing "Just-In-Time" production to assembly line processes and – more importantly from the current perspective – facilitating vastly improved employee relations and morale, by prioritizing collaborative partnerships among and across workers and managers of different elements in the production process. Toyota's approach abolishes the oppositional norms of traditional factory relations between workers and managers, normalizing teamwork and continual feedback loops between floor workers and management. This facilitates "continuous process flow" by ensuring that managers in charge of resolving production challenges can act based on full information, and with authentic buy-in from workers, who are consulted as active participants in developing solutions.

Given the evidence suggesting that regular use of art as a medium for engaging employees can stimulate cross-sectoral discussion that breaches established hierarchies and humanizes social relationships in the workplace, it seems that using such methods has potential to help promote efforts to redefine productivity in the value chain. The best resources for managers to learn about and understand inefficiencies and sources of lost value within the supply, production, and distribution process are employees and other internal and external stakeholders. As discussed previously, under the right circumstances, using well-designed artistic interventions to foster tighter and more open communicative relationships among these parties is a potentially powerful strategy, and one that can help companies truly understand their own business operations from the inside out.

Enabling Local Cluster Development

As Porter and Kramer note in their discussion of local cluster development, "The success of every company is affected by the supporting companies and infrastructure around it" (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 12). For luxury brands deploying artification as a strategy, local cluster development must involve designing the infrastructure that will empower future artists and foster a creative network and culture. Doing so will not only provide a range of profound benefits for society, but also allow them to secure channels through which to find and work with the best and brightest emerging artists. Consistent with the previous discussion, luxury brand investment in the arts often involves the creation of museums and other venues for public consumption of art. However, broad investment in educational and training programs for aspiring artists and designers to develop their talents will also be essential. By creating and fostering the growth and nurturing of emerging artists through such programs and securing space for local art appreciation and community engagement, luxury brands can create the conditions out of which the next wave of creative inspiration will emerge to shape and influence their products. Authentic engagement with these communities ensures that luxury brands will retain the cutting-edge artistic bona fides that drives their status as tastemakers and preserves the value of their brand.

It will be particularly important for brands to attend to the important value of diversity and inclusion in developing their approaches to enabling local cluster development. Although there is growing attention to empowering diverse artistic voices, the reality is that the art world remains a space that is often dominated by whiteness. Even as art shows and museums have seen an increase in the representation of people of color, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+ art and artists, these cultural spaces – including their management, staff, employees, and patrons – continue to remain less diverse than the general population. Furthermore, public education about art remains primarily focused on historically "canonical" figures while art and artists from minority race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation categories and communities are significantly underrepresented (Arts Council England, 2018). The net effect of these deficiencies is that, in spite of much progress, these minorities continue not to see themselves reflected in world of art – not only to their own detriment, but to that of the artworld itself.

Luxury brands therefore have an opportunity to advocate for and foster a more inclusive artistic community. There are many possible ways to do so, but two stand out as particularly important. The first involves directing targeted funding and lobbying efforts to arts education and support programs that redefine the artworld in more inclusive terms and provide minority students with opportunities to not only see themselves reflected in the history of art but to bring their own artistic visions to the world. Second, luxury brands must continue taking steps to ensure that their own endeavors involving art infusion and artification not only feature a panoply of diverse and underrepresented artistic voices, but that the artworld itself, including the infrastructure through which it is implemented, is equally open and inviting to minority populations.

Conclusion

Luxury brands have historically benefitted from engagement with the artistic community. There is a robust academic literature on the specific benefits for luxury brands of using mechanisms like art infusion and artification as a means of enhancing brand image and overcoming challenges associated with modern market conditions. Less clear is how luxury brand involvement with the arts can benefit the artistic community and contribute to societal well-being more generally. This paper argues that some means of artistic engagement should be considered more socially responsible than others and showed how Porter and Kramer's (2011) creating shared value framework can help brands develop strategies that use art to simultaneously benefit brand and society.

Further attention must also be dedicated to emerging technologies such as Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), which provide both artists and brands the ability to collaborate in the digital domain, and allow consumers to purchase a kind of exclusive ownership over these digital creations (Javornik et al 2021). Owing to the exclusive nature of this digital ownership, luxury brands have shown inordinate interest in this technology and several luxury brands, including LMVH, Burberry, and Gucci were among some of the first to auction NFTs (DeAcetis 2021). Given the clear differences between physical and "internet" art, it's unclear how if and how shared value can be cultivated in the digital domain.

Finally, while art is generally considered non-zero sum, some have argued that there are negative consequences for a society that becomes overly reliant on corporate art (Wu 2003, Vitaly 2004). For example, as luxury brands become increasingly integrated within the artworld, it could crowd out other potential artistic sources. This is especially threatening given that even well-intentioned luxury brands may be predisposed to engage (intentionally or not) in promoting and creating art which is biased, self-serving, and supportive of luxury ideals such as status-seeking and ostentation at the expense of other virtues. In sum, there are many ways in which the art of luxury brands may produce unintended consequences, and future work is needed to better understand these pitfalls and how to address them.

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