



How can Artification be used as a tool in luxury fashion communication to enhance brand experience, equity, and image for Generation Z consumers?

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A dissertation submitted to Bath Spa University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Batchelor of Arts, with Honours, in Fashion Marketing and Management in Bath Business School

Bath Business School

Submitted 25 May 2023

8,792 words

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Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of fluid, connected strokes that form a stylized representation of the name Lily Mason.

Lily Mason
25/05/2023

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude towards those who have contributed to the completion of this research study. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Mark Cox, who has provided exceptional guidance, and personable support throughout the process of completion. I would also like to thank Victoria Opara, for her consistent engagement, words of motivation, and valuable lectures. Finally, I would like to thank my closest friends, and family, who have stood by my side over the past 4 years, and always been there to support me.

Abstract

This research study aimed to identify how Artification can be used as a tool by luxury fashion brands to enhance brand experience, image, and equity, for Generation Z consumers. As luxury fashion brands face increases in consumer demand and industry growth there is a desire to retain their affluence and exclusivity whilst still appealing to the next generation of luxury consumers, Generation Z. The study holds value by providing luxury brands with guidance in how they can use Artification in their communication methods to do so, enhancing their brand image and equity, and experiences for Generation Z consumers. The study initially includes a review of existing literature, surrounding the presence of art in luxury fashion, the Generation Z consumer, and how Artification is already used within the industry. The review provided relevant academic knowledge and showed current research gaps. A qualitative research process was then conducted to answer the research question using an interpretivism philosophy and inductive approach. The research process utilised structured interviews and a purposive sampling strategy to explore the feelings and thoughts of Generation Z consumers in relation to Artification, brand experience, image, and equity. The study found that luxury fashion brands should use Artification as a tool in communication to convey their brand values and ethics, using social media, interactive marketing, immersive experiences and exhibitions, and inspirational brand favours, to thus enhance brand experience, image, and equity, for Generation Z consumers. For luxury fashion brands striving to appeal to Generation Z consumers, and incorporate Artification within their communication strategies, the research study provides guidance on how they can successfully do so.

Working Definitions

Artification: “A process of transformation of non-art into art.” (Kapferer, 2015)

Brand experience: “Brand experience is conceptualized as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments.” (Brakus and Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009)

Brand equity: “Brand equity is a marketing term that describes a brand’s value. That value is determined by consumer perception of and experiences with the brand.” (Shopify Staff, 2022)

Brand image: “A brands visual representation.” (Merriam- Webster, 2023)

Generation Z: “Generation Z comprises people born between 1996 and 2010. This generation’s identity has been shaped by the digital age, climate anxiety, a shifting financial landscape, and COVID-19.” (McKinsey & Company, 2023)

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Context and Value of Study

The research study aims to answer the question ‘How can Artification be used as a tool in luxury fashion communication to enhance brand experience, equity, and image for Generation Z consumers?’. Existing literature shows a lack of research regarding how Artification can be used in luxury fashion communication to boost exclusivity and consumer satisfaction. As the luxury fashion industry is evolving, it is crucial that brands adapt and establish their market presence and consumer relations. Emphasised by Kapferer (2015), art can act as an opportunity for luxury fashion brands to fortify authenticity and justify high quality and price points. Sotheby’s Institute of Art (2023) expresses that “Art and luxury have a long history of influencing each other to create timeless, aspirational experiences”, and emphasises the luxury consumers interest in art. They desire extraordinary products and experiences that few are exposed to. As luxury fashion brands need to find new ways of communicating, and the luxury consumer desires a deeper sense of exclusivity, Artification is a solution to both exigencies.

Artification being a solution for the needs of luxury fashion brands and consumers highlights the value of the study. Carrera and Salibian (2019) reported that the Generation Z consumer will present 80% of luxury fashion consumers by 2035. To future-proof the success of luxury fashion brands, connecting with the Generation Z consumer can do so. The researcher recognises the need for more academic research in this subject area and aims to offer guidance on how Artification can be used in luxury fashion communication to enhance brand experience, equity, and image, for Generation Z consumers.

1.2 Research Question

The research question of this study is identified as:

- How can Artification be used as a tool in luxury fashion communication to enhance brand experience, equity, and image for Generation Z consumers?

The sub-questions within this research question are identified as:

- How can Artification be used as a tool in luxury fashion communication?
- How can the use of Artification in luxury fashion communication attract Generation Z consumers?
- How can luxury fashion houses enhance their brand experience, equity, and image for Generation Z consumers?

1.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are identified as:

- To identify how Generation Z consumers react and respond to brand communication Artification within luxury fashion brands.
- To explore the effective Artification methods luxury fashion brands could use moving forward in their brand communication strategies.
- To identify the ways in which Artification can be utilised to enhance brand experience, equity, and image for Generation Z consumers.”

1.4 Report Organisation

The report takes the reader through the journey of the research study. Section 1.0 offers an introduction to the study’s context, objectives, and value. Section 2.0 equips the reader with a summary of relevant literature regarding Artification, the luxury fashion industry, and Generation Z consumer. Section 3.0 communicates the methodology, research process used, and why it was chosen. Section 4.0 showcases the results from the data collection. Section 5.0 discusses the results from the data collection and literature review findings. Section 6.0 is a conclusion and summary of the research study’s results, limitations, and suggestions for future research directions.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review will explore existing literature relating to the research question and objectives. It aims to identify academic knowledge and research gaps to be considered in the methodology. The review will initially look at the Generation Z consumer and how they engage with brand experience, equity, and image. This is to ensure a clear understanding of the Generation Z consumer can be attained. The review will move on to look at Artification and how art and technology can be used as tools in luxury fashion communication. This will provide insight into the methods luxury brands could use. Finally, the review will look at existing luxury fashion communication methods tailored to Generation Z consumers. This will develop insight into how Artification methods could be successfully used in conjunction with the needs of Generation Z consumers. The literature review will end with a concluding paragraph whereby research findings and gaps will be summarised.

2.2 The Generation Z luxury consumer

Carrera and Salibian (2019) identifies that the Generation Z consumer will represent 80% of luxury fashion consumers in 2035, highlighting the importance for luxury fashion brands to understand their values and needs as customers. Generation Z is a consumer group born between 1996 and 2010, shaped by the digital age (McKinsey, 2023). McKinsey (2023) explains Generation Z to be the “first real digital natives” who turn to the internet for any form of information. They are driven by idealism and have a demand for purpose and accountability in all that they do (McKinsey, 2023).

Seemiller and Grace (2019) highlight the core characteristics of Generation Z individuals, explaining that they express themselves and showcase their identities via online spaces and social media. They are driven by change and crave positive influence in society. 33.3% of Generation Z women, and 30% of Generation Z men, have an increased interest in sustainability, suggesting a concept luxury fashion brands could embrace in communication (Kollarova and Koliscakova, 2021). In experiencing various global changes in their lifetime, Generation Z consumers have become more critical and aware, having a key effect on how they engage with the luxury fashion industry (Carrera and Salibian, 2019). These sources highlight that Generation Z consumers appreciate positive change across our society, and a brand's ability to express their ethical activities and vulnerability would help them meet this consumer characteristic. However, a present research gap is concerning Artification. Whilst art can act as a vessel to reinforce exclusivity for luxury brands, a way in which it can also appeal to the Generation Z consumer is yet to be established.

Generation Z consumers have a unique way in how they like to engage with communication methods. Southgate (2017, p.229) conducted a quantitative survey which identified how Generation Z consumers view their phones as a ‘personal secretary’ which they spend more than one hour a day on. However, the receptivity of online advertisements remains low on mobile phones and Generation Z consumers particularly enjoy promotional material that allows them to interact and co-create (Southgate, 2017). HRC Retail Advisory (2017) reinforces this by encouraging retailers to create marketing avenues where consumers feel a

sense of control in what they see. As Generation Z are critical consumers this encapsulates an understanding of how Generation Z would like to be communicated with. They want to be involved in the activities of the brands they buy into. Whilst this research proves beneficial in understanding who the Generation Z consumer is, there is a research gap in how they engage with Artification, and perceive luxury brand experience, equity, and image.

2.3 Generation Z in the context of brand Experience, equity, and image

Defined by M (2021) brand equity is the value associations a brand holds. In conjunction with the Generation Z consumer group, how they view and engage with brands would determine brand equity could be enhanced. Jain et al. (2014) used a conceptual framework to explore the Generation Z consumer group and their purchase behaviours. It was found that Generation Z consumers follow habits that provide them with feelings of collaboration, creativity, and gratification, typically obtained by consuming products and experiences that no other brands can offer (Jain et al., 2014). The framework symbolises 4 purchase stages, moving from pre-purchase whereby the consumer learns of the brand, to the evaluation stage where they will examine quality and exclusivity, and the final stage of decision making which is determined by the shopping experience. Whilst the work of Jain et al. (2014) was carried out in India, it does provide a narrative of Generation Z purchase behaviours and what influences their decisions. A future research direction, that would enable the research question to be answered, is exploration into how Artification could improve the pre-purchase stages and evoke feelings of collaboration, creativity, and gratification in consumers.

To investigate how Generation Z consumers relate to brand experience, trust, and image, a theoretical framework was conducted by Joshi and Garg (2021). Identified as 'Brand love', the framework proves relevant to the research question (Joshi and Garg, 2021, p.259) by suggesting that Generation Z build brand relationships through intimacy, passion, and commitment. Cross-sectional research found that a better brand image was created when a consumer had a longer brand experience, for example, through in-store experiences. This highlights the importance of a positive brand experience and accentuates how Generation Z consumers appreciate the experience luxury brands provide. Similarly, Tran et al. (2022) conducted qualitative and quantitative interviews which suggested that for Generation Z consumers, satisfaction was of higher value in determining their brand loyalty, compared to their environmental concerns and purchase intentions. Whilst this source wasn't tailored to the luxury fashion industry, it does suggest that while Generation Z consumers do appreciate brand values and influences, their satisfaction with the brand overall is what will determine their loyalty. A key gap identified within these sources is the explicit ways in which luxury fashion brands can ensure consumer satisfaction using Artification.

A key element of positive brand experience, equity, and image is the communication methods a luxury brand utilises. Dobre et al. (2021) explored the relationship between luxury brands, Generation Z consumers, and social media. The findings suggested that Generation Z consumers respond well to social media, and do not diminish a luxury brand's affluence in response, which minimises the concerns luxury brands have about social media and how it could lessen brand equity. Dobre et al. (2021) also highlights how social media can supplement in-store sensory experiences and create positive content and social visibility, aligning with Generation Z and their digital identities. Whilst Dobre et al. (2021) decided to use non-probability convenience sampling, suggesting a limitation in how representative the

data population is, the findings prove beneficial by suggesting that Artification in social media could act as a vessel to turn luxury brands into digital imagery and interactive artwork.

2.4 Artification as a tool in luxury fashion communication

Ochkovskaya (2018) suggests the process of Artification to be successful when the communication strategy evokes experiences of emotional and symbolic value for the consumer. In enhancing value creation Ochkovskaya (2018) explains that the use of Artification should provide feelings of intellect, competence, expression, and cultural elitism for the luxury consumer. All of which provide the consumer with a positive experience and perception of the brand. Mase et al. (2018) conducted similar research concerning consumers and if Artification influences how they view luxury products. Whilst the incorporation of Artified branding increases consumer awareness, research showed that only 2 out of 880 consumers were able to identify the names of artists used in brand collaborations. When considering how Artification can be used to communicate messaging to consumers this suggests that Artification may be better suited to visual aesthetics and design as opposed to collaborations and artist involvement. However, the research conducted by Mase et al. (2018) shows limitation in that it was conducted in the context of luxury consumers in China, as opposed to Generation Z. Whilst it does offer insight into the perceptions of consumers, until further research is conducted it is not clear how effective Artification can be in brand communication.

Bai (2017, p.225) expresses that the use of Artification in museums can help luxury fashion brands “retain their prestigious appeal”. When working to enter new countries Artification can be used in international exhibitions tailored around the luxury brand (Kapferer, 2014). Hermes entered China by creating an exhibition in China's forbidden city, acting as a link between Hermes and China's cultural traditions. Hermes and Bai (2017) suggest how exhibitions can improve brand experience. A gap within both research pieces to be considered is the specification of the Generation Z consumer and how they would want to interact with Artification methods like exhibitions. A study conducted by Kapferer (2014) states that artist collaborations with luxury brands can offer creative influence to heighten brand equity and ensure consumers respect the brands activities. This finding disagrees with the work of Mase et al. (2018) by suggesting that consumers do appreciate artist input in brand communication. However, neither source is specific to Generation Z consumers, highlighting a research gap to explore further.

Iezzi and Wheaton (2007) emphasise that “brands need to connect with people on an emotional or intellectual level” and “state who they are, share their values, and build their culture”. The work of Gucci demonstrates an effective way in which Artification can be used to do so. As expressed by Massi et al. (2020, p.89) Artification helped Gucci represent “a successful marriage of fashion, art, and ethical issues”. The brand refined its strategy by working with artists to inspire new collections, create involvement with art exhibitions, and root the idea that the brand aims to “bring positive change” and “secure a collective future” (Massi et al., 2020). Looking at the Generation Z consumer, who value brand integrity and authenticity, the incorporation of Artification has allowed Gucci to align with the critical and aware characteristics of Generation Z. This indicates an effective way luxury brands could satisfy the Generation Z consumer, however the literature sources did not discuss this, thus highlighting a research gap to be explored further.

2.5 Art and technology as a tool in luxury fashion communication

Generation Z are identified as the “first real digital natives” our society has seen (McKinsey, 2023). Therefore, it is crucial that luxury fashion brands integrate themselves in the digital world through their communication methods. Annamma et al. (2022) investigated the digital future of luxury brands and identified how leading luxury brands have utilised technology to transform brand image and experience. To attract young consumers, Annamma et al. (2022) highlighted that technology is a prominent way to do so. Regarding how brands can utilise technology with Artification, He et al. (2018) examined the effect of AR technology on museum experiences and purchase intentions. The study found that when environmental augmentation was implemented, visitors were more likely to pay high prices, because of the positive experience they had. Similarly, Annamma et al (2022) explored the possibility of enhanced experiences offered by luxury brands. In 2021, Bulgari offered an immersive experience embodying their Serpente watch collection. Bold colour, unique shapes, and satisfying textures were all incorporated to offer an emotional and intellectual experience for luxury consumers.

Arribas and Alfaro (2018) expresses how technology can enable fashion designers to promote their designs in efficient and cost-effective ways. The Milwaukee Pfister Hotel generated an augmented reality app allowing guests to receive information about the artwork around them (Fox, 2015). Fox explained that the work of the hotel allowed them to attract the younger demographic and encourage them to naturally appreciate the artwork. Both sources suggest the benefit of digital spaces and interactivity to better connect with consumers. Whilst the work of The Milwaukee Pfister Hotel was not tailored to luxury consumers, it suggests a further research point for luxury brands looking at how technology could be incorporated in communication methods through Artification.

A key aspect of the evolving digital world is social media. Bandoni (2017) emphasises how communication through social media can enable luxury brands to create an authentic brand story. Through Artification in aesthetics and content, it acts as a vessel for a pleasurable brand experience that consumers can access digitally. McKinsey (2022) similarly looks at how the metaverse provides luxury brands with the opportunity to offer unique brand experiences in an interactive, online hub that is always available to consumers. Vainalaviciute (2016) reinforces the benefit of interactivity for consumers. As “traditional boundaries between the artist and public” are removed, consumers have a stronger sense of involvement, understanding and approval (Vainalaviciute, 2016). All 3 sources show evidence that interactivity can be a method for luxury brands to adapt to technology. However, a research gap is how Generation Z consumers respond to interactive communication methods.

2.6 Luxury communication trends tailored to the Generation Z consumer

To meet the preferences of Generation Z consumers, luxury brands must understand how this consumer group prefers to be communicated with, thus enabling them to improve their brand equity and image and create better brand experiences. A study conducted by Munsch (2022) identified that Generation Z consumers are more likely to value a brand's messaging when communicated by a person they admire and trust, such as a social media influencer. Sujanska and Nadanyiova (2022) confirmed this observation by commenting on how consumers are

becoming overfilled by traditional strategies suggesting a need for innovation. Munsch (2022) also stated that Generation Z consumers find it significantly easier to consume content through communication that feels natural, specifically through an influencer they “admire and respect”. Both sources suggest the opportunity for influencer marketing to be used to organically attract the Generation Z consumer, and when combined with Artification, luxury brands can enhance their affluence and exclusivity.

Despite Generation Z being the first generation to embrace digital communication methods, the observation of existing literature suggests offline marketing to be equally as effective. Mallik et al. (2022) introduces a Generation Z tailored marketing concept titled ‘Marketing 4.0’. In a push to ensure digital communication can “reach out to people’s hearts and minds”, Marketing 4.0 focuses on a mixture of offline and online methods (Mallik, 2022, p.7891). Human-to-human connection is highlighted as essential to improve consumer engagement with a balance of human interaction conducted physically, and machine interaction conducted digitally. Generation Z consumers value a brand's purpose, equally as much as their products. Human-to-human connection would be an opportunity to do in luxury retail spaces. Expressed by Annamma et al. (2022), this concept could be used in conjunction with Artification through the creation of luxury immersive experiences, reaching Generation Z on an emotional level. Kusa and Urminova (2019) encourage the Marketing 4.0 concept through the exploration of environmental retail spaces and how the Generation Z consumer responds. Kusa and Urminova (2019) emphasise that whilst social media reaches wider audiences, it cannot substitute the interactive experiences of physical spaces. It proves successful with Generation Z consumers as they can interact with brand staff, products, and the textural brand experience. The observation that offline communication can be equally effective as online methods, encourages future research points for the study. Whilst both sources are tailored to the Generation Z consumer, there remains a gap in how Generation Z consumers respond to the Artification of luxury offline experiences.

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review has exhibited findings of relevance to the research question and objectives. A key finding of the review is the identification of Generation Z characteristics and values. They are driven by purpose and appreciate emotional brand resonance. The review also suggests that for luxury brands to meet these values they should focus on human connection, and interactivity, through social media content, immersive experiences, and influencer endorsement. The review has also determined the research gaps to be considered in the study methodology. It was noted that there was a lack of what Generation Z felt about the suggested communication techniques, and how they would respond to the use of Artification. Therefore, the study should investigate how Generation Z consumers feel about interactive and immersive experiences, and the presence of art design, culture, and collaboration in luxury brands. More importantly, the study will also aim to find out what evokes feelings of gratification, creativity, and collaboration in Generation Z consumers, influencing their perception of brand equity, image, and experience. Through appropriate research design, a qualitative study will be used to convene with the Generation Z consumer group and address the identified research gaps.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology used to collect relevant data. It begins by introducing the research hypotheses, through to the philosophy, design, strategy, and sample method used. The data analysis technique is explained, alongside the reliability, validity, and ethical considerations of the research process. Subsequently, the reader can understand how the data was collected, analysed, and evaluated to address the research question and objectives.

3.2 Hypotheses

In alignment with the research question and objectives, the researcher formulated the following research hypotheses to be tested in the data collection and analysis:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Generation Z consumers respond positively to interactive and immersive luxury experiences that incorporate art, culture, and collaboration, thus improving their brand experience.
- **Hypothesis 2:** The presence of art, design, and culture in luxury brands boosts feelings of gratification, creativity, and collaboration for Generation Z consumers, thus improving their perceived brand image, and equity.

3.3 Research philosophy and design

The purpose of the research study was to explore how luxury brands can use Artification as a tool in fashion communication to enhance brand experience, equity, and image, for Generation Z consumers. By reviewing existing literature, the researcher identified an evident research gap concerning Generation Z consumers and how they respond, feel, and engage with Artification communication methods. The researcher also recognised the value of understanding how Generation Z receive feelings of gratification, creativity, and collaboration. To retrieve the relevant data in response to the research gaps the researcher used the Saunders and Lewis (2017) research onion to design a research process. This process included an Interpretivism philosophy, with a qualitative, exploratory design, and inductive approach.

Interpretivism is described as a philosophy which “uses qualitative research methods that focus on individuals’ beliefs, motivations, and reasoning over quantitative data to gain understanding of social interactions” (Nickerson, 2023). The aim was to understand the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of Generation Z consumers confirming the Interpretivism philosophy to have been an appropriate choice. It allowed the researcher to focus on the individual perceptions of Generation Z consumers opposed to external components and preconceived notions.

Using the Interpretivism philosophy, the researcher identified that the use of a qualitative research method would enable them to retrieve relevant data for the study. In comparison to quantitative research, which focuses on collecting numerical data to identify patterns in data, qualitative data enables the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of consumer experiences and emotions through the identification of themes (Taherdoost, 2022). This also highlighted the research design to be exploratory, which is described as a method for “discovering information about a topic that is not understood clearly by the researcher” (Saunders and Lewis, 2017, p.115). Recognised in the existing literature review, the researcher noted a lack of research regarding Artification for Generation Z consumers. As the goal of the research study was to understand how Artification can be used to boost the brand image, equity, and experience luxury brands offer Generation Z consumers, the use of an exploratory study enabled the researcher to do so.

The Saunders and Lewis (2017) research onion enabled the researcher to identify the study as inductive. An inductive study is described as “a research approach which involves the building of theory from analysing data already collected” (Saunders and Lewis, 2017, p.113). Commonly used with qualitative research methods, an inductive approach allowed the researcher to collect data, organise it into relevant themes, identify research conclusions and then create research hypotheses, which reflect the research question and objectives.

3.4 Research strategy and sample

To collect data a purposive sampling strategy was utilised as a form of non-probability sampling. Within non-probability sampling the researcher selects samples and participants from their subjective judgement as opposed to a random selection (Lamm and Lamm, 1998). The purposive sampling strategy acts as an extension of this as participants were chosen based on the qualities they possess and if they met the criteria of the study (Etikan et al., 2015). Whilst purposive sampling can have bias limitations, as the sample is dependent on the researcher’s judgement, it does enable the researcher to make logical generalisations of a niche population and act as a time-saving method as suitable participants can be approached and selected quickly (Patton, 2015). An alternative sampling method considered by the researcher was convenience sampling which would have enabled the researcher to potentially use a larger sample. However, convenience sampling doesn’t include the use of a participant criteria and the findings would not have been relevant to the study (Etikan, 2015).

The research method selected by the researcher was structured interviews with 10 participants, aged 18-25. The criteria set by the researcher was that participants have an interest in luxury fashion and are a member of the Generation Z consumer group. Whilst the Generation Z age group begins with those aged 13, to ensure consent could be granted by the participant the study began with those aged 18. (Boddy, 2016) suggests that a sample size of 12 participants can enable a researcher to find saturation in their data findings. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct 12 interviews, however successfully found saturation at 10, meaning adequate data had been accumulated. There were no restrictions regarding gender, and the sample included 4 males and 6 females.

3.5 Structured Interviews

Structured interviews include a fixed number and order of questions. They are appealing for the participant as little preparation is needed before the interview, but also benefit the

researcher by increasing credibility, reliability, and validity (George, 2022). All participants were presented with the same questions, making it easier to analyse answers. Semi-structured interviews were also considered to allow for flexibility in the participant's engagement, however, due to time restrictions the researcher decided structured interviews would be sufficient (George, 2022).

The interview began with the researcher approaching participants either face-to-face or via email. Those who agreed to participate were given a consent form and interview sheet prior to the interview. The interviews took place either face-to-face at the researcher's home, or online through Google Meet, commencing the week of 1st May 2023. Each participant was asked 20 questions, varying in question themes relevant to the research study, (Appendix 3). To ensure consistent reliability of the research method, the researcher ensured consistency between each participant. All were communicated using the same tone of voice and interview structure to ensure similarity in the setting (Saunders and Lewis, 2017).

Whilst the interviews were not conducted anonymously, the participants were assured of anonymity in the transcripts and analysis, and that they were to be privately stored and password protected on the researcher's google drive.

3.6 Data Analysis

Once the data had been collected the researcher analysed the results using a thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is tailored towards qualitative research whereby the researcher can develop findings concerning participant views, experiences, and values in a flexible way (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The research utilised an inductive approach and followed the analysis stages ranging from, familiarisation, coding and highlighting the data, generating, and reviewing themes, and finally defining each theme and its findings (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Each Interview's answers was transcribed upon conduction and the researcher then used a thematic analysis. The data analysis aimed to identify the emerging themes in comparison to the research question, objectives, and hypotheses.

3.7 Reliability, validity, and ethics

Saunders and Lewis (2017) describe validity as the data collections abilities to measure what they aim to measure. Throughout the research process the researcher took steps to ensure the validity of the data and research design. Each study participant was tested against the research criteria, to ensure the results were relevant to Generation Z and the luxury fashion industry. This measure ensured that the data was in alignment with what the data collection set out to measure.

The reliability of the data is equally as important as validity, being how well the data collection methods and analysis produce consistent results (Saunders and Lewis, 2017). The researcher guaranteed reliability by ensuring the research setting remained consistent throughout the data collection. All participants were engaged with the same tone of voice, with the same set of questions and interview structure. This minimised the risk of participant bias by making sure the questions were asked in the same way ensuring the participants would not interpret the questions in different ways. This measure also ensured that if another researcher were to use the same methods, they would retrieve similar findings.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Using the Bath Spa Ethics Policy, the researcher solidified steps to ensure that the study participants felt ethically considered and comfortable.

Prior to the Interview, all participants were given an information sheet and consent form. The information sheet (Appendix 2) entailed information regarding the study, and data privacy. They were assured that the answers and information provided would be anonymously stored in a password protected file, that only the researcher had access to, and once the study was completed would be destroyed. The participants were also reminded that they would be able to withdraw the study if they felt necessary, and they did not have to answer questions they did not feel comfortable with. The consent form (Appendix 1) acted as an extension of this as participants were able to confirm their feelings towards the study.

By providing the participants with this information it ensured that they felt safe and secure during the study. They did not have to worry about being identifiable, nor providing personal information which could have caused feelings of discomfort.

4.0 Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter encapsulates the themes, and findings that were retrieved from qualitative research process. The chapter outlines each identified theme, with evidence of quotes and

explanations. It concludes by establishing how the research findings align with the research question, objectives, and hypotheses.

4.2 Determining factors of positive brand experience, value, and image

The first identified theme is the determining factors of positive brand experience, value, and image. The responses of all participants showed that Generation Z consumers value factors of good customer service, convenience, product presentation, representation in models, sustainability, and brand alignment with their personal values. Many participants emphasised the importance of good brand ethics and brand reputation in the determination of a brand's image and value. Generation Z consumers want to buy into a brand which is ethically driven and high in popularity and public opinion.

“If they show how they are sustainable, and if they align with me and my values”
(Participant 5)

“How much it is publicly known, what my peers think about it, how luxurious I think it is”
(Participant 4)

The results show that Generation Z consumers feel gratification from luxury brands when they feel that they're earning something special. Many participants mentioned their appreciation for receiving complimentary gifts and brand favours. 9/10 participants emphasised that they feel inspired by luxury brands regarding self-expression and how they can style luxury products. However, a point of contradiction from one participant is that they sometimes feel overwhelmed by luxury brands and prefer to be given freedom when engaging with luxury brands.

“...inspire my style, I like growing and learning from other creators”
(Participant 2)

“I feel like I have earned their products and I've become a part of their community. I feel happy and special because they're luxury and nobody else can get it”
(Participant 3)

“I don't like it when I am being followed in the store, I like freedom. Not seeing it on other people too makes me appreciate it more”
(Participant 4)

4.3 Marketing preferences

The second theme from the data analysis is marketing preferences. Most participants highlighted a preference for online marketing, specifically through social media platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok. However, some participants expressed the value of offline marketing as they feel it's more personal and respectable. In relation to offline marketing, many participants stated how they like to physically interact with luxury brands by visiting products in-store.

“I like to follow their social medias and see If there is any content, I like”

(Participant 1)

“if you can appeal to me offline, I will feel more inclined to care about the brand”

(Participant 5)

“for me it’s less what I see online and more what I hear about and know is cool on other people”

(Participant 4)

“When there is a physical store to go to over being entirely online”

(Participant 8)

The data findings show how Generation Z consumers respond to the use of celebrity and influencer endorsement. The study participants gave equal responses to the use of celebrity and influencer endorsement, however, many participants suggested that they would only feel inclined to engage if they already liked the endorsed individual. Some participants also highlighted that they trust celebrities more if they have a higher society profile.

“depends on the person” (Participant 9)

“I prefer celebrities because they feel like they have a bigger profile, I feel like I trust them”

(Participant 1)

4.3 Art in brand communication and design

The third theme of relevance from the data analysis is art in brand communication and design. The presence of art in luxury fashion was positively received by the majority of participants whereby they expressed that when relevantly, authentically, and tastefully utilised by a brand it adds uniqueness, value, and higher appeal. Most of the participants also appreciate unique designs created by luxury brands especially when used in coherence with art themes and inspirations.

“Yes, when it is with art, I feel it is more unique and therefore less common and it is then eye catching. It takes the value up for me when it is unusual”

(Participant 4)

“If the art is relevant and matches, but if it’s another thing to just promote and be a business deal and not authentic of the art then no”

(Participant 2)

When asked if the participants would be interested in the creative and artistic processes of creative directors, most of the participants responded positively expressing that they want to know how ideas are created and influential in artistic visions. Most participants also emphasised that they would be interested in artist collaborations when they already like the artist and if they’re authentically incorporated in the brand.

“If I already enjoy the collaborating artists’ work then I may be more inclined”

(Participant 10)

“It is interesting to know his thought process in creating clothes, I enjoy knowing how they create luxury”
(Participant 2)

“I think it’s interesting to see how their environment and beliefs influence their creative visions”
(Participant 1)

4.4 Interactive and immersive experiences

The final theme established from the data analysis is interactive and immersive experiences. Some participants showed positive feelings towards interactive marketing as they find it engaging and valuable as a sense of community. These participants appreciate the concept of brands listening to their needs and personalising their experiences. However, the remaining participants had reservations against interactive marketing stating that it can feel intrusive and agitating when they want to engage with the brand in their own way.

“I think it shows the consumer that the brand cares about what they want/their needs which is good”
(Participant 7)

“I really like when brands do this as it makes the consumer feel more a part of a community”
(Participant 7)

“It can often see tedious or intrusive when used through pop ups or unskippable advertisements”
(Participant 10)

In relation to immersive experiences, the majority of participants find the concept exciting and important when they want to experience a brand in a unique and personable way. Some of these participants however stated that they would only engage with the experience if it was convenient to attend. Looking at art-based immersive experience, most of the participants expressed enthusiasm, however, it proved apparent that it is dependent on the brand, their style, and the authenticity of the artist collaborations used.

“I think they’re exciting and I’d be intrigued to experience them”
(Participant 1)

“It would be nice, but it must come with seeing the brand in person”
(Participant 2)

“Yes absolutely, it makes the experience more aesthetically pleasing leading me to be more inclined to buy from them”
(Participant 7)

“It really depends on my style and if its oversaturated. Needs to be authentic”
(Participant 2)

4.4 Conclusion

By identifying the themes and findings from the data analysis, the researcher has established points of relevance to the research question and objectives. The following chapter will move on to encapsulate a discussion, looking at the connections, contradictions, and limitations between the literature review and data findings. Therefore, allowing the researcher to answer the research question, and acknowledge any limitations and remaining research gaps.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The discussion chapter will discuss the research findings and explore whether they are in coherence with the hypotheses and research objectives, to answer the research question:

‘How can Artification be used as a tool in luxury fashion communication to enhance brand experience, equity, and image for Generation Z consumers?’

The researcher aims to cross-examine the study results with the existing literature reviewed in section 2.0. The discussion will be structured using the research objectives to identify how the research results answer the research question.

5.2 Objective 1

‘To identify how Generation Z consumers react and respond to brand communication Artification within luxury fashion brands.’

Linking to objective 1, the research process showed how Generation Z consumers respond to Artification in brand communication. Most of the participants in the study responded positively to art in luxury fashion. Participants expressed appreciation for new designs when used authentically by luxury brands. The participants emphasised that Artification induces

feelings of inspiration when they are introduced to unique designs. Ochkovskaya (2018) supports the researchers' findings, as their research suggests Artification to be successful when consumers encounter experiences of emotional and symbolic value to them. Whilst the existing work of Ochkovskaya (2018) provides insight on how Artification can influence consumers, it does not look at Generation Z consumers. Therefore, the research study has extended it by exploring Artification in the context of Generation Z, highlighting the value of the study. For members of the luxury fashion industry who would like to know how to appeal to Generation Z consumers, the study would enable them to do so.

The research process also showed how Generation Z consumers respond to Creative Directors who share their artistic processes as a form of Artification. Most participants expressed responded positively, highlighting that they want to know how ideas are created and artistically influenced. The work of Massi et al. (2020, p.89) explored a case study of the fashion house Gucci, whereby the brand is expressed as a representation of "a successful marriage of fashion, art, and ethical issues". Artification was by working with artists to inspire designs and create art exhibitions that showcase the luxury brand's design processes and products. The researcher recognised that the Artification of Gucci helped the brand align with the unique and critical characteristics of Generation Z consumers. Whilst Massi et al. (2020) did not identify this alignment, by asking Generation Z a question of relation, the study confirms this identification. Generation Z react well to learning how luxury houses source inspiration and creative visions, thus meeting the objective to identify how Generation Z consumers respond to Artification with brand communication.

The third research finding is how Generation Z consumers respond to artist collaborations in luxury brands. Whilst Generation Z consumers do have interest towards artist collaborations, they are only inclined to engage if they already hold interest in the artist's work. Kapferer (2014) compliments this by stating that artist collaborations can improve luxury brand equity as consumers appreciate the brand's activities more. However, this is contradicted by Mase et al. (2018), who suggest that consumers do not appreciate the presence of artists in communication methods. Mase et al. (2018) boosts the theory that consumers are better engaged with Artified branding and design, as opposed to artist collaborations. Only 2 out of 880 participants knew an artist's name within a luxury collaboration, suggesting that consumers do not respond well to artist collaborations (Mase et al., 2018). An implication concerning the work of Mase et al. (2018) is that the study is limited to luxury consumers in China. Neither Kapferer (2014) and Mase et al. (2018) are specific to the Generation Z consumer, thus suggesting the study findings to be valuable for those looking for Generation Z perspectives on artist collaborations.

5.3 Objective 2

'To explore the effective Artification methods luxury fashion brands could use moving forward in their brand communication strategies.'

With relevance to objective 2, most study participants expressed a preference for online marketing methods online, specifically within social media platforms. Bedoni (2017) emphasises that the use of social media in Artification communication strategies could help luxury brands create an authentic brand story, that engagingly conveys their messaging. The work of Dobre et al. (2021) directly support the research findings of the study by highlighting that Generation Z consumers enjoy social media marketing, with no diminish on how they view a luxury brand's affluence. As Dobre et al. (2021) also mention, whilst some luxury

brands remain hesitant about the use of social media in communication strategies, the research study results, and existing literature, suggest social media to be an effective method to be used by luxury brands if they wish to use Artification in the digital curation of their brand stories.

However, while some participants favour online marketing, other participants of the study emphasise the value in offline marketing as it can feel more engaging and personalised. Mallik et al. (2022) support the research findings by presenting the concept of human-to-human connection to be vital for brands looking to better connect with Generation Z. The contradiction in participant findings suggests an area for further research to be explored. Luxury brands would need to further explore their demographics marketing preferences, and engagement habits. The existing literature theories, and data findings highlight a limitation of the research study that would need to be further investigated by luxury brands.

Munsch (2022) informed the effectiveness of social media influencers in brand communication. Generation Z consumers are more trusting of a brand's messaging when it is conveyed through an individual that they admire as they find it easier to engage with communication methods that feel relatable (Munsch, 2022). The theory of Munsch (2022) is complimentary of a key finding within the research study. Many study participants highlighted that they would be more likely to engage with a luxury brand's if they liked the person used to convey the brand's messaging. However, in comparison to Munsch (2022), the study participants showed that they value the presence of celebrities more as they have a higher profile in comparison to social media influencers. The data findings, and Munsch (2022), indicate that the use of a public figure can successfully engage Generation Z consumers, however, the limitation of this is who that public figure would be which would need to be further investigated by the luxury brand and their specific demographic.

Another identification of the study is the effectiveness of interactive marketing as an Artification communication technique to attract Generation Z consumers. Some participants showed interest in interactive marketing methods, highlighting that they appreciate the sense of community and personalisation. This finding confirms hypothesis 1 by highlighting that Generation Z consumers appreciate interactive marketing as a communication method. Vainalaviciute (2016) strengthens this by emphasising how interactivity can better engage consumers. It is highlighted that when luxury brands remove the metaphoric walls between them and consumers, there can be a heightened sense of involvement, relatability, and understanding among consumers (Vainalaviciute, 2016). A limitation of Vainalaviciute (2016) is that it was not in the context of Generation Z consumers, however as the research study fulfilled this gap, the results suggest that interactive marketing appeals to Generation Z. For luxury brands looking to understand if interactive Artification can help them better engage with Generation Z, the research study is of value.

A final research finding concerning objective 2 is engagement towards immersive experiences. Bai (2017) emphasised that Artification in museums can help brands strengthen their affluence. This proves beneficial for luxury brands aiming to increase their exclusivity. Luxury brands could collaborate with museums to create immersive, exhibition spaces, which interactively showcase their designs. Similarly, Joshi and Garg (2021) showed that consumers develop better brand perceptions when they interact with a brand for a longer period. The literature supports the research study which has recognised that many of the participants showed excitement towards immersive experiences, when used cohesively with the brand, and their style, thus solidifying hypothesis 1. To conclude, immersive experiences as a form of Artification can be an effective communication technique for luxury fashion brands to utilise, meeting objective 2 of the study.

5.4 Objective 3

‘To identify the ways in which Artification can be utilised to enhance brand experience, equity, and image for Generation Z consumers.’

In alignment with objective 3, the data findings showed that Generation Z consumers value good customer service, convenience, product presentation, model representation, sustainability, and personal alignment, to evaluate a brand's experience. Seemiller and Grace (2019) summarised that Generation Z enjoy free expression, their individual identities, and are encouraged by positive influences in society. Kollarova and Koliscakova (2021) also emphasises the interest Generation Z consumers have in sustainability, and Carrera and Salibian (2019) highlight that Generation Z consumers are critical individuals who value a brand's ethical activities. The existing literature confirms the values of Generation Z consumers and emphasises the importance of sustainability and brand alignment. In coherence with objective 3, luxury brands could use Artification to artistically align with these values, perhaps through visual messaging and branding. However, a research gap within the study to be explored further is how exactly Artification can be used to do so.

When determining a brand's image and equity the research process showed that many participants admire respectable brand ethics, good reputation, and public opinion. Iezzi and Wheaton (2007) express that luxury brands should communicate who they are, their culture, and brand values to connect with consumers. Massi et al. (2020) explore the work of Gucci, highlighting a way in which Artification can be used to do so. Gucci incorporated artist collaborations and exhibitions within fashion communication to communicate their brand values and heritage. As Generation Z consumers appreciate brand authenticity and ethics, the research of Massi et al. (2020) suggests that exhibitions and artist collaborations can be used as a form of Artification to communicate their values and culture, enhancing brand image and equity.

Hypothesis 2 is confirmed within the research findings as 90% of participants explained that luxury brands do induce feelings of gratification, creativity, and collaboration when they experience self-expression, style inspiration, and brand favours such as complimentary gifts. Jain et al. (2014) also support hypothesis 2, whereby it is stated that Generation Z consumers follow brands who provide them with these feelings and offer products and experiences that others do not. A limitation of the work of Jain et al. (2014) is that it was carried out in the geographical landscape of India, however, it does give insight to Generation Z perceptions. In coherence with objective 3, the findings and existing literature suggest that Artification can be used by brands to encourage self-expression and inspiration amongst Generation Z consumers, perhaps through brand favours such as stickers and postcards that artistically mirror the brand and their activities. This proves the value of the study, as luxury brands looking to understand how they can satisfy the needs of Generation Z consumers can receive guidance on how Artification can boost their brand image and equity.

The final research finding, related to objective 3, showed that many participants like to interact with luxury brands by visiting products in-store. Mallik (2022) supports this finding, illustrating that human-to-human connection within retail spaces is essential to ensure a positive brand experience. Annamma et al. (2022) compliment what Mallik (2022) theorises by suggesting that immersive experiences with Artification can emotionally attract Generation Z consumers. Kusa and Urminova (2019) also encourage the value of physical

spaces to enhance brand experiences as Generation Z consumers can communicate with the staff, products, and textural elements of the brand. For luxury brands who would like to improve their brand experience, image, and equity, the study proves beneficial by providing an insight into what engages Generation Z consumers.

5.5 Conclusion

As the research findings have now been discussed with the existing literature, the following conclusion chapter will act as a summary of the study, its findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research directions.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Overview

As the study closes, section 6.0 summarises the research discussion points in relation to the research question and objectives. The conclusion will also identify the limitations of the research project and make recommendations for future research directions.

6.2 Summary of the research findings

Within the research study, the researcher aimed to answer the question ‘How can Artification be used as a tool in luxury fashion communication to enhance the brand experience, equity, and image for Generation Z consumers?’. By reviewing existing literature, and designing a qualitative, inductive research process with an interpretivism philosophy, the researcher investigated the presence of Artification in luxury fashion brands and the thoughts and feelings of Generation Z consumers in relation.

As a result of the research process, a key discussion points the researcher derived from the findings, is that Generation Z consumers feel positive towards the presence of art and artist collaborations in luxury brands when used authentically, and that it can inspire them creatively and encourage feelings of gratification when brand favours are received. As supported by Ochkovskaya (2018), who highlights the importance of emotionally satisfying consumers, it is evident that Artification would be a successful method for luxury fashion brands to enhance the brand experience they offer Generation Z consumers.

Secondly, the research study also shows that Artification can be used within social media and celebrity/influencer endorsement to better engage with Generation Z consumers. The research processes demonstrated that most participants in the study choose to engage with luxury brands via social media platforms, and if a respectable, high-profile individual is used as endorsement they would be more inclined to interact with the brand. The existing literature review solidified this recognition in the work of Dobre et al. (2021) who highlights that Generation Z consumers enjoy social media marketing methods. For luxury brands wanting to improve how Generation Z consumers perceive their brand image and value, but still retain exclusivity and affluence, Artification in social media marketing would allow them to do so.

A final identification is the acknowledgement that interactive marketing, exhibitions, and physical immersive experiences can be a successful method of Artification to improve brand experience. With many participants expressing their interest and excitement towards immersive experiences and interactive marketing, it is apparent that luxury brands could incorporate Artification in coherence. The study showed that Artification should be used to convey brand values and ethics and as a result, meet the needs of Generation Z consumers. Both methods are solidified within the existing literature and would enable luxury brands to enhance the brand experience, image, and equity for Generation Z consumers whilst still retaining exclusivity and affluence.

As the research study has enabled the research question to be successfully answered, the value of the study is emphasised. For luxury fashion brands looking to retain their exclusivity, whilst still appealing to Generation Z consumers, the identified ways in which Artification can be used within communication methods gives them a vessel to do so.

6.3 Limitations of the research project

Whilst the research study has proved successful, there are various limitations to be understood. Despite the study giving insight into the thoughts and feelings of Generation Z consumers, there was a small sample size of 10 participants for the qualitative interviews. A purposive sampling strategy was used which enabled the researcher to ensure all participants were in alignment with the study objectives, however, a small sample size and purposive strategy means that the researcher made generalisations of the wider population based on a small group of findings. Therefore, there is the limitation that the generalisations may not be accurate to all Generation Z consumers.

A second limitation of the research study is the geographical landscape of the research study. All participants included in the study were based within the United Kingdom, meaning that findings were limited to the perceptions of Generation Z consumers in the UK, as opposed to the global consumer group which could have been of higher value to international luxury fashion brands.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

The first recommendation for future research directions is concerning the study sample size and geographical landscape. For luxury fashion brands desiring an understanding of the global Generation Z consumer, and their perceptions of Artification, an improvement for the study would be to conduct research using a larger sample size, located globally. Another recommendation would be to further investigate the creative processes and techniques that would allow luxury fashion brands to bring Artification communication methods to fruition. Whilst the study demonstrates what engages Generation Z consumers, and how Artification can enable luxury brands to better connect with them, further research could explore what procedures would help luxury fashion brands execute them.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview consent form

Informed Consent for Lily Mason Research Study Interview

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Yes No

Taking part in the study

I have read and understood the study information dated **02/05/2023** or it has been read to me.

☐ ☐

I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ ☐

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.

☐ ☐

I understand that taking part in the study involves **a structured interview which will take place online or face to face. The interview answers will be transcribed upon conduction for the purposes of the researcher's finding analysis.**

☐ ☐

Use of the information in the study

I understand that information I provide will be used for an undergraduate research project for Bath Spa University.

☐ ☐

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared beyond the study team; researcher, supervisor and markers.

☐ ☐

I agree that my words can be quoted in research outputs.

☐ ☐

Future use and reuse of the information by others

I give permission for the **de-identified transcribed answers** that I provide to be deposited in the **research study** so it can be used for future research and learning.

☐ ☐

Signatures

Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]

Signature

Date

Study contact details for further information

Lily Mason
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Appendix 2: Interview information sheet

Research into Artfication and brand communication in Luxury Fashion

Interview information

Luxury brands are constantly adapting their brand communication strategies based on the needs and desires of their consumers. We would like your help understanding how generation z consumers react and engage with artfication as a method to so.

What is this?

- Artfication is the process of turning non-art into art.
- This structured interview is part of an undergraduate research study at Bath Spa university looking how luxury brands can use artfication in brand communication.
- The research involves this interview and relates your answers to how effective artfication could be in boosting consumer satisfaction for luxury brands.

Taking part

- Your answers to this survey will be confidential and processed anonymously.
- You are not obliged to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.
- Your answers and a transcript of the interview will be kept in the researcher's university google drive whereby the password is only known to them, it will be destroyed once the research study has been completed.

The Data

- The data collected will be used only for research, and will be kept securely in the researcher's university google drive whereby the password is only known to them.
- Data will be destroyed once the research study is completed.
- Any publication of results will retain anonymity for you; you will not be identified in this research.
- Only the researcher will have access to the data.
- At any point in completing the interview you are allowed to withdraw.

Appendix 3: Interview questions

1. When choosing a luxury brand to buy into what are the key factors you typically consider?
2. When engaging with a luxury brand what do you feel creates a positive brand experience for you as a consumer?
3. What factors determine your perception of a luxury brand's image and value the most?
4. How do you like to connect with the luxury brands you favour?
5. Do the luxury brands you buy into encourage feelings of gratification for you as a consumer? If so, how?
6. Does your engagement with luxury brands induce feelings of inspiration and creativity for you as a consumer? If so, how?
7. As a luxury consumer, do you appreciate the presence of art in luxury brand communication and design?
8. If a luxury brand were to include artist collaborations in their work, would you be more likely to engage with them than not?
9. Would you be more likely to buy into a luxury brand that incorporates art themes and inspirations in its fashion collections?
10. Would you be interested in learning about a luxury brands creative director and their creative design processes?
11. Would you like to learn about the cultural heritage and ethics behind luxury collections?
12. As a consumer do you prefer to be communicated with via online or offline marketing methods?
13. Does the endorsement of an influencer drive interest for you as a consumer when looking at what luxury brands to buy into?
14. Do you prefer the use of celebrity endorsement, or the use of influencer endorsement, in luxury brand communication?
15. What are your favoured ways to physically interact with luxury brands?
16. As a consumer, how do you feel about the use of interactive marketing within luxury brands?
17. How do you feel about the potential immersive experiences offered that could be offered by luxury brands?
18. Would you be interested in visiting and participating in an immersive experience a luxury brand could offer?

19. As a consumer, would you be likely to visit interactive immersive experiences whereby brands artistically incorporate their collections?
20. As a consumer, would you feel motivated to visit the in-store exhibition of a luxury brand's collaboration with a well-known artist?