

Art and the brand: The role of visual art in enhancing brand extendibility

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Abstract

We investigate a tool, namely visual art, which enables firms to increase the extendibility of their brands. Extant research proposes that successful brand extensions depend on favorable brand image and high perceived fit between the brand and the extension category. We propose that the presence of art has a positive influence on brand image (via a transfer of luxury perceptions from art onto the brand) and enhances perceived fit (via increased cognitive flexibility), resulting in more favorable brand extension evaluations. A pilot study and two experiments demonstrate that the presence of visual art favorably influences brand image perceptions and enhances perceptions of category fit. Mediation analysis reveals that together these factors explain the influence of visual art on brand extendibility.

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Art and the brand: the role of visual art in enhancing brand extendibility

Understanding consumers' evaluation of brand extensions is of critical importance to marketing practitioners and academics alike. Consequently, a great deal of research in marketing has been conducted to enhance this understanding. Much of the extant literature focuses on how consumers evaluate brand extensions and the product categories to which a given brand may successfully extend (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Hou, 2003). Other research has focused on how a firm can improve its ability to successfully introduce brand extensions in general, within any desired category (Barone, Miniard, & Romeo, 2000). The current research contributes to this ongoing stream by demonstrating the influence of visual art on the extendibility of a brand.

Prior research has found that consumer evaluations of brand extensions are based on two key factors: 1) the perceived

quality/image of the parent brand and 2) the category and conceptual fit between the brand extension product and the parent brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Bottomley & Holden, 2001). By its very nature, visual art exudes an aura of culture, luxury, and prestige (Margolin, 1992; Martorella, 1996; Tansey & Kleiner, 1996), and stimulates creativity, imagination, and cognitive flexibility (Dewey, 1989; Dorn, 1998; Eisner, 2002; Feldman, 1992; Kreitler & Kreitler, 1972). We therefore expect that when a brand is associated with visual art, the presence of art will enhance brand image due to perceptions of luxury, as well as increase perceptions of category fit due to enhanced cognitive flexibility. The latter refers to a limberness, elasticity and openness of mind characterized by associational fluency (Mednick & Mednick, 1967). In other words, it enables broader categorization, increases a consumer's capacity to integrate information in novel, non-obvious ways, and enhances the ability to see meaningful relationships between divergent stimuli (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987; Isen et al., 1985). It seems reasonable that this would enhance perceptions of brand extensions by enabling consumers to better visualize a meaningful connection between the brand and the extension products. In this research we therefore hypothesize that these two influences of art, that is, enhanced brand image (via a spillover of luxury perceptions) and enhanced fit (via cognitive flexibility), jointly increase the overall extendibility of a brand.

Several influential marketers already recognize the importance and use of visual art in enhancing consumer evaluations of products and brands. Indeed, art is used extensively in advertising (Hetsroni & Tukachinsky, 2005; Hoffman, 2002).

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Perhaps most famous is the long term advertising campaign of Absolut Vodka (Lewis, 1996), showcasing the work of both world famous and unknown artists in a series of more than six hundred ads, which is credited with achieving a fourteen thousand percent sales increase since its inception (Hoffman, 2002). De Beers, the diamond marketer, often uses paintings in advertisements, likening diamonds with works of art to promote an image of luxury and high class (Epstein, 1982). Art may also be a part of aesthetic product design, thus helping to attract consumers and convey favorable impressions of products and brands (Dahl, Chattopadhyay, & Gorn, 1999; Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005). However, the use of visual art appears to be based on experience, without a systematic understanding of the influence that visual art has on brands and brand extensions. Increasing this understanding therefore has substantial managerial as well as theoretical implications. The current research represents a first attempt to systematically assess the influence that visual art has on consumer evaluations of brands and brand extensions. Clearly, this research does not take into consideration other factors such as the firm's operational capabilities or strategic vision for the brand, influencing whether or not a given brand extension is feasible or advisable. However, our results suggest that in general the presence of art causes both brand image and brand extensions to be evaluated more favorably.

Consumer evaluations of brand extensions

Prior research has indicated that consumer evaluations of brand extensions are based on the perceived quality of the brand and the fit between new products and existing products associated with the brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Bottomley & Holden, 2001). However, some research has emphasized the importance of a conceptual fit with the brand itself, rather than focusing one-sidedly on product-level feature similarities (Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991). This may imply that a favorable perception of both brand quality and conceptual fit with the brand leads to increased brand extendibility, notwithstanding product-level dissimilarities. Indeed, Rangaswamy, Burke, and Oliva (1993) argue that to maximize extendibility, brands should attempt to enhance the value of characteristics associated with its brand name such as style, quality, and reputation that are not product-specific.

Brand image evaluation

Prior research has investigated the importance of brand image and perceptions of quality in consumer evaluations of brand extensions (Bhat & Reddy, 2001). Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) propose that a brand concept may guide the brand image, and that sustaining this connection should substantially enhance the market performance of the brand. Keller and Aaker (1992) observed more favorable evaluations of dissimilar extensions for high quality brands than for average quality brands, and Park et al. (1991) argue that brand extendibility to products with low feature similarity seems to be greater for a prestige brand than for a functional brand, when the brand concept is consistent with those of its extension

products. In the current research, we propose that art may be used to confer the impression of luxury and prestige on the brand with which it is associated (Margolin, 1992; Martorella, 1996), thus creating a brand image that also contributes to the extendibility of that brand.

Perceptions of category fit

Barone et al. (2000) highlight the prevalence of successful brand extensions that exist in product categories different from that of the original brand, such as Tommy Hilfiger athletic shoes, Pierre Cardin luggage, Dannon spring water, and John Deere footwear. They emphasize the need for a better understanding of factors influencing consumer evaluations of brand extensions, and suggest categorization theory as a possible approach to investigate this evaluation process (Barsalou, 1985; Mervis & Rosch, 1981). However, categories are not necessarily perceived by consumers as rigid or absolute. Rather, cognitive research has revealed that categories are flexible (Cohen & Basu, 1987; Kreuzbauer & Malter, 2005). Indeed, Kreuzbauer and Malter (2005) argue that product design can be utilized as a tool to help evolve consumer perceptions of brand category membership. Barone et al. (2000) found that positive mood influences brand extension evaluations via its impact on perceptions of similarity between the core brand and the extension. This explanation is rooted in previous research on enhanced cognitive flexibility stimulated by positive affect, and the resulting increased perceptions of relatedness between an exemplar and a category (Isen & Daubman, 1984; Isen et al., 1987; Isen et al., 1985; Murray et al., 1990). As of yet, however, no previous research has to our knowledge focused on the potential role of art in this capacity.

Conceptual framework and hypotheses

Consumer perceptions of art

Prior research has explored general principles in art perception and appreciation (Berlyne, 1974; Funch, 1997). However, experts still disagree about any formal definition of art. For instance, Wartenberg (2006) presents twenty-nine different perspectives on the philosophical question of how art may be defined. The debate of what does or does not constitute art is beyond the scope of the current research. For the purposes of this research, we adopt a consumer-focused perspective, that art is that which is deemed as art by the viewers (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1997; Dewey, 1989). This definition is essential, because in this context it is the viewers' perception that matters, irrespective of scholarly debates about what does or does not constitute art. Further, we here restrict ourselves to a classic form of visual art, namely painting. It is likely that members of a given target population would still have differing opinions about which works should be categorized as art. However, this variety notwithstanding, prior research suggests that consumers have a general schema for what constitutes art and *on average* would be able to identify art and distinguish it from non-art (Hagtvedt, Hagtvedt, & Patrick, in press; Joy & Sherry, 2003). Items thus identified

would on average have the general properties of art causing connotations of culture, luxury and prestige (Hoffman, 2002; Margolin, 1992; Martorella, 1996; Tansey & Kleiner, 1996), and increased creativity and imagination (Dewey, 1989; Dorn, 1998; Eisner, 2002; Feldman, 1992; Kreitler & Kreitler, 1972).

The impact of art on brand image

Several theoretical perspectives shed light on how properties of one object may spill over onto another object with which it is associated. In the domain of perception, the halo effect (Balzer & Sulsky, 1992) refers to how initial perceptions influence later ones. Much research has investigated the associative mechanisms of social perception, such as spontaneous trait transference (Skowronski et al., 1998) and the basking-in-reflected-glory phenomenon (Cialdini & de Nicholas, 1989). Contagion effects similarly represent a mechanism in which direct or indirect contact between two objects can lead to the permanent transfer of properties from one object, the source, to another, the recipient (Rozin, Millman, & Nemeroff, 1986).

In line with such perspectives, art infusion theory (Hagtvedt & Patrick, in press) explains the spillover effect of art on consumer evaluations of products. Using classic exemplars of Western visual art (i.e., paintings by established masters that have passed the test of time), these authors demonstrate that perceptions of luxury and exclusivity automatically spill over from the art onto the product with which the art is associated, leading to enhanced product evaluations. At a general level, art is associated with a heritage of culture, it has historically represented a special kind of quest for excellence, and it has connotations of high class and luxury (Hoffman, 2002; Margolin, 1992; Martorella, 1996; Tansey & Kleiner, 1996). Hagtvedt and Patrick (2008) assert that these general connotations of visual art underlie the art infusion effect, regardless of the specific content/depiction of the artwork. Although this previous research does not investigate how art infusion will influence the perception of brands, it seems reasonable that a target product thus infused would contribute to a luxurious brand image. Indeed, in the current research we propose that when a brand is associated with art, luxury connotations of art spill over from the art onto the brand, favorably influencing consumer evaluations of brand image. Thus,

H1. Consumers' evaluation of a brand image will be more favorable when the brand is presented with art than when it is presented without art.

The impact of art on perceived extension fit

As argued above, not only can art confer the aura of luxury on a brand, which in itself is not restricted to any specific product category, but it also stimulates imagination and creativity (Dewey, 1989; Dorn, 1998; Eisner, 2002; Feldman, 1992; Kreitler & Kreitler, 1972). Indeed, attention has in recent years been paid to the role of art in facilitating learning and cognitive development (Catterall, 1998). A report from UNESCO (2005) states that by engaging in art "students

develop analytical and interactive abilities and acquire broader, more creative, innovative, and clearer thought-patterns" (UNESCO, 2005, 10). The processes discussed here are clearly related to those studied in research on cognitive flexibility (Ashby et al., 1999; Barone et al., 2000; Isen & Daubman, 1984; Isen et al., 1987; Isen et al., 1985; Murray et al., 1990). Although previous research has focused on influences stemming from the active creation of artworks, we propose, in line with extant literature, that to view or experience an artwork may entail a creative process similar to one involved in the physical creation of art (Dewey, 1989). In this research we therefore propose that merely viewing an artwork may enhance cognitive flexibility, thereby facilitating enhanced perceptions of fit.

Cognitive flexibility refers to a limberness, elasticity and openness of mind that involves the enhanced ability to make novel connections in the thought process. It is differentiated from cognitive elaboration in that the latter simply entails generating a greater number of thoughts while the former refers to the inter-connectedness between thoughts generated. Thus, enhanced cognitive flexibility increases a consumer's capacity to integrate information in novel, non-obvious ways and see relatedness between divergent stimuli (Isen et al., 1987). It would then seem reasonable that cognitive flexibility would lead to enhanced perceptions of fit between a brand and its extension products.

H2. Consumers' perception of category fit is more favorable when the brand is presented with art than when it is presented without art.

The impact of art on brand extendibility

Earlier we noted that evaluations of brand extensions are based on two main factors: the perceived image of the original brand and the categorical and conceptual fit of the extension product with the original parent brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Bottomley & Holden, 2001). We propose that art has a favorable impact on brand image (hypothesis 1) and enhances perceptions of category fit (hypothesis 2). These two factors should favorably impact extension evaluations. Thus,

H3. Consumers will evaluate brand extensions more favorably if the original products on which they base their evaluations are associated with art rather than not.

Overview of the empirical investigation

The central thesis of this research is that the association with art favorably influences brand image (via luxury connotations) and perceived extension fit (via enhanced cognitive flexibility), and these two factors, as prior research suggests, influence brand extendibility. In a pilot study, designed to illustrate the influence that the presence of art has on the extendibility of a brand over a range of product categories, we demonstrate that both a positively valenced and a negatively valenced art image enhances consumer evaluations of various brand extensions,

while a non-art image fails to have this effect. In study 1, we demonstrate that an art image (vs. a non-art image matched for content), displayed in connection with an advertised product, enhances consumer evaluations of brand image, category fit, and brand extensions. This study also provides insight into the process underlying the influence of art on brand extendibility by illustrating the mediating role of brand image and perceived fit on brand extension evaluations. In study 2, we replicate these findings in the context of product design. Specifically, we show that the presence of art enhances brand image, perceived category fit, and brand extension evaluations. The mediation results are replicated. In this study we also demonstrate a novel effect, namely that an exposure to art facilitates increased cognitive flexibility. It is shown that cognitive flexibility, as measured via the Remote Associates Test (Mednick & Mednick, 1967), a word-association task, increases perceived category fit resulting from the presence of visual art.

Pilot study

The objective of this study was to demonstrate that the presence of art enhances the extendibility of the brand. Further, since the emotional appeal, stemming from the specific content of the artwork, is arguably a central feature of art (Margolis, 1999; Feldman, 1992), this study compares the effects of a positively valenced artwork with those of a negatively valenced one. If the effect of art is due to the valence of affect the artwork elicits, then the impact of the art image eliciting negative affect would be different from that of the art image eliciting positive affect (Barone et al., 2000; Isen & Daubman, 1984). If, on the other hand, the effect of art is due to the spillover of perceptions of luxury, the impact of the two images should be equivalent. Further, an equally decorative non-art image should not give rise to the same effect.

Method and procedure

Pretest

A pretest was conducted to choose artworks to be used for the study. Thirty undergraduates, representative of the sample used in the pilot study, compared three images: first, the painting “Palazzo da Mula” by Claude Monet (henceforth referred to as Monet); second, a visual image with a decorative pattern of flowers (henceforth referred to as Flowers); third, the painting “The Burning of the House of Lords and Commons, October 16, 1834” by J.M.W. Turner (henceforth referred to as Turner). The pretest revealed that all three images were equally unfamiliar to the respondents, ($M=2.0, 1.7, 1.8$, NS; 1=not at all, 7=very), equally pretty ($M=4.9, 4.6, 4.7$, NS; 1=not at all, 7=very), and equally decorative ($M=5.0, 4.7, 4.8$, NS; 1=not at all, 7=very) for the Monet, Flowers and Turner respectively. However, the Monet and Flowers were perceived as eliciting more positive affect compared to the Turner ($M=5.2$ and $M=5.4$ vs. $M=3.0$, $p<.05$; 1=negative, 7=positive). Further, the Monet and Turner were readily identified as art images ($M=6.6, 6.7$ respectively, NS), while the Flowers was not identified as such ($M=2.1$, $p<.05$).

Main study

Eighty-nine undergraduates participated in this study. One questionnaire was only partially completed, thus there were 88 completed questionnaires. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: the soap dispenser with the Monet, Turner, or Flowers. See appendix for stimuli used. Participants were given a picture of the soap dispenser and were told that it belonged to a brand named “Janus” (fictitious brand).

To control for the possible influence of mood, this was measured on seven-point semantic differential scales (adapted from Gorn, Goldberg and Basu 1993): negative – positive, bad – good, sad – happy, unpleasant – pleasant, in a bad mood – in a good mood, and unaroused – aroused, combined to form a mood index ($\alpha=.89$). Participants’ impression of the image on the product was measured on three seven-point semantic differential scales (adapted from Unnava and Burnkrant 1991): dull – vivid, not concrete – concrete and not easy to relate to – easy to relate to, combined to form an imagery index ($\alpha=.72$). To measure brand extendibility, participants were asked to report how they viewed a set of products if they belonged to the same Janus brand. Participants were presented with ten brand extensions (e.g. “Janus Tools” or “Janus Hotel”) in a randomized order and asked to evaluate each extension on seven-point semantic differential scales, as negative/positive, low quality/high quality and undesirable/desirable. For each extension product, the three items were combined in a brand extension evaluation index: tools ($\alpha=.92$), airline ($\alpha=.95$), furniture ($\alpha=.96$), dinnerware ($\alpha=.90$), perfume ($\alpha=.97$), spaghetti-sauce ($\alpha=.95$), cruise line ($\alpha=.96$), wine ($\alpha=.97$), hotel ($\alpha=.95$), and cosmetics ($\alpha=.97$).

Results

Mood and imagery

An ANOVA on the mood index revealed no difference in the participants’ mood in any of the experimental conditions, $M_{(Turner)}=4.38$ vs. $M_{(Monet)}=4.83$ vs. $M_{(Flowers)}=4.90$, $F(2, 84)=1.44$, NS. A similar ANOVA on the imagery index also revealed no differences in imagery in any of the experimental conditions, $M_{(Turner)}=4.66$ vs. $M_{(Monet)}=4.91$ vs. $M_{(Flowers)}=4.42$, $F(2, 86)=1.11$, NS.

Brand extendibility

A 3 (condition: Turner vs. Monet vs. Flowers) \times 10 (brand extensions) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted, where type of image was the between-subjects factor and brand extension evaluations were measured within-subjects. Results revealed the expected main effect for condition ($F(2, 83)=12.19$, $p<.05$), supporting hypothesis 3. We also noted a main effect for brand extension evaluation ($F(1, 83)=10.60$, $p<.05$), and a condition \times brand extension evaluation interaction ($F(2, 83)=4.19$, $p<.05$). Please see Fig. 1.

Discussion

This study demonstrated the focal phenomenon, that is, brands associated with art are more extendible than brands

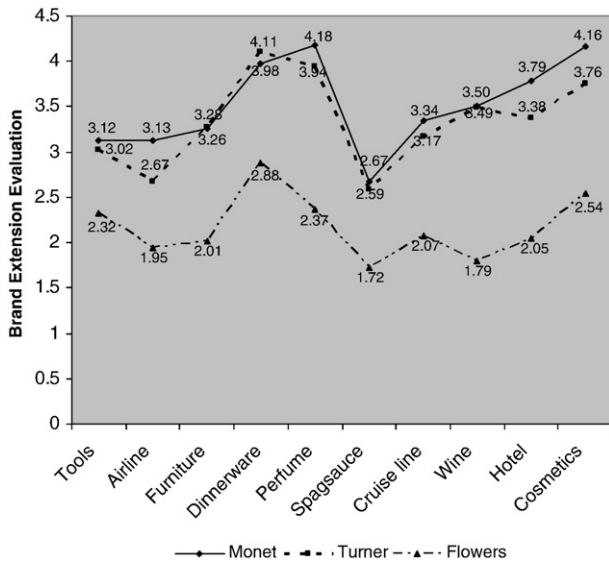


Fig. 1. Pilot Study: brand extension evaluation.

without art across a variety of extension categories. While previous literature has established that positive affect may favorably influence consumer evaluations of brand extensions (Barone, 2005; Barone et al., 2000), this pilot study demonstrates that the valence of the affect elicited by the art does not influence consumer evaluations of brands and extensions. Specifically, the influence of the positively valenced Monet painting is no different from that of the negatively valenced Turner painting. Notably, the equally decorative non-art image (Flowers) did not have a similar effect, thus indicating that the effect is unique to art, rather than it being a normal case of product embellishment. There were no differences in participants' mood after viewing the products with the different images, or in the imagery evoked by the images, ruling out the influence of mood and imagery on brand extension evaluation. The following study extends these results in a between-subjects experiment.

Study 1

In the pilot study, brands with art were found to be more extendible than brands without art across a large variety of brand extensions. In that study, each participant evaluated a number of extension products randomly presented to avoid any anchoring effects. However, it could still be argued that each extension evaluation may have been affected by other extension evaluations, because of comparative differences of fit with the soap dispenser. In the study that follows we demonstrate the impact of art on brand image (hypothesis 1), perceived category fit (hypothesis 2), and brand extendibility (hypothesis 3) in a between-subjects experiment where participants evaluate extensions that are pre-tested to be in high or low fit categories.

One hundred and thirty-five undergraduates participated in this study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions in a 2 (art presence: art vs. non-art) \times 2 (category fit: high vs. low) between-subjects experiment. The

product (MP3 player) was presented in an advertisement where the artwork used was Van Gogh's painting "Starry Night." The non-art image used was a photograph of a night sky. See appendix for stimuli used.

A pretest, conducted to identify product categories that respondents considered high or low fit, revealed that digital radios were a high fit category for the MP3 player, while clothing was a low fit category. The cover story employed in the main study entailed asking respondents to evaluate a new European brand of MP3 player called Consul (fictitious brand). They were presented with an advertisement for the product in which the visual was either the artwork or the photograph. The questionnaire assessed brand image evaluations, perceived extension fit with the parent category, and brand extension evaluations. For brand image, participants were asked to provide their impression of the Consul brand as luxurious and high class measured on seven-point Likert scales (1=not at all, 7=extremely). The two items were combined in a brand image evaluation index ($r=.93$). For perceived category fit, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought the Consul MP3 player had a close fit with each of the extension products on seven-point Likert scales (1=not at all, 7=very). For brand extendibility, participants were asked to evaluate the extension on seven-point semantic differential scales, as negative/positive, low quality/high quality and undesirable/desirable. These items formed a brand extension evaluation index ($\alpha=.93$). Mood and imagery were measured similar to the pilot study. As in the pilot study, there were no differences in mood or imagery (all F 's < 1).

Results

Brand image

A 2 \times 2 between-subjects ANOVA with art presence (art vs. non-art) and fit (high vs. low) on brand image evaluation revealed that the presence of art enhanced perceptions of brand image ($M(\text{art})=4.50$ vs. $M(\text{non-art})=4.03$, $F(1, 131)=4.84$, $p<.05$), supporting hypothesis 1. No other effects were significant.

Perceived category fit

A similar 2 \times 2 between-subjects ANOVA on the perceived fit revealed a significant main effect for art presence ($M(\text{art})=3.63$ vs. $M(\text{non-art})=3.03$, $F(1, 131)=7.24$, $p<.05$) and a significant main effect for fit ($M(\text{high})=4.36$ vs. $M(\text{low})=2.18$, $F(1, 131)=107.23$, $p<.05$). The main effect of art presence on perceived fit supports hypothesis 2.

Brand extendibility

A similar 2 \times 2 between-subjects ANOVA on the brand extension evaluation revealed a significant main effect for art presence ($M(\text{art})=3.65$ vs. $M(\text{non-art})=3.01$, $F(1, 131)=9.31$, $p<.05$) and a significant main effect for fit ($M(\text{high})=4.35$ vs. $M(\text{low})=2.18$, $F(1, 131)=119.01$, $p<.05$). The main effect of art presence on brand extendibility supports hypothesis 3.

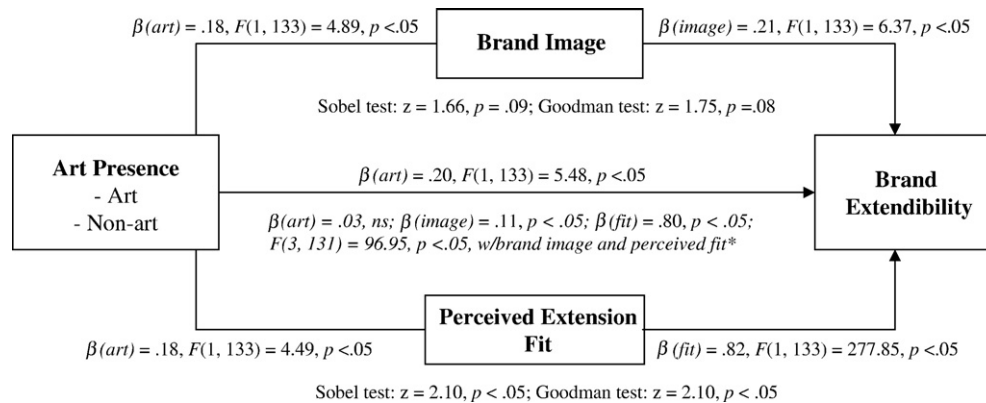


Fig. 2. Study 1: mediating role of brand image and perceived fit.

Mediation analysis

A mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986) supports our theorizing that brand image and perceptions of fit mediate the relationship between the presence of art and brand extensibility. The mediation results are shown in Fig. 2.

Discussion

In this study, the presence of art had a significant positive impact on brand image evaluation, perceived category fit, and brand extension evaluations. Further, mediation analysis confirmed that visual art exerted its influence on brand extension evaluations via its favorable influence on brand image and perceived fit. Study 2 was designed to replicate these key results in the context of product design, using a real brand, and to assess the influence of art on cognitive flexibility in an unrelated task.

Study 2

One hundred and forty-eight undergraduates participated in this study. The study was a 2 (art presence: art vs. non-art) \times 2 (category fit: high vs. low) between-subjects experiment. The soap dispenser from study 1 was used, and art presence was manipulated using two of the stimuli from that study (Flowers and Monet). A pretest, conducted to identify product categories that were considered high or low fit for a soap dispenser, revealed that towels were a high fit category and cheese was a low fit category. This study utilized the real home furnishings brand Croscill. Participants were provided with an image of the product and were asked a set of questions.

To assess brand image, participants were asked to provide their impression of the Croscill brand as luxurious, prestigious, and high class (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely). The three items were combined in a brand image evaluation index ($\alpha = .93$). To measure perceived category fit, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought the Croscill soap dispenser was similar to, related to, or had a close fit with the extension products (1 = not at all, 7 = very). These three items were combined to form a perceived fit index for towels ($\alpha = .97$) and cheese ($\alpha = .96$). Participants were also asked to

evaluate the extension on seven-point semantic differential scales, as negative/positive, low quality/high quality and undesirable/desirable. These three items were combined to form a brand extension evaluation index for the high fit category towels ($\alpha = .93$) and the low fit category cheese ($\alpha = .92$).

To demonstrate the cognitive flexibility induced by art that results in higher perceived fit, participants were asked to do a word-association task. This was a shortened version of the Remote Associates Test (Mednick & Mednick, 1967). The RAT has been widely used to measure cognitive flexibility and resulting creativity (Murray & Russ, 1981). For instance, Isen et al. (1987) used the RAT to demonstrate that positive affect may increase the tendency to combine material in new ways and to see relatedness between divergent stimuli. In this test, respondents are presented with three seemingly unrelated words and are asked to come up with a fourth word that fits with all of them. It is a measure of cognitive flexibility that enables broad or superordinate categorization and the perception of meaningful connections that are not obvious on the surface. In other words, the RAT measures the type of cognitive flexibility that would enhance perceptions of brand extensions by enabling consumers to better visualize a meaningful connection between the brand and the extension products. Participants were given 18 items of varying difficulty to complete, that is, six low difficulty, six moderate difficulty, and six high difficulty. These items were chosen based on solution norms assessed by Shames (1994) with p -values (unsolved) ranging from .40 (low difficulty) to .90 (high difficulty). Each item consisted of three words followed by a blank space, in which participants were instructed to provide a word that related to each of the three words given in the item. An example of a Remote Associates Test item (of moderate difficulty) are the three words Board, Magic, Death, for which the answer is Black (p (unsolved) = .65). Each correct item was assigned a 1 and each incorrect or incomplete answer was assigned a 0, and the correct responses of each group of difficulty level were summed.

Finally, participants were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale how familiar they were with the Croscill brand (1 = not at all; 7 = very). Results revealed low familiarity with the brand and no differences in familiarity between the experimental conditions.

Results

Brand image

A 2×2 ANOVA with art presence (art vs. non-art) and category fit (high vs. low) as the independent variables and brand image evaluation index as the dependent variable revealed that the brand with the art image was evaluated significantly higher than the brand without art ($M=3.77$ vs. $M=2.28$, $F(1, 143)=60.91$, $p<.05$).

Perceived fit

A 2×2 ANOVA with art presence (art vs. non-art) and category fit (high vs. low) on the perceived fit revealed a significant main effect for art presence ($M=3.51$ vs. $M=2.92$, $F(1, 144)=4.42$, $p<.05$) and for fit ($M=4.31$ vs. $M=2.12$, $F(1, 144)=91.42$, $p<.05$), and a significant art presence \times fit interaction ($M(\text{art, high})=4.78$ vs. $M(\text{art, low})=2.12$ vs. $M(\text{non-art, high})=3.81$ vs. $M(\text{non-art, low})=2.13$, $F(1, 144)=4.65$, $p=.05$).

Brand extension evaluation

A 2×2 ANOVA with art presence (art vs. non-art) and category fit (high vs. low) on the brand extension evaluation index revealed a main effect for art presence ($M=4.12$ vs. $M=3.10$, $F(1, 144)=21.43$, $p<.05$), and a main effect for fit ($M=4.07$ vs. $M=3.12$, $F(1, 144)=18.44$, $p<.05$). These results replicate the findings from study 1 to reveal that the presence of art enhances brand extendibility to both high fit and low fit product categories compared to a brand without art.

Cognitive flexibility

A mixed design ANOVA with art presence as the between-subjects variable and item difficulty level as the within-subjects variable was conducted with the correct score as the dependent variable. Results revealed a main effect of art presence ($M=2.30$ vs. $M=1.51$, $F(1, 146)=6.04$, $p<.05$) lending further support to the assertion that the presence of art enhances cognitive flexibility. As might be expected, all participants performed significantly better on the easy items than on the difficult ones as revealed by the main effect of difficulty level ($F(1, 146)=56.71$,

$p<.05$). Moreover, comparing across each difficulty level separately participants in the art presence condition were able to complete a significantly greater number of word associations in the difficult ($M=.35$ vs. $M=.16$, $F(1, 146)=4.69$, $p<.05$), moderate ($M=.88$ vs. $M=.55$, $F(1, 146)=4.12$, $p<.05$) and easy ($M=1.07$ vs. $M=.73$, $F(1, 146)=3.83$, $p<.05$) word associations compared to those in the non-art condition.

Further, if cognitive flexibility is the process underlying the increased perceptions of fit, then controlling for cognitive flexibility should attenuate the effect of manipulated fit on perceptions of fit. Using a rationale similar to that of Barone et al. (2000, 393), an ANCOVA with art presence (art vs. non-art) and category fit (high vs. low) on perceived fit revealed that participants' evaluations of perceived fit were strongly attenuated when cognitive flexibility was used as a covariate. The results were revealed when using the difficult items, but not all items, from the RAT. Introducing cognitive flexibility as a covariate resulted in a drop in the F -statistic from 91.42 (as derived from the ANOVA) to 39.31 (as derived from the ANCOVA) indicating a reduction in effect size (partial eta square) from .39 to .31. These results provide support for the role of cognitive flexibility in the influence of art on perceived fit.

Mediation analysis

A mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986) supports our theorizing that brand image and perceptions of fit mediate the relationship between the presence of art and brand extendibility. The mediation results are shown in Fig. 3.

Discussion

This study replicated the results from study 1 to show the impact of art presence on brand image, perceived fit, and brand extension evaluations using Crossill, a real home furnishings brand. Once again, mediation analysis confirmed that visual art exerted its influence on brand extension evaluations via its favorable influence on brand image and perceived fit. Although increased perceived fit was demonstrated for a number of product categories in the first two studies, the lack of this

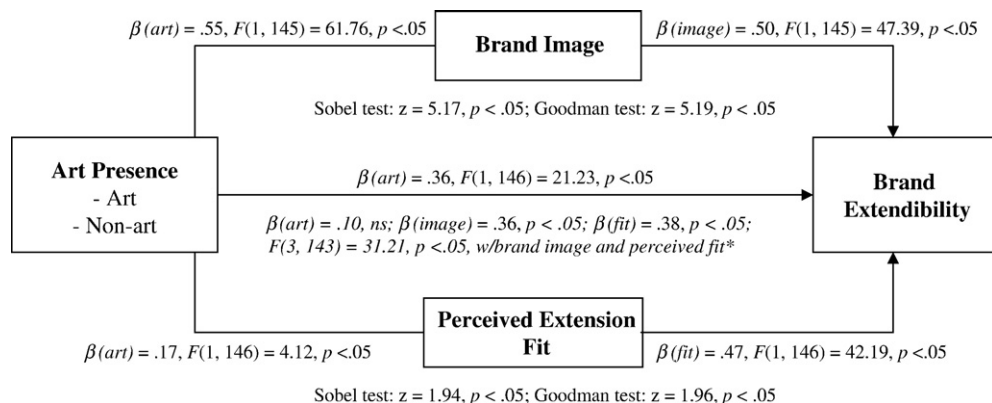


Fig. 3. Study 2: mediating role of brand image and perceived fit. *Additional analyses were run to check the sensitivity of the results to correlations between brand image and perceived fit. This was done by partialing out the effect of brand image on perceived fit and using these uncorrelated indicators in the mediation analysis. The pattern of results was identical to the mediation analysis depicted above.

influence for the low fit category in this final study indicates that there may nonetheless be limitations to the impact of visual art on perceived fit. Interestingly, evidence for enhanced cognitive flexibility on exposure to art was obtained via an unrelated task, the Remote Associates Test. It was demonstrated that participants who saw the product with art performed better on the task than those who saw the product without art. Moreover, the ANCOVA results support the role of cognitive flexibility in the influence of art on perceptions of fit, thus further illuminating the impact that the presence of art has on brand extendibility.

General discussion

The extension of a brand to different categories is a valuable strategy that managers rely on to ensure the trial, adoption, and success of new products and services. However, marketing academics and practitioners recognize that there are limits to the extendibility of brands. Indeed, prior research has examined the key factors involved in brand extension evaluations, specifically, perceived quality/image of the parent brand and category and conceptual fit between the brand extension product and the parent brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Bottomley & Holden, 2001).

In this research, we suggest the use of visual art as a strategic tool that marketers might use to increase the extendibility of a brand. We theorize that art has two key effects as relates to brand extendibility: first, it confers an impression of luxury, prestige, and high class on the brands with which it is associated; second, it facilitates cognitive flexibility. We thus develop a conceptual framework suggesting that the presence of art enhances brand image and perceptions of category fit, and through these effects increases overall brand extendibility.

We systematically investigate the impact of visual art on brand image, perceptions of category fit, and brand extendibility in two studies. Taken together these studies consistently demonstrate the influence of visual art on brand extendibility while utilizing different products, different art images, associating the art directly integrated with the product as well as in an advertisement for the product, and when employing both fictitious and real brand names.

Managerial implications

Although visual art is used extensively as a tool in marketing, there exists virtually no theoretical foundation to guide managerial decision-making in this regard. This research is a first attempt to provide insight regarding the role of art in brand management. We demonstrate that art may be successfully used to improve consumer perceptions of a brand and to increase brand extendibility across a variety of categories. Clearly, there are other factors that will influence whether or not it is feasible or desirable for a firm to extend a brand into a given category. For instance, the firm may not have the operational capabilities in place, or a particular extension category may be inconsistent with the overall strategic vision for the brand. What this research demonstrates is that visual art may be used as a tool to help extend the brand to various

product categories, if the introduction of those extensions is feasible and desirable in the first place.

The present research demonstrated that visual art had a favorable influence compared to an equally decorative non-art image. What matters in this case is that consumers recognize the image/object to be an artwork. On average, an object perceived as belonging to a general category of art will tend to elicit a set of general connotations. This simple insight has important implications in regards to the use of art to obtain a luxurious brand image and a more extendible brand. Irrespective of scholarly debates about what does or does not constitute art, managers should choose artworks that their target market deems to be art.

Future research directions

Since little research exists that examines the role of visual art in marketing, opportunities abound for future investigation in this domain. For instance, future research may investigate *how* art might be most effectively associated with a brand. In this research, art was presented either integrated into the product design, or alongside the product in an advertisement. However, which of these approaches would be more effective than the other, or what the impact would be of some other approach such as art sponsorship or corporate collecting, remains to be investigated. Additionally, there may be different processes through which the concept of art can be combined with other product-related concepts to create new product concepts (Gill & Dube, 2007). Future research could investigate the impact of such integrated product concepts on product, brand, and brand extension evaluations. Further, if multiple brands competing in the same product categories associate their products with art, it remains to be investigated how the presence of art as a shared feature might impact individual brand evaluations (Brunner & Wänke, 2006).

Another critical question arising with regard to this art-brand association is how lasting the impact of art is on the brand. For instance, must the brand be consistently associated with art (e.g., Absolut vodka), or can even a temporary association with art, as in a single advertising campaign, have a lasting positive impact on a brand? Additionally, while this research demonstrates that the presence of art enhances the extendibility of a brand, it does not investigate whether the extension products should be similarly associated with art.

This research also has implications beyond brand extendibility. For instance, brand extensions facilitated by the presence of art may subsequently affect or change the brand image itself. Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran (1998) demonstrated that the typicality of the extension and consumers' level of motivation determine the effect of extensions on family brand name. In cases where visual art facilitates non-typical extensions, or where intrinsic interest in art affects consumers' level of motivation, this may lead to dilution or enhancement of the brand image. Future research may thus begin to map out the broader implications of associating art with brands and brand extensions. Additionally, future research may investigate the influence of art on other types of entities, such as individuals or corporations.

In the current research, the strongest influence of visual art on brand extendibility appeared to occur via the infusion of luxury perceptions into the brand image. The impact of luxury perceptions on brand extendibility represents another area for future investigation. Consumers are increasingly trading up to luxury products and brands (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), so the importance of understanding the causes and effects of perceptions of luxury is increasing along with this trend (Mandel et al., 2006). Additionally, future research might investigate inferences consumers make, other than those related to luxury, based on an association with artworks (Kardes, Posavac, & Cronley, 2004).

Finally, the influence of visual art on cognitive flexibility is a particularly fertile area for future research. A wealth of extant literature has established the role of positive affect in enhancing creativity and cognitive flexibility (Barone et al., 2000; Isen et al., 1987), but it seems reasonable that there exist other influences of this kind. A cursory glance at art history will remind us that some of the most admired and arousing artworks, such as Picasso's *Guernica* or Cellini's *Perseus*, have a negatively valenced content. This is also true in the realm of music, where many a requiem, though inspired by death, has stimulated listeners for centuries. It seems apparent that the influence of the arts on the mental processes of both creator and audience is an area in need of a great deal of more research.

Extant literature has indicated that the creation of artworks stimulates creativity and imagination. The current research builds on literature streams from the fields of psychology, art theory, and art education to propose that 1) cognitive flexibility as discussed in the psychology literature is closely linked to aspects of the enhanced creativity and imagination discussed in the arts literature and 2) merely viewing an artwork is enough to achieve enhanced cognitive flexibility. This is a novel insight that raises a host of opportunities for future research. The current research represents only an initial step in investigating this role of visual art, and thus it should primarily be thought of as a stepping stone for future research.

Indeed, a number of limitations should be noted for the current research. First, the RAT gives indications of cognitive flexibility, but perhaps other measures may be developed that can better capture this construct. Second, such measures may perhaps be used as direct process measures for the influence of visual art on cognitive flexibility. Third, the current research revealed mixed results in terms of increased fit for different brand extensions. While the influence of visual art on brand image appears robust, further research is needed to establish the scope and boundaries for the influence of art on perceived fit. For instance, it may be that exposure to artworks may facilitate psychological distancing and abstract processing (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak 2007), which in turn would influence the categorization of product types (see also Gregan-Paxton, Hoefler, & Min 2005). Further, interactive effects of art presence with other influences on perceptions of parent-extension similarity, such as for instance self regulatory focus (Yeo & Park, 2006), remain to be examined. Fourth, future research may investigate other results than enhanced brand

extension evaluations stemming from enhanced cognitive flexibility. Indeed, considering the variety of tasks consumers perform in their daily lives, the implications of enhanced cognitive flexibility merit a much broader investigation. Fifth, a great deal more research is needed to establish the scope and boundaries for the influence of visual art on cognitive flexibility. The current research has opened the door to a novel phenomenon, but a thorough investigation of this phenomenon must be left to future research. For instance, are there specific conditions that are necessary for the phenomenon to occur? Do different types of art have a differential influence, or are there situational conditions or individual differences that will moderate the influence, or eliminate it entirely? The current research used a limited number of artworks, but future research may investigate the influence of a much larger variety of artworks, perhaps also under varying conditions, to better map out how, when, and why the experience of visual art influences mental processes.

Without a thorough understanding of how visual art affects the mind, these research efforts may suffer the same fate as those associated with the Mozart effect (Rauscher, Shaw, & Ky, 1993), where initial findings indicated a temporary enhancement of mental abilities stemming from the presence of Mozart's music, but where outside replications were not obtained. For instance, although the influence of art on brand image is associated with luxury perceptions tied to the historical quest for excellence represented by art, there is no evident reason why luxury perceptions should be linked to cognitive flexibility. A possible explanation may be that art has evolved through prehistory as a form of pre-linguistic communication and source of information (Averill, Stanat, & More, 1998; Hagtvedt & Patrick, *in press*). In this case, the contemplation of aesthetic properties may be linked to thought processes that have to some degree been displaced by language, due to the obvious practical benefits of the latter, while the combination of language and aesthetics may perhaps be the optimal solution for information processing. Indeed, the interplay of language and aesthetic communication, and the influence of this interplay on cognitive flexibility, is an area for future research. In conclusion, the role of art in facilitating consumer information processing is an interesting and important domain for future research in consumer psychology.

Appendix A. Stimuli used in pilot study and in studies 1 and 2



Pilot and Study 2 Art image (Monet)





Pilot and Study 2 Non-art image




Pilot Art Image (Turner)

The new star on the European horizon






With a blend of aesthetic appeal and technological precision, the Consul MP3 player brings the rhythm of the night within your reach.




Study 1 — Art image

The new star on the European horizon

With a blend of aesthetic appeal and technological precision, the Consul MP3 player brings the rhythm of the night within your reach.



Study 1 — Non-art image

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