

The Role of Curatorial Marketing Strategies in Branding and Enhancing Brand Influence: The Case of Fashion Brand Gentle Monster

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Abstract: With the rapid development of modern business, numerous innovative marketing strategies are used for branding and brand management, so finding suitable and effective marketing strategies to make brands stand out has become an issue of great concern to many companies. And Gentle Monster, as a famous fashion brand, which has become renowned and performed year-on-year brilliant business because of its marketing strategy, has not yet been profoundly researched and studied, especially in terms of the role of this curatorial marketing strategy on branding and brand influence. This study adopts a mixed research methodology, including a detailed analysis of the fashion brand Gentle Monster and a questionnaire survey of 204 consumers, to demonstrate the positive effects of "curatorial marketing" on branding and brand influence. The results of the study show that the curatorial marketing strategy with a very artistic design has a positive effect on enhancing brand impact. In addition, brands (especially fashion brands) can benefit from incorporating more artistic elements into their marketing campaigns for better brand performance. Gentle Monster can provide an excellent case study for fashion brands to learn from, and the findings of the study can also provide insights and inspiration for other industries.

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's world, well-known brands are often not confined to a single traditional marketing strategy but seek many more innovative strategies, such as co-branding, to increase brand awareness and further promote consumerism (Murtas et al., 2022). Schmitt suggested that companies have transferred from the traditional marketing way of promoting "features-and-benefits" to the marketing way of creating experiences for their customers in many industries (Schmitt, 1999a). And according to him, experiential marketing is all about taking the main features of a product and turning them into activities that customers can enjoy and that get their senses and emotions involved (Schmitt, 1999b). Gentle Monster, a Korean fashion eyewear brand, broke the traditional framework of sales strategy and used a more innovative curatorial marketing strategy. Gentle Monster chose to take offline artistic shops as the medium to convey the brand's unique perspective, philosophy, and values to consumers, giving them a

unique experience and fully mobilizing their emotions to stimulate consumption. This curatorial marketing strategy is based on experiential marketing and has a similar transmission path. This unique marketing strategy creates a special experience for their customers through specific artistic exhibitions and builds their customers an unforgettable brand image and enhancing brand influence through these special experiences. Its highly artistic and disruptive retail space has created a huge success for the brand. It is worth noting that some brands, such as the Chinese fragrance brand "document" have already adopted a similar marketing strategy with some success. Curatorial marketing is a marketing strategy derived from experiential marketing that relies particularly on offline spaces. One of the features of curatorial marketing that distinguishes it from experiential marketing strategies in general is the artistic nature of its exhibitions. According to "Art Infusion Phenomenon", the presence of art has a positive effect on how consumers view products, influencing their perception of the products (Hagtvedt

& Patrick, 2008). At the same time, according to the concept of "Brand as sign", a brand can influence the consumers' perception of the product or convey the values represented by the brand through symbolic expression, thus motivating consumers to express their own personality and identity by consuming the brand (Baudrillard, 1998). Curatorial marketing strategies often involve the design of highly artistic installations and spaces in offline spaces, thus activating the effect of Art Infusion Phenomenon and symbolizing the brand.

There is relevant literature focusing on the study of artist-brand collaboration cases, which mainly investigates the impact of artist-brand collaboration on consumer feedback and other related subjects (Kim et al., 2018). And there have also been studies focusing on artistic collaborations on consumer response (Kim & Lee, 2014). In addition, other researches focused on analyzing the impact of the visual arts on consumers' product evaluations and purchase intentions (Kim & Lee, 2012). The way of branding through marketing has been analyzed more as well, for example, Chrysochou has analyzed how the marketing elements can build a proper brand image (Chrysochou, 2010). Some research has pointed out that a proper brand image strategy is extremely important in terms of the failure or success of that brand in nowadays competitive business environment (Lee et al., 2000).

However, much of the existing literature applies experiential marketing to analyses of tourism development, or other industries such as theme parks (Tsaur et al., 2007). Curatorial marketing, as a more innovative marketing strategy based on experiential marketing, has not been deeply studied. And in terms of the combination of in-depth art cooperation and curatorial management, there are few in-depth analyses to explore how this kind of cooperation can inject unique art culture and high-end atmosphere into the brand, especially how curatorial marketing can differentiate itself from the previous simple artist cooperation and other strategies to enhance the brand influence in a powerful and non-monotonous way. At the same time, Gentle Monster, as a typical example of the application of curatorial marketing strategies, has not yet been deeply researched because of its uniqueness and innovation, as well as its good performance in branding and enhancing brand influence.

This study aims to demonstrate the role of curatorial marketing strategies in branding and enhancing brand influence, taking the fashion accessory brand Gentle Monster as an example. In this study, a case study of the Gentle Monster brand

was conducted through the Brand 3-Perspective Analysis Model from the three angles of Brand Strategy, Product, and Audience Experience, along with the questionnaire data analysis to demonstrate the positive effects of curatorial marketing strategies on brand image and brand influence. Depending on the context, executives can apply this particular type of curatorial marketing to increase their brand impact (especially in the fashion industry) or be inspired to discover other ways in which art and branding can work together to achieve branding and brand loyalty goals.

2 METHOD

2.1 Case Analysis

Founded in South Korea in 2011, Gentle Monster is a brand that primarily designs and produces trendy eyewear, taking the world by storm with its high-end, edgy, and innovative brand image. Gentle Monster is now present in 30 countries with 22 flagship shops, and its sales network covers over 200 distribution channels and 10 online sales platforms. In 2024, Gentle Monster's annual sales are expected to reach approximately \$570 million, while operating profit is expected to rise by 54.7%. Gentle Monster has performed well since its inception, and the brand's strength is remarkable. The case study will use the Brand 3-Perspective Analysis Model to analyze the Gentle Monster brand in terms of brand strategy, product, and audience experience.

2.1.1 Brand Strategy

In terms of brand strategy, firstly, Gentle Monster identified the gap in the Asian eyewear market by investigating the market demand and positioned the product as "For Asians By Asians". This positioning helped Gentle Monster to successfully open up the Asian eyewear market first, and laid a valid foundation for the subsequent opening up of the global market. Secondly, according to the "Brand as sign" theory, Gentle Monster strongly symbolizes the brand through curatorial marketing. With the motto of "Innovative High-end Experimentation", Gentle Monster is differentiated from traditional marketing strategies by focusing on providing consumers with fresh experiences through innovative visual arts. The combination of artistic and innovative shop design with boldly designed products leaves a deep impression and inspires strong emotional resonance in customers. Eyewear is no longer an ordinary tool

for correcting vision, but a fashionable expression of artistry and individuality. Each piece of eyewear becomes a symbol of fashion forwardness, empowered by the storytelling of the exhibition, and the brand thus becomes a status symbol of fashion and art. Meanwhile, Gentle Monster also often cooperates with celebrities or artists, and the form of cooperation mainly includes launching a collaborative range of products and inviting them to the offline shops to take photos and promote them. This approach ensures a certain degree of exposure for the offline shops, and at the same time, makes the brand's highly fashionable and artistic image deeply rooted in people's hearts, becoming synonymous with fashion and quality.

2.1.2 Product

In terms of products, first of all, Gentle Monster's initial product concept was to design glasses that suit Asian face shapes and aesthetic characteristics. The brand has gained an edge in the Asian market by capitalizing on market demand while combining differentiated product design with superior manufacturing to win the recognition of consumers in the Asian market. Secondly, Gentle Monster's products are generally unique, with stylish and distinctive designs that correspond to its artful offline exhibitions. Thus, the concept that the shop conveys is consistent with the concept that the product shows, and aligned with the brand's philosophy. Finally, the pricing of the Gentle Monster range is usually higher, and Gentle Monster is positioned at the premium end of the market, which matches the premium brand image it creates through curatorial marketing-artistic, and high-end presenting offline shops. Consumers are willing to pay a higher price for the unique design and brand experience, on the one hand, and the high price, on the other hand, reinforces the premium brand image.

2.1.3 Audience Experience

In terms of audience experience, it is worth noting that Gentle Monster's success is mainly attributed to the perfect manufacturing of the offline shop audience experience, in which curatorial marketing strategy plays an extremely important role. According to "Art Infusion Phenomenon", The brand brings together a large number of art installations and uses unique display methods in the design of the shop space, and these artistic elements make the shop not only a sales place, but more like an art space, which conveys the brand's unique aesthetics and cultural

connotations to the consumers, and shapes a high-end, fashionable and creative brand image.

The all-around artistic experience makes consumers more emotionally resonant, while enhancing brand influence to a certain extent. Firstly, through the planning of art exhibitions, the brand perfectly combines its brand values with its offline shops through immersive storytelling, transforming brand values into perceptible scenarios by providing them a progressive and innovative shop design, and guiding customers from mere feelings to gradual recognition in the process. Amplifying the customer's visual touch through the entire conduction process creates a rich, unique, and memorable experience for the consumer. At this point, the process of brand experience differentiation has been completed. Secondly, Gentle Monster's products are usually characterized by a strong sense of fashion, and most customers who identify themselves as having a low sense of fashion may not initially accept the brand's products. However, by designing the offline shop into a unique art exhibition space, Gentle Monster can help customers change from passive acceptance to active participation in the immersive drama. Thus, every time they step into a Gentle Monster shop, they will be touched deeply. In this process, the customer realizes both self-identity and brand identity.

2.2 Data Analysis

In this study, 204 valid responses were collected through an online questionnaire in 2025. The age range of the participants was 16 years and above. 78.92 percent of the respondents were concentrated in the age group of 16-34 years, and 21.08 percent of the respondents were concentrated in the age group of 35 years and above. In terms of occupation, about 35 percent of the respondents were from the student community, about 51 percent were office workers, while the remaining about 12 percent of the respondents were freelancers. This study collects data through self-administered questionnaires and focuses on analyzing consumer feedback on Gentle Monster's curatorial marketing strategy.

The questionnaire is based on a survey of feedback from those who have visited the exhibition, as well as a survey of perceptions of "curatorial marketing strategy" and "integration of art and branding" from all respondents, including those who have not visited the exhibition. Based on the respondents who have visited the exhibition, the survey breaks down the "feedback on marketing strategy" into two dimensions: "interest in or fondness for the brand" and "interest in or engagement with the brand". The survey also investigated which features were most important or

attracted their attention during their visit to Gentle Monster's offline shop exhibitions. Based on the total number of respondents, the survey breaks down the "brand-art integration impact" into "brand perception impact", "brand loyalty impact" and "brand engagement impact". "Expectations for future campaigns", and in-depth research into respondents' views on "the best way to integrate branding and art".

The questionnaire consisted of 11 closed-ended multiple-choice questions, three of which were yes/no dichotomous options (e.g., "Have you developed a deeper interest or fondness for the Gentle Monster because of the art exhibitions in its offline shops?"), and two were 3-point Likert-scale items. Gentle Monster because of the art exhibitions in its offline shops?", and 2 questions on 3-point Likert-scale items. The questionnaire was designed using Conditional Branching, based on the respondents' answers to Adaptive route follow-up questions. For example, if the respondent chooses 'No' to question Q2 ('Have you ever visited Gentle Monster shops or other fashion exhibitions organized by Gentle Monster?'), then Q3-Q5 (questions related to feedback on art exhibitions in offline shops) will be skipped, and the respondent will go directly to Q6 (How do you visit Gentle Monster stores?). Go directly to Q6 (How do you think the integration of branding and art affects consumers' brand perception? (Multiple-Choice Question)). The question-skipping logic was implemented through Qualtrics to ensure that only respondents who had visited the exhibition answered questions about their experience of visiting the Gentle Monster, reducing the number of invalid responses.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate the frequency and percentage of answers to each question. For example, the answer "Yes" stands for "Support".

3 RESULTS

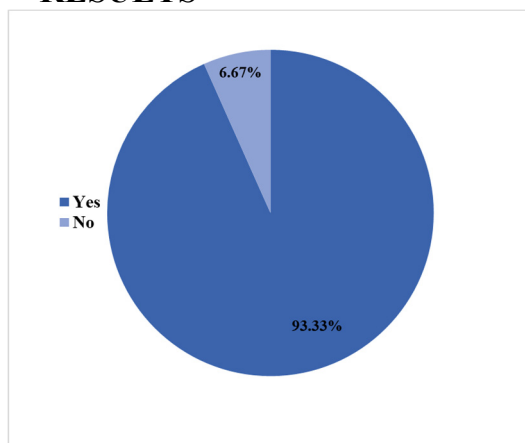


Figure 1. Deeper Interest or Fondness.

As shown in Figure 1, of the 106 respondents who visited a Gentle Monster offline store, about 93% of the respondents supported the idea that visiting an offline art fair made them more interested in Gentle Monster or develop a greater fondness for the brand.

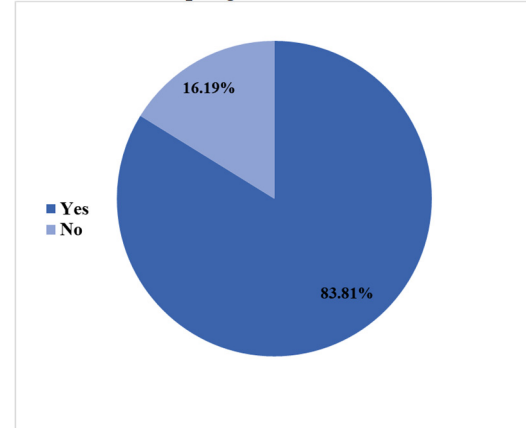


Figure 2. Attention or engagement growth.

And at the same level, as shown in Figure 2, nearly 83% of respondents would increase their interest or engagement with the brand after visiting its offline artistic space.

Combining the above two sets of data, the positive effect of Gentle Monster's offline art exhibitions on enhancing the brand's influence can be proved to some extent.

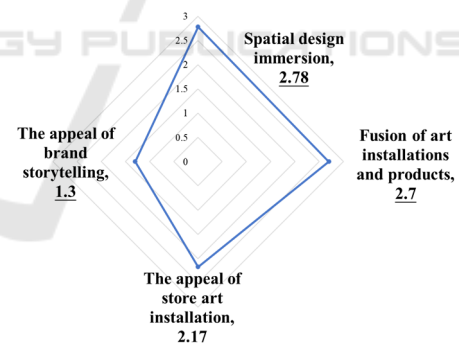


Figure 3. Feeling about different aspects of the experience.

At the same time, as shown in Figure 3, when visiting Gentle Monster's offline exhibitions, respondents generally found the spatial design immersion and the fusion of art installations and products to be the two aspects that appealed to them the most as well as the best experience, with the appeal of store art installations being the most important in this regard. The appeal of store art installation was also recognized as the third most appealing aspect.

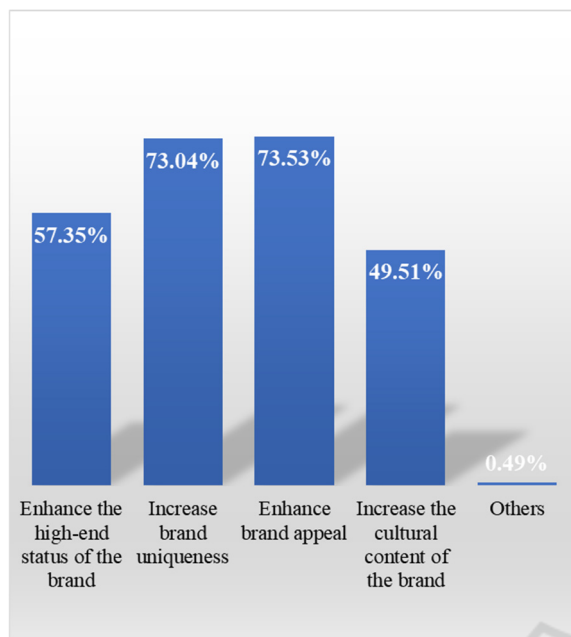


Figure 4. Integration of branding and art and consumers' brand perception.

As shown in Figure 4, among all respondents (including those who have not visited Gentle Monster's offline exhibitions), "Increase brand uniqueness" and "Enhance brand appeal" were the two most recognized aspects of consumers' perception of branding as influenced by the fusion of art and branding. And the number of respondents recognizing the impact of these two aspects is almost the same, at around 73%. Even though "Enhance the high-end status of the brand" and "Increase the cultural content of the brand" do not have the same much impact, the number of respondents who recognize these two aspects is almost the same, at around 50%. And even though "Increase the cultural content of the brand" did not receive as much support as the first two, it was still supported by about 50 per cent of the respondents.

In a further question, around 70% of respondents would like to see more art-integrated activities in future marketing strategies for brands, especially fashion brands.

It is worth noting that even though Gentle Monster's curatorial marketing strategy was widely recognized by respondents, when finally asked about the best way to merge branding and art in their minds, the most favored option was "Limited edition products with artists", while Gentle Monster's "Curatorial Store Design" had almost 10% fewer supporters than the previous strategy.

In the case studies and data analysis, this study delves into consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards the Gentle Monster brand's curatorial

marketing. Considering the findings of the case study and data analysis, the initial hypothesis of this study, "the positive effects of curatorial marketing strategies on brand image and brand influence", can be supported.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Brand Symbolization Through Offline Space Experience

Gentle Monster has silently communicated its brand philosophy to its customers through an offline shop design that immerses and refreshes them. It is worth noting that this kind of communication makes customers actively feel remembered rather than passively accepted, which usually leaves a deep impression in their minds. In this way, the artistic fashion, high quality and avant-garde conveyed by the shops become the main symbols of the brand, and customers will naturally have the idea of owning the identity and labels by purchasing the products after accepting the brand concept, thus the brand symbolization has been completed and recognized by the consumers.

4.2 Space, Product, and Brand Personality Harmonization

If the design of a product is mediocre, it may be difficult to stimulate spending, even if it does create a lasting impression on the customer. However, if the product design is in accordance with the brand's conceptual style through art exhibitions, then consumption will be stimulated. Gentle Monster's product design is not only beautiful and unique, but also has a high price tag that matches its high-end fashion environment. As a result, the products sold by the brand are in line with the feeling of the space and the brand personality, and consumers will be more willing to buy and complete the "subscription" of their own identities of art, quality, and avant-garde. The brand sells products that are consistent with the feeling of the space and the brand's personality.

5 CONCLUSION

Marketing strategy is usually a very important part of a brand; a good marketing strategy can help a brand to open up the market, while an inappropriate marketing strategy may cause the brand to fall into

trouble. Gentle Monster's innovative marketing strategy, tailored to the brand's product category and based on the brand's personality, was a perfect fit for the product and also maximized the effectiveness of the strategy to make the brand a global phenomenon. But at the same time, due to specific limitations or other reasons, such as offline shops are usually concentrated in first-tier cities, curatorial marketing strategy may be more limited than some more common strategies such as limited edition products with artists and so on, and cannot be used as an all-round and universal marketing strategy by brands.

While other fashion brands can take Gentle Monster as an excellent marketing example to learn from, other industries, such as home furnishing brands, can also explore other excellent strategies that are unique and innovative from the success of Gentle Monster's curatorial marketing.

There are some limitations in this study, such as the small amount of data in terms of questionnaire data. Future research could focus on how this unique marketing strategy can be applied to other types of brands and the specific conditions that need to be met for this strategy to be successful.

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